

ALBINO DARK-EYED JUNCO AT CANAL FLATS, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Colin Cartwright and Kathy Cartwright

Box 321, Canal Flats, BC V0B 1B0

On 1 January 2008, while watching a flock of “Oregon” Dark-eyed Juncos (*Junco hyemalis oregonus*) at our feeders in Canal Flats, British Columbia, we noticed a small, pure white bird also busy feeding. It turned out to be a pure albino junco (Figure 1) that was part of a flock of about 15-20 birds that are regular winter visitors to our yard. Our six-acre property is mostly cleared but has numerous spruce, pine, and poplar trees as well as patches of natural brush (willows). One side is partially cleared. The feeding birds like the shelter and safety of the spruce trees where our feeders are located and move to and from the brushy areas throughout the day.



Figure 1. A pure albino Dark-eyed Junco feeding with “Oregon” Junco at Canal Flats, BC. 1 January 2008 (Colin and Kathy Cartwright). BC Photo 3616.

Our feeders contain only oiled sunflower seeds, which the juncos and many other bird species, consume in great quantities. They also feed among the bushes and remains of the flowerbeds close by.

The albino junco appeared to be somewhere in the middle of the feeding hierarchy within the flock - dominant to some while giving way to others. The albino was also observed at several other properties within a range of about a half-mile of our place - the other properties being similar to ours.

The albino Dark-eyed Junco was last seen near Canal Flats on 25 March 2008 for a visit of 84 days.

Aberrant plumages, including varying degrees of albinism and hybridization, have been reported for the Dark-eyed Junco (Phelps 1968, Nolan et al. 2002, Preston and Campbell 2007) but it is a very rare event. In fact, in 1,847 cases of albinism examined by Gross (1965) for 28 species of North American birds only 24 (1.29%) were reported for the “Slate-colored” Junco (*J.h. hyemalis*). The same author mentioned that of all the articles examined only about seven percent (129 birds) were found to be pure albinos.

Literature Cited

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About the Authors

Colin is a lifetime resident of Canal Flats. Kathy’s family arrived from Saskatchewan in the 1960s and she and Colin were married in 1972 and raised their family in the small East Kootenay town. Colin has been employed for most of his working life in the forest industry so he has spent a great deal of time in the bush. They have always been interested in the outdoors and have travelled extensively on horseback and on foot in the vicinity of Canal Flats.

Colin and Kathy have spent many years locating and identifying native plants and have also become enthusiastic, amateur, bird watchers and also enjoy camping, hunting, fishing, and hiking.