

145-01-1995



KING EIDER

Somateria spectabilis

Location: Presque Isle State Park

Date: November 9, 1995

Time: 9:15 AM

Weather: Cloudy (stratus) wind about 10 mph from the west. Visibility good.

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Optics: TSN 4 Kowa scope at 35X

Details of sighting and description: Migration was not particularly heavy while I was conducting my annual waterbird count watching Lake Erie from Sunset Point. Yesterday a cold front arrived over northwestern Pennsylvania dumping inches of snow on inland sites, but sparing the Lake Erie shore. I was hoping for a relatively good flight of loons and duck this morning with hopes of the odd unusual bird to pass Sunset Point. While somewhat disappointed by the low numbers of birds, I did manage to tally 135 Common Loon, 3 Red-throated Loon, and all three scoter species. Shortly after the nine o'clock hour there was a burst of activity that included several Surf Scoter, a couple of Black Scoter, and hundreds of Red-breasted Merganser. At 9:15 three or four flocks of mergansers containing 50 or fewer birds was approaching from the east and flying quite high ahead of the flock I noticed a fairly large chunky blackish looking duck. My first thought was a White-winged Scoter, because of its bulk and unlike the other two species of scoters White-wings occasionally fly two or three hundred feet above the water as they are migrating over the lake. As it got closer it began to descend and by the time it was directly across from me at its closest approach as it was flying past, the identity of the bird became readily clear. The blackish appearance moments early now took on an even medium brownish cast, which was especially evident as it showed its upperside. The distance from myself to the bird at this time was perhaps 400 to 500 yards. There was some dark barring noticed along the flanks, but because of the distance I was from the bird, I could not describe the shape of the barring. At this point I knew I was looking at an eider. The bird was very heavy, especially notable was the bulging chest and short stocky neck. The head was heavy and appeared to be only slightly thicker than the neck. The head profile was similar to a White-winged or Surf Scoter, heavy billed with a sloping forehead. However, there was a noticeable dip about midway between the tip of the bill and the top of the head. The wings were broad based and seemed almost too short to propel the bird in flight. The

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upperwings were entirely medium brown with no tonal color distinction from the primaries, secondaries, or coverts. The underwing pattern was clearly that of King Eider. The wing linings were an even dirty white contrasting with the dark narrow bar that followed the leading edge of the wing. The primaries and secondaries appeared to be grayish-brown which were slightly lighter than the upperside. The King Eider continued flying west over the lake, but unlike its approach, it flew low and in a direct flight inches above the water until it was out of sight. The only possibilities that King Eider could be confused with that readily come to mind would be female Mallard, American Black Duck, Surf or Black Scoter, and female Common Eider. The first two species can be ruled out on shape and flight behavior alone. Both species have longer thinner necks, longer, narrower wings and in Mallard blue secondaries bordered by white. In Black Duck, the distinguishing characteristics are the pure white wing linings without a dark bar along the leading edge of the wing and a bluish-purple secondary bar on the upperwing. Both species of scoters are black with patterned faces and no white in the wing linings. This bird is most likely to be confused with female Common Eider, but Common Eider has gray not white wing linings that do not contrast with the narrow dark bar along the leading edge of the wing. The head profile does not show a prominent dip midway between the tip of the bill and the top of the head as in King Eider, but shows an even flowing slope. I have seen hundreds of female Common Eider both in flight and on the water along the north Atlantic Coast. I have seen about 15 different female King Eiders, all but one was at Presque Isle State Park.

Adrian

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*)

Date of Sighting: 9 November 1995 to 9 November 1995

Location: PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

County: ERIE

Observer(s): Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: 1996

Submitted by: Jerry McWilliams

Written Description: YES Photo: NO Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V			Abstain
					A	B	C	
F. Haas			X					
N. Pulcinella			X					
E. Kwater			X					
R. Ickes			X					
G. McWilliams			X					
P. Schwalbe			X					
S. Feldstein			X					
TOTALS			7					
DECISION			X					

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

J. C. Keas

Date:

2-22-97