

November 20, 1944

Birds do eat holly berries in the fall, and they have a decided preference for the berries of one variety over those of another - another point to be considered in the selection of holly. I have a small holly tree near the house, which nearly every year bears a good crop of berries, and the birds almost always strip it before Christmas. This matter was discussed at the meeting at Judge Brown's, and Mr. Nearing had us taste the berries of different trees. Nearing said the berries were an emetic, but did not have such effect if merely tasted and were then spit out. The berries of the tree that Judge Brown said were always stripped early in the season Mr. Nearing called sweet. So they were, but with an unpleasant after-taste. The presumption is that the birds prefer the sweeter berries and eat them first. This is something on which holly enthusiasts can begin observations. However, I think it will be well to find something to dispel the disagreeable after-taste of even the sweet berries.

Elizabeth C. White

November 26, 1944

I am so glad to get your notes on the eating of holly berries by birds. On the strength of them, I tasted a berry from a tree which the birds had nearly stripped. I do not admire their taste, for I had to return to the house to get a peppermint to take away the unpleasant after-taste. I am not sure that the birds do eat the fruit of this particular tree, for I have watched it and have never seen a bird near it. On the other hand, there are many field mice and it might be that they take the fruit for the seeds only; or it may be chipmunks. Another reason for my thinking so is that the fruit disappears from the center of the tree and that on the outer branches never seems to go entirely.

I recall that trees of "St. Mary" and "St. Ann" always held their berries through the season. Apparently, if the theory is correct, these berries were not acceptable

to the birds, for starlings and robins were in flocks on the Island. I am wondering if the so-called everbearing holly is tied up with the bird or mice food question. Two years ago when I went to get branches for Christmas in one of the holly groves at West Barnstable, I found the snow covered with berries. This was the work of red squirrels, for I saw them filling their mouths with berries. If we are to contend with birds in holly growing, this will become a serious problem, particularly if the birds go after the berries before Christmas. Starlings would be the greatest offenders; they like all kinds of fruit. I recall that in another year I saw blue jays in the trees in West Barnstable, and I also saw a cuckoo acting as though he liked the berries. I am watching my trees which have fruited quite carefully this year in order to see what really happens.

Wilfred Wheeler

December 15, 1944

Dr. Pirone writes that he has sent you copies of the minutes of the two meetings of the Holly Research Committee. He sent them also to Harry Dengler, Extension Forester at the University of Maryland and to Mr. O'Rourke at Glendale, Md., who is connected with the U.S.D.A. His specialty is the culture of plants which will check erosion on hillsides and also have some economic value. It was he who told me that Mr. Dengler was interested in forming a committee in Maryland similar to that in New Jersey.

Why should not a similar committee in each holly-producing state of the eastern seaboard, sponsored by a stable agricultural organization, be the very best kind of organization for the promotion of interest in holly? Because of your interest in holly and your connection with agriculture in Massachusetts, I think you are especially fitted to start such an organization in Massachusetts.