

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE HABITS OF CROSSBILLS
(*LOXIA C. MINOR*) OBSERVED AT HANOVER, N. J.,
MAY 4-6, 1900.

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These birds we saw every day, but doubt whether there were more than a single pair. They evidently had no home cares, and wandered about over several acres of pitch pines, but rarely so far from a given locality that fifteen minutes of careful looking and listening would not reveal their whereabouts. One was in the red plumage (very bright on the rump) the other, olive.

On one afternoon I watched them carefully for three-fourths of an hour, as they fed in a pitch pine, the top of which was about 25 feet high.

They showed their tameness by descending lower and lower, until they were only about eight feet from my head, so that the field-glass was scarcely needed. In moving from cone to cone they progressed, a step at a time, along the connecting branch, and once when climbing from a lower to a higher twig the female (as I took the olive one to be) used her beak much as a parrot on his cage bars. They seemed to prefer to feed clinging to the cones with their heads downward, looking below with a knowing eye, each time they paused to nip the kernel of the seed they had withdrawn.

When the beak was pressed in between the scales, one could plainly see the imbricated rows separate and open, and the orange-colored tongue dart out, and all at once, as if by magic the seed was in the withdrawn beak, and the rejected wings were fluttering down. The Crossbill thoroughly understands the combination of the pine cone.

The mandibles of these two birds both crossed the same way, the upper one turning to the left, and the lower one to the right. The female bird more than once alighted on one of the short broken-off dead branches which project from the main stem of the pitch pine and worked away at the fractured end, darting out her tongue as she crushed off fragments, sometimes holding small pieces of wood in her beak a moment. But why she thus made kindling, I do not know. She also sometimes settled among the long pine leaves at the very end of a branch and nibbled away at the needles, and an examination of one such place showed that the inner fleshy part of the leaf had been eaten out, leaving the outer membrane only.

Suddenly, at a well understood signal call, the two would launch out into the air and undulate off to some distant tree.