Del Norte Triplicate

OPINION

Bird brain is not an insult

By Kevin Hendrick: In My View July 23, 2026

In my last column, I stated that birds provide a connection to nature, enhance wellbeing, improve mental health and are an indicator of environmental health.

Based on my personal experience I can attest to this. My homestead is a bird sanctuary and when I go outside, I am surrounded by bird song. This has a natural calming effect. Our bird feeders attract a beautiful variety of little birds and watching them makes me feel more connected to nature.

The presence of such a diversity of birds is evidence that we have a healthy habitat. Occasionally I will see larger birds fly over like ducks, geese, hawks, eagles, vultures, egret and great blue heron, which always remind me of a pterodactyl.

Bird brain is not an insult. In fact, birds are a lot smarter than some people think.

I recently did research about how intelligent crows are. They can learn and adapt. I learned that crows remember if you are mean to them and I wondered if they would also remember if you are nice to them.

So, I started an experiment.

I started putting unsalted peanuts in a specific spot to see if I could lure some crows. In a few months I have trained two crows to come when I whistle, sometimes. I think they have also trained me. When I forget to put out peanuts, they perch on the garden fence and caw at me until I bring them nuts.

What I have found interesting is that these are not random birds. I recognized that these two birds are a mating pair. They nested in a tall tree and hatched two fledglings that appeared one day 80% the size of their parents. Each has a distinctive voice and the fledglings gurgle like they are still learning to caw.

This preoccupation with birds may seem weird but I come by it honestly. When I was young, my father was the President of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. My mother referred to him as a “bird nut” but that label was frowned on in the scientific birding community.

In eighth grade, I had my father for a science teacher. He taught us all about birds, what they are called and how to identify them. He had a slide show so we could see them in the wild and he also had a large collection of actual birds preserved inside of clear plastic tubes so we could see them up close.

I truly enjoy birdwatching and I am not alone. Recent surveys reveal that 96 million Americans, one third of the adult population, engage in birdwatching activities. Ecotourism is big business and Del Norte County is a prime location to capitalize on this.

We should hang out a sign that says, “Welcome Bird Nuts!”