



HAL
open science

Colouration and flavouring of sunflower seeds affect feeding behaviour in urban Carrion crows (*Corvus corone*): A preliminary study

Alexandra Destrez, Christophe Sausse, Victoria Aublet, Mathilde Lanthony, Benoist Schaal, Morgane Costes-Thiré

► To cite this version:

Alexandra Destrez, Christophe Sausse, Victoria Aublet, Mathilde Lanthony, Benoist Schaal, et al.. Colouration and flavouring of sunflower seeds affect feeding behaviour in urban Carrion crows (*Corvus corone*): A preliminary study. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 2022, 251, 7 p. 10.1016/j.applanim.2022.105642 . hal-03690208

HAL Id: hal-03690208

<https://institut-agro-dijon.hal.science/hal-03690208>

Submitted on 22 Jul 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Copyright

1 **Colouration and flavouring of sunflower seeds affect feeding behaviour in**
2 **urban Carrion crows (*Corvus corone*): a preliminary study**

3

4 Alexandra Destrez^{a,b*}, Christophe Sausse^c, Victoria Aublet^b, Mathilde Lanthony^b, Benoist
5 Schaal^a, Morgane Costes-Thiré^d

6 ^a Developmental Ethology & Cognitive Psychology Laboratory, Centre for Smell, Taste &
7 Feeding Behaviour Science, UMR CNRS, Université de Bourgogne Franche-Comté, Inrae,
8 Institut Agro Dijon, 21000 Dijon, France

9 ^b Institut Agro Dijon, 21000 Dijon, France

10 ^c Terres Inovia, Centre de Grignon, 78850 Thiverval Grignon, France

11 ^d GenPhySE, UMR Université de Toulouse, Inrae, INPT, ENVT, 31326 Castanet Tolosan,
12 France

13 *alexandra.destrez@agrosupdijon.fr

14 **Abstract**

15 The damage caused to crops by wildlife, particularly birds, represent a major challenge for
16 farmers. This study aimed to preliminarily assess feeding behaviour of Carrion crows (*Corvus*
17 *corone*) on sunflower seeds in field conditions. The crows' preferences were tested along a
18 visual cue (seed colour: blue vs. uncoloured) and a taste cue (pepper coating vs. unflavoured).
19 The experiments were carried out in two sessions interspersed by several weeks. For each
20 session, the influence of seed colours on birds' preferences (n=200 uncoloured, n=200 blue)
21 was assessed on day 1, and the influence of seed pepper coating (n=200 pepper coated, n=200
22 unflavoured seeds) was assessed on days 2 and 3. Every day, the remaining seeds within each
23 furrow were counted at 4 after the start of the assay. Throughout the experiments, the only
24 wild birds seen consuming seeds were Carrion crows (*Corvus corone*). In each session, the

25 birds consumed significantly less blue seeds than controls ($p < 0.05$). However, blue seed
26 intake significantly increased between the 2 sessions. The birds thus appear to rely on sight to
27 select sunflower seeds. Otherwise, a significant effect of pepper coating arose in session 2,
28 with birds consuming less pepper-coated seeds than unflavoured seeds ($p < 0.0001$). This
29 intake of pepper seeds was significantly higher in session 1 than in session 2. Therefore,
30 coating the seeds with a pungent irritant may induce reluctance. These assays confirm that
31 Carrion crows are sensitive to the colour and flavour of sunflower seeds, rapidly learn and get
32 used to visual and chemosensory novelty.

33

34 **Keywords:** Corvids; *Corvus corone*; Bird repellents; Avoidance learning; Colour preferences;
35 chemosensory preferences.

36

37 **Highlights**

- 38 • Crows rely on sight to select seeds, but seed colouring is insufficient to prevent intake
39 in the long-term.
- 40 • Crows rapidly learn the safe character of a food made visually unfamiliar.
- 41 • Crows appear not very sensitive to capsaicin.
- 42 • Multisensory repellence methods should be favoured against birds.

43

44 **1. Introduction**

45 The damage caused to crops by wildlife, particularly birds, represents a major challenge for
46 farmers (Linz et al., 2015; Sausse et al., 2021). Birds feed on a wide range of crops, but
47 sunflower crops are especially appetent to them (Linz et al., 2011; Sausse et al., 2021).
48 Sunflower seeds contain essential proteins and lipids, they are a very attractive nutritional

49 resource to birds. Hence, birds are considered as key pests on sunflower farms in America,
50 Europe and Asia (Peer et al., 2003; Khaleghizadeh, 2011; Sausse et al., 2021).

51 In America, birds feed on sunflower heads with little evidence of emergent saplings intake
52 (Klosterman et al., 2013). In fact, the development of sunflower seeds coincides with the post-
53 reproduction and pre-migration periods of birds, during which nutritional requirements are
54 high. For example, North-American sunflower producers expect crop losses during August
55 and September when large numbers of Blackbirds (*Icterinae*) congregate prior to migration
56 (Peer et al., 2003). For sunflower producers in North Dakota, Blackbird damage is a chronic
57 problem costing millions of dollars annually (Klosterman et al., 2013). Bird damage rate to
58 sunflower crops has also been estimated at about 15-25% overall, based on individual
59 estimates in Manitoba (Canada), Punjab (India), Bangalore (India), Turkey, and Khoy (Iran)
60 (Khaleghizadeh, 2011). Using bioenergetic and economic modelling to estimate the potential
61 impact of birds on production yields of sunflower in the northern Great Plains of North
62 America, Peer et al. (2003) concluded “the solution to the conflict appears to be one that
63 focuses not on eliminating all damage, but on preventing it from exceeding 5% per field”.

64 In Europe, although damage from *Passerines* on flower heads exists since the introduction of
65 sunflowers (ACTA, 1967), damage from *Columbidae* and *Corvidae* at the seed then at the
66 emergence has been the subject of increasing concern over the last 15 years. A survey on
67 oilseeds and pulses conducted by Terres Inovia (a French institute devoted to vegetable oils
68 and proteins production) since 2016 shows that sunflower is the first crop affected (80%) by
69 bird damage and that damage at maturity only constitutes 3% of declaration. Wood pigeon
70 (*Columba palumbus*) is the main species declared, followed by the Carrion crow (*Corvus*
71 *corone*) and the Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) (Sausse et al., 2021). Accordingly, many farmers
72 hesitate to grow sunflowers, a useful alternative crop offering environmental and agricultural

73 benefits as it is a honey crop and a favourable precedent for weed management in rotation
74 with winter crops (de la Fuente et al., 2014).

75 Over the past century, various methods of bird control have been tested to protect sunflowers,
76 including lethal control and acoustic harassment (Linz et al., 2011). For example, in 1989,
77 experiments on aerial avicide sprays in the USA were conducted on a roost of 330.000
78 Blackbirds and European starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris L.*). The population of birds decreased to
79 70.000, 5 days after the spray of avicide and the roost was abandoned 13 days after it
80 (Heisterberg et al., 1990). However, lethal management of granivorous bird populations has
81 several drawbacks, such as public disapproval, low cost-effectiveness, difficult logistics and
82 environmental risks especially to non-target birds and biodiversity at large (e.g., Linz et al.,
83 2015). Thus, non-lethal alternatives are needed to manage bird feeding on sunflower crops.
84 Among these non-lethal management options, a number of studies have explored the sensory
85 keenness and cognitive biases of birds, in manipulating the pre-ingestive effects of visual,
86 acoustic or chemosensory cues associated with the crops or the seeds. For example, Delwiche
87 et al. (2007) were successful in broadcasting distress calls to reduce feeding of crows in
88 almond orchards. Wang et al. (2019) tested a drone system incorporating bird psychology for
89 efficient bird damage control in vineyards. Their drone broadcasting bird distress calls could
90 deter large birds (Ravens (*Corvus*) and Cockatoos (*Psittacidae*)). Other strategies used
91 secondary repellence, i.e. the effects of stimuli affecting the birds after they have ingested a
92 target crop or seed. For example, Werner et al. (2011) tested an anthraquinone-based bird
93 repellent on captive Ring-necked Pheasants (*Phasianus colchicus*) and Common Grackles
94 (*Quiscalus quiscula*), which induced post-ingestive illness and long-term avoidance of visual
95 or chemosensory cues associated with the seeds. These birds discriminated between untreated
96 sunflower seeds and seeds treated with 1300-ppm anthraquinone. Moreover, a field efficacy
97 study (Linz et al., 2011) found less bird damage on ripening sunflowers in anthraquinone-

98 treated enclosures than in untreated enclosures. Even if such strategies were used for high-
99 value crops and on limited areas, the concept of exploiting the animals' foraging behaviour
100 and cognition of foods has largely improved the methods of bird control for other crops
101 (Beauchamp, 1995; Clark, 1997; Avery, 2003).

102 The present study aimed to better understand the birds' foraging behaviour and preference for
103 sunflower seeds in an area of intensive agriculture situated in Burgundy, France. Locally,
104 Corvidae (especially, *Corvus Frugilegus* and *Corvus Corone*) predominate in the avifauna of
105 this open field landscape (Frochot, 2016). Here, two sensory cues were considered to assess
106 the alteration of the birds' preference for sunflower seeds when these are artificially coloured
107 or flavoured through pepper coating. Several preliminary assays were conducted in open
108 fields to reproduce the local conditions of sunflower production, but without systematically
109 controlling variations in meteorology.

110

111 **2. Materials and methods**

112 ***2.1. Study site and animals***

113 The study was conducted between November and December 2018 in the experimental field
114 belonging to Institut Agro Dijon, an Agricultural Engineering School located at the periphery
115 of Dijon, France (47°18'34.0"N, 5°04'00.9"E). The experimental plots devoted to this
116 research (Figure 1) are situated in a urban wooded environment, measured 5 x 10 m and have
117 had no pesticide treatment. A little group of 6 adult carrion crows were known to live in the
118 area of these plots.

119 ***2.2. Experimental design***

120 The experiments were carried out over two 3-day sessions from 19 to 21 November (session
121 1), then from 17 to 19 December 2018 (session 2). For each session, day 1 was dedicated to
122 measuring the influence of seed colours, whereas days 2 and 3 were allocated to measure the

123 influence of seed pepper coating on birds' feeding behaviour. We organized the experiment in
124 this way to prevent rejection of seeds by birds first trying pepper-coated seeds. For each assay,
125 200 sunflower seeds were placed in 10 furrows (10-m long; 3-cm deep) spaced 10 cm apart.

126

127 ***2.3. Assessing the influence of seed colours on birds' intake***

128 On day 1, two colour modalities were assayed: uncoloured sunflower seeds (control) and blue
129 sunflower seeds, coloured with food colouring [composed of Blue 1 (CAS: 3844-45-9, E133);
130 citric acid; and potassium sorbate (CAS: 24634-61-5, E202), purchased from Vahiné®
131 Avignon, France)]. We used black and white striated aviary sunflower seeds (Confection non-
132 oilseeds, Hamiform©). Following certain authors (Pegram and Rutowski, 2014), we
133 considered blue coloration as a potential warning colour for birds . On each day, twenty seeds
134 of each colour modality were alternately placed 25 cm apart in each furrow on the surface of
135 the soil and left for 4 hours from 9 am. Each furrow began with a blue seed then a control
136 seed, then a blue seed and so on. The operation was repeated within the ten furrows ($n_{\text{total}}=20$
137 seeds x 2 colours x 10 furrows= 400 seeds; 200 seeds by colour). Four hours after placing the
138 seeds, the remaining seeds within each furrow were counted.

139 The bird species seen on the plot and their numbers were identified with a panoramic
140 videorecorder (Moultrie P-180i, PRADCO Outdoor Brands, Birmingham, USA) equipped
141 with motion detection. When the camera detected a motion, one picture (Figure 2) and one
142 short video (10 sec) were recorded. The minimum duration between two motion detections
143 was 1 min. The behaviour of the bird was analysed along following behavioural categories:
144 feeding (head movements downwards with beak directed to or in contact with the ground),
145 moving (bird walking or hopping on the ground) and flying (bird positioned over the
146 experimental ground without contact, wings spread). To accustom the birds to the video-
147 camera, it was positioned 2 days prior to the start of the session.

148

149 ***2.4. Assessing the influence of pepper coating seeds on birds' intake***

150 A pepper coating (PNF19, Bio Natural Protect, Roissy, France) composed of a mixture of
151 spices (chili peppers and pepper) and an odour agent (geraniol) suspended in water and oil,
152 was assayed on the same striated sunflower seeds. To prevent a possible generalization of
153 avoidance of all seeds in birds who would have first tried the pepper-coated seeds, we delayed
154 the presentation of the different types of seeds. Thus, twenty uncoated seeds (control) were
155 placed in each of the 10 furrows on day 2 for 4 hours from 9 am as control. Then, after
156 removing the uncoated seeds, twenty pepper-coated seeds (Pepper Seeds) were placed in the
157 same 10 furrows on day 3 for 4 hours from 9 am ($n_{\text{total}}=20$ seeds x 2 modalities (control vs.
158 pepper) x 10 furrows= 400 seeds; 200 seeds by modality). The remaining seeds within each
159 furrow were counted 4 hours after the start of each assay.

160 To ensure that only birds consumed the seeds in both sessions (4 hours after the start of each
161 assay), an experimenter systematically checked the pictures-recordings, directly in the
162 experimental field. Then, the exact number and behavior of birds cannot be analyzed due to
163 technical problem with the storage of pictures and videos.

164

165 ***2.5. Data Handling and Statistical Analyses***

166 From the number of seeds remaining in the furrows, we calculated the bird's intake of each
167 kind of seed (Colours: control vs. blue seeds; Pepper-Coating: control vs. pepper seeds) 4
168 hours after the start of an assay.

169 The intake of birds was tested for normal distribution of the error residuals and homogeneity
170 of variance (Shapiro-Wilk test). Parametrical tests were used if the conditions of normality
171 were verified and non-parametrical tests if not. A mixed procedure with "Colour", "Session"
172 and "Colour*Session" as fixed effects and "Furrow" as random effect was used for testing the

173 influence of sunflower seed colour. When there was a significant interaction between the
174 factors, the Bonferroni correction was applied to pair comparisons. A Kruskal-Wallis test
175 with “Coating*Session” as factor was used for assaying the pepper effect. Then a multiple
176 comparison by pairs with the Dunn procedure was used. The significance threshold was set at
177 $p= 0.05$. Statistical analysis relied on the XLSTAT software (version 2016.03.35937,
178 Addinsoft, Paris, France).

179

180 **3. Results**

181 ***3.1. Species attracted to the experimental plots***

182 Only Carrion crows (*Corvus corone*) were detected in both sessions from the video recordings
183 on the experimental plot during the 4 h-observations from assay onset. Depending on the
184 period, one to 3 individual crows landed on the furrows at the same time (Figure 2).

185

186 ***3.2. Influence of seed colour on bird's intake***

187 Birds' general behaviour are described in Figure 3. They spent 91% of time feeding and 9%
188 of time moving (on 44 pictures of bird taken between 9h00 and 13h00) during session 1; 81%
189 of time feeding, 15% of time moving and 4% of time flying (on 54 pictures of bird taken
190 between 9h00 and 13h00) during session 2 (Figure 3).

191 Table 1 describes the number of seeds consumed by session and colour modality. In session 1,
192 after 4-h testing, the total intake consisted of 85.5% of control seeds and 14.5% of blue seeds
193 (Table 1) (i.e., 74% of total control seeds and 12.5% of total blue seeds were consumed). In
194 session 2, after 4-h testing, the total intake consisted of 57.1% of control seeds and 42.9% of
195 blue seeds (Table 1) (i.e., 62% of total control seeds and 46.5% of total blue seeds were
196 consumed).

197 The birds' intake of sunflower seeds was significantly affected by the colouring, as attested by
198 the main effects of Session ($F=4.7$; $P=0.04$) and Colour factors ($F=62.1$; $P<0.0001$), and the
199 Session x Colour interaction ($F=23.8$; $P<0.0001$). For both sessions, blue seeds were
200 significantly less consumed than control seeds at 4 after the assay onset (Figure 4). The blue
201 seeds were significantly less consumed in session 1 than in session 2 (Figure 4).

202

203 ***3.3. Influence of seed pepper coating on bird's intake***

204 Table 2 describes the number of seeds consumed by session, and coating. In session 1, after 4
205 h testing, the total intake consisted of 51% of control seeds and 49% of pepper seeds (Table 2)
206 consumed (i.e., 100% of total control seeds and 96% of total pepper seeds were consumed). In
207 session 2, after 4h testing, the total intake consisted of 62% of control seeds and 38% of
208 pepper seeds (Table 2) consumed (i.e., 100% of total control seeds and 60.5% of total pepper
209 seeds were consumed).

210 Pepper coating affected significantly the birds' intake of sunflower seeds (Kruskal Wallis test,
211 $K=30.4$; $P<0.0001$; Figure 5). In session 2, the pepper coating induced a significant effect on
212 ingestion, the birds consuming less pepper seeds than control seeds. However, this difference
213 was not significant in session 1 (Figure 5). Birds consumed significantly less pepper seeds in
214 session 2 than in session 1 (Figure 5).

215

216 **4. Discussion**

217 This study assessed whether and how birds react when naturally attractive sunflower seeds are
218 altered visually or chemosensorily. In the present conditions, the video-recordings of assays
219 lasting 4 h showed that only birds consumed the seeds. Specifically, only Carrion crows
220 (*Corvus corone*) landed on the experimental plots to consume sunflower seeds.

221

222 **Crows' reaction to the visual alteration of seeds**

223 The colouring of the sunflower seeds in blue hue influenced significantly the birds' selection.
224 Against non-coloured seeds, blue colouring reduced indeed seed intake. Corvids (crows and
225 ravens) are able to discriminate between colours, and appear especially reactive to blue [e.g.,
226 blue plastic tubes (Range et al., 2008), eggs (Götmark, 1992) or images (Nieder, 2017)]. In
227 our study, the crows appeared clearly reluctant to ingest blue-coloured seeds. These results
228 ascertain first that they rely at least in part on sight to detect the seeds, and secondly that the
229 blue hue is used selectively before food intake. Here, crows appear to perceive blue as a
230 negative clue. This might represent a case of neophobia, a stable behavioural trait in corvid
231 species (Miller et al., 2021). The crows' reluctance to blue seeds decreased indeed between
232 sessions, as they consumed significantly more of them during session 2 than during session 1.
233 Neophobia in corvids is modified by socio-ecological factors: it decreases when the observed
234 corvid species dwell in urban habitats (as in the present study), and forage in larger flocks and
235 family groups (Miller et al., 2021). Thus, several hours might be enough to attenuate their
236 assumed neophobia in familiarizing them with seeds newly coloured in blue. This rapid
237 change from selective to non-selective intake behaviour suggests that the crows quickly learn
238 the visually safe character of this novel food, probably in testing the absence of negative post-
239 ingestive consequences of its intake. Carrion crows, as other corvid species, show indeed
240 great behavioural plasticity to environmental challenges due to their high cognitive abilities
241 (Emery and Clayton, 2004; Nieder, 2017). After a first episode of rejection of visual novelty
242 conveyed by foodstuffs, they can rapidly adopt novel foods (Chiarati et al., 2012). This fast
243 habituation is probably boosted by the social group, as an individual bird's feeding behaviour
244 depends on the food choices of co-occurring conspecifics (and even heterospecifics, as carrion
245 crows often flock with other corvid species) (Reidinger and Mason, 1983). Here, the lower
246 intake of blue seeds by birds may not be linked to a true avoidance or lower detectability of

247 the coloured seeds, but only to some delay in learning that this colour is not detrimental. To
248 sum up, it appears that only altering the colour of sunflower seeds is transitorily effective to
249 prevent carrion crows from eating them, but it is clearly not an operative way in the long run.

250

251 **Crows' reaction to the chemosensory alteration of the seeds**

252 It may be noted that the method used to colour the sunflower seeds in blue was confounded
253 with an exposure to flavourants (citric acid and potassium sorbate). Thus, the reluctance to
254 consume the blue seeds may be additionally explained in part by the effect of chemosensory
255 novelty at the pre-ingestive and oral phases of ingestion, respectively. In the second
256 experiment, we assessed whether altering only the chemosensory features of the seeds
257 impacted their intake by the crows. We opted to treat the seeds with a commercial mixture of
258 compounds, dominated by pepper and geraniol, activating simultaneously all types of oro-
259 nasal chemoreceptors of birds (olfaction, taste, trigeminal chemesthesis). It turns out that the
260 pepper coating induced a reluctance relative to the control seeds in the second session only
261 (i.e., 3 weeks after the session 1). This result suggests that the birds may sense and remember
262 adverse interoceptive effects of the flavoured seeds. Indeed, crows can learn and memorize
263 negative events associated with feeding as, for example, the presence of dead conspecifics (in
264 wild American crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) : Swift and Marzluff, 2015) or taste-aversion
265 conditioning (in wild American crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) : Nicolaus et al., 1983; in
266 hooded crows (*Corvus cornix*) : Bogliani and Bellinato, 1998).

267 Earlier studies (Mason et al., 1991; Werner et al., 2010) showed that birds are not exceedingly
268 sensitive to capsaicin, the active compound of pepper, and that therefore pepper-coating does
269 not suffice to induce long-term deterrence. Whereas capsaicin is a useful deterrent for
270 mammals (e.g., horses: (Aley et al., 2015); flying squirrels: (Meyer and Cox, 2019)), the
271 Flock Buster®, a repellent in the USA which contains pepper among other substances, is

272 insufficiently effective to reduce bird damage on sunflower crops (Werner et al., 2010).
273 Moreover, the ‘Blue1’ used here as the colouring agent also contains citric acid, which has a
274 sour taste. Hence, it may be hypothesized that the addition of sourness alone has no strong,
275 long-term repellent effect on Carrion crows. Some authors suggest even that capsaicin and
276 acid taste are effective in repelling mammalian predators from birds’ nests, considering that
277 birds are relatively insensitive to them (Baylis et al., 2012). It would be interesting to study in
278 an experimental population the flavours that birds prefer.

279 In fact, other chemical treatments used on crops, in particular bitter tastants, appeared to be
280 more efficient repellents for birds. For example, the bitter/astringent taste of anthraquinone
281 reduced corn pulling by birds and increased plant populations (Curtis et al. (2019).
282 Considering the present and earlier investigations (Werner et al., 2007), approaches targeting
283 the bitter taste, such as black soap or caffeine, should be favoured. However, relying on
284 monomodal cues (only visual or only chemosensory) to alter the sensory properties of the
285 seeds appears moderately effective or ineffective to prevent carrion crows from eating
286 sunflower seeds. Experiments associating multiple cues should be conducted, for example,
287 associating visual and olfactory at pre-ingestive phase, taste and olfactory cues at the
288 ingestive phase, and adverse interoceptive cues favouring the engagement of aversive
289 conditioning at the post-ingestive phase.

290

291 **Limitations and perspectives**

292 This study is exploratory in nature, and, hence, has several limitations. First, the sensory
293 alterations of the seeds relied on single sensory cues, visual or chemosensory (although the
294 visual cues were confounded with chemosensory cues). We suggest, in line with other studies
295 (e.g., Japperton et al., 2012; Sausse & Levy, 2021), that associating visual plus chemosensory

296 primary repellents into a multisensory effect may bear more efficiency in the interaction
297 between carrion crows and sunflower seeds.

298 Secondly, multiple factors linked with the presentation of the seeds should be explored more
299 thoroughly. For example, the depth of burying (making or not the seeds visible), the visual
300 contrast effect of seeds on the soil background, and the timing of seedling or the visibility of
301 furrows might be investigated. Here, the study was conducted in autumn, which is not the
302 usual sowing season for sunflowers in France, but which corresponds to the birds' maximal
303 anabolic needs before winter. The bird's cognitive abilities (Dufour et al., 2020) may have let
304 them anticipate an easy-to-get energy food source. Moreover, here the seeds were left in the
305 furrows uncovered whereas the seeds for the regular practice of sowing are covered with dirt.
306 It would be interesting to study the behaviour of birds with covered seeds.

307 Thirdly, issues can be raised about the generalisation of the present results with Carrion crows
308 living in different landscape ecologies. Here, the crows most probably belong to an urban
309 population as they were assessed in a built area interspersed with numerous wooded parks.
310 Birds habituated to anthropic environments may behave differently from those living in rural
311 or wild habitats (Miller et al., 2021). Indeed, urban birds may adjust to the multiplicity and
312 variety of foraging and shelter conditions typical of cities (Sol et al., 2013). Accordingly, it is
313 reasonable to consider that urban Carrion crows are more exposed to artificially coloured and
314 spicy leftovers from human consumption goods. This could attenuate visually- and
315 chemosensorily-based neophobia and partially explain why the birds consumed the sunflower
316 seeds within a day in the experimental plot. Thus, this investigation should be pursued on
317 larger samples of individuals and groups of multiple species, including Rooks (*Corvus*
318 *frugilegus*) and Jackdaws (*Corvus monedula*) as they often occur in the field.

319 Fourthly, although difficult in wild birds, it would be useful to recognize the birds
320 individually, at least some of them that could be used as markers of social groups recurring on

321 the feeding grounds. In the present conditions, it is indeed probable that the same birds flew to
322 the experimental field, explaining their rapid habituation to the visual and chemosensory
323 treatments applied on the seeds, especially between the two sessions. We assumed the birds
324 that visited the experimental furrows in sessions 1 and 2 were the same, but cannot be fully
325 certain as the individuals were not recognizable.

326 Finally, both above experiments underline the learning competence of Carrion crows. It is
327 indeed well known that these birds easily get used to common scarecrows (Marsh et al., 1992)
328 and rapidly adapt to human activities (Lee et al., 2011). Accordingly, any method aiming to
329 manipulate their behaviour should rely on these cognitive abilities to shape their interactions
330 with the crops, in turning these interactions into long-standing avoidance. Werner and
331 Provenza (2011) showed that Red-winged blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) associate visual
332 and gustatory experience with post-ingestive consequences to avoid alimentary toxicants. In
333 addition to social facilitation and long-term memory, such a multisensory paradigm is
334 promising with crows. Multiple ways of sensory manipulation are available for these birds,
335 relying on auditory, chemosensory, tactile, interoceptive, visual, physiological, pyrotechnic or
336 physical means and their combination (Mason and Clark, 1992; Clapperton et al., 2012).
337 Thus, we encourage the implementation of sustainable control studies, based on the
338 associative learning of the target bird species and keeping in mind the use of natural products
339 applicable to organic farming, such as plant secondary metabolites. Moreover, in a context of
340 societal valuation of animal welfare, especially in agriculture, it is important to seek
341 sustainable alternatives to the lethal methods often implied in the management of crops.

342

343 **Acknowledgements**

344 The authors wish to thank Lionel Thiery (Terres Inovia), the technical staff of Inrae Dijon,
345 Nollan Puget and Vincent Choulet (Institut Agro Dijon) for their technical assistance and
346 advices. They also thank Leanne Featherstone for linguistic proofreading.

347

- 349 ACTA, 1967. Association de coordination technique agricole. La Protection des cultures
350 contre les oiseaux: étude sur les dégâts provoqués par pigeons, corvidés et passereaux et les
351 moyens de les limiter. Collection phytosanitaire. Paris, France. Association de coordination
352 technique agricole, Fédération nationale des groupements de protection des cultures, ACTA,
353 Paris, France.
- 354 Aley, J.P., Adams, N.J., Ladyman, R.J., Fraser, D.L., 2015. The efficacy of capsaicin as an
355 equine repellent for chewing wood. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* 10, 243-247.
- 356 Avery, M.L., 2003. Avian repellants. *Encyclopedia of agrochemicals* 1, 122-129
- 357 Baylis, S.M., Cassey, P., Hauber, M.E., 2012. Capsaicin as a deterrent against introduced
358 mammalian nest predators. *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology* 124, 518-524.
- 359 Beauchamp, G.K., 1995. Chemical signals and repellency: problems and prognosis, National
360 Wildlife Research Center Repellents Conference 1995, Denver, p. 5.
- 361 Bogliani, G., Bellinato, F., 1998. Conditioned aversion as a tool to protect eggs from avian
362 predators in heron colonies. *Colonial Waterbirds*, 69-72.
- 363 Chiarati, E., Canestrari, D., Vera, R., Baglione, V., 2012. Subordinates benefit from
364 exploratory dominants: response to novel food in cooperatively breeding carrion crows.
365 *Anim. Behav.* 83, 103-109.
- 366 Clapperton, B.K., Porter, R.E., Day, T.D., Waas, J.R., Matthews, L.R., 2012. Designer
367 repellents: combining olfactory, visual or taste cues with a secondary repellent to deter free-
368 ranging house sparrows from feeding. *Pest Manag. Sci.* 68, 870-877.
- 369 Clark, L., 1997. Physiological, ecological, and evolutionary bases for the avoidance of
370 chemical irritants by birds, *Curr. Ornithol.*, Springer, pp. 1-37.
- 371 Curtis, P.D., Wise, K.L., Cummings, J., Gabriel, A.D., Ganoë, K., Miller, J.J., Hunter, M.E.,
372 O'Neil, K.A., Lawrence, J.R., Cerosaletti, P.E., Dewing, D.R., 2019. Field evaluation of
373 anthraquinone treatment to reduce corn seedling damage by birds. *Crop Prot.* 123, 59-62.
- 374 de la Fuente, E.B., Suárez, S.A., Lenardis, A.E., Poggio, S.L., 2014. Intercropping sunflower
375 and soybean in intensive farming systems: Evaluating yield advantage and effect on weed and
376 insect assemblages. *NJAS - Wageningen Journal of Life Sciences* 70-71, 47-52.
- 377 Delwiche, M., Houk, A., Gorenzel, W., Salmon, T., 2007. Control of crows in almonds by
378 broadcast distress calls. *Transactions of the ASABE* 50, 675-682.
- 379 Dufour, V., Broihanne, M.H., Wascher, C.A., 2020. Corvids avoid odd evaluation by
380 following simple rules in a risky exchange task. *Ethology* 126, 153-164.
- 381 Emery, N.J., Clayton, N.S., 2004. The mentality of crows: convergent evolution of
382 intelligence in corvids and apes. *science* 306, 1903-1907.
- 383 Frochot, B., 2016. Les oiseaux. La faune sauvage de Côte-d'Or. *Revue Scientifique*
384 *Bourgogne-Nature*, Special issue 14, 187-243.
- 385 Götmark, F., 1992. Blue eggs do not reduce nest predation in the song thrush, *Turdus*
386 *philomelos*. *Behav. Ecol. Sociobiol.* 30, 245-252.
- 387 Heisterberg, J.F., Cummings, J.L., Linz, G.M., Knittle, E., Seamans, T.W., Woronecki, P.P.,
388 1990. Field trial of a CPT-avicide aerial spray. *Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest*
389 *Conference*, University of California, Davis.
- 390 Khaleghizadeh, A., 2011. Effect of morphological traits of plant, head and seed of sunflower
391 hybrids on house sparrow damage rate. *Crop Prot.* 30, 360-367.
- 392 Klosterman, M.E., Linz, G.M., Slowik, A.A., Homan, H.J., 2013. Comparisons between
393 blackbird damage to corn and sunflower in North Dakota. *Crop Prot.* 53, 1-5.
- 394 Lee, W.Y., Choe, J.C., Jablonski, P.G., 2011. Wild birds recognize individual humans:
395 experiments on magpies, *Pica pica*. *Anim. Cogn.* 14, 817-825.

396 Linz, G.M., Bucher, E.H., Canavelli, S.B., Rodriguez, E., Avery, M.L., 2015. Limitations of
397 population suppression for protecting crops from bird depredation: A review. *Crop Prot.* 76,
398 46-52.

399 Linz, G.M., Homan, H.J., Werner, S.J., Hagy, H.M., Bleier, W.J., 2011. Assessment of Bird-
400 management Strategies to Protect Sunflowers. *Bioscience* 61, 960-970.

401 Marsh, R.E., Erickson, W.A., Salmon, T.P., 1992. Scarecrows and predator models for
402 frightening birds from specific areas, *Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest Conference*, 49,
403 Nebraska - Lincoln.

404 Mason, J.R., Bean, N.J., Shah, P.S., Clark, L., 1991. Taxon-specific differences in
405 responsiveness to capsaicin and several analogues: correlates between chemical structure and
406 behavioral aversiveness. *J. Chem. Ecol.* 17, 2539-2551.

407 Mason, J.R., Clark, L., 1992. Nonlethal repellents: the development of cost-effective,
408 practical solutions to agricultural and industrial problems, *Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest*
409 *Conference*, University of California, Davis.

410 Meyer, R.T., Cox, J.A., 2019. Capsaicin as a tool for repelling southern flying squirrels from
411 red-cockaded woodpecker cavities. *Human–Wildlife Interactions* 13, 12.

412 Miller, R., Lambert, M.L., Frohnwieser, A., Brecht, K.F., Bugnyar, T., Crampton, I., Garcia-
413 Pelegrin, E., Gould, K., Greggor, A.L., Izawa, E.-I., 2021. Individual repeatability, species
414 differences, and the influence of socio-ecological factors on neophobia in 10 corvid species.
415 bioRxiv.

416 Nicolaus, L.K., Cassel, J.F., Carlson, R.B., Gustavson, C.R., 1983. Taste-aversion
417 conditioning of crows to control predation on eggs. *Science* 220, 212-214.

418 Nieder, A., 2017. Inside the corvid brain—probing the physiology of cognition in crows.
419 *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 16, 8-14.

420 Peer, B.D., Homan, H.J., Linz, G.M., Bleier, W.J., 2003. Impact of blackbird damage to
421 sunflower: bioenergetic and economic models. *Ecol. Appl.* 13, 248-256.

422 Pegram, K.V., Rutowski, R.L., 2014. Relative effectiveness of blue and orange warning
423 colours in the contexts of innate avoidance, learning and generalization. *Anim. Behav.* 92, 1-
424 8.

425 Range, F., Bugnyar, T., Kotrschal, K., 2008. The performance of ravens on simple
426 discrimination tasks: a preliminary study. *Acta ethologica* 11, 34-41.

427 Reidinger, R., Mason, J.R., 1983. Exploitable characteristics of neophobia and food aversions
428 for improvements in rodent and bird control, *Vertebrate pest control and management*
429 *materials: Fourth symposium*, ASTM International, West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania,
430 United States.

431 Sausse, C., Chevalot, A., Lévy, M., 2021. Hungry birds are a major threat for sunflower
432 seedlings in France. *Crop Prot.*, 105712.

433 Sol, D., Lapiedra, O., González-Lagos, C., 2013. Behavioural adjustments for a life in the
434 city. *Anim. Behav.* 85, 1101-1112.

435 Swift, K.N., Marzluff, J.M., 2015. Wild American crows gather around their dead to learn
436 about danger. *Anim. Behav.* 109, 187-197.

437 Wang, Z., Griffin, A.S., Lucas, A., Wong, K., 2019. Psychological warfare in vineyard: Using
438 drones and bird psychology to control bird damage to wine grapes. *Crop Prot.* 120, 163-170.

439 Werner, S.J., Cummings, J.L., Tupper, S.K., Hurley, J.C., Stahl, R.S., Primus, T.M., 2007.
440 Caffeine formulation for avian repellency. *The Journal of Wildlife Management* 71, 1676-
441 1681.

442 Werner, S.J., Linz, G.M., Tupper, S.K., Carlson, J.C., 2010. Laboratory efficacy of chemical
443 repellents for reducing blackbird damage in rice and sunflower crops. *The Journal of Wildlife*
444 *Management* 74, 1400-1404.

445 Werner, S.J., Provenza, F.D., 2011. Reconciling sensory cues and varied consequences of
446 avian repellents. *Physiol. Behav.* 102, 158-163.
447

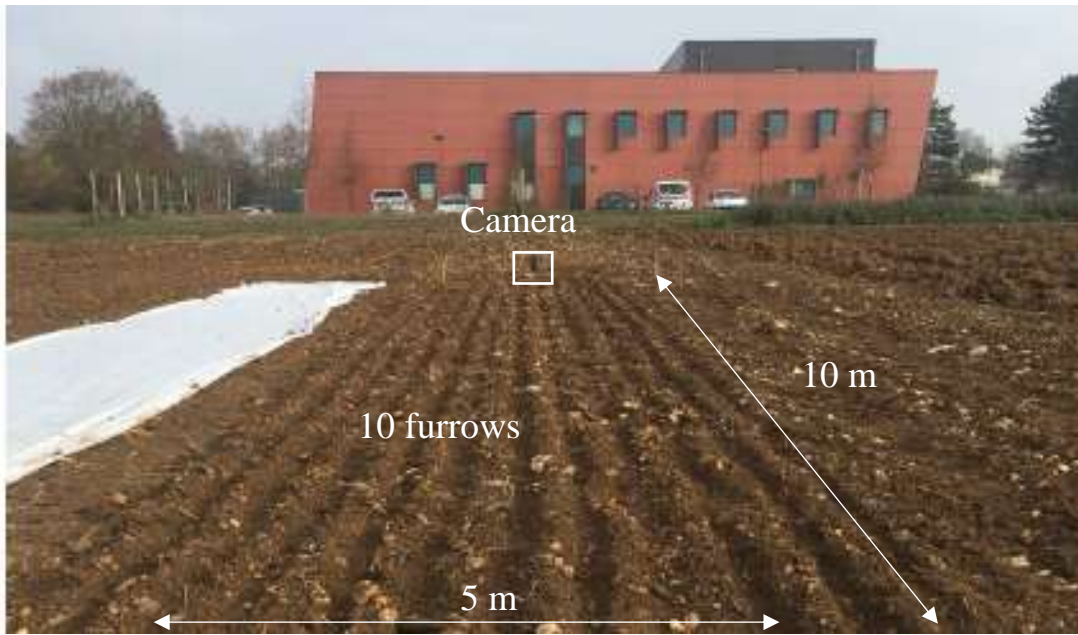


Figure 1. Experimental design



Figure 2. Example of a picture from the camera: three individual carrion crows (*Corvus corone*) detected, n°1 is moving, n°2 and n°3 are feeding

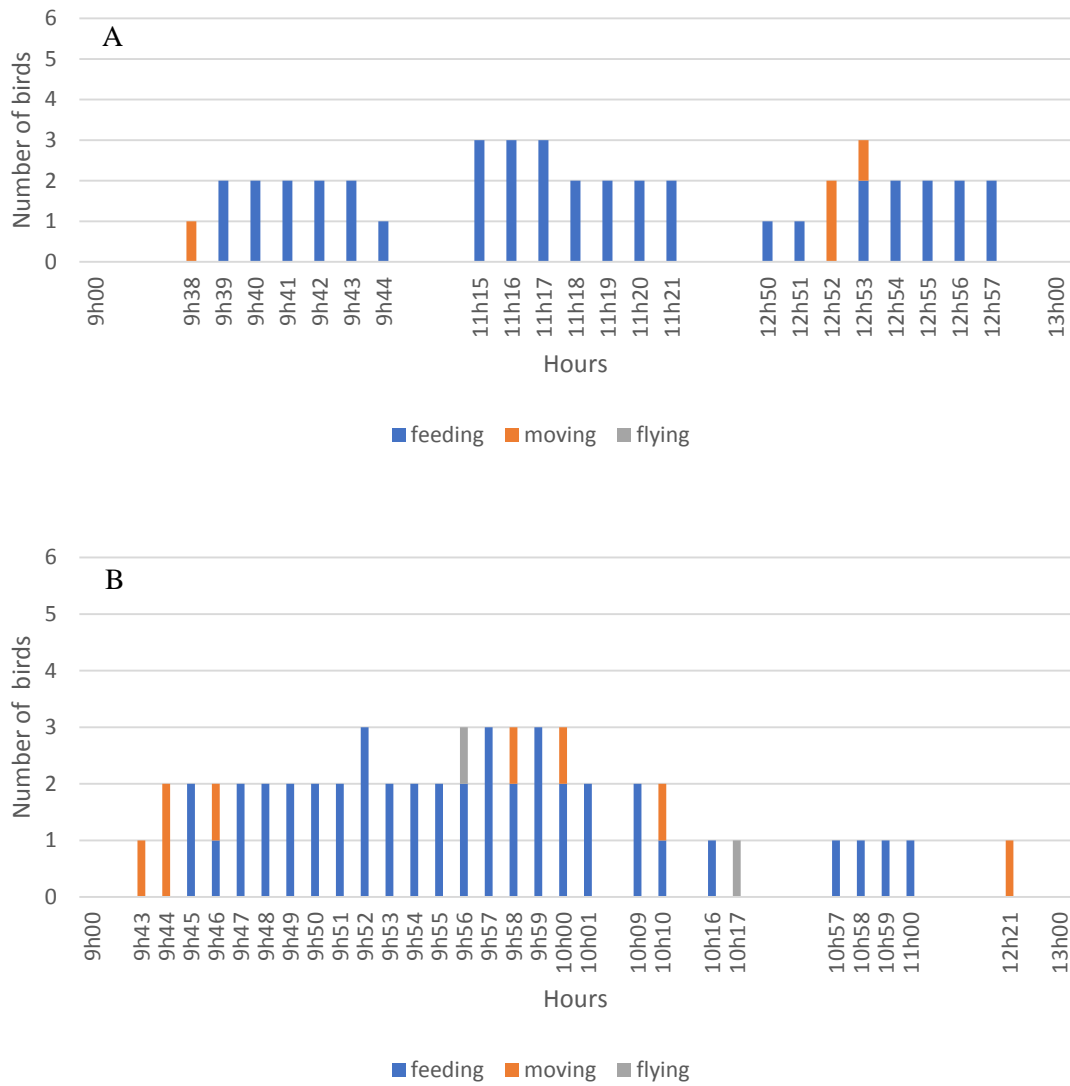


Figure 3. Number of carrion crows and their behavior during the assay assessing the influence of seed colour on birds' intake A. Session 1; B. Session 2

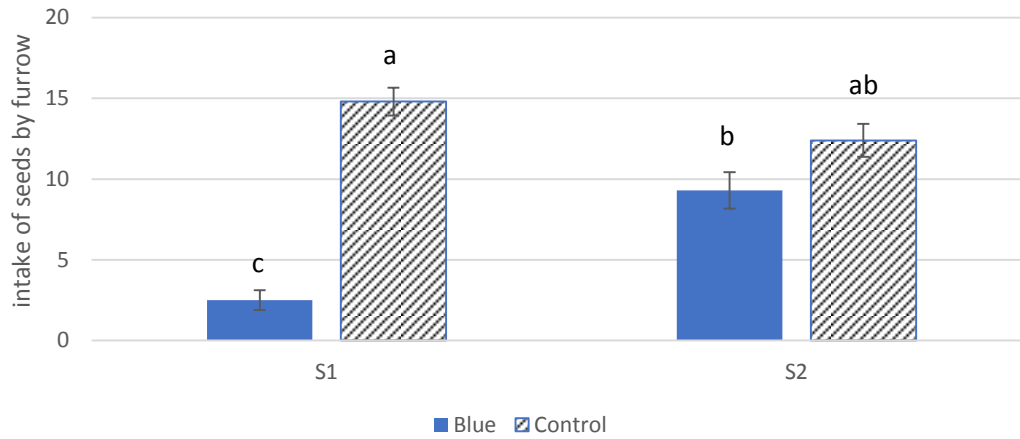


Figure 4. Average intake of seeds by furrow (n=10) depending on coloration (Blue and Control seeds). Results are presented for session 1 (S1) and session 2 (S2) after 4h testing. Data are means \pm SEM. Different letters indicate statistically significant differences with $P < 0.05$ (Bonferroni's correction).

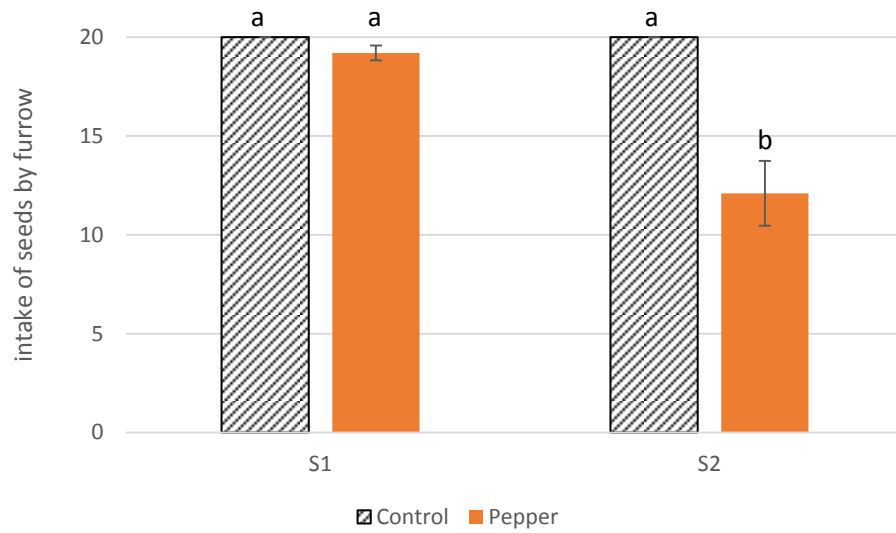


Figure 5. Average intake of seeds by furrow (n=10) depending on pepper coating (Control and Pepper seeds). Results are presented for session 1 (S1) and session 2 (S2) after 4h testing. Data are means \pm SEM. Different letters indicate statistically significant differences with $P < 0.05$ (Dunn procedure).

Table 1. Number of seeds consumed by session, hour of test and colour

Session	Hour	Total seeds consumed	Blue seeds consumed	Control seeds consumed
1	4h	173	25	148
2	4h	217	93	124

Table 2. Number of seeds consumed by session, hour of test and coating

Session	Hour	Total seeds consumed	Pepper seeds consumed	Control seeds consumed
1	4h	392	192	200
2	4h	321	121	200