

# LOUISIANA CRITTER CORNER

July 2013



## CEDAR WAXWINGS

The cedar waxwing is a sleek, crested brown bird. Slightly smaller than a robin, at about 6 ½ to 8 inches long, it has a black mask, yellow tips on the tail feathers and hard red waxlike tips on the secondary wing feathers.

Cedar waxwings are almost always seen in flocks, occupying open woodlands, orchards and residential areas. Nesting habits involve the laying of four to six blue-grey eggs that are spotted with dark brown and black. The eggs are placed in a bulky cup of twigs and grass in trees located in open areas.

Although Louisiana is outside the breeding range for cedar waxwings, where this does occur, fledglings often are fed some type of fruit. Nesting often is correlated with the occurrence of a good supply of berries in the area. Adults store these berries in their crop and regurgitate them to their young. Cedar waxwings are very social birds and have the amusing habit of passing berries from one bird to the next along a long row of individuals sitting on a branch, until one bird eats the food.

The flocking and feeding habits of the cedar waxwing tend to create tremendous problems for fruit growers, most notably strawberry farmers in our state. Hundreds of these birds suddenly will appear in an area to exploit a crop of strawberries and then suddenly vanish and seek a different feeding area when that crop is exhausted.

The birds are known to be quite persistent in their use of strawberry

fields and will simply fly a short distance into a different section of the field when scare tactics are used. Migration patterns of these birds tend to cause little or no damage to fields in some years, while at other times, entire crops are in danger because of the number of birds that descend on fields. The pecking habits of cedar waxwings also lead to the damage and unsalability of much more fruit than what is actually consumed.

Another nuisance aspect of cedar waxwings occurs when large flocks feed in berry-producing trees such as mulberries or black cherries. If someone makes the mistake of parking a vehicle under one of these trees during the feeding activity, the vehicle can quickly become covered in messy bird droppings.



cedar waxwing

Cedar waxwings are federally protected under the migratory bird treaty act – in addition to protection at the state and local level. Lethal control is not an option in dealing with them.

Protective netting can be used on small plots, but installation expenses and difficulty in picking fruit often make this impractical in large operations. A solution that has had limited success in some areas is the use of mylar tape, also known as “bird tape.” This tape is ½ inch wide, with red and silver reflective coatings that tend to scare birds away from an area. The tape, when placed above the rows between the strawberry plants and allowed to blow in the wind, will have a tendency to deter birds from landing in the area.

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Dr. Don Reed, Professor Wildlife  
Bob R. Jones-Idlewild Research Station  
(225) 683-5848

Reviews:

Dr. Regina Bracy, Hammond Research Station  
Dr. Allen Owings, Hammond Research Station



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