

C.M.P.

THE CEDAR WAXWING

Originally all family names had some connection with the occupation of the person, the locality of his residence or something personal that distinguished him from his neighbor. The names applied to birds generally relate to food habits or some distinctive part of the plumage.

The cedar waxwing is named for its love of cedar berries and the little red tips at the ends of its flight feathers. These look like bits of ceiling wax.

If you ever ate a cedar berry, you would not be able to understand the tastes of a waxwing. He gorges until his stomach is full. In fact, he eats until he can't swallow. No one knows just why the bird wears red tips on his wings unless it is purely for the sake of adornment.

Mother Nature has dressed the waxwing in elegant and quiet tones. He is a sort of an aristocrat, well-groomed in silken attire. The general color of the plumage is cinnamon or brownish-fawn. On the end of his tail, he wears a little band of bright yellow. Another distinguishing mark is a crest or top-knot that is straight up at times or may be lowered when the bird is at rest. Although he is listed among the songbirds, its silence is a mystery because he has no song. The only noise he makes is a wheezy call note sounding like the syllable Zee! Zee! It takes a sharp ear to catch this.

The waxwings are a small family. Throughout the world, there are but three species known. Two live in America, and the third is a resident of Japan. The cedar waxwing ranges through temperate North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Its occasional visits to sample the fruit of early cherry trees has given it the local name of "cherry bird." This bird should not be confused with the California purple finch that sometimes flocks into the cherry trees early in the spring to eat the buds much to the disgust of the cherry grower. It is always well as a matter of protection to crops for a farmer to have a row of soft early cherries or mulberries around his orchard. The waxwings, robins and others take this fruit in preference to the more marketable varieties. None of these birds live on fruit alone, but a good part of the diet is insects.

A second species similar to the cedar waxwing but larger is called the Bohemian waxwing. These birds breed in the coniferous forests from southern Alaska to Manitoba. They flock in winter and range further south according to the food supply. Occasionally in cold winters, they are seen about Portland searching for the berries of the mountain ash, holly and other trees. One of several dozen may light in a tree, silent and with long top-knots erect.