

## GENERAL NOTES

**Homing Instinct in Cowbirds.**—That the homing instinct during the nesting-period is firmly fixed in at least one member of the cowbird species (*Molothrus a. ater*) was established without doubt during the summer of 1929 at our banding station in Glenolden, Pennsylvania. At the time this Cowbird formed the trap habit, being captured nearly every day for over a month, sometimes four times a day, a pair of Yellow Warblers nesting close by suddenly deserted, and we placed the blame on the Cowbird. About six weeks later a Yellow Warbler was observed feeding an immature Cowbird, which would seem to verify our conclusions. This is the first time the writer has actually seen the Summer Yellowbird with a Cowbird "in tow."

The female Cowbird was observed one morning entering a cavity in which Crested Flycatchers appeared to be about ready to nest. Not wishing to have the Flycatchers driven away by the Cowbird, we decided to take her several miles away in the hope that she would not return. The following day our traps were not set, but the morning after that the Cowbird was recaptured. Her first excursion had been to the northeast, so we decided to take her in another direction, and several days later released her two miles to the south by the Delaware River. In three hours she was back in the trap partaking of some soda crackers, of which she seemed to be very fond.

The following day she was taken northeast to Philadelphia and released at a point eight miles distant in the heart of the city amid the skyscrapers. When last seen she was headed toward the east in the direction of the Delaware River and New Jersey, but Mrs. Gillespie telephoned me four hours later that, like a bad penny, she had come back.

She was next deported to Wilmington, Delaware, about twenty miles southwest, and we felt confident that we had at last got rid of her (but hoped we hadn't). At lunch-time, just four hours later, she again appeared at our banding station.

Arrangements were made to send her into Maryland the next day, fifty miles away, but we never saw the bird again, and the probabilities are that our neighbor's cat made away with her.

To the writer it appears rather unusual that the homing instinct should be so pronounced in a species having no nest, eggs, or young of its own to care for. A persistent craving for the particular food we offered seems to be the most plausible explanation for the actions of this bird.

That immature Cowbirds may possess the homing instinct was demonstrated several summers ago on Martha's Vineyard Island when two immature Cowbirds were released three miles from our banding station on the opposite side of the town of Oak Bluffs. One of them returned to the traps about seven hours later.—JOHN A. GILLESPIE, Glenolden, Pennsylvania, November 3, 1929.

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**A Saw-whet Owl Banded, and Other Experiences with this Species**

—On the afternoon of Armistice Day a boy who had been following the trails of the Bird Sanctuary reported to me that he had seen a very small owl, and, though thinking it merely the common Screech Owl, I inquired where it had been found. "It is in a pine tree right near the entrance to that trail," he said, and so I accompanied him to the spot. There, perched close to the trunk on a low branch of a white pine, sat *Cryptoglaux acadica* staring at us with its bright yellow eyes.

Approaching slowly, I extended my hand to within a few inches of the bird, and almost grasped it as it flew to another pine close by. Asking the "discoverer" to watch it, I hurried for my insect net, and by holding this

open directly in front of the bird had no difficulty in taking it. In my hand, with its feet held between the fingers, it made no effort to get away or to bite, and submitted to being stroked and petted by the score or more to whom I displayed the prize. At dusk, after applying band No. 279510, I released the bird and watched it fly to the shelter of the pines again.

The living owls, of all species, are too interesting, and, excepting possibly the Great Horned Owl, too valuable to greet with a shot-gun at every opportunity. I have been fortunate in finding the Saw-whet Owl on four occasions, though unfortunately the first time with a gun. This was on November 10, 1913, at Westfield, Connecticut, when the Owl was flushed from the ground and shot in mistake for a Woodcock. On November 23, 1926, I discovered a Saw-Whet perched in a tree in the Sanctuary not far from where this last visitor was taken. The next night, November 24th, probably the same Owl was seen to rise from the ground just before dusk with a meadow mouse in its talons, and it flew to a low tree, where it killed and devoured its prey. The Saw-whet Owl is unmistakable if seen perched in good light; the much more rare Richardson's Owl being decidedly larger. —LESTER W. SMITH, Stone Bird Sanctuary, Babson Park, Massachusetts.

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**Canada Jay Migration.**—An account of the unusual movement, or migration, of Canada Jays that has been taking place since last summer and is still going on (December 4, 1929) is being prepared by Harrison F. Lewis, National Parks of Canada, Ottawa, Canada, who will appreciate any information, however scanty, relating to this subject.

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**Bee-eating Catbird.**—Italian honey-bees had invaded a flooring section of our summer cottage on the shores of Narragansett Bay by finding entrance at the edge of the porch roof. Catbirds frequently were seen flying in the vicinity as though searching for the bees. As I sat in a rocking-chair with field-glasses in hand, a Catbird was seen to fly to where the bees found entrance to their hive under the flooring of a second-floor room. The Catbird caught a bee on the wing and alighted on a porch rafter not ten feet from me. The bee was distinctly seen to be in a transverse hold in the bird's bill, but the bird by a tossing motion of the head was able to rearrange the bee so that it faced downward toward the bird's throat. Without any crushing to kill the bee, the bird swallowed it alive. I am certain of all these moves as they were very distinctly seen and were repeated on other days. As a bee is killed it is able to sting, and will sting. I have been stung by the sting many hours after it has been removed from a bee or the bee has been killed. After the live bee was swallowed by the Catbird, it doubtless lived inside the esophagus and stomach of the bird for an appreciable time. The point for settlement is whether birds are immune to bee stings and, if so, what makes them immune.—HAROLD B. WOOD, M.D., Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

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**More Notes on the Spring Molt of the Evening Grosbeak.**—This year (1929) from April 13th, the earliest date on which I noticed any new feathers coming, to May 17th, the latest date on which I could find any new feathers, I looked over fifty Evening Grosbeaks at my banding station at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. Thirty-one showed some molt, while on nineteen I could detect no new feathers coming. On the birds examined, the molt was largely confined to the front of the head, including chin, and the neck. I am rather of the opinion that all the birds had some molt. It is not always an easy matter to examine live birds as carefully as you would like to do. On dull and rainy days the light was sometimes poor.