

## A TEN-YEAR-OLD CARDINAL

BY ALBERT F. GANIER

Mortality among the smaller birds is surprisingly large due to the hazards of a life without shelter from the elements and exposure to natural enemies. Some conception of how short lived our birds really are may be had when one stops to consider that through the years most of our common birds neither increase nor decrease, yet the smaller species bring forth two broods (average) a season, in all, about eight young. If all of these birds returned the following spring there would be ten birds where there were two the year before, and on the third spring there would be fifty. If, as it usually happens, on the second spring there survives only one pair, it means that four pairs have perished and that the average life of these birds has been less than three months. Settlement of new territory and widening of range accounts for only a small percentage of this apparent loss. When a bird has reached the full maturity of its first mating season it has become worldly wise to the extent that its life expectancy has greatly increased and it is probable that a bird which has celebrated its second birthday may look forward to two more. If it lives on beyond that time it may be classed as "lucky" or having had a degree of protection and food supply far better than the average.

During the winters of 1923-24-25, the writer banded at his home, forty-six adult Cardinals (*Richmondia c. cardinalis*), twenty-six of which were males. On one of these males, on February 12, 1924, he placed band No. 73082. Between that date and spring, nine more Cardinals were banded, three of which repeated, but No. 73082 was not handled again. During the next winter twenty-three more of this species were banded and there were a number of repeats, but again No. 73082 was not among them. A real estate development about my home in 1926, effected such a cleanup that few birds remained or returned to visit my premises, so I gave my traps to others for use at other points. During the years which followed, however, I maintained each winter, a feeding shelf which was patronized by a Mockingbird, a pair and sometimes a flock of Cardinals, together with other transient species. In 1930 and again in 1931 I noted that the male Cardinal of the pair wore a band but several attempts to trap him failed. Always, winter and summer, there was a pair of Cardinals about my grounds, and with ample shrubbery as well as fruited hackberry trees, water, and a feeding shelf, they seemed to be entirely at home. During warm days in late winter the male would herald the approaching

spring with his loud, clear whistle from the top of one of the trees in the yard.

In January, 1933, birds had begun to increase in the neighborhood and Cardinals visited my "cafeteria" several times each day, usually in a flock of eight or ten males and females. More often they could be seen on the lawn, sedately hulling the fallen hackberries which they found in the grass. I decided to resume trapping on a limited scale and during the first three months, banded nineteen Cardinals, fourteen of which were males. A surprising thing to me was that these birds rarely repeated and instead of being visited by the same flock each day, it developed that they were roving flocks, very few of which returned. On January 29, 1933, I placed band No. B227540 on a male and with a hurried glance, I released him as being of no particular interest. During the balance of the winter I failed to find him among the seven repeats. In late October I set a drop trap outside my bedroom window, which I could watch as I dressed, and on the 28th, I pulled the string as my pair of Cardinals entered it together. The female was found to have been banded the preceding February and the male was No. B227540. Looking him over, I found that he was in good condition except that some of his new neck feathers had not grown out to full length and the outer tail feathers were as yet only about half the length of those at the center. He appeared unusually quiet and made no particular effort to bite or get away. As I examined him I was much surprised to find that on his left (wrong) leg he wore a snug and well worn band. Securing the assistance of my son I carefully removed this and released the bird. The number was not among those I had placed early in the year so I sought out my old record book and was soon elated to find that the band, No. 73082, was the one placed on this bird February 12, 1924. The figures are clearly visible although it had been worn nearly ten years; the band has been sent to the U. S. Biological Survey to keep in its archives. Since the bird was at least six months old when first banded, here is an authentic instance of a Cardinal having attained a life of more than ten years.

I have reason to believe that this male has used my yard as a home during his entire lifetime. A pair of Cardinals build at least three nests each year in the shrubbery about the place. The first of these nests each season for six years past has been built in an Amoor River privet which grows against the south window of a bedroom. In late March the male leads the female into this early leafing shrub and, although she inspects other sites, this one is chosen, even to the same crotch. Both birds bring in material and when the female is shaping

the nest, the male "hands" her his material and she weaves it into the structure. This first nest is usually completed from ten to twenty days before the first egg is laid. It was noted this spring, through the glass of the window two feet away, that both birds wore bands. The young left this nest successfully, as they usually do, and shortly afterwards a second brood was brought forth from a nest in a trellis. Three more nests were built in an effort to raise a third brood but grackles robbed each of them.

On October 12 I noted a male banded Cardinal at my feeding shelf in such poor plumage that I at first took him to be a young one. The bird was molting. A moment later, another male flew beside him, all spick and span with full new plumage. The latter immediately began to quiver his wings and beg for food which the molting bird proceeded to pick up and place in his mouth. This procedure was noted again a few days later and serves to show how the parental devotion persists long after the young are able to shift for themselves. I feel certain that the banded bird was No. 73082.

This pair of Cardinals furnished interesting data in June, 1932, on the ability of diurnal birds to see at night. On the night in question the moon was nearly full but the sky was overcast so that its light was much subdued. At 9:15 P. M., I was walking along the side of my tall privet hedge and, noting some projecting shoots, proceeded to cut them off with my knife. A bird fluttered out above my head and I then perceived its nest in silhouette a few inches from where my hand had been. The bird had flown into a large hackberry tree about thirty feet away. I immediately withdrew and from hiding watched for thirty minutes to see if the bird would fly back. There was certainly no direct return during that period. I went into the house and two hours later, with shaded flashlight, carefully approached and was gratified to see that the bird, a female Cardinal, was again on the nest.

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