

GYRFALCON IN OKLAHOMA CITY: SOUTHERNMOST RECORD FOR NORTH AMERICA.

BY JOSEPH A. GRZYBOWSKI

On 1 December 1982 at about 0845, I was driving east on an elevated portion of Interstate 40 near the Myriad Convention Center in downtown Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma. The day was overcast, wind was from the south at 20 miles per hour, and the temperature 60°F. To my surprise, I saw a large falcon sweep up over the highway about a quarter-mile ahead. I noted its slow wingbeat, similar to that of a Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*). As I drew nearer, I saw that the falcon, which was then dropping off to the north side of the interstate at about eye-level, was very darkly marked. Suspecting that it was a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), I began searching for characters that would distinguish between adult and immature. The dark chest precluded it from being an adult Peregrine, and I could discern no bold "mustache" mark. I became confused, however, when I observed whitish streakings on the nape and crown; an immature Peregrine should have had a solid brown "helmet." I did note that the underparts and wing linings were very heavily streaked. As the falcon coursed about 20 feet above some Rock Doves (*Columba livia*), I estimated that it was greater than one and one-half times their length. With some apprehension, I concluded that this bird was a Gyrfalcon (*F. rusticolus*), a circumboreal species well south of its normal range.

John S. Shackford searched in vain for the bird later that afternoon. However, on 6 December he saw a large blunt-winged falcon at a distance, soaring high over the area of my earlier sighting. The following afternoon, John ob-



IMMATURE BLACK GYRFALCON

Immature black Gyrfalcon observed from 1-19 December 1982 in downtown Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Note the diagnostic pale area at the base of the primaries. Photographed 14 December 1982 by Wesley S. Isaacs.

served the Gyrfalcon chasing Rock Doves around a grain elevator near Walnut Street and Southeast Third Avenue, and later among the tall skyscrapers in the downtown business district. On 8 December, he watched it at close range; the blue-gray cere and eyelids confirmed that it was an immature bird.

This bird was observed sporadically thereafter. Laurie MacIver saw the Gyrfalcon as it perched on the arm of a light atop the U-Haul building next to Interstate 40 during the evening rush-hour on 9 December. On 13 December, Shackford photographed it consuming a Rock Dove (see photo in *Am. Birds* 37:315, 1983). His pictures show the indistinct mustache mark on the right side of the face to be bolder than that on the left. On 14 December, Wesley S. Isaacs also took photographs of the Gyrfalcon, one of which is reproduced here. The big raptor consumed a Rock Dove in a large cottonwood tree (*Populus deltoides*) and then flew to another cottonwood and slept. The bird was last reported on 19 December by Brad Carlton. Because it was not easily found, the falcon may have been in the vicinity longer. Never was it observed eating or chasing prey other than Rock Doves, which were abundant in the area.

The Gyrfalcon has been recorded in Oklahoma on two other occasions, both times in Osage County, near the Kansas state line. The first sighting was on 12 January 1974 when Steve W. Platt observed an immature white bird near Grainola (1977, *Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc.* 10:27-28); this bird was captured the next day, but later died and was prepared as a specimen by George M. Sutton (UOMZ 12739). More recently, Steve K. Sherrod recognized an adult male gray Gyrfalcon on 4 November 1982 (Williams, F., 1983, *Am. Birds* 37:315) near Foraker; Sherrod (pers. comm.) writes that the falcon flew 30 feet over his head, landed in a tree nearby, and, after five minutes, briefly gave chase to a lone Greater Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*).

Tom J. Cade (1982, *The falcons of the world*, Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca, N.Y., p. 76) indicates that Gyrfalcons are observed south on the Atlantic Coast to New Jersey, on the Pacific Coast to Washington, and to eastern Colorado and western Nebraska in the Great Plains. The southernmost records outside Oklahoma have been at Wilmington, Delaware, on 5 November 1974 (Scott, F. R., and D. A. Cutler, 1975, *Am. Birds* 29:36), Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Missouri, on 18 December 1977 (Kleen, V. M., 1978, *Am. Birds* 32:358), and Davis, California, from 22 January to 8 February 1982 (LeValley, R., 1982, *Am. Birds* 36:326). The records for Oklahoma are apparently the most southerly; thus the Gyrfalcon at Oklahoma City (latitude 35° 30' N, longitude 97° 30' W) represent the southernmost for North America.

Because falcons are kept in captivity, extralimital records may be of escapes. The pictures of the Gyrfalcon taken by Shackford and Isaacs reveal no jesses or signs of abrasion on the legs and toes. The tail feathers do show some tattered edges, but this may represent normal wear in wild birds which ordinarily attain their first winter retrices between June and August (S. Cramp, ed., 1980, *Handbook of the birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa*, Vol. 2, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, England, p. 360). The Oklahoma City falcon ate Rock Doves on the ground several times, a habit which might account for some wear of the tail feathers; however, this wear may also be attributable to past captivity.

Hank Coburn is to be thanked for his cooperation in allowing numerous birdwatchers to search the area around the grain elevator near Southeast Third Avenue and Walnut Street. John Shackford and Wes Isaacs both shared their fine photographs with me.

1701 LENOX, NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069, 26 JULY 1983.

GENERAL NOTES

Barrow's Goldeneyes in Cimarron County, Oklahoma.—Participants in the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count for Kenton, Oklahoma, have twice observed drake Barrow's Goldeneyes (*Bucephala islandica*) on Lake Carl Etling in Black Mesa State Park, Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma. On 31 December 1979, nine other persons and I discovered a drake Barrow's among 25 Common Goldeneyes (*B. clangula*) (Williams F., 1980, Am. Birds 34:572) that were aggregated in a small ice-free part of the lake. Nannette Johnson and I again identified the species there on 1 January 1983, this time two drakes that were with another flock of Commons (Williams, F., 1983, Am. Birds 37:665).

In each case, the Barrow's Goldeneyes were resting quietly on the lake with heads tucked under their scapular feathers when first noticed. The extensive black on their backs initially drew our attention to them because it continued approximately two-thirds of the way down their sides; the black dorsum of the Common Goldeneye drake extends only about a third of the way down. Another distinguishing feature was the black vertical bar just in front of the folded wing, a character lacking in *B. clangula*. When the Barrow's became more active, we could see that the white patch in front of their eyes was vertically elongate (unlike the round spot of the Common Goldeneye) and that it extended upward past eye-level. Also prominent was a broken dorsolateral stripe formed by successive white blotches on the scapular feathers. On neither date could we tell whether or not any of the several female-type birds present in the flocks were Barrow's Goldeneyes.

During each sighting, the Barrow's Goldeneyes were studied carefully with the aid of several 20-60X telescopes under optimal conditions of light; however, because the birds were as far away as one-quarter mile, we were unable to photograph them. Other observers present on at least one of the sightings were: JoAnn S. Garrett, Julie Halford, Earl McHugh, Jananne McNitt, Malana Mock, Jean Schulenberg, Marvin Schwilling and Harold Smith.

Bucephala islandica has been reported in Oklahoma on four other occasions: on 22 November 1956, two adult drakes, accompanied by three female-type goldeneyes, were observed in Mohawk Park, Tulsa, Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma by E. J. and Lena Esst (Baumgartner, F. M., 1957, Aud. Field Notes 11:36); on 28 January 1961, A. M. and Sophia Mery and others reported "several" on Hulah Reservoir in Osage County, northeastern Oklahoma (Baumgartner, F. M., 1961, Aud. Field Notes 15:341); Richard A. Ellis saw a drake in a shallow roadside pothole near Lake Humphrey in Stephens