



Cedar Waxwings are nomadic omnivores, having voracious appetites for berries, sap, tree buds, flowers, and insects



Who's the tallest hog at this trough?

### **Brunswick Wildlife Air Hogs coming soon to your Backyard!**

It's time for March Madness! Not the round ball tournament but another one of my favorite events for crazies. About this time of the year Cedar Waxwings come through our yards in roving, swirling flocks and suck down all remaining berries like industrial-strength vacuums.

During the winter, robins, mockingbirds, and other fruit-eating birds have lived on berries from the 2009 crop. Since Christmas I have monitored the birds and dwindling supply of berries on the Brunswick Community College campus.

Though just an anecdotal, non-scientific observation on my part, the competition for and territorial protection of food supplies seemed more intense this year. The berries seemed to have given out sooner.

The dependence of overwintering birds on berries was probably more crucial to survival given the cold winter we've had. The amount of food a bird must eat depends on the food's caloric content, the bird's size and activity level, and the air temperature. The smaller the bird, the larger are its body surface area and heat loss (in relation to its volume), the larger its caloric needs.

In early February, waxwings moved in and cleaned up most of the remaining berries. These photos were taken as BCC's last remaining cherries disappeared.

I saw the waxwing flock fly into a Bradford Pear Tree; however, before I could get my camera out and move into position they were chased off by a pair of mockingbirds.

My luck quickly improved. The waxwings flew over a building and I hustled around to the other side and found them hogging up the cherries. I established a great position with the morning sun to my back and the waxwings' tight, erratic swarm actually flew toward me into a nearby cherry tree. Due to their feeding frenzy, they seemed oblivious to my presence.

Cedar Waxwing numbers have increase over the past twenty years and their breeding range seems to be expanding southward. Population increases are thought to be the product of increased edge habitat, as farmlands succeed into forests, that supports fruit-bearing trees and shrubs plus inclusion of more fruit-bearing plants in urban and suburban landscaping.

Waxwings nest in the northern boreal forests of the US and Canada extending down to our mountains. They form flocks after breeding season, migrate, and then spend the winter roaming open forests and suburbs that have ample berry supplies. Winter flocks may run into the hundreds.

Waxwings' flocking and nomadic roaming are typical of other birds that depend on food widely distributed in patches such as fruits, nuts, and pine cones.

While fruits are the main waxwing diet they add insects during the summer, gleaning them from plants or through midair flycatching. Like many species, they feed insects to their young for a short time after hatching because protein fuels rapid growth.

Cedar Waxwing tail tips are normally bright yellow; however, individuals with orange-tipped tails started appearing over the last forty plus years. Waxwings, like many other species, cannot produce yellow pigments. The color of their tail tip comes from carotene pigment in berries or flowers they eat which is then deposited in tail feathers as their plumage develops.

Exotic bush honeysuckles such as Morrow's or Tartarian are deciduous shrubs with berries that contain a red pigment. The red blends with the yellow of carotene from other berries to yield orange tail tips. Look for this among your backyard hogs because more and more birds show this color as these invasive honeysuckles spread.

Bush honeysuckles are Eurasian natives introduced as ornamentals as early as the eighteenth century and are now distributed from New England south to North Carolina and west to Iowa. They are invasive with high distribution near urban areas and in rural areas where bush honeysuckles were once planted to improve wildlife habitat. Of course, the widespread distribution of bush honeysuckles is aided by the birds themselves.

Waxwings will soon head north; however, they may stop by your yard and wolf down emerging buds from your trees on the way. They love my birch trees.

Enough of this madness...gotta turn on the game. You've have to admit "Air Hogs" would be a great name for a motorcycle club's charity basketball team. I hereby grant permission for such use.

John Ennis



**Waxwings get their name from the wax-like red tips on the secondary flight feathers of adults**



**Cedar waxwings polish off the remainder of last year's Bradford Pears**