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Overnight weight loss in Cedar Waxwings

Kendrick Y. Hodgdon

During the first week of March 1981 a flock of Cedar Waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) appeared in my area, looking for Mountain Ash (*Pyrus americana*) berries on a neighbor's tree. However, the neighbor had cut off almost all the berries and boxed them the day before, for he thought the birds would not be coming this year.

There were just enough berries left on the tree to attract the flock of about 50 birds which went right to work gleaning the partially dried red berries from the tree and the ground below. The neighbor gave me the box of "trimmed" berries which were still in clusters on the stem. I hung these bunches on an apple tree limb in my backyard, put some traps under the tree, and baited them with the berries.

I caught more than 60 birds in the next few days. Since they fed late in the evening, I was able to hold 43 overnight, in order to do a weight-loss study. Each bird was placed in a separate cell of a 24-celled holding cage, and the cage was placed on a screened-in porch.

Using all the data for 43 birds, the average loss was 2.64 g per bird and, eliminating the high and low losses, the average for 41 birds was 2.55 g per bird. The unusual fact was that the loss was so consistent. The temperature ranged from 40° to 30° F (4° to -2° C) so that exceedingly cold (freezing) weather was not a factor.

I weighed them on an Ohaus Scale which has a modified metal cone for weighing birds (made by local Vo-Tech students). They were weighed at 1800 and 0600 hours, or as close as possible to those times. The greatest loss was on 8 March when one bird had lost 8.4 g. The greatest loss on 5 March was 4.1 g. The least amount lost overnight was 0.9 g on 9 March.

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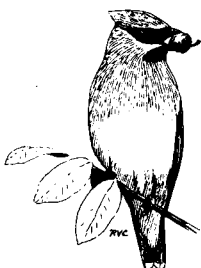


Table 1. Overnight weight loss in Cedar Waxwings, March 1981. (All birds AHY-U)

Band Number	Date	Weight gm-PM	Weight gm-AM	Loss gm	Temp °F (°C)
1201-57931	5 March	34.4	30.3	4.1	32 to 30* (0 to -1)
32		34.4	31.5	2.9	
33		34.1	30.6	3.5	
34		33.7	31.6	2.1	
35		37.4	35.0	2.4	
36		36.3	33.6	2.7	
37		33.4	31.2	2.2	
38		35.1	33.7	1.9	
39		34.6	32.5	2.1	
44	8 March	36.7	33.7	3.0	35 to 32 (2 to 0)
45		37.8	34.4	3.4	
46		35.2	31.5	3.7	
47		36.0	32.4	3.6	
48		34.2	32.2	2.0	
49		34.6	30.6	4.0	
50		35.3	30.6	4.7	
51		32.3	29.3	3.0	
52		34.2	31.2	3.0	
53		35.5	31.7	3.8	
54		36.7	28.3	8.4	
55		32.3	29.6	2.7	
56		32.7	31.2	1.5	
57		31.2	28.7	2.5	
58		33.2	31.5	1.7	
59		34.1	30.6	3.5	
62	9 March	33.2	31.7	1.5	40 to 32 (4 to 0)
63		32.1	30.4	1.7	
64		32.6	30.5	2.1	
65		34.5	31.8	2.7	
66		34.5	32.3	2.2	
67		35.5	33.1	2.4	
68		35.5	34.3	2.2	
69		35.1	33.2	1.9	
70		33.4	32.2	2.2	
71		35.8	33.6	2.2	
72		32.3	30.2	2.1	
73		33.3	31.1	2.2	
74		32.6	31.7	0.9	
75		34.6	32.4	2.2	
76		33.4	31.3	2.1	
77		31.3	29.2	2.1	
78		33.2	31.7	1.5	
79		34.3	33.1	1.2	

*5 in (13 cm) snow