

A TOUCH OF ALBINISM
By Constance Katholi

Articles have been appearing with regularity in banding publications relative to techniques for speciating the Carolina and Black-capped Chickadee using wing chord and/or tail measurements; and/or the ratio between the two. One recent discussion was the "Correction" issued for the section on these species in Merrill Wood's A Guide to the Determination of Age and Sex, etc., p. 63. Another, even more recent, by John P. Hubbard is to be found in EBBA News, 33, 5, p.211. This short paragraph, then, is timely at least, - if not of scientific significance! To quote Artur Wiseman (a 1970 issue of Inland Bird Banding News): "...it is only a bit of light, frothy dessert after a hearty meal."

In describing the Black-capped Chickadee, T. S. Roberts in Birds of Minnesota and Neighboring States, p. 642 states: "...the tail is blackish-slate with feathers edged with olive-gray, becoming white on the outer web of the outer rectrices. Wings, blackish-slate edged with grayish white, broadest on the tertials, and greater coverts." In accordance with these references, Black-capped Chickadee No. 119-66758, which had a wing measurement of 63mm, and a tail measurement of 61mm, is a partial albino. All six rectrices on the left side were totally white on both the inner and outer webs including the shafts. Those on the right side were only "frosted" with white on the outer webs, and normally slate-gray on the inner webs. A sizeable amount of white is present on the edges of the wing coverts, - graded "4" on a scale of 1 to 4. This is more pronounced on the right side than the left. The widest margins were on the tertials with narrower amounts on the four inner greater secondary coverts. No other "off-color" areas in the body plumage were observed. Upon close examination in the hand it could be seen that the all-white rectrices were ever-so-slightly brushed distally on the inner webs with soft gray, in a spot like a warbler tail-spot, only in reverse color.

The effect was startling and beautiful when the bird flew from the hand; it was of course, instantly recognizable whenever it appeared at the feeder. Originally, banded on 12 December 1969, it repeated on 27 March 1970, and was last observed at the feeder on 14 April 1970. It is undoubtedly too much to hope that he might reappear in 1971! It would be interesting indeed to see if he had shed the white feathers in his summer molt. A whole species of paridae with a white tail would be an attractive addition to our avifauna.

--930 Woodland Avenue, South Charleston, W. Va., 25303