

TABLE 2
FEEDING HABITS IN RELATION TO WEATHER CONDITIONS FOR 75 PERIODS AND 1,296 BIRDS

Sky	Per cent of periods	Per cent of birds
Sunny-clear	44.0	44.7
Medium-cloudy	10.7	14.7
Overcast	32.0	32.3
Rain or snow	13.3	8.3
Temperature (F)		
11-20	9.4	7.4
21-30	12.0	10.7
31-40	46.6	55.0
41-50	21.4	18.8
51-60	10.6	8.1
Wind (mph)		
0-5	58.8	71.0
6-10	20.0	14.5
11-15	12.0	7.5
16-20	6.6	5.5
21-25	2.6	1.5

were made generally every other day from late September 1963 to early April 1964. On some days two observations were taken. The weather conditions were obtained by an outdoor thermometer, Beaufort wind scale, and the local weather reports.

The totals in the tables include all the birds that took food. For example, 765 records of House Sparrows could have included only 300 different birds. Data were obtained for 15 species, but were sufficient for discussion for only six. Records of choice of food are summarized in Table 1.

The relation of feeding habits to weather (Table 2) indicates that in most conditions approximately the same percentages of birds were observed for each condition as that condition was of the total. Possibly a few less birds fed in the rain or snow than expected. The wind, however, played an important part. A comparison of observed percentage (71.0) against expected (58.8) for 0-5 miles per hour was significant by a chi-square test when contrasted with all the other wind velocities together.

Analysis of the number of birds at the feeder showed that most birds ate singly. On 912 occasions different species came together at the feeders. One individual soon drove off the intruder and ate alone 645 times. Only two species occurred in larger flocks, the House Sparrow and the Evening Grosbeak. The House Sparrow fed alone 144 times, with another 86 times, with two others 47 times, and only four times ate in a group of six.

The change in position of the various foods confused the birds for a short time. A Starling, accustomed to bread in the first section, would either fly away or move back and forth until it located the bread.—BURNELL A. CRIST, *The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, 19 March 1965.*

Fire in birds' nests.—During the 1965 nesting season I noticed two independent and widely separated newspaper accounts of fires occurring in birds' nests built in attics. I attempted to verify the circumstances of each. Although no ornithologist saw the nests

or birds and much of the evidence is circumstantial, I believe it probable that the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) in one instance, and the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) in the other instance carried a spark, perhaps a smoldering cigarette, to its nest.

The first of these events occurred in a residential area of Toledo, Ohio. The city fire department answered an alarm at 1607 Freeman Street at 7:23 PM, 14 June 1965, and found a smoldering fire in the nest of a House Sparrow. A few days later I visited the site and talked with the resident, Mrs. Amanda Caudill, and also discussed the circumstances with Fire Chief Carl J. Nalodka and Lieutenant Robert J. Patterson, who had been at the scene. Chief Nalodka had concluded that the fire had probably been carried to the nest by a bird, and he had stated so in his formal report.

The nest was situated about nine meters above the ground just under the roof at the front of a two-story house. Sparrows had gained entrance to the attic space through an opening between the wall and the roof. Into the space between the joists and rafters where the sloping roof met the plastered ceiling of the upper story, they had packed a mass of nesting material, mostly grass. The material was entirely within the building, and neither the grass nor the opening was visible from the ground because of the eaves-trough below it. When pulled out and piled loosely in a basket, the material had a bulk of fully 10 liters. The nest cavity was well within the mass, but nearer the entrance than the back. It contained young birds not yet feathered.

The fire appeared to have begun near the entrance and to have burned a narrow path slowly through the packed grass, not spreading or becoming a flame until it reached the looser strands at the edge of the mass farthest within the attic. At this time the firemen arrived and extinguished it before much of the grass had burned. The surrounding wood was charred but not ignited.

The fire was reported by two boys, about 7 and 10, who smelled the smoke. They had been reading in another part of the attic which was floored. They disclaimed any approach to the nest, and there was no evidence that they had been playing with tobacco or matches. In fact the nest was not easy to reach; the roof was so low at this point that a fireman had to lie flat on the joists to reach the nest at arm's length. To reach it from outside the house, a person would have needed a ladder. There were no electric wires nearby. It would have been impossible for a person to have thrown a lighted object into the nest from the yard or street. I know of no instance of spontaneous combustion in so small a quantity of dry grass. Therefore, it seems probable that the bird had carried to the nesting mass a smoldering spark of some kind, such as a cigarette or a straw left from a trash fire.

The circumstances of the second event were investigated by Betty Strath, who relayed the information to me through Douglas A. Lancaster.

The fire occurred at Watkins Glen, New York, on Sunday, 15 August 1965, at the home of Richard Sheesley, 108 Madison Avenue. A passerby saw smoke coming from the roof of the house and reported it to the owners. The fire department came promptly and removed some shingles to get to the source of the smoke. Here in a smoldering nest of a Starling they found a partially burned cigarette. The location of the nest, fully concealed under the roof, precluded the possibility that the cigarette had been placed there by a human being. The firemen, therefore, reported that the fire had been caused by a burning cigarette carried to the nest by the bird.—HAROLD MAYFIELD, *River Road RFD, Waterville, Ohio, 25 February 1966 (originally received 21 July 1965).*