

# Harbor Island, Naturally

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## CEDAR WAXWINGS

### COLORFUL FRUIT AND BERRY EATERS

The Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedorum* is not a beach bird. They live in the edges of forests and well planted suburbs. The mild winters and abundant supply of berries make the coast a winter haven for them.

These birds travel in flocks providing a delightful kaleidoscope of flashing yellow, red and black. They are known for their gluttony. A tree covered with cedar or holly berries quickly becomes a banquet for a flock. Backyard birders are sometimes treated to the sight of tipsy birds that have eaten too much fermented fruit. Fruit makes up over 70% of the Waxwing's diet during a year.

PHOTOS BY JOHN ALBERT

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Waxwings breed in lower Canada and the upper midwest. While courting they pass food to each other, rub beaks and may do mating dances. Three to five pale bluish gray eggs with black spots are laid in nests in trees.

The name Waxwing comes from red, drop shaped waxy tips of the secondaries (prolongations of their shafts) These may or may not be age marks or indicate social status used in mating.

Cowbirds often lay their eggs in Waxwing nests. The host rejects the Cowbird eggs by ejecting them from the nest, damaging the eggs, or by abandoning the nest altogether.



For those of us in the low country mid to late winter is the best time to see flocks of these colorful birds swoop into a eastern red cedar or yaupon holly and in a matter of minutes completely strip it of its berries.

Keep your eyes on bird baths and other sources of fresh water as they do not frequent feeders but do like to bathe regularly.



Sources: *Book of N. American Birds*, James Cassidy Project Editor Reader's Digest General Books, 1990.  
*The Birder's Handbook*, Paul Ehrlich, David Dobkin & Darryl Wheye, Simon & Schuster, NY, 1988.