

Crow Country by Mark Cocker.  
Jonathan Cape 2007.

There are few genres of literature that I enjoy more than nature writing, for at its best it takes you out of yourself and transports you not just to exotic places but those so easily ignored which are much closer to home, and focuses on flora and fauna that may be similarly commonplace as well as those of a rarer nature.

Crow Country, a slightly misleading title, takes the reader into Mark Cocker's abiding passion for members of the Corvidae, specifically rooks and their corvid cousins, jackdaws. If all that comes to mind when the name rook is mentioned is a non-descript, large-ish black bird with an ugly beak then Crow Country will change your perceptions for ever.

The sub-title of the book is *A Meditation on Birds, Landscape and Nature*, and it hints broadly that the sweep of the book will be much more general than the title suggests. Cocker writes autobiographically of his passion for rooks, and the lengths to which he has gone to observe them across the British Isles, of other great ornithologists of the past who have shared his passion, of the way in which rooks have contributed to the countryside and become the 'sound' of the country, and of their place in literature.

Crow Country is a wonderful example of quality nature writing, superbly crafted, and a worthy complement to *A Tiger in the Sand* published last year.

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