

It was surprisingly docile, even at first (see photo). Equipped with hood and jesses, it thrived in captivity. On 24 February I took it to the home of George M. Sutton in Norman. Unhooded in the kitchen there, it showed neither fear nor animosity. It became a good hunter. Its health, generally speaking, was excellent. As it grew older its cere and feet became slightly more yellow.

On 23 July 1976, while being cared for by a fellow falconer in Colorado, the Gyrfalcon became unaccountably ill and died. Its carcass was autopsied at the Colorado State University Veterinary Hospital. Dr. Sutton prepared its skin (GMS 16264), which is now in the University of Oklahoma bird collection. One incoming primary and several secondary feathers in each wing of the three-year-old bird are pure white.

A published statement concerning the capture of this bird (Sutton, 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, *Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist.*, Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 11) is slightly in error; as stated above, it was first seen on 12 January 1974 but it was captured and photographed the following day.

3017 N ASH ST., PAULS VALLEY, OKLAHOMA 73075, 19 MARCH 1977.

ON CORRECT IDENTIFICATION

BY GEORGE M. SUTTON

It sometimes seems to me that the only person fully qualified to comment on that which gives sight records full validity is the confirmed collector of specimens who has had the experience of identifying a living bird in the field to his complete satisfaction, then of collecting that very bird only to find it *not to be* of the species he had been sure it was.

Three times I have had that experience — first at Churchill, Manitoba, along the west coast of Hudson Bay in the summer of 1931, when I crawled across a mudflat on a very foggy day stalking what I felt sure was a Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) only to find, after I'd collected the bird, that it was a Stilt Sandpiper (*Micropalama himantopus*) in full breeding feather. In heavy fog the bird had appeared to be three times its actual size. That's how fog can affect visibility.

Again, in the northern panhandle of West Virginia, I collected what I felt sure was an adult male Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*), a species that had never been reported from that area, and picked up a Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), a common species there. The sky was clear and very blue that day. The feathers of the catbird's back had reflected that blue and the bird died because I, convinced that the blueness was that of a Blue Grosbeak, and mindful that I had many times failed to obtain an important specimen as a result of too much deliberation, did not check one very important point — the looks of the bird's bill. Many a reader will say: What nonsense! Nobody'd ever mistake a catbird for a grosbeak! To which I reply: That's exactly what I did. I wanted very much to obtain a Blue Grosbeak. And the reflected blueness tipped the scales in favor of my calling the catbird a grosbeak. It was as simple as that; and the point of this particular discussion is that what happened *happened to me, a veteran*.

Again, in central Oklahoma, this time on 13 September 1954, along the east edge of Norman, I collected what I'd identified as a Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*), at that time a species that had never been taken in Oklahoma. I had noted the strongly yellowish tone of the flanks and the rather warm tone on the chest and was confident that the bird was a Philadelphia, this despite the fact that I'd heard a Warbling Vireo (*V. gilvus*) singing more than once that morning in that very area. When I picked the specimen up I saw at once that it was a Warbling Vireo. Its chest was pale buffy, not yellow. For a moment I toyed with the idea that I'd seen one bird and shot another; then I knew that I'd simply misidentified the bird while it was alive.

So nowadays when someone tells me that what he saw was surely a raven (*Corvus corax*) because it was "so much larger" than a crow (*C. brachyrhynchus*), or a Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) because it was "a whole lot bigger" than a Common Grackle (*Q. quiscula*), the first question I ask is this: Was the day foggy? Or, if the moot bird was supposedly a Philadelphia Vireo, I insist on ascertaining that the color of the underparts was the right sort of light, clear yellow and that this color extended throughout the whole of the throat and breast, before I feel sure that the bird was not a Warbling Vireo.

Most bird students are honest; but I have reason to suspect that many of those who dedicate their efforts primarily to building up a "life list" tend to be content with identifications that are not entirely satisfactory. Especially is this true when the "life lister" knows that the locality and season are right for the species he is determined to see. After all, he may have travelled across a continent just to see that particular species.

Here in Cleveland County, Oklahoma, those of us who have worked, really worked, with the birds of the area know that Smith's Longspur (*Calcarius pictus*) is a fairly regular winter resident. We know about when it arrives and about when it departs. We know from specimens carefully collected and examined that the molt into handsome breeding feather does not start while the species is here. We know about where to look for the birds, for they seem to be attracted winter after winter to certain largely treeless fields.

How many of us know just what to look for in identifying Smith's Longspur — the boldly black-and-white lesser and middle wing coverts in adult males (a feature that can be seen clearly on a bright day as the birds fly past), the strongly buffy tone of the underparts in both sexes, the diagnostic tail pattern? Showing visitors from afar some flying longspurs and announcing that "they could be Smith's Longspurs" is not enough. Falling back on the well documented statement that all four longspurs are known to occur here in winter is not enough. The truly scientific "life lister" will have in mind just what characters to look for and also exactly what the analogous characters are in similar species before he calls his sight record completely valid.

STOVALL MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, NORMAN 73019, 18 OCTOBER 1977.

GENERAL NOTES

Brant in Johnston County, Oklahoma.—On the clear, cold, windy afternoon of 21 November 1976, at the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge in Johnston County, south-central Oklahoma, we sighted through our tripod-mounted telescope a light-bellied immature Brant (*Branta bernicla*). When first seen, the bird was in a tightly bunched flock of geese, all of which were swimming not far from shore in an arm of Lake Texoma a hundred