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# Another Dark-eyed Junco with 13 rectrices

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A Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) that had 13 rectrices was reported by Yunick (1977. *N.A. Bird Bander* 2:6). On 13 April 1979 I banded a bird of this species that also had 13 rectrices. The circumstances were somewhat different from those reported by Yunick.

For a number of years I have recorded notes on the white-dark patterns of junco rectrices. Because the pattern is close to symmetrical, I routinely examine the right side only. After reading Yunick's note I began counting the entire complement of feathers. I have never done any plucking experiments, but rectrices are sometimes accidentally lost during handling.

Junco 1530-69834 was AHY-U. It had a wing-length of 74 mm and was slightly brownish above and on the flanks. On the left side it had 6 rectrices only, but on the right 7. Rectrices 5, 6, and 7 on the right matched the patterns of left 4, 5, and 6; R7 and L6 were all white; R6 and L5 had some gray to about one-third of their lengths; R5 and L4 had about 4 cm of each rachis white and the rest of these feathers gray. Thus it seems that R5, R6, and R7 by count were 4, 5, and 6 morphologically. Rectrix 1 is very different from the others and there was only one such feather on the right side of my bird. Normally, rectrix 2 is slightly shorter than rectrix 3. Further examination showed that right rectrices 3 and 4 (by count) were essentially

identical and 2 was shorter than either of these. It appears, therefore, that, while Yunick's bird achieved the 13-rectrix condition by duplication of right rectrix 6, my bird attained that condition by duplication of right rectrix 3.

Although I have a fairly high rate of repeats and returns among wintering juncos, this late spring individual had not been recaptured as of 9 January 1980.

The significance of 2 cases of 13-rectriced juncos in 2 years is probably not great. In the days when morphology dominated ornithology the counting of rectrices was, no doubt, a much more frequent procedure than it is today among banders. I have found references to anomalies resulting in uneven numbers of rectrices in Coues (*Key to N.A. Birds*, ed. 6, p. 121) and in Newton (1896. *Dictionary of Birds*. p. 769, footnote 1), but both authors ascribe the condition to injury of a feather follicle, implying reduction rather than increase in number. However, it seems reasonable to suppose that some circumstance in early development might cause a follicular subdivision that would result in 2 identical feathers, increasing the total to an uneven number. It seems to me that the plucking practiced by Yunick in fully-developed birds would not be likely to have such an effect. ❖

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