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A PARTLY ALBINO WILSON'S WARBLER (*Wilsonia pusilla*)

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On 20 September 1995 at 11:15 MST, during routine mist-netting for a study investigating the use of the middle Rio Grande riparian habitat by migratory land birds at Rio Grande Nature Center, Bernalillo County, New Mexico, we were surprised to discover a light yellowish warbler in one of the nets. After careful examination and comparison, the bird was identified as a hatching-year (by incomplete skull ossification) Wilson's Warbler with albino plumage. The sex was not determined.

This is the first documented occurrence of albinism in Wilson's Warbler in the United States to our knowledge. The species is not listed in the Gross (1965) compilation of albinism in North America birds. The body plumage of the bird was light yellowish, and the primaries, secondaries, and rectrices were whitish with a small amount of light yellow at the edges and the irides appeared completely black (Photo 1). The bird otherwise had no dark or black color, except that the head had an illusive hint of contrast between the crown and the sides of the head reminiscent of a normal male Wilson's Warbler (Photo 1). No obvious or unusual wear on the body plumage, primaries, or rectrices was observed. The bill and feet of the bird were pinkish and the skin was light pink. The bird was small and body mass was low (wing chord 54 mm, tail 47 mm, and body mass 6.2 g) compared to normal hatching-year Wilson's Warblers (wing chord 55.8 ± 1.8 (SD) mm, tail 49.5 ± 2.5 mm, and body mass 7.3 ± 0.6 g, N = 1,067, Yong unpubl. data). The bird was banded, photographed in the hand, and released about one hour after capture. The bird was not recaptured or seen again, despite continuous netting and survey of the area through the fall migration season.

The capture site is a riparian forest (bosque) along the Rio Grande within the city limits of Albuquerque. The habitat is dominated by Rio Grande cottonwood (*Populus fremontii* var. *wislizeni*) with Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) dominating the understory. This area is an important stopover site for many neotropical migratory land birds, especially during fall migration (Finch et al. 1995, Yong et al. 1995). A banding program was established at this site in 1979 by Rio Grande Bird Research Inc. About 30,000 land birds including approximately 2,000 Wilson's Warblers were captured from 1979 to 1994, and this is the first albino warbler encountered.

The colors of birds result from deposition of pigments, mainly melanins and carotenoids, in integumentary structures, chiefly the feathers (Ralph 1969). Albinism is caused by the reduction or absence of pigment. Four types of albinism have been identified in birds, including total albinism, when pigment is completely absent; incomplete albinism, when pigment is completely absent from the plumage, or irides, or skin, but not from all three; imperfect albinism (leucism or dilution), when pigment is reduced or diluted in any or all three areas, but never completely absent from anyone; and partial albinism, when pigment is completely or partially absent from localized areas (Pettingill 1970). In total albinism, the feathers' structure reflects light, giving white. In imperfect albinism, if only a single pigment is lacking, e.g., the melanins, a bird may change its color from a dark to a light yellow, retaining only its carotenoid pigments (Welty 1982). The skin without pigment will have a light red or pink color, owing to the blood showing through from the capillaries. The abnormal Wilson's Warbler in this case could be a combination of leucism and partial albino because the bird had diluted yellow pigment on the body plumage, blackish irides, but whitish wing and tail feathers, a pinkish bill, and pinkish feet and skin.

Gross (1965) studied the incidence of albinism in North American birds and compiled a list of 1,847 albino sightings or specimens of 304 species of 54 families. Sage (1963) recorded 3,134 albinos in Great Britain birds of 163 species of 42 families. Both studies found complete albinism was not common in birds. Gross found that the incidence of albinism was much greater in certain species such as American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), Red-winged

Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), and Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). Sage (1963) observed that species with the highest incidence of albinism were either social in their breeding habitats or fairly sedentary.

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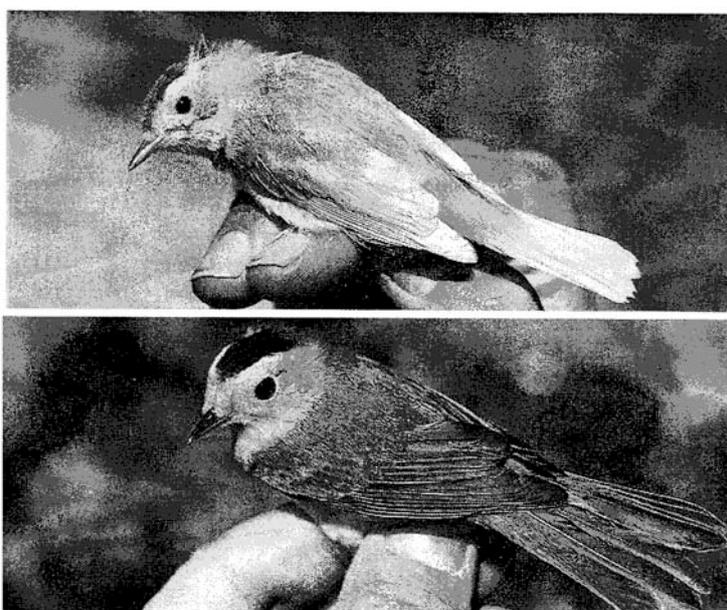


Photo 1. Comparison of the albino (top) and regular hatching-year male (bottom) Wilson's Warblers. The two birds were photographed at same time on 20 September 1995 at Rio Grande Nature Center, Bernalillo County, New Mexico.

INTERACTION BETWEEN A NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) AND
A PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

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Interactions between birds of prey are less frequently reported than other aspects of their behavior. Forbush (1927) reported on a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) attacking Red-shouldered Hawks (*Buteo lineatus*) and Snowy Owls (*Nyctea scandiaca*). Bent (1938) reported an encounter where a Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) attacked and caused a Peregrine Falcon (*F.p. anatum*) to flee.

Aggressiveness by Northern Harriers (*Circus cyaneus*) directed toward other birds of prey seems to be reported more often than among other birds of prey. Bent (1937) reported on the aggressiveness of Northern Harriers toward other birds of prey and reported specific attacks on a Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), Red-shouldered Hawks, "eagles," and American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*). Forbush (1927) reported an account that ended differently. He reported seeing a Peregrine Falcon "knock" a harrier from a duck it was eating. He also gave another instance where a harrier took a scaup (*Aythya* sp.) from a Peregrine that protested "ineffectually." Bent (1937) reported a harrier taking a fallen duck from a Peregrine Falcon; the falcon did little to challenge the harrier except to fly overhead and protest loudly.

The following report is of such behavior between a Northern Harrier and a Peregrine Falcon in Eddy County, New Mexico. The Peregrine Falcon is an uncommon migrant in spring and fall in Eddy County and is noted most frequently in the latter half of April. On 22 April 1995, Tommy Joe Hines sighted a adult at about 0700 at the southeast corner of Lake Avalon. The bird was on the ground and it flew up to a nearby Saltcedar (*Tamarix chinensis*). Later it flew across the lake, and the bird was not seen again that day. The site on the ground was examined for kill remains, but nothing was found.

The authors visited Lake Avalon the following day at about 1000, and found a number of raptors present at the lake. We saw five Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), a Northern Harrier, two Harris's Hawks (*Parabuteo unicinctus*), and one Red-tailed Hawk.

While driving along the northwest corner of the lake, where the river channel empties into the lake, we spotted a single adult female Northern Harrier standing in 15-20 cm high grass. The bird was looking at something to the west, but we were unable to see what it was. After a moment, what appeared to be an adult male Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) raised its head and shoulders. The Peregrine Falcon was obviously mantling over some object that couldn't be seen from our vantage point.

Both birds looked at each other briefly before the harrier made a move toward the Peregrine. The harrier took a couple of steps, jumped into the air, and flapped toward the falcon. The Peregrine responded immediately and both birds grappled momentarily above the site where the falcon had been. Feathers, probably from both birds and from the kill, scattered as the birds interacted. The harrier dropped onto the site where the Peregrine had been, while the falcon landed on the ground nearby and eyed the harrier. After about five seconds, the Peregrine took to flight and made two nonaggressive passes over the harrier. The harrier looked up, but did not make any noticeable response. After making two circular passes, the Peregrine flew out of sight to the north.

The harrier watched as the falcon flew away and then began to feed. From the amount of plucking, it seemed that the Peregrine had made a recent kill, but had eaten little of it. We didn't wish to disturb the bird so we continued upriver for a half-hour before returning.

On our return, we found the harrier still at the same site, and it seemed to be finished with the prey item. We walked toward the bird, which immediately flew away. We examined the site and, with the exception of the fully-feathered skull, were surprised at the paucity of material left. There were only a very few scattered

feathers, no bone elements, and no major feathers such as primaries or rectrices. Examination of the skull identified the remains as an adult female Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*).

Northern Harriers and Peregrine Falcons use different feeding strategies. Harriers are better equipped to take prey in close quarters and to make quick changes in their pursuit (Bent 1937; Oberholser and Kincaid 1974). The long stooping flights at high speed that the Peregrine uses to strike prey are unknown in harriers. Peregrines, while effective in aerial pursuit of prey at great speeds, would undoubtedly be at a disadvantage in taking small prey in confining or terrestrial situations. It may be that Peregrines, once they take their prey and have it on the ground, are at a disadvantage defending it against other birds of prey that have better developed terrestrial habits. It may not be an uncommon occurrence for Northern Harriers to steal prey from Peregrine Falcons, both of which often occupy and hunt in the same habitat.

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ZIMMER, BARRY 6720 Heartstone Ct, El Paso, TX 79924
ZIMMERMAN, DALE & MARIAN 1011 W Florence St, Silver City, NM 88061
ZWARTJES, PATRICK Dept Biology - UNM, Albuquerque, NM 87131

New Mexico Ornithological Society
Financial Statement
as of December 31, 1996

Balance as of 1/1/96:

Checking acct.	8230.48
Certificates of Deposit	15000.00
Petty Cash	52.31
Total	\$23282.79

Receipts to 12/31/96:

Dues	1875.43
NMBFG	4429.00
NM Field Checklist	371.05
Other publications	100.00
Postage	230.03
Miscellaneous	1288.50
Interest	938.99
Total	\$9233.00

Expenditures as of 12/31/96:

Printing	1446.05
Postage	1082.68
Rent	336.00
Miscellaneous	1788.82
Research Grant	400.00
Total*	\$5053.55

Balance as of 12/31/96:

Checking Account	12467.39
Certificates of Deposit	15000.00
Petty Cash	(5.15)
Total	\$27462.24

Petty Cash input and distributions (\$15.75 and \$(73.21)) are included in the income and expense categories above.

Date: 2 February, 1997

Submitted by:

Jerry R. Oldenettel, Treasurer