

Albinos occur in wildlife as well as people

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Correspondent

Last weekend, as I watched a flock of house sparrows stream up from the pond-edge shrubbery to fill their fat little bodies at our feeder, a flash of white in their midst caught my eye.

Part of the flight stopped short of their destination, coming to rest in the thick branches of a dead spruce tree. The strange bird was amongst them.

Quickly, I trained my binoculars on what at first sight looked to be a rarity. As the bird in question hopped into plain view, I found it was, alas, only a house sparrow.

Unlike the rest, however, it had some white tail and wing feathers marking it as a partial albino.

Actually, partial albinos are relatively common amongst sparrows and other familiar birds about our backyards and gardens.

Over the past years, we've had several other house sparrows, two starlings and a red-winged blackbird, all with white wings, tails or feather patches.

One winter season, a tree sparrow with a completely white head and normal other markings put

in an appearance. It sure looked out of place in the flock of regular brown and grey-patterned northern visitors.

While the incidence of partial albinism is not known, complete albinism is said to occur once in every 10,000 human births. That in itself is a much higher percentage than most people realize.

Among mammals and birds, with their usually higher reproductive rates, the chances of it happening are probably much greater.

Albinos have been known to occur in most living creatures with snakes, insects, crayfish and trout being good examples.

The flashing white attraction most of these individuals present makes it easy for a predatory hawk or cat to move in quickly.

The word albino was originally conceived as a name for white negroes in Africa, whose abnormal appearance in the tribe caused much superstition, religious belief and legend among these primitive people.

The condition itself is caused by a lack of pigment in the skin, fur or feathers, depending on the species. This abnormality usually is genetic and results from a failure of the body to produce or

distribute the pigment. Occasionally, it occurs as the result of an accident to the tissues involved, improper diet, or even psychological shock.

In some cases where the bird lost its tail feathers in a close brush with death, this partial albinism is only temporary.

Later, when feathers are replaced in the next seasonal molt, the white feathers will be replaced by the normally colored feathers. In true albinos, the eyes are pink and the vision weak, while partial cases usually have normal eye color and vision.

Most people have seen examples of albinism in mammals and birds in zoos or museums or even in the outdoor world. Elizabeth LeGeyt, the weekly Ottawa Citizen bird columnist, raised an albino robin last summer and released it on her Manotick property.

Westport OPP Officer Jim McGlade has in the past year had a partially white squirrel coming to his feeder, while residents in the Chaffey's Locks area are well aware of cream-colored squirrels frolicking around their neighborhood.

A number of years ago while

living in St. Catharines, I saw an albino fawn that the then Department of Lands and Forests had found near Welland.

Of course, the opposite of albinism is melanism in which all parts are abnormally dominated by dark pigments. While melanism is less common than albinism, there are even cases of birds being partially albinistic and partially melanistic.

The bobcat that Robert White and his wife saw along Parish

Rd. in Leeds County, several years ago was almost black and was certainly one of these melanistic individuals. I didn't see the animal myself, but measured the tracks to verify it as a bobcat.

TIPS 'N' CLIPS: Did you know one of the worst materials for shoring up your dock or cribbing is old railroad ties? They continually leach creosote into the water for years, killing local food chains and young game fish.



Uxbridge man signs his work

In today's competitive business climate, the image projected by a company or store can have a significant effect on its ability to succeed.

No one is more aware of that

fact than David McFarlane, whose company, Distinctive Signs, offers clients a comprehensive package, which can include everything from logos and letterheads to business cards and signage. McFarlane's history of design experience, combined with state-of-the-art computer equipment, can provide a unique service to local businesses.

McFarlane has always worked in the design field. "I graduated from the Ontario College of Art and went straight to work with a design consultant firm in Toronto, where I worked on packaging, labelling and corporate design," he explains. "I've worked with several design firms in Toronto over the years."

He continued to work downtown until this spring, when he decided to take the plunge and work full time from his Uxbridge home. "It took me the best part of five years to make the decision." During that time, McFarlane began to build a client base both in Uxbridge and outside. While about 70 per cent of his clients are local, some hail from as far away as Belleville.

"I've done all the entrance signs for Uxbridge Township, and I've done work for a number of merchants in Uxbridge and Uxbridge." he states. One of his favorite assignments was for a store called The Creative Basket in Port Perry, for which he designed both a sign and business cards. "I sort of set the tone for the feel of the shop itself."

His other work includes creating a symbol for the Uxbridge Business Improvement Association and working on the design of the "Keep Uxbridge Tidy" campaign.

McFarlane is currently working on signs for two merchants in town, "and I'm still doing work on the civic pride campaign for the township." Of his new computer equipment he says, "it's an investment. I can do an original piece of art and put it into the scanner and the image comes up on the screen. Then I can clean it up or do some slight alterations to the design. It's quite exciting to work with."

McFarlane believes he can offer an excellent product at reasonable cost. "I do quality work for a fair price. Because of my background in graphic design I can offer a great deal to a client who may be looking for a sign or a design package for a business. My signs can range in price from as little as \$50 up to \$2,000. He can be reached at 852-6106."

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