

The Hungry Bird: A Raven and Its Find

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If one particular Common Raven could talk, and we could understand what it was saying, you might hear something like, “The sweet you can eat between meals without ruining your appetite,” or “At work, rest and play, you get three great tastes in a Milky Way.” *Let me explain.

On 21 May 2012 I was approaching the Grand Junction entrance to one of my favorite places, Colorado National Monument. Before entering this magnificent piece of Utah inside our western border, I decided to cruise the subdivision northwest of the entry road to try for a common resident, Gambel’s Quail, “needed” for my year list. This lovely desert species quickly obliged, and I fell back under the tug of a stroll through Devil’s Kitchen within the monument. Just as I left the subdivision road to enter the park entry road, a raven on a split-rail fence caught my eye. It had been eating something.



My car should have a bumper sticker that reads, “Warning, Sudden Stops for Birds With Stuff In Their Beaks.”

The mandibles of this raven, especially the lower one, were not completely blackish-gray like Sibley shows, but rather mottled with globs of pale and dark brown.



On the fence was a shred of colorful paper.



I took photos of the bird and the paper for later detective work. As everyone knows, you can find almost everything on the internet. After cropping the paper scrap photo, it was apparent this was some sort of candy wrapper. A search for “candy bar wrappers” yielded 2.6 million results (I’m making this up but it was a lot), one of which was a perfect match: Milky Way Simply Caramel.



My ex-wife never outright said it, but I'm certain thought it, that we were all going to die stopping along the interstate somewhere to see what kind of dead or discarded morsel a corvid was eating, or to procure a road killed specimen for the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. So far so good, but she was right to the extent it was probably unimportant to World Peace and not worth the risk. But the question, "What is it?" always begged an answer, and still does. One lives and learns, and the intersection of Monument Road with S. Camp Road in Mesa County is not nearly as dangerous as I-70 in Saint Louis.

So, those warm-toned blobs were caramel, the darker ones chocolate. Those facts generate a lot of questions: Why would any sane human become separated from such a combination? Did the raven perhaps steal the bar from an open car window? Did it fall out of a biker's backpack? Were the ingredients harmful to the bird, helpful to the bird? I would guess the answer to the last is like that for anything really tasty – a mixed bag, probably mostly bad.

A search of The Birds of North America database did not yield any answers (Rodewald 2015). A general on-line search in different forms around the general theme of "birds and chocolate" seemed to indicate chocolate is not good for birds, be they wild or pet.

Chocolate can contain both theobromine and caffeine which can lead to vomiting, diarrhea, increased heart rate, tremors, seizures, hyperactivity, and even death. Yikes, that's right up there with every prescription drug advertised on TV when people over 25 are apt to be watching. One site offered a rule of thumb for chocolate toxicity: one pound of chocolate per seven pounds of animal can be lethal (all you chocoholics, this includes humans). A raven weighs 2.6 pounds. A Milky Way Simply Caramel weighs 1.91 ounces. The bar is not all chocolate, but let's assume it is; 8.38 bars would make one pound. It would take 2.7 ravens to equal seven pounds. Doing the math, believing the rule of thumb source and accepting the assumption above, a raven would have to consume 3.11 Milky Way Simply Caramel bars to kill itself. I doubt this happened. Not even that kid in your childhood neighborhood who could be tricked into anything would be dumb enough to toss/allow to be stolen 3+ Milky Way Simply Caramel bars.

And besides that, ravens everywhere are safe because I learned during my web wandering this candy bar has been discontinued.

*Actual marketing slogans over the years for Milky Way candy bars. The author gets no proceeds from sale of chocolate products induced by reading this article.

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