

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

two at a time, would grab a small chunk of bread, fly with it to the ground and carefully hide it from sight, either among the short grass, under dead leaves or under a bit of bark, and immediately return to the table for more provender to put in storage. Occasionally pausing to worry a little more of the bread down their throats, the birds kept up these prudential activities until all of the smaller bits of bread were stowed away and only a rather large piece of the heel of the loaf was left. This they tried also to carry away, but got it no further than the edge of the table, when it fell to the ground and was abandoned.

During this performance constant lookout was kept on my part for the appearance of an adult bird, or for some raucous sound denoting the nearby presence of one, but to no avail. I even watched for a while from behind a screen on the cottage porch with no resulting approach of a parent, aunt, cousin or other relative. When first observed these young jays seemed to be too freshly out of the nest to be able to put into practice anything much in the way of example set them by their elders, and when next observed, after an interval of four days, they again were unattended by a parent. This being the case, when or how did the youngsters learn the storage scheme? Did they learn it, or was it just instinct?—JOSEPH MAILLIARD, *California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, California, March 19, 1932.*

Winter Occurrence of the Townsend Warbler at Portland, Oregon.—On January 13, 1928, a much-emaciated Townsend Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*) was found dead on one of the city streets of Portland (Pacific Coast Avifauna, No. 19, 1929, p. 40) and reported as the first winter record available at that time. Since then, Miss Maude Ragon of the local Audubon Society brought another adult male to the writer on January 12, 1931; and the third, also a male, was found dead in the same part of the city on January 13, 1932, by Miss Ruth Russell, who also found the specimen in 1928. It is interesting to note that the three winter records of the occurrence of this warbler in Oregon should be reported on January 13, 1928, January 12, 1931, and January 13, 1932, all three by Miss Ragon and Miss Russell.—STANLEY G. JEWETT, *Portland, Oregon, January 16, 1932.*

Bird Notes from Santa Cruz Island.—On February 20, 1932, I saw a Short-billed Gull (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) in immature plumage at Pelican Harbor, Santa Cruz Island, and on March 6, four Short-billed Gulls, three immature and one adult, in Prisoner's Harbor on Santa Cruz Island. The only published record for this bird from the Channel Islands is that of three individuals taken at Catalina, February 11, 1910, by A. van Rossem.

On March 5, 1932, I saw a Townsend Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) on the ridge above Pelican Harbor.

Mr. Fred Caire reports a flock of about one hundred and fifty Band-tailed Pigeons (*Columba fasciata*) at the main ranch on Santa Cruz Island. He states that he has seen band-tails once before on the island, but there are no records for either the Band-tailed Pigeon or the Townsend Solitaire in Howell's list. Both species have been present in Santa Barbara this winter in unusual numbers, and nearer the sea than the writer has ever before seen them.

The writer noted Varied Thrushes (*Ixoreus naevius naevius*) near Pelican Harbor on Santa Cruz Island on February 21, 1932. A specimen, proving of this subspecies, was taken by Harry H. Sheldon at the main ranch on March 5.—RALPH HOFFMANN, *Santa Barbara, California, March 11, 1932.*

The Townsend Solitaire in San Francisco.—The severity of the present winter has driven many boreal birds to low elevations, resulting in a number of "record" observations in California lowlands. My twenty-five foot wide garden at 1879 Broadway, San Francisco, received its share of winter visitants. Here two large berry bushes (*Pyraecantha crenulata* var. *yunnanensis*), whose fruit has always been a source of attraction to seed-eating species, were particularly so this winter due to an unusually heavy crop.

Ordinarily no more than a few Western Robins and Gambel and Song sparrows visit our 25 by 40 foot garden in the course of a winter. Yet on January 1, 1932, the following individuals and species were noted throughout the day; and many of them remained for more than a month, until every berry was stripped from the bushes: 1 Barlow Chickadee, 6 Western Robins, 3 Pacific Varied Thrushes, 4 Dwarf Hermit