

MULTIPLE BIRD SPECIES EATING FRUIT OF ONE SUGARBERRY TREE

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In the Tropical Zone of the Americas, various bird species have such dietary specialization toward eating fruit that they are described as "frugivores" or fruit-eaters. In the Temperate Zone of North America, only a few summer residents are primarily frugivores, but numerous species will feed on fruit according to its seasonal and local availability.

The fruit of mulberry trees (*Morus* spp.) is commonly recognized to be very attractive to birds such as American Robins (*Turdus migratorius*) and other thrushes, but also other families such as mimids. Being unaware of such a favored use of fruits of sugarberry trees (*Celtis laevigata*) by birds, it seems appropriate to record observations of multiple species from several families feeding at a lone sugarberry tree on a single day.

On 18 October 1987 I visited the headquarters area of the Pascagoula Wildlife Management area at Parker Lake, Jackson County, off MS 614 near the eastern edge of the flood plain of the Pascagoula River. Weather conditions were mild, with the temperature about 80° F, low humidity, and very light breezes. The sky was mostly clear after a recent cool front passage.

Between 14:00 and 16:30 I observed bird activity at one sugarberry tree. This tree (since removed) was about 6-8 meters tall and stood 8-10 meters south of an equipment shed located ca. 250 meters south from the paved roadway. There was no other tree within 20 meters. Very few leaves remained on the tree at that time.

The bird species and number of individuals seen to use the ripe fruit of this sugarberry over 2.5 hours were as follows:

Red-bellied Woodpecker (<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>)	1
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (<i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>)	3
Northern Flicker (<i>Colaptes auratus</i>)	2
Pileated Woodpecker (<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>)	2
Eastern Phoebe (<i>Sayornis phoebe</i>)	1
Swainson's Thrush (<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>)	2
Wood Thrush (<i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>)	3
Gray Catbird (<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>)	3
Northern Mockingbird (<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>)	1
Scarlet Tanager (<i>Piranga olivacea</i>)	3
Northern Cardinal (<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>)	3
Rose-breasted Grosbeak (<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>)	7

The avidity of the various bird species toward the fruits of the sugarberry tree was surprising to me considering the small size, merely ca. 5 mm diameter, of the fruit. This seemed particularly remarkable and incongruous in the case of the largest species, the Pileated Woodpecker. It may be noteworthy that for only one of the twelve species--the Northern Flicker--is fruit *not* shown as a recognized dietary component by the compendium of Ehrlich et al. (1988). The fruits of the several species of the genus *Celtis* (hackberries, sugarberries) were described as "popular with many winter birds" (Martin et al. 1951). Martin et al. listed numerous bird species as feeding on fruits of the hackberries, among which were six included in the present list: Yellow-shafted (= Northern) Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Northern Mockingbird, Gray Catbird, Olive-backed (= Swainson's) Thrush and Northern Cardinal. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, which was listed only for using sap from hackberry trees, and the five additional species from the present report comprise additions to the list of Martin et al., 1951).

These species did not all visit the tree simultaneously, but most of the time there were two or more species present concurrently. Very little agonistic interaction was evident among the visitors; all seemed intent on the harvesting of their share of the berries. One apparent exception was a "flipping" of the wings by Wood Thrushes, seemingly a warning behavior or a sign of agitation directed at or evoked by the birds nearest to them.

Literature Cited

Ehrlich, P.R., D.S. Dobkins, and D. Wheye. 1988. *The birder's handbook: A field guide to the natural history of North American birds*. Simon and Schuster, Fireside, New York.

Martin, A.C., H.S. Zim and A.L. Nelson. 1951. *American Wildlife & Plants*. McGraw-Hill, New York.