

## ANTING

Mrs. M. S. Baptist, of Abbotsford, B.C. has brought to our attention a very interesting subject, that of a mysterious trait of certain birds called "anting." We have read considerable about this and have seen photographs of the procedure, but do not remember of its having been reported in the BLUE JAY by any of our members. This possibly may be a case of symbiosis, or mutual helpfulness. We would be pleased to receive reports from any who have observed these antics.

Mrs. Baptist sent us the following article on the subject, published in the Vancouver Daily Province, April 22, written by Mr. Wildwood in his "Wildwood Trails" column.

"For those who are interested in the ways of the wild birds, an interesting problem is presented. What is the reason for their association with ants at times, other than feeding on them.

This association has been noted; in the States, by Audubon a hundred years ago; by a school boy in Australia; by Germans who coined a new verb "anting;" in Ireland, and in an aviary in eastern Canada.

No one was concerned with Audubon's reference to turkeys rolling themselves and "dusting" in old ants nests, but fifteen years ago a youth near Melbourne, Australia, noticed starlings picking up ants with their beaks and putting them in the underfeathers of their wings. A professor in Germany took up the subject in a scientific journal and received in return, numerous replies from readers.

They had observed birds acting in an excited manner when ants were about; gathering them under their feet, lying on them, dancing over the, rubbing them into the bases of their feathers.

It appears that the actions of the birds are so swift that it is difficult to see what is done. Whether the effect desired is cleansing, de-lousing or tickling; or whether the odor of formic acid, strong when the ant is disturbed, is alluring, has not been decided, as interest among bird-watchers was not maintained.

Now the query has been opened again by a Scottish journal, "What is bird-anting?" Instances reported are so widely placed that scientific attention must be given to the subject. We know that some birds, particularly the flicker, woodpeckers and ground birds are fond enough of ants to eat them; but if they take an esthetic enjoyment from their acid vapour, as cats roll in the catnip-plant, and dogs in more forceful odors, they must be credited with a higher sense of smell that has been accorded to them hitherto. Their avoidance of odors we consider "foul" has never been conspicuous.

The ant habit is not confined to one kind of bird. Audubon saw young turkeys rolling in enjoyment; in Ireland, magpies were seen engaged. Carrion crows were watched covering themselves with scurrying ants.

American robins, bluebirds, grosbeaks, and blackbirds have been discovered; starlings apparently are the most active. Most remarkable was the effect in a Canadian aviary. When an ants' nest was thrown on the floor, twenty species out of the thirty-one present began "anting" at once.

Such evidence is too wide-spread to be either ridiculed or ignored any longer. These birds must be watched more closely until the true reason for such behaviour is settled. More observation must be reported. It is a mystery that anyone may solve by keen and accurate watchfulness when birds are noticed performing antics. They may gain as much as others do from talcum and Bath-salts, real or fanciful!"