



This rare albino sapsucker was seen recently near the Oyster River.

Charles Brandt photo

Rare bird spotted

By Father Charles Brandt

Special to the Weekender

An albino Red-breasted Sapsucker (*sphyrapicus ruber*) is unusual to say the least.

The sapsucker, not an uncommon winter resident in the Courtenay/Campbell River area (several were observed on the Christmas birdcount), is not commonly found with a white body and tail and breast. Its usual plumage is a red head and throat, yellowish breast, and black back.

The albino was identified by Mary and Ray Palmer on Jan. 27 in their backyard — which in reality is a small nature conservancy inhabited by many species of birds.

A neighbor, Tom McCulloch, while having tea with the Palmers, noted a white bird flying across the lawn. It was the Palmers, who assist in the yearly Christmas Birdcount, who pinned it down to species.

The sapsucker was observed feeding on the sap exuding from the Norway Maples on the fringe of their gardens. A characteristic marking of the sapsucker is the white line of feathers running from the base of the bill to under the eye.