

Aberrant Common Redpoll in Cortland County: The great redpoll invasion of the winter of 1993-94 heightened many a birder's hopes that this would finally be the year that Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni*) would be added to their life list. Thus, a report that such a bird was at a feeder in the Town of Virgil, Cortland County, seemed highly believable. The authors separately visited that feeder on 14 and 15 January 1994. Both of us quickly found the target bird, consorting with a flock of up to forty Common Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*), and we were able to study it at close range, at leisure and at length. The bird immediately commanded our attention by its most striking feature, a pure white head with no other obvious markings except for a flame-red forehead patch; closer examination revealed a few very small rose-colored feathers on the cheek. Most odd was its complete lack of the expected black chin. The effect was that of a bird with a white hood. The bill was striking too: a brilliant orange-yellow, quite in contrast to the dull tone of a Common Redpoll's bill; it had no black edging on the culmen and gonys as shown by the other redpolls. The bird appeared to have unstreaked undertail coverts and rump. However, there were strong brown lateral streaks along each flank, and the wing and back pattern seemed similar to that of the attendant redpolls. The rump was suffused with light rose, and at least one feather had a dark spot near the shaft. A strong rosy-colored collar extended in an inverted U-shape from the flanks and across the chest. An abnormal spot of white, present on the distal end of one of the left primaries, was not matched by the equivalent feather of the right wing.

After some discussion, we agreed that the bird probably was an aberrant Common Redpoll, although we differed on the relative importance of features that led to that decision. For one of us, the size and structure of the bill, indistinguishable in comparison to the other redpolls present, was the first clue that the bird probably wasn't a Hoary Redpoll: the latter typically has a noticeably smaller, stubbier bill, giving the face a "pushed-in" appearance. However, according to A. G. Knox (1988. The Taxonomy of Redpolls. *Ardea* 76 1-26.), *hornemannii* bill sizes show complete inclusion within the range of *flammea*, although the mean is smaller. For the other, the strong streaking on the flanks and back, as well as the rose color on the chest and rump, were the most inconsistent features. Whatever the case, it was certainly a striking bird. It was easy to see why the owners of the feeder felt that they had seen a Hoary Redpoll. One wishes that true Hoary Redpolls were as easy to pick out of a flock of Commons as this bird was!

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