

'ANTING' BY THE ROBIN AND TOWHEE

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THE published accounts of 'anting' by birds have been summarized by W. L. McAtee (*Auk*, 55: 98-105, 1938) and Margaret M. Nice and ter Pelkwyk (*Auk*, 57: 520-522, 1940) but I never fully believed in the occurrence of this most improbable phenomenon until I recently saw it with my own eyes.

On the evening of July 10, 1942, soon after sunset, I saw a male Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) preening himself on the lawn 15 feet from our window. The bird was preening much more vigorously than is customary and his actions were further remarkable for the frequency with which he preened in a single motion the whole outer edge of the wing from wrist to tip. In fact, this wing preening was done so violently that the bird repeatedly fell down at the end of the preening motion and once this ended in a complete somersault. Sometimes the bird preened the tail or body plumage but more often he concerned himself with the wing. Almost immediately I noticed that nearly every preening was preceded by a hasty picking of some small object from the ground and I realized that here at last was a bird 'anting'. Several times the Robin crouched and seemed to rub its body against the ground. Twice he ran off out of sight but returned almost immediately to resume anting at the same spot as before. Clearly the bird was mainly concerned with preening and I saw no evidence of its swallowing anything. Nor did there seem much chance that any ants could have survived the violent treatment they received.

After more than five minutes of this, the Robin ran off out of sight and was almost immediately replaced by a female Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) that came to the same spot and briefly but definitely preened and anted. After the Towhee left, a Catbird came several times to the spot but seemed to detect us at the window and scolded and flew off to the bushes nearby without doing any preening.

Specimens of the ants which I found swarming in considerable numbers about the anting ground were identified by Frederick M. Gaige as *Tapinoma sessele* (Say), a weak, non-predaceous, aphidicolous species.

I have found no earlier records of anting by either the Robin or Towhee.

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