

A WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL IN TULSA

BY JUNE WILSON

During breakfast on 22 December 1976, while my husband (James A. Wilson) and I were watching the Purple Finches (*Carpodacus purpureus*) and other small birds that regularly visited the feeders at our house in the eastern part of Tulsa, Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma, he remarked that one of the birds he had just been watching was "the prettiest Purple Finch" he had ever seen. Puzzled by the bold plumage pattern of this bird, we watched it closely. Its red was brighter than that of a male Purple Finch, though far less rich than that of a male Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*). Its wings were black, each with two conspicuous white bars. Consulting the books, we found that our bird was much like a male Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enu-*



WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL

*A male bird photographed on 26 February 1977 by Robert J. Farris at the James A. Wilson residence in Tulsa, Oklahoma.*

*cleator*), but it was obviously much too small for that species. We decided that it could be nothing but a White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera*). An important diagnostic feature, the crossed bill, we did not actually see that day.

So far as we knew, the White-winged Crossbill had never been seen in Tulsa, so our identification needed confirmation. I called Alma Bentley, who suggested that I get in touch also with Elizabeth Hayes. Word thus went round that we had something rare in our midst, yet for several days we despaired of being able to show it to anyone. On 5 January it was at our feeders for some time, yet when Elizabeth Hayes came to see it that day, it had gone.

On 9 January we had a heavy snowstorm. The crossbill visited us often while snow was on the ground. When some disturbance "spooked" the birds at the feeders, making them all fly off, the crossbill went with them, but it was usually the first to return. Frequently it alighted on a short stretch of wooden fence not more than 4 feet from the dining room window. The other birds occasionally picked at it, though never very fiercely. Now and then it took a drink near the patio's edge. We never saw it bathe there, however.

On 14 January, Elizabeth Hayes, her husband Kenneth, and Polly Keating finally got a good look at the bird. They agreed that it was, indeed, a White-winged Crossbill. From 15 to 25 January, no one saw it. During the noon hour on 25 January it reappeared; word went round that the crossbill was back; and on that and the following day about 14 of Tulsa's "expert birders" saw it. On the 26th, Robert J. Farris photographed it well in color. No one saw it after 26 January.

*Loxia leucoptera* has not heretofore been reported from Tulsa. Indeed, there are very few records of the species for Oklahoma. According to data filed at the University of Oklahoma Bird Range, the species first visited the state in 1951. On 23 August of that year L. E. Dunn obtained a male specimen (UOMZ 3287) that had been killed by a car on a highway 1 mile east of Gate, Beaver County, at the eastern end of the Panhandle. On 11 January 1958, Emma H. Messerly saw six female birds in Bartlesville, Washington County, northeastern Oklahoma (1958, Audubon Field Notes, 12: 291). On 22 and 23 January 1961, W. A. Carter saw the species on the McCurtain Game Preserve in southeasternmost Oklahoma (1961, Audubon Field Notes, 15: 341): on the 22nd, five males and eight or nine females as they moved through the top of a large oak with about 20 American Goldfinches (*Carduelis tristis*); on the 23rd, flocks of from four to 12 birds that wandered about with goldfinches and Pine Siskins (*C. pinus*), that fed occasionally at cones, but that spent most of their time resting in the dense tops of the big pines. On 24 November 1963, W. O. Pruitt, Jr. observed a flock of about 20 White-winged Crossbills feeding in pines along the south edge of Norman, Cleveland County, central Oklahoma. The few sightings just discussed are all briefly mentioned by Sutton (1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma,

Norman, p. 44), who calls the closely related Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) an "irregular winter visitor" found "virtually statewide."

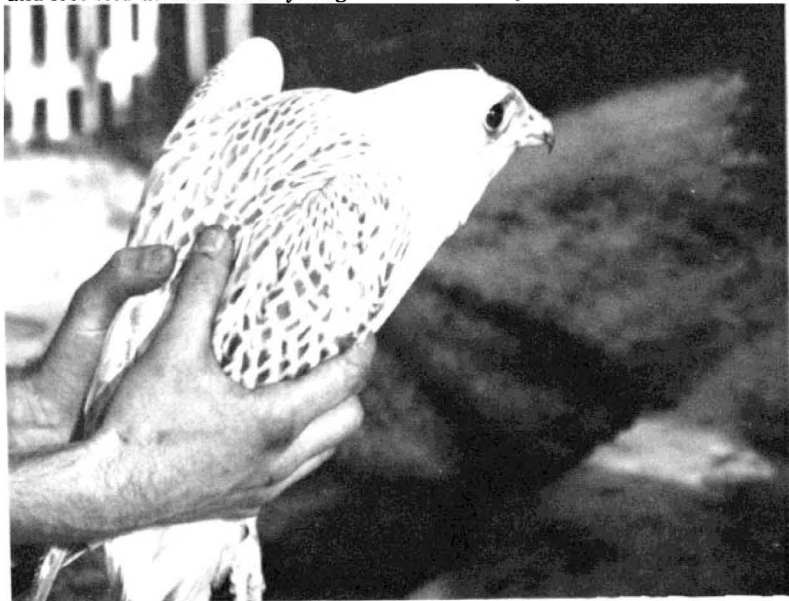
4019 EAST 45TH ST., TULSA, OKLAHOMA 74135, 20 JUNE 1976.

## GYRFALCON IN OKLAHOMA

BY STEPHEN W. PLATT

On 12 January 1974 (a clear, calm, very cold day), while driving along a dirt road 2 miles east of Grainola, Osage County, northeastern Oklahoma, I saw a large, very white bird of prey perched on a fencepost not far from the road. I drove to within about 50 feet of the bird before it flew. As it made off, I realized that it was a large falcon and I deduced from its coloration that it could not be anything but a Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*), a species that had never before been seen in Oklahoma.

The following day, James W. Lish and I returned to the spot at which I had seen the bird. After searching for an hour we found it about a mile south of the post from which it had flown. Using a live-trap baited with a Rock Dove (*Columba livia*), we captured it. The light bluish gray of its bill, cere, eyelids, and feet told us that it was young — a bird of the year.



### GYRFALCON

Captured near Grainola, Osage County, Oklahoma on 13 January 1974 by Stephen W. Platt and photographed that day by James W. Lish.