

Bill-cleaning behavior in White-winged Crossbills: On Sunday, 30 Oct. 1977, the author and Warren Lloyd visited Hamlin Beach State Park on Lake Ontario near the western edge of Monroe County to look for White-winged Crossbills (*Loxia leucoptera*), which had been reported there the previous day. Hamlin Beach has extensive stands of White Pine, which were probably planted in the 1930's, and have now reached a height of 40 to 50 feet. This fall, they were the only conifers with a good crop of cones. The once solid plantings have now been cut for roads and campsites, allowing easy access to the area.

We found a few White-winged Crossbills near Parking Lot Four, but these soon flew southward over the trailer site area. We could hear the birds calling and finally a flock flew over our heads and landed in the nearby White Pines, where they began to feed.

As we followed the birds in their erratic movements, we suddenly came upon a small ash tree, about thirty feet in height, growing next to the road. This was the only deciduous tree in the area and much to our surprise contained a group of about 25 male and female crossbills scattered about its branches. There were no seeds on the tree. All the crossbills were busily engaged in an activity which seemed to involve wiping or cleaning their bills. They paid no attention to our approach as we moved up to within 25 feet.

As we watched, each bird turned its head and wiped first one side of its crossed mandibles on one side of a pencil-sized twig and then the other side on the opposite side of the twig. They kept doing this for the 15 minutes we observed them, moving their heads back and forth, back and forth. The activity always involved alternating from one side of the bill to the other, rather than concentrating on one side for a period of time. Eventually a bird would fly off, but another would take its place.

We have researched A. C. Bent's *Life Histories*, and numerous other sources on crossbills and can find no reference to this kind of behavior. We can only conclude that the birds may have been trying to remove the pine pitch from their bills, as the cones we saw had a great deal of pitch on them.

We watched the birds as stated from about 25 feet and for about 15 minutes. We were able to study them carefully with 7 x 35 and 10 x 50 binoculars. The tree was in full sunshine, with the light behind us, so that we had the best possible viewing conditions. Some birds were at eye-level. It was a rare opportunity to observe these birds under optimum conditions.

We would be interested in knowing if anyone else has observed this behavior.
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