

OCCURRENCE OF ALBINISTIC HUMMINGBIRDS IN OKLAHOMA

BY ELLIE WOMACK

In 1984 I was granted permit No. 22056 by the Bird Banding Laboratory of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to band hummingbirds in the state of Oklahoma. It was also in 1984, at Tejunga Canyon, California, that I observed and photographed a mostly white hummingbird with dark bill, eyes and feet. That experience piqued my curiosity and led to this paper.

Alfred O. Gross (1965, The incidence of albinism in North American birds, *Bird-Banding* 36:67-71) reported albinism in four species of hummingbirds involving 16 of 1847 individuals among 54 families. The categories he used are defined by John K. Terres (1987, *Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, p.11) thusly:

"Total (or pure) Albinism: The rarest form, in which the bird has a complete absence of melanin (dark coloring pigment) from the eyes, skin, and feathers.

Incomplete Albinism: Pigment is completely absent from either eyes, skin, or feathers but not all three.

Imperfect Albinism: Pigment formation is partially inhibited (reduced) in eyes, skin, or feathers but pigment is not totally inhibited in any.

ALBINO HUMMINGBIRD



Schizochroistic hummingbird photographed 31 August, 1987 at the home of William Bass, Norman, Cleveland County, Oklahoma. The photographer, Pat Garrison, authorized use of this excellent photograph.

Table 1. Albinistic hummingbirds known for Oklahoma.

SPECIES	LOCATION	DATE	DEGREE OF ALBINISM	OBSERVER	REFERENCE	COMMENTS
Unk	Cherokee Co., ca. 10 mi E Muskogee	1970	Unk	Opal King, James L. Norman	<i>Nature Soc. News</i> , Nov 1986	
Unk	Ottawa Co., near Quapaw	1983	Schizochroistic (buff head and neck, o/w white)	Elsie Hutchins, m. ob.	<i>Bird Watcher's Digest</i> , Jul/Aug 1984	Photographed by Terry Wilcox in Sep
Unk	McIntosh Co., Checotah	Lt. Aug- 13 Sep 1986	Unk	Mr./Mrs. Chick Boothman & Mr./Mrs. Curtis Finch	<i>Nature Soc. News</i> , Nov 1986	2 birds, 1 larger & whiter
Unk	Wagoner Co., Muskogee	19-20 Sep 1986	Schizochroistic (almost grayish)	Vera Jennings, Jeri McMahan, m. ob.	<i>Nature Soc. News</i> , Nov 1986	
Rufous?	Cleveland Co., Norman	10 Aug- 7 Sep 1987	Schizochroistic (tan washes on wings & scapulars, few buff feather tips)	Wm. Bass, Bob E. & Jean Ragsdale, m. ob.	Bass, W., 1988, <i>Bull.</i> <i>Oklahoma Ornithol.</i> <i>Soc.</i> 21:20-21	Photo by Janice Higgins- Blunck published in <i>Norman Transcript</i> , 1 Sep 1987
Unk	Rogers Co., near Talala	Aug & Sep 1987	Unk	Lee Bob & Lynn Roberts		2 birds, 1 larger & whiter; author has photo of one
Rufous?	Comanche Co., 1 mi. N, 5.5 mi. E Meers	6 & 26 Aug 1991	Unk	June Hewes	Hewes, J., & A. McCoy, 1991, <i>Bull.</i> <i>Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.</i> 24:33-34	Larger than Ruby-throat

Table 1. (Cont.)

SPECIES	LOCATION	DATE	DEGREE OF ALBINISM	OBSERVER	REFERENCE	COMMENTS
Unk	Comanche Co., Lawton	19 Sep- 1 Oct 1991	Schizochroistic (lt. gray on wings & tail)	Anita & Charles T. McCoy	Hewes & McCoy, <i>loc. cit.</i>	Photo on file at CUMZ ¹
Unk	Mayes Co., near Disney	7-15 Sep 1991	Unk	Karen & Dave Shepardson		Photo in author's file
Ruby- throated (HY♀)	Tulsa Co., Tulsa	21 Aug- late Aug 1992	Schizochroistic (dorsum soft gray, wings dark, o/w white)	Lloyd, Pat & Virginia Seibert, Dee Isted, the author		Photo in author's file Band No. T75601 (24 Aug)
Unk	Creek Co., Sapulpa	21-27 Aug 1992	Schizochroistic (buffy crown, back, tail, o/w white)	Willard & Marjorie Buckner, the author		
Unk	Haskell Co., near Porum	Sep-Oct 1993	Incomplete (white except dark eyes & bill)	O.D. Walker, Jeri McMahan, James & Marion Norman		Copy of videotape of bird in author's file

¹CUMZ - Cameron University Museum of Zoology, Lawton, Oklahoma.

Partial Albinism: The commonest form; complete or partial albinism within local parts of the body which may involve certain feathers only; it is often symmetrical and each side of the bird may show white feathers in the same pattern."

In addition, the terms "schizochroism" and "leucism" should be explained. Van Tyne and Berger (1959, *Fundamentals of ornithology*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, p.160) define the former as a condition in which there are one or more pigments absent from the plumage, resulting in an abnormally pale, washed-out appearance. The terms "dilute" and "pale mutant" probably fall into this category. "Leucism" is similar and is caused by "varying degrees of dilution of normal pigmentation..." ranging from "... a rufous leucism to a pale ginger, and then on to silver-gray and to an almost or even absolutely total albino" (Thomson, A.L., 1964, *A new dictionary of birds*, Thomas Nelson Ltd., London, pp. 643-644).

While banding nearly 3000 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*), I have encountered only a handful with any evidence of albinism. Most of these exhibited only minor traces, such as the adult female (T21079) banded on 29 April 1990 which exhibited a small area of white sprinkled with normally colored feathers at the base of her upper mandible. On 7 May 1990 I banded another adult female (T21117) with white feathers scattered asymmetrically over her body, including a white tip on her left seventh primary. It is not known whether or not these white feathers remained after her next complete molt. The following table omits these records but summarizes mostly or entirely albinistic hummingbirds known by the author to have occurred in Oklahoma.

Reports that several of these albinistic hummingbirds were larger than Ruby-throats should be considered, but conclusions must be guarded. All sightings were in the fall with migration well under way. There is wide variation in hummingbird weight at this time, ranging from small recently-fledged young to birds easily one and one-half times heavier than their spring weight. Color also plays a part in visual evaluation of size.

In cases where two white birds are reported and one is larger and whiter than the other, the possibility exists that they are female (larger) and male siblings. It is believed that adult male Ruby-throats begin migration first, followed by adult females, then the young. Each individual apparently follows its own instincts rather than migrating in a family group.

Another possible explanation for differences in size or appearance is that some of the larger hummingbirds may not be Ruby-throats. Although this is the only species known to breed in the eastern third of the United States, many states in the Atlantic Flyway and the Midwest increasingly identify other hummingbirds, especially during fall migration. Most commonly reported in Oklahoma are species in the genus *Selasphorus*. No Allen's Hummingbird (*S. sasin*) has ever been confirmed in the state, and in most plumages it cannot safely be separated in the field from the Rufous (*S. rufus*). Adult male Rufous Hummingbirds often, but not always, are distinguishable by sight. Since 1991, twelve Rufous Hummingbirds and seven *Selasphorus* sp. are documented in my file of Oklahoma extralimitals. Three of the Rufous were banded: an adult male (T31054) in Grove, Delaware County, on 11 August 1992; a hatching year female (T75883) also in Grove on 5 November 1993; and an adult female (T75884) in Tulsa, Tulsa County, on 12 November 1993.

Rufous Hummingbirds tend to be slightly larger than Ruby-throats, and with the number of sightings apparently increasing each year, we may even consider them "expected," though not common, in fall migration. While some albinistic individuals appearing "larger than Ruby-throats" could be Rufous or some other species,

there is enough variation in weights and measurements within each species, as well as between sexes of the same species, that positive identification is tenuous without physical examination of each bird.

Albinism in hummingbirds remains a prime interest of the author. New sightings and any additional information would be gratefully received.

1022 SOUTH SYCAMORE DRIVE, GROVE, OKLAHOMA 74344, 6 AUGUST 1994.

GENERAL NOTES

Roseate Spoonbills and Wood Storks in Johnston County, Oklahoma. — The Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*) is a "very rare summer and fall visitant at large impoundments and rivers, chiefly in eastern and central Oklahoma..." (F.M. Baumgartner and A.M. Baumgartner, 1992, *Oklahoma bird life*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 75). On 17 August 1994 we spotted two pinkish immature Roseate Spoonbills in a slough 50 yards south of Nida Point on the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge in Johnston County, Oklahoma. Here, exposed mudflats and shallow pools of water were interspersed with numerous willow stumps. The slough was 30 to 60 yards wide and surrounded by woodlands except for its confluence with the lake at the north end.

The spoonbills were loafing and preening in the shallows with several Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*), Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*), Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*), Green Herons (*Butorides striatus*), and a few female Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*). When they became aware of our presence, the two spoonbills flew off to the west and landed near the outflow of Pennington Creek from Cumberland Pool.

On the morning of 19 August, Jeri McMahon, James L. and Marion Norman and the senior author watched the spoonbills in the same place for 45 minutes. At 1830, June Ketchum, John Sterling and the authors returned. In addition to the aforementioned associates, the spoonbills were consorting loosely with several American White Pelicans (*Pelicanus erythrorhynchos*). The spoonbills were not seen again at Nida Point.

We spotted probably the same two spoonbills at Big Bottom on the Tishomingo Wildlife Management Unit on 5 September. Big Bottom is a 200-acre diked field along the banks of the Washita River 4 miles west of Nida Point. The large pink waders were feeding in a large shallow pool near the dike at the south end of the field, together with several Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons.

Four days later, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation game warden Mike Stafford reported sighting 10 Wood Storks (*Mycteria americana*) at Big Bottom. This species, too, is rarely encountered in the state (see Baumgartner and Baumgartner, *op. cit.*, p. 76). At 1700 on 11 September, the authors, Arnella Trent, Steve Metz, and John Sterling found four Wood Storks, two immature spoonbills, and three Great Egrets perched in a large dead tree 50 yards south of the Big Bottom dike. However, we did not realize that the spoonbills were present until we were within about 300 yards of the roost. They left the tree and fed in the shallow pool at the base of the dike at 1800.

On 15 September the authors and Leonard and June Ketchum observed a single Wood Stork at Reeves Ravine on the Tishomingo Wildlife Management Unit. It was roosting in a large dead tree in standing water just east of the ravine. Several egrets and vultures were also present in the same and adjacent trees. We studied the stork from 50 yards for 15 minutes before darkness and traffic forced us to leave. — Mike and Cindy Goddard, *Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge, Rt. 1, Box 151, Tishomingo, Oklahoma 73460, 6 October 1994.*

Re-evaluation of possible Iceland Gull record for Tulsa County, Oklahoma. — From 6 January to 5 March 1969, an “all-white” gull, believed to be an Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*) in second winter plumage, was seen at various places in Tulsa County, Oklahoma, mainly along the Arkansas River below Keystone Dam. The bird was initially discovered by Anne L. and L. Bruce Reynolds who showed it to several members of the Tulsa Audubon Society, including John S. Tomer. The Reynoldses later asked Tomer to write an account of the observations for publication (Tomer 1970). Although the identification was provisional, as the title “Possible Iceland Gull...” indicated, the record afforded quasi-official status for the Iceland Gull as a new species for Oklahoma when listed as a hypothetical by Sutton (1974, p. 18).

In 1986, the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee (OBRC) began evaluating observations of unusual birds using a more structured and rigorous set of standards than had previously been applied. The committee also re-evaluated a number of old records for seldom-reported species previously recognized as occurring in Oklahoma (Grzybowski 1986). At the 25 January 1992 meeting of the OBRC, the Iceland Gull record for Tulsa County was re-examined.

Since this observation, much new information has become available on the identification of gulls. A current evaluation indicates that the Tulsa County gull should not be considered an Iceland Gull, but more likely a Glaucous Gull (*L. hyperboreus*), a species already known to occur in Oklahoma. This was the basis for the OBRC recommendation that the Iceland Gull should not be regarded, even in hypothetical status, on the Oklahoma state bird list (Grzybowski *et al.* 1992, p. 37). The following aspects of the 1969 gull observation were considered in reaching this conclusion.

The primary basis for the gull’s identification was its small size approximating that of the Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*) it accompanied, and thus it was smaller than expected for most Glaucous Gulls. While Iceland Gulls can fall in this range, they average slightly smaller than Herring Gulls. This would place the observed bird at the upper extreme for Iceland Gulls. However, the ranges of body lengths given for these three gull species by Cramp (1983) are: Herring, 55-67 cm. (p. 815); Iceland, 52-60 cm. (p. 837); Glaucous, 62-68 cm. (p. 840). They indicated that a Glaucous Gull is twice as likely to be the size of a Herring Gull as an Iceland. For these reasons, the size of the observed bird does not as strongly indicate that it was an Iceland Gull as was originally believed.

Iceland Gulls have a smaller and more noticeably rounded head, and more petite bill than Herring Gulls (Zimmer 1991, p. 257). Although the Tulsa County white-winged gull was compared directly with Herring Gulls, no mention was made of these characteristics. The differences were apparently not dramatic; the head and bill of the white-winged gull was similar in size and shape to that of a Herring Gull, and, thus, consistent with a Glaucous Gull. In 1970, while visiting the bird collection at the American Museum of Natural History, Tomer compared the head and bill size of several study skins of Iceland and Herring gulls, and was very surprised by the obvious differences. This was the first of Tomer’s misgivings about the identification of the Tulsa County white-winged gull.

Another characteristic, not well known at the time, was the length of the wings. Because Iceland Gulls are proportionately longer-winged than Glaucous Gulls, their wingtips at rest extend considerably beyond the tip of the tail. This distance is typically *greater than* the length of the bill which averages about 1.77 inches (Cramp 1983, p. 837; Zimmer 1991, p. 258). However, the wingtips of the gull observed in Tulsa extended only slightly beyond the tail (Tomer 1970), as in Glau-

cous Gulls.

The bird's pale pink bill with dark top suggested that the gull, if an Iceland, was in its second winter, as this species' bill is almost entirely black during its first winter (Zimmer 1991, pp.261-264). However, there was no mention of gray feathers in the mantle that most Iceland Gulls attain during their second winter (Cramp 1983, pp. 839-840). Although some birds are slow in attaining their gray mantles (Zimmer 1990, p. 125), the lack of it in the Tulsa bird points more strongly to the gull having been a Glaucous Gull than an Iceland.

The observers noted that the plumage of the bird was "entirely creamy white" except for some buffy-edges on the feathers of the belly, rump and undertail coverts. However, creamy plumage is apparently more characteristic of Glaucous Gulls than Iceland Gulls (Harrison 1983, p. 348), which are whiter (see photographs in Zimmer 1991, pp. 254-263.)

To date, the Tulsa County bird has been the only record for Oklahoma given potential as an Iceland Gull. The OBRC has considered another record of *L.g. kumlieni*, but found the written documentation unacceptable. Thus, no acceptable record currently exists for the occurrence of the Iceland Gull in Oklahoma.

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Lone Bank Swallow pair nesting in Logan County, Oklahoma. — On 19 July 1985, Dana Base, John S. Shackford and I found an active Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) nest along the Cimarron River in western Logan County, Oklahoma. Paul A. Johnsgard (1979, *Birds of the Great Plains*, Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln, p. 273) stated that the species "is characterized by colonial rather than solitary nesting." In his extensive study of this species, Dayton Stoner (1936, *Studies on the Bank Swallow in the Oneida Lake region*, *Bull. New York State Col. Forestry at Syracuse Univ.* 9(2:126-233) made no reference to solitary nests.

We had planned to walk the river in search of nesting Least Terns (*Sterna antillarum*) that day. We entered the Cimarron River bed near Crescent in Logan County. Flying above the river was a Bank Swallow. Its back and wings were brown, below the white throat was a conspicuous brownish band, and the tail was slight-

ly notched. Within a few minutes, a second bird appeared. In a tall vertical sand cliff along the northern bank of the river were a few widely scattered holes, so we sat down on the opposite shore to observe them. Soon, a swallow entered one of the larger holes in the bank, then reappeared a few seconds later. Not long thereafter, the second bird appeared. We watched them for 1½ hours, during which time they entered the nest cavity 12 times at intervals of less than one minute to about 5 minutes. At 1024, one swallow departed with a fecal sac in its bill, which it dropped into the river. As noon approached, the pair visited the cavity less and less frequently, sometimes being absent for intervals of up to 15 minutes. At 1125, we walked downriver in search of terns, but found no other evidence of Bank Swallows.

Returning to the Bank Swallow nest about 1500, we again observed both adults flying about, but they failed to enter the nest during the 15 minutes that we watched. Unfortunately, we had no flashlight or other means to ascertain the exact contents of the nest.

Two days later, Shackford and the author returned for photographs. After waiting 30 minutes without seeing the swallows, we investigated the cavity with a flashlight. It was empty. Whether or not the one or more nestlings present on 19 July had fledged we could not ascertain. Because of its location in the bank, the nest would seemingly have been accessible only to snakes. This solitary Bank Swallow nest was apparently a rare exception to the species' usual colonial habits.

The nest hole was eight feet above the water and two feet below the top of the bank. It extended 26 inches into the bank and was lined extensively with assorted feathers. A.C. Bent (1942, *Life histories of North American flycatchers, larks, swallows and their allies*, *Bull. U.S. Natl. Mus.* No. 179, p. 407) reported that Bank Swallow nesting material includes "...a few feathers for the lining of the structure. Generally large numbers of feathers are not added until after the set of eggs is completed and incubation under way." His extensive description of nest materials used in Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) nests mentioned feathers in only a single case (Bent, *op. cit.* p. 427-428).

We examined several hundred yards of bank upriver for Bank Swallow nest cavities, but discovered none. We did observe two Northern Rough-winged Swallows at their bank-nest downriver, which held one well-feathered juvenile bird.

Sutton (1967, *Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p.358) described the Bank Swallow as a transient and summer visitant, "...but is not known to have nested successfully in Oklahoma..." However, in the spring of 1980, Paul W. Wilson (1981, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 14:9-11) documented nesting in large chat piles near the town of Picher in Ottawa County, northeastern Oklahoma. Northern Rough-winged Swallows also raised young in old Bank Swallow burrows there. Scattered and sporadic nesting has also been recorded in several other areas of Oklahoma (Baumgartner, F.M., and A.M. Baumgartner, 1992, *Oklahoma bird life*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 246). — David F. Evans, 1619 NW 35th St., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73118, 11 October 1985.

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