

OBSERVATIONS OF ALBINISM IN BIRDS

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During the winter of 1989-90, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Taylor of East Kildonan, Winnipeg, observed at their feeder on many occasions a House Sparrow with standard plumage except for a long white stripe on the lower wings on both sides. On 11 June 1990, the Taylors saw this particular sparrow feeding a fledged white sparrow in their backyard (see photo).¹⁵ From time to time albinism and melanistic mammals and birds make an appearance.

On 26 February 1986, I observed a white House Sparrow in a flock of wild birds which were being fed by visitors at the Honolulu Zoo Park in Hawaii.¹

Herbert Copland reports that the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature has in its collection a completely white specimen of an immature House Sparrow donated by the Delta Waterfowl Research Station. This bird was collected and prepared by T. Ward in July 1941 at Delta, Manitoba, and numbered 1.2-4650.¹⁶ The museum also has "two somewhat indistinct colour photographs" of a partial albino House Sparrow taken by Michael J. Nagonchy just prior to 13 August 1986 in

the north end of Winnipeg.¹⁰ A fledgling partial albino House Sparrow was found dead 31 May 1990 by Herbert Copland on a sidewalk near his home in Elmwood, Winnipeg. "This bird had large white areas on primaries and secondaries, with brown tips to these feathers on both wings and also whitish on some of the inner tail feather vanes."³

Other species of albino birds are reported. Peter Dunn of New Gretna, New Jersey, reported that in the summer of 1990 he had an albino Purple Martin hatch in one of his martin houses.⁴

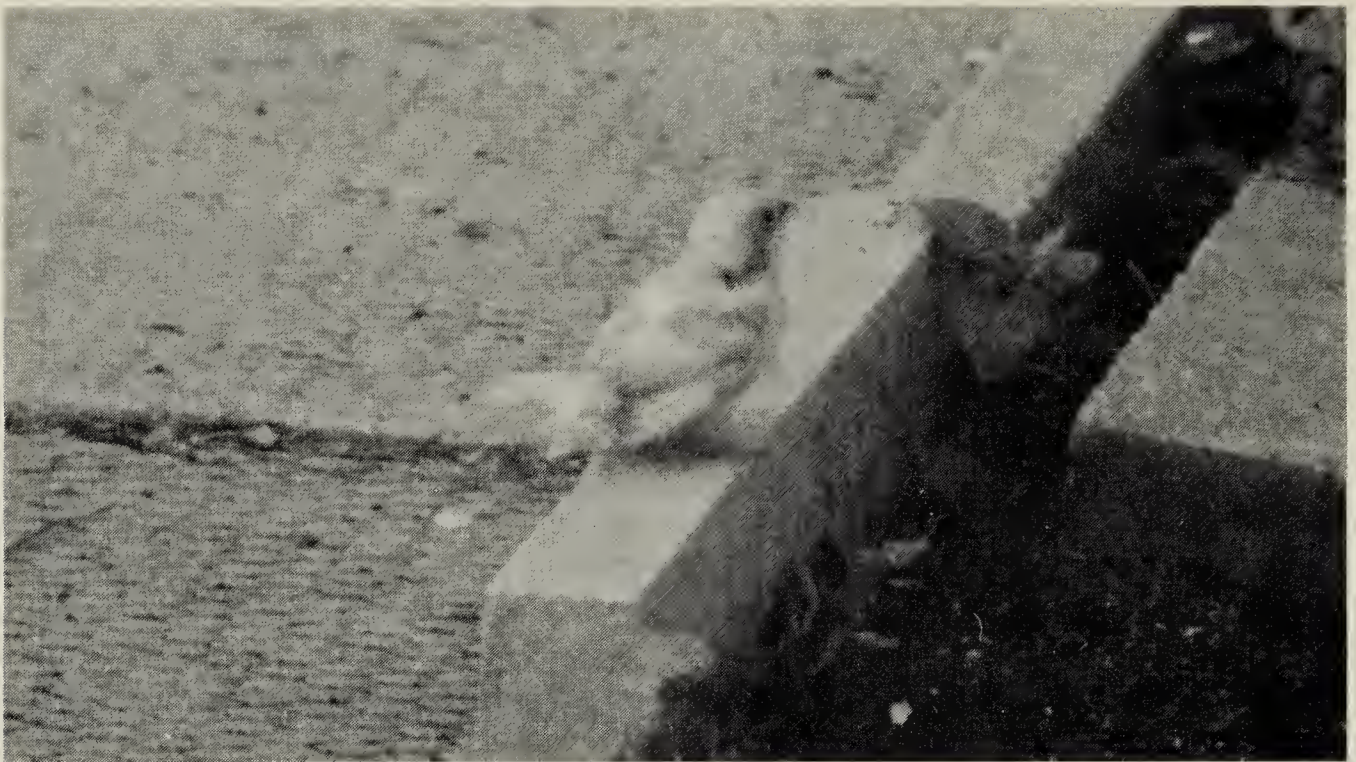
Robert Nero makes mention of a white Great Grey Owl having been photographed near Norway House, Manitoba.¹¹ George Holland reports having seen an albino Great Grey Owl near Patricia Beach, Manitoba.⁶

W.J. Maher did a search of publications in Blue Jay and came up with a list of 29 records of albino or partially albino birds of 18 species, including records of four House Sparrows.⁸

Since Maher's publication there have

Table 1

| Species | No. of Records | Reference |
|-------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Yellow-headed Blackbird | 1 | 2 |
| Kestrel | 1 | 7 |
| Flicker (common) | 1 | 5 |
| American Widgeon | 1 | 9 |
| Great Grey Owl | 3 | 6, 11, 13 |
| Sandhill Crane | 1 | 14 |
| House Sparrow | 5 | 1,3,10,15,16 |
| 7 species | 13 records | |



Albino House Sparrow

Ernest Taylor

been seven additional reports of albino birds in *Blue Jay* (Table 1), including this article.

R.W. Nero did considerable research on plumage aberration in redwings.¹² These characteristics were found in over 300 redwings. "Ninety aberrant specimens of both sexes were obtained on request from 28 museums... Practically all of the 219 adult males collected near Madison, Wisconsin, in 1952 were found to show some deviation from the wholly black plumage."¹²

It would appear that plumage aberrations, mostly in reduced pigmentation, occur more frequently than is generally realized.

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