

Crow Attacks Have Gotten So Bad That a Scientist Built a Tool to Map the Carnage

By [Kate Lunau](#)

June 3, 2016, 10:33am

On June 2, an anonymous Vancouver resident was violently attacked from behind while walking through the city's downtown.

"Two crows swooped down and started scratching my head I then started running, and screaming, and they flew after me and kept scratching my head," the victim wrote of the bird assault.

"I had to run into a restaurant to stop the attack."

This is just one of some 896 bird-human altercations [documented on a map](#) built by Langara College instructor Jim O'Leary to document crow attacks in Vancouver and Victoria BC. O'Leary told me he was inspired to create it after witnessing several crow attacks on the leafy streets of downtown Vancouver. He'd be at work, and a colleague would complain they'd just been targeted.

"People were coming in after getting whacked on the head" after being dive-bombed by a bird, he said. The attacks are especially severe at this time of year, he believes, when crows are aggressively protecting their young.

Clicking around on the map, which launched April 22, would terrify anyone with a fear of birds. People rate crow attacks on an "aggressiveness" scale of 1-to-5 (least to greatest).

"I walked by and felt that someone was shoving me aside," says one report, dated May 2. "Turned around and it was a crow."

"Crow struck my head!!" reads another.

These birds are fearsomely intelligent, which makes them either more impressive, or even scarier, depending on who you ask. Members of the corvid family have been known to [craft hook-shaped tools](#), and can recognize human faces.

"Crow attacked the back of my head and then tried to follow me into the lobby"

O'Leary, who teaches a course in [geographic information systems](#) (GIS)—which essentially means mapping and storing data that has a spatial component—used open source software to build the map. "I figured, I'm a GIS guy. I should come up with a GIS solution."

The field of GIS has opened up in the past few years, O'Leary continued, with the launch of QGIS in 2013, free and open-source software "that's changing the landscape." Before, similar software might have cost thousands of dollars, he added, leaving it mainly in the hands of big companies and government departments.

Of course, it would be possible to build something similar to this on Google Maps. But after a certain amount of usage, [Google will charge a fee](#). "The other thing is that, [this way], you're not using someone else's technology. I built this from scratch," O'Leary said.

Because the field of GIS is exploding, more students are enrolling in GIS courses at Langara, and O'Leary anticipates that to continue. Of course, some of that keen interest might have to do with this crow attack map, which has gotten a lot of attention in the local media. Crow attacks are apparently a big concern.

O'Leary expects them to taper off in the next few weeks, when the birds are no longer so fiercely protecting their young.

In the meantime, West Coasters should watch their backs. And check the map.

"Crow attacked the back of my head and then tried to follow me into the lobby," one poster wrote (May 29). Fortunately I made it inside without him. So scary!"