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TUFTED DUCK IN CRAWFORD COUNTY

ED KWATER

On Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1992 I received a telephone call from Jerry M<sup>r</sup> Williams in Erie saying that he had just talked to two birders from Pittsburgh who had found a Tufted Duck, Aythya fuligula at Pymatuning, Crawford County, the day before. Jerry was unable to investigate the report that day, so I hurriedly changed my plans and headed for Pymatuning. The bird had been reported from the spillway area just south of Linesville. I arrived at the site at approximately 2.00 p.m. but there was no sign of the bird amongst the hundreds of Mallard, Anas platyrhynchos and Canada Geese, Branta canadensis. I searched for over an hour and a half and just as I was about to leave, the Tufted Duck suddenly appeared within thirty yards of me. I assumed that it had probably been hiding amongst the vegetation overhanging the bank of the reservoir.

The bird was obviously a male and it appeared to be molting out of eclipse plumage into alternate definitive plumage. I observed it for at least thirty minutes, taking numerous photographs, and noting the following field characters:

In size the bird was noticeably smaller than the accompanying Mallard, being about the same size as a Ring-necked Duck, A. collaris. The head was relatively round, with a fairly steep forehead. It was jet black and showed a purple gloss at certain angles. There was a short tuft of feathers hanging down from the hindcrown. This was only about half as long as on a male in alternate definitive plumage so it was clearly still growing in. The breast was blackish brown. The mantle, scapulars, tertials, exposed primaries, undertail coverts and tail were all mottled blackish brown. The presence of some paler brown feathers indicated remnants of eclipse plumage. This plumage and the timing of molt are discussed in Cramp and Simmons (1977) and Madge and Burn

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(1988). There was a greenish sheen on the scapulars and especially on the tertials. The most distinctive feature of the bird was a large, white flank patch similar in size and shape to that of a Lesser Scaup, A. affinis, or Greater Scaup, A. marila. The upper border of the patch was S-shaped, the front border being straight and the hind border strongly rounded (Fig 1). Some brown feathers towards the hind end of the flank patch were further evidence of remaining eclipse plumage. The underparts of the bird could not be seen as it was not seen in flight during the observation period. The iris was bright yellow and the pupil small and black. The bill was a dull gray with a large black nail bordered by a narrow bluish-white subterminal band.

The bird fed actively by diving, and appeared to be relatively tame, swimming within a few yards of the lake shore. This raised initial doubts over whether or not the bird was wild. However I have seen Tufted Ducks coming in to feeding stations on a number of occasions in Britain. Jerry McWilliams and I have also observed and photographed wild Lesser Scaup and Redhead, A. americana, at very close quarters at Erie Public Dock, particularly during cold weather. Although this behavior contrasts strongly with the nervous habits of Ring-necked Duck at Presque Isle immediately prior to and during duck hunting season (pers. obs.) it appears that tameness is not unusual in a number of Aythya species. Wild waterfowl are often prone to join flocks of Mallard in localities where they are fed. I have personally seen apparently wild American Wigeon, Anas americana, Gadwall, A. strepera, Northern Pintail, A. acuta and Hooded Mergansers, Lophodytes cucullatus at very close range under these circumstances on Marshall Lake in North Park, Pittsburgh. Further evidence that the Tufted Duck was genuinely

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wild was provided by Jerry McWilliams (pers. comm.) when he observed the bird on 4<sup>th</sup> October. He was able to examine the legs and confirm that the bird was not carrying any leg bands. It was also obviously full-winged and was seen flying strongly by a number of observers. The bird was present at Pymaturing till at least 23<sup>rd</sup> October.

The Tufted Duck is a Palearctic breeding species. The closest breeding grounds to eastern North America are in Iceland (Madge & Burn 1988) and it is possible that many of our records originate from there. The species also occurs as a vagrant along the west coast of North America from Alaska south to California and also in the interior and it is likely that these records originate from breeding populations in Siberia. To complicate the issue Tufted Ducks are kept quite commonly in waterfowl collections so there is at least a chance that some records refer to escapes from captivity as is the case with some other extralimital records of waterfowl. Such birds should always be checked for leg bands and pinioned wings, although pinioned birds are likely to have been deliberately released. Conversely Tufted Ducks are extremely common in the Palearctic and as the species is a medium distance migrant the chances of genuine vagrancy to North America must also be quite high.

This was the second record of Tufted Duck for Pennsylvania, pending acceptance by P.O.R.C. The first was a male at Lake Sitkworth on December 6<sup>th</sup> 1985. There was also an unsubstantiated report of a bird on Lake Arthur on April 16<sup>th</sup> 1972.

### References

Cramp S and K.E.L. Simmons 1977 - The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Vol 1. pp 577-586. Oxford.

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Madge S. and H. Burn 1988 - Waterfowl, an Identification  
Guide to the Ducks, Geese and Swans of the World. pp255-6  
Houghton Mifflin

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**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

**Voting Tabulation - Round # 2 of 2**

Species: **Tufted Duck**

Date of Sighting: **3 October 1992**

Observer(s): **Ed Kwater**

Date of Submission: **1992**

Submitted by: **Ed Kwater**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater	X						
B. Haas	X						
F. Haas	X						
R. Ickes	X						
G. McWilliams					X		
S. Santner					X		
J. Skinner	X						
TOTALS	5				2		
DECISION					X		

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

*J. C. Haas*

Date:

*11/14/93*

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: **Tufted Duck**

Date of Sighting: **3 October 1992**

Observer(s): **Ed Kwater**

Date of Submission: **1992**

Submitted by: **Ed Kwater**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater	X						
B. Haas	X						
F. Haas					X		
R. Ickes	X						
G. McWilliams					X		
S. Santner					X		
J. Skinner	X						
TOTALS	4				3		
DECISION							

Comments:

*Go to second round.*

Signature (Secretary):

Date: