

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS



Figure 1. Dark-eyed Junco with white cheek patches, Wadhams, Essex Co., New York. Photograph by Dean Spaulding.

A White-cheeked Dark-eyed Junco: I often ignore Dark-eyed Junco as a species. They pass through on their way north each spring, stopping for a few days at my feeder outside of Wadhams, New York, in the Adirondacks, and then pass back through by my way in the fall. For whatever reason, the spring of 1994 became one big junco count. I'd sit at my window and keep an informal count. With a little observation, it isn't difficult to see the different waves of junco come into the feeder during migration. One day I would count two or three, the next thirty, forty, fifty. Then, a few days later it would be back to just a few. One morning, I looked out my window to find a welcome surprise. I counted only one junco, but this junco was unlike any other I had ever seen or probably will ever see again. This junco had white cheek patches (Fig. 1). The Slate-colored races of Dark-eyed Junco are often described as appearing as though they had been hand dipped in chlorox, meaning that their undersides are white and not slate-colored like the rest of their body. This particular junco appeared as though someone had gotten a little sloppy with the chlorox bottle and dribbled some across the little bird's head. As I watched "white cheeks" join other juncos, I told myself that I was seeing some type of strange pigmentation. Continuing to watch, I noticed that the white-cheeked junco stayed by itself, as though

it was weary of the others busily working the freshly raked soil under my feeder with their "junco shuffle:" a one, two, three step shuffle where they dig in with both feet, jump back on the next, before hopping back up to where they had started, only to dig their feet in again. I thought that perhaps his white "birthmark" alienated him from the others, but I found this to be untrue. In fact, he used his white-cheeks as a factitious power symbol, puffing them up as he approached female juncos and using them to scare off the older and darker adult males when he had scratched up all the area around him. The white-cheeked Dark-eyed Junco stayed around my feeder for two days from 14 to 16 May before moving on to its next stop. In that time, I managed to sneak down into the cellar when he was feeding and snap a few eye-level pictures of him, so, like the odd junco that showed up at my place, I too wouldn't be accused of getting too close to an opened bottle of chlorox.

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