

BLUE JAY SCAVENGING WINDOW-KILLS

ROBERT W. NERO, Box 14, 1495 St. James Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba. R3H 0W9

Blue Jays are regular visitors to our yard in a well-wooded section of Winnipeg, where we keep two bird-feeders well-stocked throughout the year. In the past two years we have observed this species feeding on dead birds on three occasions.

My attention was first drawn to a Blue Jay pulling at an object on our lawn about 4 m from a feeder at 10:30 a.m. on 1 October 1989. A few minutes later the first jay was displaced by a second one which in turn pecked at the object a few times and then departed. The object turned out to be a dead Swainson's Thrush, partly plucked in the upper breast region and with some flesh removed, but otherwise intact. It appeared to be about a day old and was presumably a window-kill. I left the thrush lying on the ground. At 11:40 a.m., a Common Grackle walked over to it and weakly pecked at it for less than a minute. All this while, Blue Jays and grackles were nearby feeding more or less continuously on sunflower seeds. Although we did not watch constantly, we saw a Blue Jay feeding on the thrush again at 12:15 noon and from 4:03-4:05 p.m. By this time, the thrush's neck had been severed, though the head was nearby, and about two-thirds of the breast muscle and flesh from the upper back and base of one wing had been devoured.

The following morning, at 7:31 a.m., I saw a Blue Jay fly to the carcass of the thrush and begin feeding. It fed for about a minute and a half before something startled it and it flew away, as did other

birds. My wife, Ruth Nero, saw a Blue Jay feeding on the thrush again at 1:30 p.m. When I examined the carcass of the thrush late that afternoon most of the breast bone had been removed, exposing internal organs; much of the lungs and part of the liver were gone.

In two other incidences observed by Ruth Nero, a Blue Jay seized a bird shortly after an observed window-kill. At about 6:45 p.m., 3 July 1990, a jay flew in and carried off a juvenile House Sparrow right after it struck the window and fell to the ground. The jay carried the sparrow onto the lawn about 40 feet away. It was harassed by other House Sparrows and three times was forced to land. It then began jabbing at the dead sparrow's head, whereupon my wife ran out to retrieve the sparrow. The jay remained on the ground, about a foot from the sparrow as she approached, still being harassed by four or five other House Sparrows. When she picked up the sparrow, it was still alive, but unable to fly. The next day, at 8:00 a.m., a juvenile American Robin struck the window with a loud thump; half an hour later she noticed a Blue Jay sitting on the dead robin. She again dashed out and retrieved the dead bird which the Blue Jay apparently had not had time to begin eating.

I cannot recall reading any previous observation of this kind, but given the omnivorous food habits of the Blue Jay, and considering the number of window-killed birds, it would be surprising if others have not witnessed a similar event.