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'ANTING' BY ROBINS

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SEVERAL notes have appeared recently in ornithological literature regarding the subject of 'anting' by birds. In connection with this matter the following observations may prove of some interest.

On August 3, 1941, at about eight o'clock in the morning, I noticed a male Robin (*Turdus migratorius migratorius*), on my lawn at Ridgewood, New Jersey, which was very obviously engaged in anting himself. He would pick an object from the ground and quickly place it under one of his partly opened wings, as has been frequently described, and sometimes on the under side of the tail. In his efforts to accomplish the latter he would assume most grotesque postures, similar to those illustrated in an article by Nice and ter Pelkwyk (Auk, 57: 520-522, 1940) and frequently would lose balance and fall on his back as noted by Ivor (Auk 58: 416, 1941). At other times he would press his breast to the grass and partly rotate his body with this contact as a pivot.

After this had continued for about fifteen minutes, another male Robin appeared and drove the first from the spot. Settling on the favored point, he duplicated, as far as I could discern, the procedure of the first. While the new arrival was in possession, Robin number one sat on the lawn about ten feet away, quietly watching.

When bird number two had enjoyed the spot for several minutes a third male swooped down, drove number two away, and took his place on the anting point. Number two now joined number one as audience.

From that time the procedure was that of rotation. After one bird had occupied the anting point for a few minutes, one of the others would approach him threateningly, drive him from the spot and usurp the favored place. Only for a short time, however, would he be permitted to remain there unmolested; then he, in turn, would be driven away and replaced by another.

At one time, when a passer-by had frightened the birds and they had flown up into the trees, I went out and made a hasty examination of the spot. I found a swarm of about one hundred ants milling around rather excitedly in a space about one foot square. I could see none that were maimed or crushed but there were three that appeared to be dead and these were being carried about in the mandibles of members of the swarm. A sample of the ants was taken and these were later identified by Dr. William S. Creighton as workers of *Formica fusca*, probably the variety *subaenescens*.

As soon as I left the Robins returned and resumed their routine of rotation and this was kept up for about thirty minutes more. I could see nothing that indicated that any of the ants were eaten and, so far as I could determine, the feathers showed no moisture as might have been expected if the secretions of crushed ants had been used for dressing the feathers. When they had left I examined the spot again but found not an ant in sight.

In an article on "Anting' by Birds," McAtee (Auk, 55: 98-105, 1938) lists a number of reasons that have been suggested for this custom, one of these being the "simple use of ant hills as dusting places." This reason can be discarded in the above case, however, for at this point there was no ant hill nor any trace of dust or sand.

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