Cedar Waxwing

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

The Cedar Waxwing is so named for its love of red cedar fruits and for the bright red, waxy material that forms on the shaft of an adult's secondary wing feathers. Juveniles will have fewer of these waxy appendages until eventually reaching adult plumage. These birds are gregarious creatures who socialize in flocks and have the unique and endearing habit of sharing their food with one another.

Adults show little fear of humans and, in spring and summer when nesting begins, have been know to pluck hairs from human heads to line their nest.

Photo courtesy of Jerry Kumery

Interesting Facts:

Family: Bombycillidae

Scientific Name: *Bombycilla ceororum*

Location: Cedar Waxwings can be found throughout North America with ranges in the summer as far north as central to northern Canada and Alaska. However, the vast majority are found in the northeastern United States, as well as the Great Lakes region, and southern Ontario. Smaller concentrations can be found in the coastal areas of Washington, Oregon, and California. They frequent coniferous and birch forests in the north; as well as open woodlands, overgrown fields, farms, orchards, plantations, and suburban gardens.

Migration: The Cedar Waxwing is often thought to do more wandering in search of food than migrating. During winter their range can extend as far south as Costa Rica and as far north as southern Canada depending on the amount of fruit available for foraging. Wintering birds will normally congregate in central Texas in stands of oak and juniper, as well as Alabama and eastern Mississippi.

Nesting: Cedar Waxwings will begin nesting in June-September (when fruit crops becomes more abundant) and have been known to nest from southeast Alaska to northern Georgia. Nests are made from twigs, grasses, weeds, pine needles, moss, and the like. Females will lay 3-5 eggs and incubate them for 12-16 days.

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Eggs are a pale gray or blue-gray with black or dark brown spots. Fledglings will leave the nest within 14-18 days. These birds generally have only one brood per year.

Diet: A Cedar Waxwing's diet consists of approximately 70% fruit with the remainder made up of insects, sap, and flower petals of apple and pecan trees. Renown for their revelry, these waxwings have been known to overindulge to the extreme, at times being so stuffed they could barely move, or so intoxicated by overripe berries they are easily caught by human hands.

Size and Color: The Cedar Waxwing typically grows from 6-1/2" to 8" long, with a wingspread of 11 to 12-1/2". Unlike most birds, the male and female are virtually identical in looks. Each are brown crested with brown turning to gray closer to the tail. They have a black mask outlined in white and a yellow underbelly. Wingtips have a red wax-like substance on secondary wing feathers and a yellow tip on tail. The only difference between male and female is that the male has a black throat while the female's is a dark brown.

Song: A high thin lisp or trill *zeee*.

Special Characteristics:

- Cedar Waxwings typically flock in numbers of anywhere from 30 to 100 and in rare cases up to 1,000 have been found grouped together.
- Their politeness when feeding is legendary. Cooperation is the operative word, as they eat in shifts, one group feeds first then moves out of the way as the next group comes in. This is the exact opposite of most birds who may flock together to find food, but will compete vigorously once the food is found.
- Cedar Waxwings are often found nesting later in the season than most birds. This is generally attributed to their dependence on a fruit diet and coincides with availability in areas they nest.

Attracting: If you've ever seen these incredible birds up close you already know you'll want them in your yard. As with most birds, appropriate habitat is the key. Choke cherry, mulberry, red cedar, or any fruit-bearing tree or shrub is an excellent choice to bring in flocks of Cedar Waxwings. These friendly and social birds are also a thirsty bunch. Providing them with a water source, whether through a birdbath or garden pond, will be a definite bonus in your quest to tempt them to your yard.

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Life Span:	The oldest recorded Cedar Waxwing was 8 years, 2 months.

Bird Pond Kit w/3-Tier Cascade

Fruit & Berry Cuisine

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