



The Katharine Ordway
Natural History Study Area

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Ordway Bulletin

No. 92

MACALESTER
COLLEGE

located at 9550 Inver Grove Trail (Dakota County Road 77), Inver Grove Heights, Minn.

"FLASHER" at ORDWAY.

I first glimpsed the white something flashing through the thickets in May of 1974. Two days later it became entangled in my net-trap and received leg-band No. 791-68581 for identification. It was an albino Rose-breasted Grosbeak, retaining the yellow axillary coloration which is typical of the female of that species.

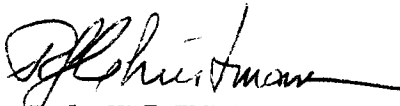
When first captured she was taken from a mist-net which also held an active male Grosbeak, only a few inches apart. Since courting pairs of birds often fly about crazily it is not rare for them to be ensnared together. Therefore I kept my eyes open for ol' 791-68580, as I felt he was indeed her mate. Subsequently I located their nest but it was deserted and empty. During the remainder of that summer she continued her wraithlike flights in the vicinity and I had to deduce that they were unsuccessful in their mating.

She showed up the next spring (1975). I was pleased (and a little surprised) to spot the ghostly blur of her flight in the proximity of her previous year's haunts and I contemplated the prospect of having another season in which to observe her, perhaps to find her nest and offspring. I feared that her startling white coloration might cause her to withdraw from other members of her species.

On June 1st an early visit to my nets gave me a chilling sight. There in the net, higher than most net-captures occur, were the remains of my albino subject. Her skull had been caved in and severed from her body, which was not otherwise badly damaged. I believe that it was a flying predator which caused "Flasher"'s demise. The feather tract on her back had developed some coloration and she did not appear nearly so albinistic as the previous summer. However, her underparts were quite white save for the yellow axillary region. That was the end of 791-68581, the albino Rose-breasted Grosbeak who came first to attention on May 27, 1974 and died a violent death on May 14, 1975.

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Epilogue: Ol' 791-68580 showed a lot more longevity. I did not encounter him at all during 1975-'76 but in June of '77 he showed up again at Ordway, not far from where I had first seen his albino mate. Another three years passed but in spring of '80 he showed up once more in the same haunts. Since he was probably two years old at our first encounter he lived to be at least eight years of age, a rather long life for a songbird.


R. J. CHRISTMAN,
Naturalist.

April 22, 1981