

July, 1932

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Waxwings Eating Spoiled Fruits.—On February 23 of this year, Mr. Robert Fowler, one of my students, brought me a paper bag containing ten Cedar Waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*). These birds with fifteen others had been picked up underneath an ornamental date palm (*Phoenix Canariensis*) at his home in Los Angeles, California. The following day seventeen more were brought in from the same spot, making a total of forty-two birds from a flock estimated at two hundred. Mr. Fowler reported that the birds fell out of the tree, fluttered and gasped a moment, and then died. Some observers stated that they were choked to death in an effort to swallow the fruits of the date. This, of course, was impossible, but the birds were evidently consuming the flesh of the fruit.

Stomach examination showed plant tissues ascribed to the date; fruits had been picked into. A sticky fluid smelling of fermented fruit ran from the mouths of many of the birds and had smeared their feathers. The birds were all excessively fat. Examination for internal parasites was made by Dr. Gordon Ball, with negative results. Dissection showed marked congestion in the head region, but no other lesion was noted. Fruits were examined by Dr. O. A. Plunkett for poisonous fungi, but no unusual forms were found. No form of spray had been applied to the trees of the vicinity and there would be no reason to spray these valueless fruits. Tests for mineral poisons were not made. The cause of death then remains unproven, though the following hypothesis offers possibilities.

Ripe fruits of the ornamental date remain on the tree for considerable periods of time. The weather preceding the occurrence had been very wet for a long period of time. Fermentation changes in the tannin and sugars normal in these fruits could readily have produced some toxic alcohols or other complex organic compounds that would result in acute poisoning. Ordinary ethyl alcohol would be the product naturally expected of such fermentation, but such high mortality would hardly be expected from this alcohol.

A count of the birds showed 30 per cent had wax tips on the secondaries and none on the tail feathers.—LOYE MILLER, *University of California at Los Angeles, California, May 10, 1932.*

Forehandedness of California Jays Begins Early.—At Woodacre (Marin County, California) jays are rather scarce at the present time, for many small boys wage persistent, and some of their elders occasional, warfare upon these birds. In spite of this, however, in the spring of 1929 a pair of Northwestern California Jays (*Aphelocoma californica ocleptica*) succeeded in raising a brood near my cottage at Woodacre Lodge, and the youngsters, after leaving the nest, soon discovered that they were not interfered with inside of my half-acre enclosure.

It was on June 1 that these birds came under my observation, when they were noticed in an old pear tree where they appeared to be finding something to their taste among the gray moss (*Ramalina reticulata*) drooping from the branches. Visiting the place only on week-ends, I did not know just what went on between times; but by the end of the following week—that is, June 8—the youngsters were noticeably able to fly with something like ease and had acquired a vocabulary of some of the unmusical sounds that their immediate relatives delighted in producing. They also seemed to have reached the stage when parental supervision was no longer exercised, or perhaps their parents had been “potted” by the small boy, but they had not yet learned fear of mankind.

On June 9 I placed on the feed table some moistened crumbs of stale bread and in a short while noticed the young jays helping themselves to the offering. The next day more bread was put on the table, dry and in small pieces, and was readily accepted. In fact, it was practically demanded. By noontime on this day the youngsters looked considerably over-stuffed. However, they turned their youthful energies for a while in other directions, returning occasionally to gobble and stuff themselves as before and paying no attention to their host, who was doing some gardening work a few yards from the table. While watching my guests in one of my resting spells, I was surprised to see that they had changed their tactics and that one after another, often