

Factsheet

Ravens at the Tower of London

Background Information

- The newest birds are a male raven called Gundulf, after the architect of William the Conqueror's White Tower, and a female raven called Hugine, actually the third Tower raven to be called this. They both came to us in June 2008 from a breeder in north Somerset and have been settling into the Tower since then, as well as being checked over and monitored by the vets at London Zoo. At the time of writing (Oct 08) they are currently about six months old
- The new arrivals can look forward to a good life at the Tower - the ravens are given 6oz of raw meat and bird formula biscuits soaked in blood each day. Once a week they enjoy an egg, plus the occasional rabbit, which is given to them whole because the fur is good for them! They are also rather partial to scraps from the mess kitchen at the Tower
- There are now a total of nine ravens that reside at the Tower (Hugine, Gundulf, Marley and Erin are brothers and sisters):
 - Gundulf (male, yellow leg ring, Somerset, 2008)
 - Hugine (female, red ring, Somerset, 2008)
 - Marley (male, light green ring, Somerset, 2008)
 - Erin (female, white ring, Somerset, 2006)
 - Merlin (female, pink ring, South Wales, 2005)
 - Baldrick (male, dark blue ring, Dartmoor, 2005)
 - Munin (female, dark green ring, Scotland, 1995)
 - Thor (male, orange ring, Hampshire, 1995)
 - Gwyllum (male, blue ring, Wales, 1988)
- It is not known when the ravens first came to the Tower of London but their presence is protected by legend. Traditionally,

with birds of ill omen, it is their absence rather than their presence that is feared at the Tower of London. There is debate as to when the legend dates from, but the legend say that if the ravens leave, the Tower would fall and the Kingdom would fall, so Charles II decreed that there must always be at least six here.

- To prevent the birds from flying away, their lifting feathers are trimmed by the Raven Master. This procedure does not hurt, nor does it harm them in any way, but by unbalancing their flight it merely ensures they don't stray far from the Tower
- Tower Ravens enjoy a good life - as well as a good diet and veterinary care, their life expectancy is high unlike in the wild.. The oldest raven to live at the Tower was called Jim Crow who died at the age of 44. At the time of writing (Oct 08), the oldest Tower raven serving today is currently 20 years old
- There has been the occasional raven escape. Grog was last seen outside an East End pub called the Rose and Punchbowl in 1981. Whilst he had been at the Tower for 21 years, he clearly felt the need for a change
- Occasionally ravens have to be dismissed for bad behaviour. This happened to George who received his marching orders in 1986 after he developed an unhealthy taste for TV aerials:
"On Saturday, 13th September 1986, Raven George, enlisted 1975, was posted to the Welsh Mountain Zoo. Conduct unsatisfactory, services therefore no longer required." George was sent to a sanctuary in Wales where it transpired he was Georgina - who gave birth to Gwyllum, one of today's Tower ravens
- Since 1987 the Tower has undertaken an ambitious and successful breeding programme for the ravens. Two ravens called Charlie and Rhys paired up and produced a total of 17 chicks.
- Thor, a very good mimic, came from The Owl Sanctuary in the New Forest having been rescued as fledgling. On a quiet day he will repeat things the Raven Master has said to him with exactly the right tone to create all sorts of confusion!