

# Rare albino bird spotted near Oyster River

An Oyster River couple who spotted a rare bird in their backyard plan to have it noted by North American bird-watching organizations.

Mary Palmer said this week she first spotted the red-breasted sapsucker in a Norway maple tree in the yard while having coffee with neighbor Tom McCulloch Jan. 29.

Palmer said her attention was drawn to the bird because of its unusual coloring. It's a very rare partial albino, with red on the head and chest but white everywhere else.

"We thought at first it must be a cockatoo or something like that," the keen birdwatcher said.

But the bird also had a long

beak which it used to drill rows of small holes in the tree for sap, so Palmer said she knew it had to be a sapsucker, a member of the woodpecker family.

By the time her husband Tom returned, two other sapsuckers had chased the stranger away, so Palmer said her husband didn't believe her at first.

"It was like saying, We've seen a pink elephant," she said.

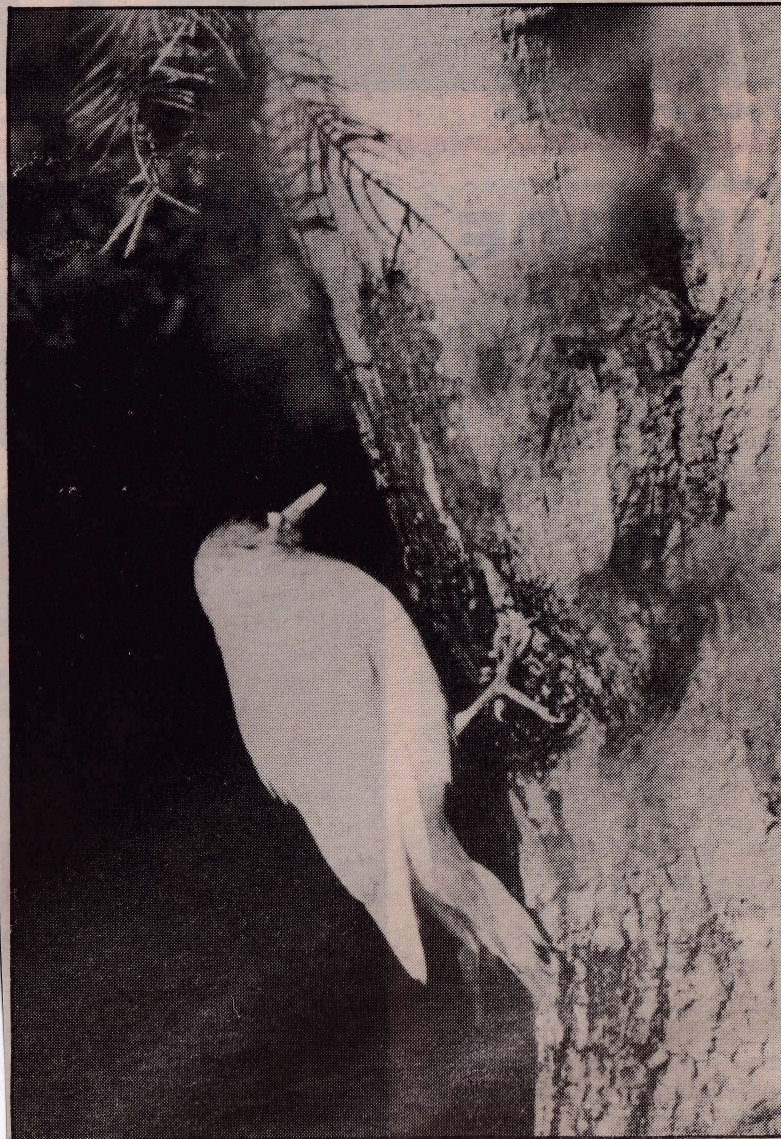
But the bird returned four days later and three times in the next four days. Palmer notified Father Charles Brandt, a birder neighbor from directly across the river, and he took pictures of it over an hour or so. The bird allowed him to get as close as 15 feet away.

Palmer said she and her husband, both regular members of the local Christmas bird count since the 1970s, participate in the Feeder Watcher Program from Cornell University in the United States.

She said she will notify the program's bird recorders and send a picture.

The couple are now keeping a regular eye open for the unusual visitor and hope it won't get chased away, but have refrained from giving it a name for fear something might happen to it.

"We're really excited," she said. "Once he decides to work on a tree, he'll stay there for hours. The others flit from tree to tree."



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**THIS RARE** part-albino sapsucker was spotted by an enthusiastic bird watcher in her own backyard recently.