

# Arctic Bird Pays a Rare Visit to New Jersey

## Fulmar Freed After 2-Day Stay Despite Museum Protests

An Atlantic fulmar, one of the most common birds in the world but a rarity here, was set free near Yonkers yesterday. Museum experts here were sorry to see it go, for they had hoped it would die so they could stuff it.

The bird, which looks something like a small seagull with a hooked beak, is gray with a white head and white breast and belly, and has a three-foot wingspread. There are millions of them in the Arctic and in such chilly lands as Baffin Island, Iceland, Greenland. They go to Northern Scotland during their mating season, at which time they enjoy showing each other the pretty purpled insides of their beaks.

### One Found in 1891

Fulmars, however, hardly ever get as far south as the United States. According to Charles K. Nichols, a research associate with the American Museum of Natural History, one was found near Ridgewood, N. J., worn out after a bad storm in December, 1891. It died and was stuffed and is still on exhibition in the museum.

A carcass was found in southern New Jersey in 1949. It, too, was stuffed and is on display at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.

In 1930, and again in 1937, fulmars were sighted by reputable bird watchers in Long Island. One also landed once in California, but that was back in the Pleistocene Age and all that was found was its fossil.

As this bird is not common hereabouts, Harry Breitenback of Ramsey, N. J., mistook it for a sick seagull when he saw it sitting beside the road between Ramsey and Mahwah Saturday afternoon. He stopped his car and put the bird which nipped him, in a box and took it to a local veterinarian, who thought it might be a midget seagull.

### Conservationist Called In

Styles D. Thomas of Allendale, N. J., president of the Fyke Nature Association of Allendale and a prominent local conservationist and bird watcher, was called in for consultation. He identified it. The bird nipped Mr. Thomas. Mrs. Eleanor Dater, the local official bird-bander, also got nipped when she banded it.

The word soon spread in local bird circles and numerous experts visited Mr. Thomas' home, where the fulmar was being kept. They were sharply divided on whether the bird should be set free. One school of thought was that this was a young and foolish bird, and possibly sick, and that its chances of survival were slim so far from home. The

others, the conservationists, held that the bird's screaming and biting indicated that it was quite lusty and that it should be freed after it had rested a bit.

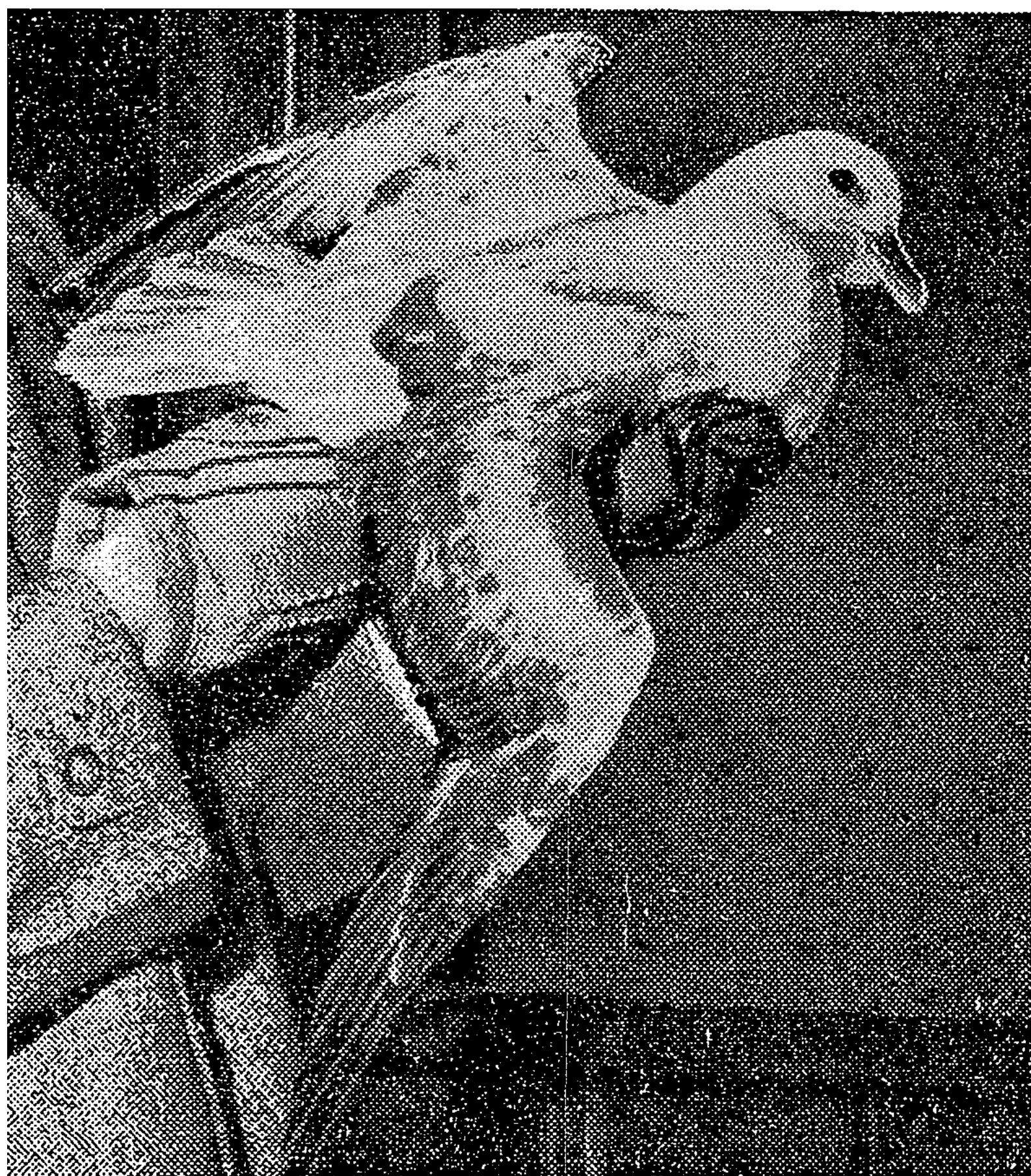
Mr. Nichols, the man from the Museum of Natural History, explained rather sadly that "we did so hope that this one wouldn't survive, so we would get it." He said that another fulmar shipped down from where they are plentiful would not be the same thing at all. A bird that has flown down here under its own power would be a particularly valuable specimen.

In any case, the conservationists were the ones with the bird in hand, so after lunch yesterday Mr. Thomas drove to the New Jersey end of the Yonkers ferry line and, after receiving a parting nip, tossed the bird out to freedom. A group of seagulls spotted the fulmar and took off after it.

A fulmar is equipped with a fine weapon, a barrel-like tube along the top of its beak out of which it can squirt a jet of liquid wax. Yesterday the seagulls and the fulmar had a brief dog-fight, but the seagulls soon returned home as the stranger winged off to the northeast. Possibly they were outgunned.



Styles D. Thomas releases fulmar from Yonkers Ferry dock in New Jersey



The New York Times (by Edward Hausner)

The fulmar, common in the Arctic, resembles small sea gull