

believes that the existence today of both red and gray phases in eastern North America [including much of Oklahoma] "is indicative of selection for bimodal variation" — in other words, that *Otus asio* survives throughout a vast part of North America not in spite of its two color phases, but because of them. In a more recent paper, James A. Mosher and Charles J. Henry (1976, *Auk*, 93:614-619) present data indicating that red-phased birds survive severe winter weather less successfully than gray-phased birds as a result of "color-related metabolism differences" in their makeup. This would suggest that during the unusually severe winters of 1977-78 and 1978-79 in Oklahoma more red birds than gray perished here as a result of exceptionally low air temperatures and heavy snowfall. I have no data in support of such a concept. Of the eight Screech Owls found dead during those winters in central Oklahoma (and preserved as skins or skeletons in the University of Oklahoma collection), six were gray, and two red. Seven of them, including both red ones, were victims of road traffic. One gray bird may have died of starvation. It was found, barely alive, clinging to the end of a juniper branch not far above ground in a residential part of Norman on 25 January 1978. A series of ten Screech Owls found dead on highways in southern Oklahoma by John Sandidge (four from Bryan County, four from Carter County, one from Pushmataha County, one from Marshall County) in the fall and winter between 20 February 1976 and 12 March 1978, contained two red-phased birds.

(Deceased), NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069, 9 MARCH 1980.

Ed. Note — Some of the above information was alluded to in Dr. Sutton's popular account of these species in his recently published book, *Birds Worth Watching* (Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, pp. 76-79, 1986).

GENERAL NOTES

Barnacle Goose in Caddo County, Oklahoma,—About 450 yds (400 m) southwest of my home 4¼ miles (6.8 km) northeast of Anadarko, Caddo County, Oklahoma, lies a pond surrounded by a field of winter wheat. The pond, probably less than 12 in. (30 cm) deep, covers approximately 10 acres (4.5 ha).

At 0650 on 20 November 1985 (clear, bright, 27°F), I noticed 50 or 60 Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) loitering near the pond. At 0720, I set up my 32× telescope and studied them closely. Among the Canadas was a strange goose with such a distinctive black and white pattern that it immediately caught my attention. Having formerly been a game biologist for several years with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, I was familiar with North American waterfowl to be expected in Oklahoma, but this one was certainly not among them. Although it was the size of one of the smaller races of Canada Goose, both its chest and neck were black (only the neck is dark in *B. canadensis*). A sharp vertical line of contrast was created where the black lower chest interfaced with the white of the belly. The dorsum, too, was dark. Most striking of all was the brilliant white head — including throat, cheeks and forehead — that stood out vividly from the bird's black neck and crown. In addition, I could tell that the eye color was light, possibly yellow.

At 0741, the entire flock flew off to the west. I hastily consulted a field

guide. There was no doubt that this bird was a Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*).

According to the A.O.U. Check-list of North American birds (6th ed., 1983, p. 69), this Old World species is casual in North America, particularly the northeastern U.S., and has been reported as far inland as Nebraska, Colorado, Oklahoma, and the Gulf Coast of Texas on rare occasions. Some of these birds had presumably escaped from captivity, but others may have been vagrants.

There are five published records for Oklahoma: (for details, see Hawthorne, B.J., 1975, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 8:5; and Green, R. K., 1981, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 14:13).

The following points should be borne in mind: the Barnacle Geese reported thus far in Oklahoma have all been single birds seen between 7 November and 1 March; each was observed in association with large flocks of Canada Geese; and all but one were on or near national wildlife refuges.—Bud Exendine, *Rt. 1, Box 147, Anadarko, Oklahoma 73005, 2 December 1985.*

Unusual fishing behavior of an Osprey.—On 24 September 1985, John G. Newell and I observed at least three Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) at Lake Hefner, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma. More than once we saw a bird dive to the water, catch a fish, then fly off, presumably to find a perch where it could eat its prey. About 1530, however, I observed a bird about 400 yards away that was carrying what I took to be a fish which it held, one foot in front of the other. Instead of flying off to eat the fish, the bird made a shallow dive toward the water, but pulled up well before striking it. Several seconds later (after I had located the raptor with my 15× telescope), I clearly saw it plunge toward the water, drop the first fish just before hitting the surface, catch a second fish in its talons, and fly off.

The following points strike me as worth noting: (1) the Osprey did, apparently, trade one fish in its talons for another it had to catch in the water, the second appearing to be slightly larger and shinier; (2) the Osprey waited until the last possible second before dropping the first fish, and (3) because the dead (or injured) fish landed near where the second was caught, the Osprey could have returned for it, should it have missed the second fish.

I have seen many Ospreys dive down and catch a fish, then fly to a perch to devour it, but never have I seen this type of "trade" described above. A. C. Bent describes no such behavior for the Osprey in his discussion of the species (1937, Life histories of North American birds of prey, Pt. 1, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 167, Wash., D.C., pp. 369-371). Steve Sherrod (pers. comm.) informs me that young Ospreys frequently engage in "play" behavior similar to the above, but I could not tell whether or not the bird I saw was immature.—John S. Shackford, *Rt. 1, Box 125, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73111, 3 October 1985.*

Ruby-throated Hummingbird banded in northeastern Oklahoma recovered in south-central Texas.—The recovery of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) nearly 500 miles from where it was banded is noteworthy. The history of Number X29588 is unique in my nine years of hummingbird banding. During this period I have banded a total of 1,641.

On 8 July 1983, I placed band number X29588 on an adult female hummingbird in my yard 5 miles south of Jay, Delaware County, northeastern

Oklahoma. She was captured in one of my two cylindrical, drop-door traps baited with a commercial nectar feeder containing a solution of one part sugar and four parts water. The possibility that she was a Black-chin (*A. alexandri*) was ruled out by careful measurement of the bill and by the fact that only twice in nine years had I encountered other than Ruby-throats in this vicinity. Number X29588, though new to me, showed the worn plumage of an adult bird and a full-length bill (19 mm). (The exposed culmen of 10 adult female specimens measured by Robert Ridgway in the U.S. National Museum ranged from 17 to 19.5 mm and averaged 18.2. The same measurements for an equal number of adult Black-chin females were 19.5-22, averaging 20.6 mm (Ridgway, R., 1911, The birds of North and Middle America, Pt. 5, Bull. U.S. Natl. Mus. 50, pp. 629, Wash., D.C.)). She was recaptured on 7, 8, 13, and 19 August, a total of five times, in both the front and back yard traps.

This was a period of increasing activity in our local hummingbird population. The first fledglings had come in during the week, and many females banded during May were recaptured after an absence of several weeks. During the 1984 season she visited my traps on 31 May, 6 June, 9 and 23 July, and 30 August. Again, she was caught a total of five times during the summer.

In 1985 she was back for a third year. I captured her once on 20 May, twice on 22 May, and once more on 14 August.

The first and last date that she was recorded each year are comparable to those of prior years and are typical for hummingbirds that summer in our region: she was neither the earliest to arrive nor the last to depart.

The recovery of this bird on 16 September, 1985 at Kerrville, in south-central Texas, revealed that she journeyed roughly 475 miles southwest in a month's time. The report from the Bird Banding Laboratory at Laurel, Maryland, informed us only that she was found dead and reported to a local game ranger. A friend, Mrs. C. C. Boyd, whom we met in Alaska during the summer of 1985, by chance happens to live in Kerrville, and obligingly contacted the game ranger for us. He reported that this bird had somehow entered a construction building and began to bump repeatedly against the high ceiling. Four hours later it finally dropped to the floor, completely exhausted. It died before compassionate observers could rush it to wildlife officials.

This is my first and only "foreign recovery" (official terminology) of a hummingbird beyond two miles from the home station. Though a total of 241 individuals (17.6%) banded for at least a year have subsequently returned to our yard, their recovery elsewhere is an almost unheard-of incident.

In an effort to determine the normal route of autumn migration for Oklahoma Rubythroats, I searched 40 years of fall migration reports in Audubon Field Notes (1949-1970) and its successor, American Birds (1971-1985). In the Southern Great Plains section, which includes Jay, Oklahoma, on its eastern margin and Kerrville, Texas, midway across the southern border, I found only two references, one for 1977, the other in 1984. "Adult Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were abundant throughout W. Texas *where they are normally rare*, in late August and early September (1977). There is no way to estimate how many of the hundreds of female and young hummers present were also Ruby-throateds." (Williams, F., 1978, Amer. Birds 32:225; author's italics); "A Ruby-throated

Hummingbird in the foothills Aug. 24 (1984) completed the roster of Big Bend hummers" (Williams, F., 1985, Amer. Birds 39:74).

Number X29588 is noteworthy not only for the fact that her history has been documented, but also because she pursued a course considerably west of her place of origin and the normal route of her species.—A. Marguerite Baumgartner, Rt. 2, Little Lewis Whirlwind Nature School and Sanctuary, Jay, Oklahoma 74346, 18 December 1985.

Opportunistic feeding on insects by European Starlings.—While at a truck stop in northeast Tulsa, Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma, shortly before 0700 on 28 August 1985, we observed six to ten European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) cleaning recently killed insects from a windshield and grills of six parked semi trailer-trucks. The weather was clear and calm. The flock landed on the grill of the first truck and picked off all the insects there. They next moved to the second truck grill in line, then to the third, and so forth, until all the grills were clean, then they flew off. One starling landed on the hood of the first truck, flew to the windshield, and secured a perch on a wiper blade, from where it plucked all the insects within its reach. Although every truck had a short flattened hood, we saw no starling on any other windshield. This entire sequence of events lasted less than 10 minutes.

The European Starling is a very adaptable species and thrives in association with man. C. Feare (1984, *The Starling*, Oxford University Press, New York) discussed feeding adaptations used by this bird, but made no reference to the above-described behavior. Nor did a search of recent literature reveal instances of this or similar foraging strategy.

W. T. Beecher (1978, *Feeding adaptations and evolution in the Starlings*, Bull. Chicago Acad. Sci. 11:269-298) points out the ability of starlings in the genus *Sturnus* to rotate the eyes forward, enabling them to sight down the bill to see food items while probing. This adaptation no doubt facilitates the accuracy and speed with which European Starlings glean insects from truck grills, but this is obviously a learned behavior.

At no time were starlings seen at automobile grills or windshields. Considering the size difference of "foraging area" and the availability of truck grills versus smaller automobile grills, this seems to make sense. Large trucks are frequently parked in rows that face open areas, thereby providing an easily exploitable resource, whereas autos are most often parked indiscriminantly.—Bruce Miller and Carolyn Wright, *Oklahoma City Zoo, 2101 N.E. 50th St., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73111, 25 September, 1985.*

Common Grackles exhibiting partial albinism in southwestern Oklahoma.—While driving in open pastureland between subdivisions 2 miles east and 2 north of downtown Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma, at 0820 on 20 May 1985, I observed a piebald Common Grackle, *Quisacalus quiscula*. There were numerous other black-colored birds in the immediate vicinity, including about 25 Common Grackles, a few Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), and several European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*). I returned to this location at 1100 and again at 1330, each time observing this odd-plumaged

grackle for several minutes through a 9×35 binocular. The bird's head was gray, washed with white, and its outermost rectrices were white. White splotches on the torso and wings ranged from dime to quarter size. This bird was extremely wary and would not allow me to approach closer than about 100 feet.

Although I drove by this site daily, I saw the piebald grackle only once more. On 28 May 1985, a grackle quite similar to the one described above (and quite possibly the same bird) flew across the road 25 to 35 feet ahead of me.

On 9 April 1986, at a place less than a mile south, I saw another black and white grackle. It flew past my vehicle and lit on a wooden fence next to the road. At least three quarters white, this bird actually appeared to be white with black spots. Due to heavy traffic, I was unable to stop and study the grackle, and by the time I returned, it was gone. Because albinistic black birds become whiter with each molt (Sage, B. L., 1962, Albinism and melanism in birds, *Brit. Birds* 55:201-225), and since the 1985 and 1986 sightings were in such close proximity, the possibility that I saw the same piebald grackle two years in succession cannot be completely discounted.

During a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Breeding Bird Survey in Cotton County, Oklahoma, on the morning of 21 June 1986, Jack D. Tyler and I discovered a partially albinistic Common Grackle among a flock of about 80 others. This female bird was light brown except for its all-white primaries. We watched it for approximately 15 minutes. It and most of the flock eventually flew from a barbed wire fence between plowed fields to a highline near a grove of soapberry trees (*Sapindus drummondii*) along the road. The surrounding habitat was mostly sandsage grassland interspersed with cultivated fields 2 miles west and 5 south of Randlett.

Although partial albinism in grackles is not unheard of (Sutton, G. M., 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 557), it is sufficiently uncommon to warrant further investigation. Pure albinos (complete absence of pigment or melanism) are comparatively rare. Only 7% of 1847 records of albinism in North American birds represented total or pure albinism; other forms are more common (Gross, A. O., 1965, *Bird-Banding* 36:67-71). These include incomplete albinism (pigment lacking in eyes, plumage or naked parts but not all three), imperfect albinism (pigment reduced or diluted in one or more of these areas), or partial albinism (pigment locally absent, as above). *Quiscalus quiscula* ranked fifteenth among the 28 species most commonly reported to exhibit some form of albinism in North America, with 23 cases (1.24%) out of the 1847 (Gross, *op. cit.*). Sage (*op. cit.*) stated that albinism may result from numerous causes: heredity, inbreeding, diet, senility, shock, disease and injury.—Larry L. Choate, 3110 NE Kingsbriar Circle, Lawton, Oklahoma 73507, 1 July 1986.

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