

Sexual variation in *Nephoecetes niger*.

Editor of 'The Auk:'

On page 69 of the January number of 'The Auk,' Mr. Ludlow Griscom denies the fact that the sexes of the Black Swift are similar in the adult, following Mr. Ridgway in this statement, (Bulletin 50, Part V), and expressly contradicting Hartert's description in the British Museum 'Catalogue of Birds', XVI, where the adults are said to be similar.

I have already (Auk, Vol. XXXIV, p. 41) pointed out that adults, (old adults?), are exactly similar in some cases, both as to the lack of light edging to the under parts, and the amount of emargination of the tail.

This is based on the collecting of about two hundred individuals of the northern subspecies, (*Nephoecetes niger borealis*), principally at the commencement of the breeding season when there could be no mistake in the sexing. The majority of females have the tail rounded and the feathers of the lower breast and abdomen broadly edged with white, but a good number present in a varying degree the characters of the male, some are absolutely indistinguishable in every way from fully adult males by external characters.

I have sent numbers of these during the past thirty-seven years to different collections, pointing out this character, and have a letter from the late Wm. Brewster commenting on it.

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January 19, 1924.

Editor of 'The Auk:'

In 'The Auk' for January, 1924 (Vol. XLI, pp. 68-71) there is "A Review of the West Indian Black Swifts" by Ludlow Griscom. In his comments upon sexual variation in this species Mr. Griscom makes certain statements with which I take issue. I have no personal knowledge of the West Indian subspecies of *Nephoecetes niger*, but the statements to which I object are made as generalizations covering the species as a whole, and they assuredly do not apply to the race with which I am familiar, the North American subspecies, *Nephoecetes niger borealis*.

Mr. Griscom describes certain variations of color and markings as distinguishing males and females, and remarks of such supposed sexual variation that "this has already been correctly described by Mr. Ridgway" (Birds of North and Middle America, part V, 1911, pp. 703-710). He says further that "Hartert (Catalogue of Birds, Brit. Mus., XVI, 1892, p. 94 [*sic*; correctly, 494]) errs in regarding the adults as similar, and the birds with light tips to the feathers below as immature." This last assertion of error is altogether too positive and sweeping a statement of what is really no more than Mr. Griscom's opinion. My own conviction is that Hartert is correct.

There is an article on this subject by Frank M. Drew (Bull. Nutt. Orn.

Club, VII, 1882, pp. 182-183), cited at some length by Ridgway (*loc. cit.*, p. 707, footnote) and so, of course, familiar to Mr. Griscom, though ignored by him. This need not be dwelt upon further here, but I do wish to point out that there have also been published papers of my own ('Auk,' Vol. XXIX, 1912, pp. 241-242; Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool., Vol. XXIV, 1922, pp. 222-223), giving facts that are in contradiction to Mr. Griscom's opinions on sexual variation in this species.

Of the series of Black Swifts in this Museum I have myself shot and dissected twenty-eight specimens. Briefly, my assertion is that I have collected females of the Black Swift (*Nephoocetes niger borealis*) which in color and in lack of white markings ventrally are indistinguishable from adult males. I have talked on this subject with Major Allan Brooks, who has collected many more specimens of this Swift than I have, and he had long been familiar with the fact that some females lack any white-tipped feathers on the lower parts.

It seems then that three men who have themselves shot and dissected a number of these Swifts (and there are not many who are familiar with the species) are agreed that the (presumably fully mature) female is indistinguishable from the adult male. Surely this is evidence sufficient to establish this statement as a fact.

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February 13, 1924.

NOTES AND NEWS

COUNT ADELARDO TOMMASO SALVADORI PALEOTTI, the last of the original Honorary Fellows of the A. O. U., died in Turin, Italy, on October 9, 1923, in the 89th year of his age. He was born at Porto S. Giorgio in Umbria, Italy, on September 30, 1835, son of Count Luigi Salvadori and Ethel Welby of England.

His ornithological studies were begun early in life, and in 1862 he published a Catalogue of the 'Birds of Sardinia' in the Proceedings of the Society of Natural Science of Milan. In 1863 he settled in Turin and from then on devoted his life to ornithology. He became Assistant in the Museum of Zoology, at the University, and in 1879 Vice Director, which post he held until the time of his death, developing the ornithological collection until it became the richest in Italy. His interest early centered on the birds of the East Indian Archipelago and he studied the many collections from this region received at the Civic Museum at Genoa.

In 1877 he travelled in Europe studying the collections of East Indian birds at Paris, London, Leyden and Berlin and in 1880 appeared the first