

GENERAL NOTES

**Whooping Cranes at Shoal Lake, Manitoba.**—On April 26, 1943, I saw nine white birds flying north over East Shoal Lake, Manitoba. They were about a mile away, flying low over the water. Their profiles were obscured by the far shoreline so that positive identification was impossible, but I was certain they were neither Whistling Swans nor White Pelicans, both of which are rather common here during spring migration.

Later in the morning I walked north up the lake shore to the rich hay meadow at the "narrows" where, as I mounted the rise from the shoreline, I saw nine Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*) some 200 yards distant. Although only my head and shoulders were visible to the birds, they took alarm. In circular flight slower than that of the Sandhill Crane, they gained an altitude of about 300 feet, then struck due north. Without glasses I could not be certain of the number of adults and young birds in the band, but at least three were adults.

Shoal Lake has been my home since 1889. Up until the late nineties Whooping Cranes were not uncommon migrants through the Interlake region of Manitoba. Flocks of 20 and 30 were common, and as children we were told the white birds were Sandhills in full maturity. Tall and wary, they were difficult to approach, and I know of only one or two being shot in those early days. I saw these birds in small numbers each year up until 1924, except 1915, 1916, and 1917, when none passed through. Since 1924 I have seen them but twice, three in 1934 and the nine birds this year.—F. C. WARD, 1933 *William Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.*

**Least Tern in southeastern Michigan.**—High water in Lake Erie this year turned a field in Erie Township, Monroe County, Michigan (10 miles north of Toledo), into an area of shallow pools and mud flats separated from the lake by a hundred yards of slightly higher ground. The shore of the region is largely marshy, with frequent narrow strips of sandy beach. At this field in July the common birds were Ring-billed Gulls, Bonaparte's Gulls, Forster's Terns, Common Terns, and Black Terns, along with occasional Herring Gulls and Caspian Terns.

On June 19, 1943, I saw what I believed to be a Least Tern in this field, but circumstances prevented my being certain of the identity. On July 10, Louis W. Campbell and I took a Least Tern there—an adult male of the Mississippi Valley race, *Sterna albifrons athalassos* (described by T. D. Burleigh and G. H. Lowery, Jr., in *La. State Univ. Mus. Zool. Occ. Paper No. 10*, 1942). There have been several published reports of the Least Tern in Michigan, but no evidence had been found to confirm the reports, and there was strong reason to suspect that the supposed Least Terns were actually immature Black Terns (see B. H. Swales, *Wils. Bull.*, 25, 1913:32-33). This appears to be the first specimen of Least Tern taken in Michigan, though Campbell collected two immature females nearby, on the Lake Erie shore in Lucas County, Ohio, on September 16, 1934.

I am indebted to George H. Lowery, Jr., for the identification of this specimen, which is now in the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology.—HAROLD MAYFIELD, 3311 *Parkwood Avenue, Toledo, Ohio.*

**The carpels of red spruce blossoms as food for birds.**—During the past several years I have been paying particular attention to the belt of red spruce forest (*Picea rubens*) which clothes some of the higher mountain peaks in West Virginia, particularly with reference to the presence of crossbills and other northern finches in this forest. I have visited certain areas at all seasons of the year and have found the blooming season of the spruces to be, by far, the best time to find these birds of northern association.

This season ordinarily covers the first three weeks in June; June 10 is, generally speaking, near the height of the blossoming period. At this time the young spruces bear, during most years, a light to heavy crop of ovulate strobili containing numerous bract-like carpels which are coated with a waxy or resinous substance that is distinctly sweet to the taste. On many of the carpels this substance forms beads. The coated carpels are eaten avidly by both Red and White-winged Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra* and *L. leucoptera*), and by Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*). These strobili, many of which never ripen into cones, are much more in evidence on young spruces (15 to 25 years old) than on older trees, and they are much more likely to occur annually than are mature cones. It is therefore much easier to estimate crossbill populations during June than at any other time at which I have tried it. I have found Red Crossbills in certain spruce patches during every June for the past five years.

On some of our visits during June, 1940, and again in 1941, Cedar Waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) were observed feeding habitually on these coated carpels. The crop of one individual collected in the act of feeding was stuffed with the carpels, and the body had the same accumulation of very firm fat which had been observed in the Red Crossbills collected there at that season. Cedar Waxwings have on a number of occasions been observed to feed on the petals of apple blossoms, but this is, so far as I am aware, the first recorded occurrence of their eating red spruce carpels.—MAURICE BROOKS, *Division of Forestry, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia.*

*Ilex collina* fruits as bird food.—On some of the higher mountains of Virginia and West Virginia there grows a very attractive deciduous holly which has recently been described as *Ilex collina* Alexander. Since this description was published subsequent to the appearance of Van Dersal's "Native Woody Plants of the United States, Their Erosion Control and Wildlife Values" (*U. S. Dept. Agric. Misc. Publ. No. 303, 1938*), there are no food records in that volume referable to this species. Even the largeleaf holly (*I. longipes*), with which the present species was long confused, is without data, so far as its use by wildlife is concerned.

*Ilex collina*, which I have called 'mountain long-stem holly' for want of a better name, is abundant in parts of the Allegheny Plateau, particularly at elevations of 3,000 feet or above. In the Cheat Mountains of West Virginia it occurs to 4,000 feet. During September and October it ripens immense crops of large, pulpy, long-pediceled drupes. Many of these persist on the shrubs until after the first of January; others fall to the ground and are eaten by birds and other animals.

In the winter of 1942-43 a number of trips were made for the purpose of observing the winter use made by animals of these fruits, and autumn observations have been made during several years. Thus far I have observed Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), Catbirds (*Dumetella carolinensis*), Robins (*Turdus migratorius*), Wood Thrushes (*Hylocichla mustelina*), Olive-backed Thrushes (*H. ustulata*), and Cedar Waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) feeding on the fruits, and I have excellent evidence that wild Turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) also use them. During a period when snow was on the ground in December, 1942, I visited a number of spots where this holly grew, and found that grouse had been scratching at every one of them, and at one clump a flock of Turkeys had completely trampled the area.

So far as I am aware, this holly is not now commercially available, although it is being propagated from cuttings which I have furnished the Soil Conservation Service. It seems to offer considerable promise as a winter food in Appalachian mountain areas where weather conditions are severe, and where glaze is a constant menace to birds and other wildlife.—MAURICE BROOKS, *Division of Forestry, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia.*