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100 Years Ago in The Auk



From "General Notes" (1885 Auk 2: 113-114):

"**Albinism.**—My attention was drawn to a note in the 'Oölogist' for April last, in which the writer gives his experience in albinism and asks for an explanation of these freaks of nature. In order to air my experience, and at the same time to give a probable cause, which I would like, for the sake of possible verification, other observers to look for in the future, is the object of the present note.

"True albinism is of course congenital, and is a condition in which the normal pigmentary matter is deficient in the system of the individual affected; in such cases the eyes are pink, and the skin with its appendages are white or nearly so. In the case of partial albinos, however, it is difficult; their condition can probably be explained by some circumstances occurring after birth which will account for the change in the color of the skin, such for instance as the case given by the writer in the 'Oölogist,' in which the skin had been injured on the back of a Swift, and next year the patch of white feathers indicated the situation of the injury. The same thing is

familiar in the case of the horse whose back or shoulder is galled by the harness; white patches appear, owing to lowered vitality of the injured part. These cases are familiar, but I wish to give possibly another cause acting in the same way, only more general. It is this. When a boy I shot among others a black squirrel peculiarly marked, it having a perfectly white tail, with some white about the head; on making a post mortem I discovered through a rent in the intestines a tape-worm about 20 feet in length. Did not wonder then that his head was gray. A few years after a partially white Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) was taken, which also contained two or three taenia; next a partial albino Mallard; then a Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) with a white head and mottled back and breast. All were mounted, and are now in my collection. Each of these had two or more tape-worms in their intestines. I am aware that birds, especially some species, are particularly obnoxious to tape-worms, and the above may have been merely coincidences; still it has been observed sufficiently often to make the fact suspicious as a cause of albinism.—G. A. M'CALLUM, *Dunnville, Ont.*"