

A partly chestnut specimen of Variable Seedeater.—On 30 March 1963, on the Navy pipeline near Gamboa, Panama Canal Zone, Horace Loftin and I collected an adult male Variable Seedeater (*Sporophila aurita*) with a considerable amount of chestnut in the plumage. There is a faint chestnut malar stripe and a narrow transverse band of chestnut across the throat. The flanks and crissum are chestnut and the only remaining white is the speculum and lining of the wing and the midline of the abdomen. The rest of the plumage is solid black. The bill shape and measurements are average for *Sporophila aurita aurita*. The skin is now in the American Museum of Natural History.

This species is extremely variable in Panama in regard to the extent of black and white in the plumage, and it is of interest that the chestnut in this specimen is present only in those places where black replaces white in blackish individuals of *S. a. aurita*—not in the speculum and lining of the wing and the midline of the abdomen, which remain white in such individuals. Mr. Eugene Eisenmann (whose aid is gratefully appreciated) writes me that the collection of the American Museum contains no other such example and that he knows of none reported in the literature.

The occasional occurrence of chestnut in place of black is known in the usually all black Thick-billed Seed-Finch (*Oryzoborus funereus*), an allied bird of similar distribution. Wetmore (1957. *Smithsonian Misc. Coll.*, 134:102-103) rejects de Schauensee's lumping of *funereus* in the same species with the South American *O. angolensis*, in which the breast, abdomen, and sides of the male are chestnut, and he interprets the "occasional occurrence of this chestnut marking in *funereus* as a deep-seated character that indicates ancient relationship to *angolensis* through some common ancestral stem," rather than an intergradation between these allied forms. Taking this view, the presence of chestnut in *Sporophila aurita* could indicate recurrence of characteristics still found in other species of the genus *Sporophila* with chestnut-colored underparts. More simply, it could be a tendency of two closely related genera (*Sporophila* and *Oryzoborus*) towards occasional modification of the normal melanin giving a reddish effect.

If Harrison (1965. *Ibis*, 107:106-108) is correct in his conclusion that the pigment causing chestnut coloration ("erythromelanin") is genetically distinct from the pigment responsible for black coloration (eumelanin), then rather than a dilution of black to chestnut, the presence of chestnut in *Sporophila* would seem to be either a direct replacement of black by chestnut or a loss of black revealing underlying chestnut pigment.—STORRS L. OLSON, 700 Stiles Avenue, Tallahassee, Florida, 6 April 1965.

Erythristic eggs.—Erythristic (red) eggs are so unusual among American birds that it is of some interest to report four successive sets of these abnormal eggs laid by a Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) in a nest located on Kent Island, New Brunswick.

In 1929 Mr. Allan Moses, the warden of the island sanctuary, obtained two sets of two erythristic eggs each from the same nest, the second set having been laid after the first had been removed. One of these two sets, which were presented to Mr. Robey Tufts of Wolfville, Nova Scotia, is now in the Museum of Science at Halifax, Nova Scotia. Mr. Moses collected a third set, of three eggs, in 1931, and in 1932 I collected a fourth set of two eggs from the same nest. This nest was in a slight depression on the top of a small knoll among a group of spruce trees. No other nests were near.

Both adult birds were of normal coloration, and while it is apparent that all four sets were laid by the same female, it is not known whether the male was the same individual in all 3 years.

The set of eggs which I obtained (now in the ornithological collection of Bowdoin

College, Brunswick, Maine) had the following weights and measurements when fresh: No. 1, 67.9×52.2 mm, weight 92 grams; No. 2, 69.5×50.5 mm, weight 89.5 grams. The colors ascertained by comparison with Ridgway's color standards (1912. "Color Standards and Color Nomenclature") were: Egg No. 1: ground color Shell Pink, marked with irregularly shaped spots of Hellebore Red interspersed with very faint markings of Vinaceous Gray; Egg No. 2: ground color Vinaceous Fawn marked with large spots of Prussian Red interspersed with a few faint markings of Light Vinaceous Gray. No other cases or erythristic eggs among North American Laridae have come to my attention. Figure 1 shows this set of eggs together with an albino gull egg.

Mr. Willam Rowan of Edmonton, Alberta, informed me that he collected two sets of erythristic eggs which were laid by the same Common Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

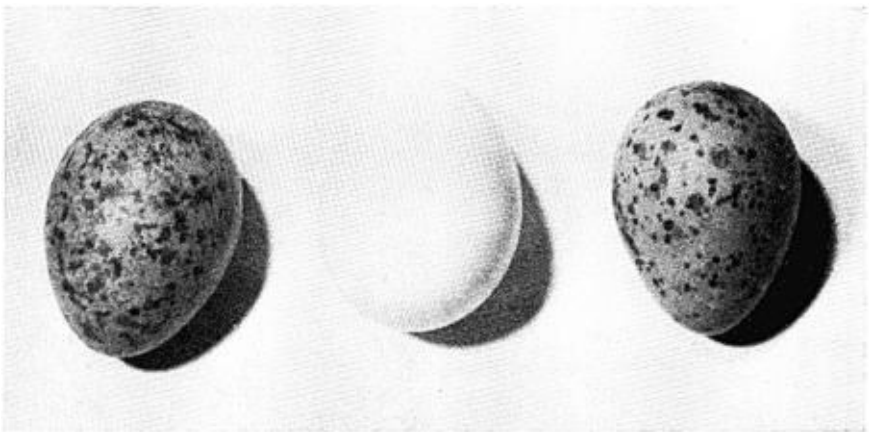


FIG. 1.

in successive years. He further stated that the same type of red eggs was found in the same nest for 7 successive years. There are a few published records of abnormal red eggs in the Common Crow. Bendire (1895. "Life Histories of North American Birds") described two sets. Sage (1913. "Birds of Connecticut") reported two sets, and Jacobs (1935. *Auk*, 52:189-190) describes a set from Pennsylvania.

The cases of the gull and crow cited above would indicate that if the first set of eggs is erythristic, subsequent sets may be of similar abnormal coloration. However, there are a few instances among European birds where there have been both normal and erythristic eggs in the same clutch. (Hellebreckers, 1949. *Limosa*, 17:84-88).

Jourdain and Borrer (1937. *Brit. Birds*, 7:246-260) have compiled records of erythristic eggs of British birds. Their list includes the Herring Gull and several members of the genus *Corvus*. Baker (1932-34. "The Nidification of the Birds of the British Empire") has reviewed the occurrence of these abnormal eggs in Indian birds and Hellebreckers (op. cit.) has discussed the general problem of erythristism in eggs.—ALFRED O. CROSS, 11 Boody Street, Brunswick, Maine, 16 November 1964.