

FURTHER NOTES ON A VERY OLD CARDINAL

BY ALBERT F. GANIER

In the WILSON BULLETIN for December, 1933 (p. 152) I recorded the fact that a male Cardinal, banded February 12, 1924, was still about my premises and that he was therefore at least ten years old. His constant companion and mate was a female which I had banded in February, 1933. It is with considerable satisfaction that I am able to report that these birds are still mated and about my home. The male is now (October 1) at least eleven years old. At the west end of my home, on a trellis just outside the dining room window, is a feeding shelf on which I place grain and sunflower seed each morning before I sit down to breakfast. There has rarely been a morning since my last account, that these two Cardinals have not come to the repast within a few minutes. In cold weather they are frequently awaiting in the trees about for their breakfast to be spread; if not, a whistling imitation of the male's song would often bring one or both of them from a distance. Only on one or two occasions have other Cardinals been seen on the premises during the present year. During mid-winter the male would fly to the tray closely followed, usually, by the female. She then demurely takes her place to one side until he is through, for if she attempts to join him he rushes her off as he does the English Sparrows. After about five minutes he has satisfied himself and flies away, whereupon she takes his place and likewise rushes the sparrows. On the morning of January 19, the lack of gallantry on the part of the male came to a sudden close. On that morning the thermometer rose from a spell of low temperatures and there was a distinct touch of spring in the air. A Carolina Wren loudly broke a long silence and for the first time the male Cardinal was heard to whistle his spring call. At breakfast time their grain was placed as usual and in a few moments both birds flew to the shelf, the female awaiting "second table" a yard away. He ate leisurely and when he was through, carefully selected a choice kernel, flew to the female and placing it in her beak, flew away. This performance was witnessed nearly every morning from then on until nesting time. As spring advanced his attentiveness became more pronounced and during the period of his breakfast he would feed her sometimes three or four times as she softly chipped to attract his attention. On March 10, she was finally permitted to eat at "first table". The personalities of these two birds are markedly different. The female is notably gentle and quiet of manner. She will alight on the shelf at times while I stand in the open, two yards away. I have never known so gentle a wild

bird. I judge she is relatively young for her plumage is perfect at all seasons. The male is alert and ever watchful—perhaps that is the secret of his long life. He vigorously drives the sparrows away while he eats and during the song period sings as regularly and as well as a young bird. His plumage, however, is poor and his feathers do not lie smoothly upon him. When he lowers his head to eat, a gap appears in the feathers on the back of his neck, giving him the appearance of having a bald neck.

On March 25 both birds inspected the site which they usually choose for their first nest. It is in the top of a privet bush against a south window. Because the new leaves were as yet very small, actual nest building did not begin until April 6. They used the same crotch that has held the male's first nest now for seven years. (I have no proof that the present female has been his mate farther back than 1933 but believe she has). On April 17 the third egg was laid, on the 29th or 30th these hatched and on May 8 the young left the nest. Two of these were noted about the place all through May, being carefully tended by the old birds. The second nest was begun May 21, in the top of a privet hedge, eight feet above the ground, but was deserted upon completion. They then built another, in a similar location and on June 6 began sitting on two eggs. These hatched, the young were banded on June 27, and they left the nest that afternoon. Both adults were singing on the 28th while carrying food to their young. On July 7 they had completed a third nest, nine feet up in a privet against the south wall of the dwelling next door, and later the female was observed sitting on three eggs. These hatched, as did all the others, and this third brood left the nest on July 28. At least two of them have survived and are still about the place as well as one or two young males of an earlier brood. Due to ample rainfall and the green condition of the foliage, I should not have been surprised to have seen them attempt a fourth brood. So far, however, I have been unable to locate another nest. I hope to be able to chronicle another successful season for this pair a year hence.

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