

*Passerculus sandwichensis alaudinus*. This species, referred to as probably common at Point Barrow, does not occur there.

*Asio accipitrinus*. Mr. Nelson says, "On the Alaskan coast of the Arctic, it is found nearly if not quite to Point Barrow." It was not found at Point Barrow.

*Ægialitis semipalmatus*. This species was not seen, although Mr. Nelson's remarks would lead to the inference that he saw a pair there in 1881.

*Ereunetes pusillus*. This bird, which is said to breed at Point Barrow, only occurs in the autumn migrations, when large flocks of the young appear among the mudholes at Elson Bay, moving southwest along the coast.

*Numenius hudsonicus*. Referred to as occurring "north to the vicinity of Point Barrow." We did not see it, and the only species of Curlew observed (*N. borealis*) was rare and irregular.

*Dafla acuta*. Referred to as nesting "in the greatest abundance . . . to the farthest northern extreme of Alaska in the vicinity of Point Barrow." We found the bird comparatively rare and none breed. The natives say they are abundant inland on the rivers.

*Nettion carolinensis*. It does not reach Point Barrow, as Mr. Nelson thought might be the case.

*Mergus serrator*. Referred to as found "along the Alaskan coast of the Arctic to Point Barrow." We neither saw nor obtained it.

The following species, supposed by Mr. Nelson not to reach Point Barrow, were obtained by our party.

*Limosa lapponica novæ-zelandiæ*. A few immature birds were obtained in the autumn migrations.

*Grus canadensis* (= *fraterculus* Cass.). These birds were seen and two taken in June, 1883.

*Lampronetta fischeri*. This species occurs sparingly with the other Eiders in the great spring flights, and a few remain on land and undoubtedly breed, as a female was shot with an egg ready for laying in the oviduct, and half-grown young were taken in August, 1883.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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## CHANGE OF COLOR IN THE WING-FEATHERS OF THE WILLOW GROUSE.

BY C. HART MERRIAM, M. D.

At the last meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union Dr. Leonhard Stejneger exhibited the type specimen of 'A new subspecies of Willow Grouse from Newfoundland,' which he named *Lagopus alba alleni*. He characterized it as follows:



“Similar to *Lagopus alba* (Gm.), but distinguished by having the shafts of both primaries and secondaries black, and by having the wing-feathers, even some of the coverts, marked and mottled with blackish. Habitat: Newfoundland.”\*

In the discussion which this announcement occasioned, Mr. William Brewster expressed the opinion that the characters pointed out might prove seasonal. To this Dr. Stejneger replied that since the primaries were moulted but once a year their color could not possibly be influenced by season, but must be permanent.† I then stated that I could not agree with Dr. Stejneger, for, when in Newfoundland, I had examined several hundred specimens of this Ptarmigan in the flesh, and was fully convinced that change of color of individual feathers did take place, both independent of and coincident with the moult. In this belief I was supported by Mr. D. G. Elliot.

My views have recently been confirmed in the most gratifying manner. Mr. Napoleon A. Comeau of Godbout, on the north shore of the St. Lawrence near the Gulf, was present at the meeting of the Union and was much interested in this discussion. Since his return (in fact, between the 6th and 14th of November, 1884) he has killed no less than three hundred Willow Grouse at Godbout, and has had the kindness to send me one hundred and fifty of their wings. The locality is a little more than four hundred miles west of Newfoundland, and Ptarmigan generally appear there early in December, a few occasionally remaining till May.

They sometimes come in enormous numbers, while at other times they are not seen at all for several years. They arrived nearly a month earlier than usual this winter: two were seen November 2, and large flocks appeared on the 7th. The change from summer to winter plumage was already nearly completed.

The large series of wings sent by Mr. Comeau demonstrates beyond a question that individual feathers do change color. Most of them are already pure white excepting the shafts of the six outer primaries, which, as usual in winter specimens of *Lagopus albus*, are black. The quantity of black varies greatly in the different wings. In those in which the change is most advanced it is merely a narrow strip of pale sooty-brown extending along

\* This description has since been published in 'The Auk,' Vol. I, No. 4, Oct., 1884, p. 369.

† Dr. Stejneger has since informed me that he is prepared to admit that change of color in the primaries can take place.



the middle of the upper surfaces of the shafts of the six outer primaries, and is confined to the middle half of the exposed part of each, so that the basal half, and a considerable apical portion, together with all the rest of the wing, is pure white.

In the other extreme, the black covers the exposed portions of the outer surfaces of the shafts of all the primaries (sometimes being as intense on the 8th, 9th, and 10th, as on the 2d, 3d, and 4th) and also of the 'false wing' (alula). The under surfaces show it, but in a much less degree. The black is not limited to the shafts, and in some cases all the primaries, except the first, are extensively blotched and marbled with sooty, the markings being most distinct subapically. The coverts also are occasionally clouded.

Unfortunately, the wings were severed at the carpo-metacarpal joints; consequently it is impossible to say whether the secondaries had black shafts or not. But the primaries present every intermediate phase between their normal winter condition in typical *L. albus*, and the extreme dark mottled form characterized by Dr. Stejneger.

It is worthy of note that many of these wings are deeply tinged with a delicate and very beautiful shade of rose-pink, which is more pronounced than in a freshly killed Roseate Tern. The color is very transient and has already begun to fade in specimens which have been exposed to the light but little more than a week.

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## RECENT LITERATURE.

Gurney's 'List of the Diurnal Birds of Prey.'\*—In a compact little volume of less than 200 pages, we have the fulfilment of Mr. Gurney's promise to supplement his valuable critical notes, published in 'The Ibis' for 1875-1882, on Mr. Sharpe's 'Catalogue of the Accipitres or Diurnal Birds of Prey in the collection of the British Museum,'† by a tabular index to the species, with references and annotations. The plan,

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\* A list | of the | Diurnal Birds of Prey, | with | references and annotations: | also | a record of specimens | preserved in the | Norfolk and Norwich Museums. | By | John Henry Gurney. | London: | John Van Voorst, 1 Paternoster Row, E. C. | MDCCCLXXXIV. | Small 8vo., pp. i-xv, 1-187.

† Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum. Volume I. London: Printed by order of the Trustees, 1874. 8vo., pp. i-xiii, 1-480, pls. I-XIV.



Merriam, C. Hart. 1885. "Change of Color in the Wing-Feathers of the Willow Grouse." *The Auk* 2, 201–203. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4625228>.

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