

## MELANETTA FUSCA (LINN.) IN ALASKA.

By ROBERT RIDGWAY.

Among the birds collected by Mr. C. L. McKay, U. S. Signal observer at Bristol Bay, Alaska, is a fine adult male of the European Velvet Scoter, obtained at Alloknaqik Lake, July 20, 1882 (Nat. Mus. No. 92149, collector's No. 104).

This species may be readily distinguished from its American representative, *M. velvetina* (Cass.) Baird, by the longer culmen, the distance from the tip of the bill to the frontal feathers being greater than from the same point to the most anterior loral feathers; the relative measurements being reversed in *M. velvetina*. This character holds good in both sexes, and also in young birds. In the adult male of *M. fusca* the side of the base of the maxilla (near the rictus) is much more swollen than in *M. velvetina*, but at the same time the base of the culmen is decidedly less elevated. The colors of the bill are much the same in the two species, but *M. fusca* has a distinct black line running on each side of the nail, connecting the upper and lateral black areas.

This is the second known occurrence of *M. fusca* in America, the first record being that of Dr. Reinhardt in *Vid. Medd. Nat. For. Kjöbenhavn*, 1869, p. 1, where a specimen from Southern Greenland is reported. It is true that Mr. Nelson, in his "Birds of Bering Sea and the Arctic Ocean" (Arctic cruise of the revenue steamer Corwin in 1881, published in 1883, p. 102), gives *M. fusca* as the Alaskan species, but he, in common with some other writers, does not distinguish the two species. All Mr. Nelson's specimens which I have had the opportunity of examining in this connection, are *M. velvetina*, as are all other Alaskan examples that have come under my notice, except the one above referred to. *M. fusca* is the species of Eastern Asia, and may, therefore, like some other Palaeartic birds, straggle more or less frequently to the American side.

## DESCRIPTION OF A NEW SNOW BUNTING FROM ALASKA.

By ROBERT RIDGWAY.

*Plectrophenax hyperboreus* Ridgw. *McKay's Snow Bunting.*

SUBSP. CH.—*Adult ♂ in spring* (No. 78551, Saint Michael's, Alaska, April, 1879, E. W. Nelson): Entirely pure white, except the terminal portion of the five outer primaries, which are chiefly black, for the space of about 1.40 inches from the tip of the longest quill. Tail pure white, the middle rectrices with a very small blackish spot near the end of the inner web (almost obsolete on one feather). Bill dull brownish,

the tip dusky; legs and feet deep black. Wing 4.65, tail 3.10, culmen .45, tarsus .90, middle toe .60.

*Adult ♂ in winter* (No. 92090, Nushagak, Alaska, December 10, 1882, C. L. McKay): Like the spring plumage as described above, but pileum strongly tinged with rusty brown, the auriculars washed with a paler shade of the same, and jugulum with a very faintly marked pale rusty collar, more distinct (but still faint) on each side; lower back and rump also faintly washed with pale rusty. Black spots near ends of inner webs of middle rectrices more distinct, and black on ends of primaries rather more extended, than on inner web of outer quill reaching about 1.70 from the tip. Bill wax-yellow, with dusky tip to the maxilla. Wing 4.60, tail 3.15, culmen .40, tarsus .95, middle toe .60.

*Adult ♀ in spring* (No. 78556, U. S. Nat. Mus., Saint Michael's, Alaska, April, 1879, E. W. Nelson): General color white, the pileum and auriculars tinged with rusty, the nape and back faintly washed with pale buff-yellowish, and back very narrowly streaked with dusky, but these narrow streaks rapidly widening toward the roots of the feathers so as to form the predominating color of the concealed portion; scapulars more strongly tinged with ochraceous, and with still broader concealed dusky acuminate spots, but without distinct streaks on the surface. Tertiaries with the central part of the exposed portion blackish, the very broad marginal part light dull ochraceous, becoming nearly white at the tips of the feathers; alulae dull black, bordered with white; primary coverts similar, but greater portion of inner webs white; longer primaries chiefly dusky grayish, distinctly bordered with white and with basal half or more of inner webs wholly white; on the shorter primaries this dusky rapidly decreasing in extent until on the innermost quill there is a mere trace near the tip of the outer web. Four middle rectrices brownish dusky, bordered with white; rest of the tail white, but all the feathers with more or less of a dusky streak near end of the outer web. Bill brownish wax-yellow, the culmen dusky; feet brownish black. Wing 4.25, tail 2.90, culmen .45, tarsus .85, middle toe .60.

*Adult ♀ in winter* (No. 92091, Nushagak, Alaska, November 16, 1882; C. L. McKay): Similar to the spring plumage, as described above, but upper parts much more strongly washed with rusty, this deepest on the pileum and auriculars, but also pervading the nape, whole back, and scapulars, and, but less uniformly, the rump; an interrupted or broken jugular collar of rusty touches or cloudings; broad margins of the tertials deep cinnamon. Bill paler and purer wax-yellow, without black on culmen; feet deep black. Wing 4.25, tail 2.90, culmen .40, tarsus .87, middle toe .58.

Of this remarkably fine and easily recognized species I have examined altogether seven specimens, three adult males and four females, all of them obtained in Alaska in winter and early spring. The summer home of this bird is probably the unknown region to the north of the Arctic mainland, since at the extreme northern point of Alaska only the true

*P. nivalis* breeds, Messrs. Murdock and Smith, of Lieutenant Ray's party, having brought back with them from Point Barrow numerous specimens of the latter, together with the nests and eggs.

The fully adult male may be at once distinguished from that of *P. nivalis* by the total absence of black except on the terminal third (or less) of the primaries and near the ends of the middle rectrices. In *P. nivalis* the primaries are black nearly to the base, the alulae, primary coverts, and tertials also black (though bordered with white), the dorsal region mainly black (wholly black in summer), and the six middle rectrices black to the base. The rusty wash is also much paler in the new form.

In its summer plumage, the entire plumage, except the black quill-tips, would evidently be snow-white, the bill black instead of yellow.

The females are distinguished from those of *P. nivalis* by their much paler coloration, with the dark markings far more restricted, and the rusty wash of the winter dress much less distinct. All of the four specimens of this sex have the back white, more or less tinged or stained with yellowish (more rusty on the scapulars), and narrowly streaked with black, although these streaks are nearly obsolete in one specimen.

The vernacular name of this new species is bestowed in memory of Mr. Charles L. McKay, who sacrificed his life in the prosecution of natural history investigations in Alaska, and in whose collections the new species was first noticed. The specific name *hyperboreus* needs no explanation.

#### ON THE USE OF TRINOMINALS IN AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY.

By LEONHARD STEJNEGER.



Ornithological trinominals, although at present more *generally* employed in America than elsewhere, are neither an American invention nor were they first applied in America to the extent which they are now occupying in this country.

That trinominals for varieties occasionally are found in some early works, even in those of Linnaeus, is of very little significance, although Pallas came pretty near being a trinomialist in the modern sense of the word. Nor do I intend in this connection to call attention to the numerous trinominals of C. L. Brehm, as he used them in a somewhat different sense from what we do.

The father of modern trinomialism in ornithology was the famous Swedish ornithologist, Carl Sundevall, who in 1840 commenced to treat systematically the ill-defined species as geographical varieties, which he provided with a third name in addition to the specific appellation. Of groups treated by him in that manner may be quoted the genera *Acanthis*, *Budytes*, *Lagopus*, *Dendroeca* and the family *Picidae*. He himself styled these varieties "local forms" or "races," as an example of