

on the banks of a stream where they could obtain sand. They are harmless, familiar little birds, and are very quiet in their manners, as I never saw any encounters, nor those battles that so often occur among English sparrows and other inches. The nests are generally placed near the extremity of a hemlock or cedar branch, and are large and very thick for the size of the builder. They are variously lined with bits of small roots, fibres of vegetables, hair, feathers and the like, but of course vegetable fibres predominate. I have frequently seen the head and a little portion of the tail of the bird project over the side of a nest, when on, or nearly on a level, but never from below. Although I saw numbers of nests, I never obtained any eggs. The fact is I never tried, as the thought did not at the time occur to me. I, however, obtained many fine and beautiful specimens, of *L. curvirostris* as well as *L. leucoptera*. These birds breed early in March or towards the end of January and during February. I am unable to state exactly how many eggs they lay, nor the period of incubation. On the 24th of March, 1862, I saw a female crossbill feeding her young; there were four of them, closely huddled together on a maple twig. I shot three of them, the fourth and the old bird escaping seemingly unhurt. I carefully examined the young; they were of a greenish brown color, and there was down on the ends of their feathers, especially on the head and back. The tail was more than half grown, and the flight of the young bird that escaped, seemed very strong. The bills of the young were not in the least crossed, and this proves that the beaks take this form as they arrive at maturity; the appearance was like that of any young finch. It strikes me, that their bills were too tender to procure food, and that the parents fed them for a longer period than is general in the finch family. But since that period the axe has done its work. We find no more of this species in the neighbourhood as it has little to live on. Occasionally in Spring before the foliage comes on the trees, families of five or six pass around, but every year they are becoming more scarce, and I have neither heard nor seen one for four or five seasons past. The nest, is, as has been stated, very thick, compact, and large; nature has taught the bird so to construct it, as otherwise the eggs and young birds would be frozen. The crops of the three procured were quite distended with hemlock seeds. The external covering in every case was removed and each

seed was bruised, and covered with a peculiarly glutinous fluid, either so given by the old bird, or produced in the crop of the young ones; perhaps as in parent parrots. Although these birds chirp continually while on the wing, yet I never recollect hearing them sing, and they are very silent when on the ground and when feeding on trees. But, the moment a note of alarm is given, they rise altogether with much noise, and after flying about for a moment, to see that danger has passed, they settle down, frequently on the same tree, in perfect silence, seeming intent in procuring food. The peculiarity of the bill, is wonderfully designed to open the scales of fir cones, on which this family feeds, and this point has been discussed by abler pens. But though one is sad to know that they are very seldom seen in this locality, yet noble farms and happy homes take the place of the wild woods where these birds formerly had their habitation. It seems remarkable that crossbills should breed so early in the year. It is not at all strange in any of these months, to see the thermometer frequently below zero. Their food is at this time abundant, and continues so until summer, and it seems improbable that food supply is the cause of such early incubation. These statements are true, but why this little bird breeds during the coldest period of a Canadian winter, who can tell? Mr. Maynard in his "Naturalists' Guide," mentions a gentleman in Maine who obtained the eggs. This Naturalist, whose name I forget, also avers that he procured the eggs in February, and if I only had such a chance as in 1862 to collect, I would certainly lay past a large store of them. Crossbills are indifferent to cold, and I have observed them, in a heavy snow storm, feeding with great composure. I have seen them in considerable numbers in Beverly township near Hamilton. I presume they migrate north in summer. I never remember seeing them before December, nor after the beginning of May. I should like to see the observations of others on the life history of this species, especially any theories or facts that might help to elucidate the cause of its winter incubation. I have heard parties deny that the crossbill or any other little bird, could incubate so early, but this is because they have not had the opportunity to prove it as I have; and, I confess, I was skeptical till I saw the birds, both male and female incubating, and obtained the young.

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