

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
210 Welcome Ave. Norwood, PA 19074

13 February 2002

Jerry McWilliams
3508 Allegheny Road
Erie, PA 16508

Dear Jerry,

Four of your submissions that did not fare well with the committee. I'll try to summarize the results carefully:

King Eider, Presque Isle, 18 December 1999: The vote was two favoring acceptance (Couchman, Ickes) and five not favoring (Armistead, Hess, Reid, Sharp, Rodewald).

Armistead spoke for us all in emphasizing a healthy respect for your experience, but those who voted against acceptance felt that female Common Eider was not ruled out conclusively – partly as a result of the bird's distance away.

Various members listed characters they considered necessary for diagnostic identification, especially details of the bill morphology. Some also expressed the view that features such as entirely reddish-brown plumage, neck thickness, and rounded head were not sufficient, even combined, to be diagnostic.

Speaking only for myself, I thought the white underwing coverts were the sole character likely indicating King, but another member considered the extent of pale feathering on the underwing to be "variable and hard to determine."

A majority of the committee was willing to go no further than "eider sp."

Pomarine Jaeger, Presque Isle, 7 December 1997: This went two rounds, as you may recall. The final vote was yours favoring acceptance, five not in favor, and one abstaining.

The dissenters expressed a variety of reasons for declining to accept the Pomarine ID as conclusive. Hess and Rodewald commented that the description of the head shape seemed to indicate Parasitic rather than Pomarine. Armistead and Couchman felt that a skua species was not ruled out. Reid felt that the description did not include enough information for him to evaluate. Abstaining, Ickes deferred to the others' views.

Jerry, I just read your description again and though some aspects do indicate a Pom to me, I still don't think it is entirely consistent with Pomarine. Your description of the forehead and crown shape didn't seem correct to me, but your second-round comments were so firm that I began to have doubts. After I looked again at the Olsen & Larsson *Skuas and Jaegers*, my conclusion was that neither one of us should have set down a diagnostic difference in the forehead/head shape between Pomarine and Parasitic. In at least a couple of dozen photos, the variation is such that each of our views of Pom and Parasitic head shape is randomly shown both species. Maybe the standard head shapes we've both been talking about aren't of value to support either ID.

Armistead commented: "Certainly the most likely candidate seems to be a Pomarine Jaeger, and observer experience is compelling, but I too would like to have had some attempt at ruling out (the albeit much more unlikely) skua sp. I've seen over-anxious observers call young, dark Poms Skuas and I imagine it could happen the other way around as well."

At any rate, most members had considerable uncertainty about accepting the identification as conclusive.

Parasitic Jaeger, Presque Isle, 28 October 1999: This also went two rounds, with a final vote of three favoring acceptance (Armistead, Rodewald, Sharp) and four not in favor (Couchman, Hess, Ickes, Reid).

Couchman, Hess and Reid believed that despite the white wing flashes Long-tailed could not be eliminated conclusively through 35X at several hundred yards. Ickes felt that he lacked enough information for a judgment.

It may be carrying conservatism too far, but I'm beginning to wonder whether any jaeger except a typical adult with fully grown retrices can be accepted without a photograph.

Thayer's Gull, Presque Isle, 23 January 1998: On second round, the vote was four in favor (Couchman, Ickes, McWilliams, Rodewald) and three not in favor (Armistead, Hess, Reid). As for the dissenters:

Armistead placed it in IV-B, commenting: "I find the description insufficient for a bird that is as variable as it is. The mantle should be darker than sypical *smithsonianus* and the primary pattern described overlaps with the pale extreme of Herring Gull."

I changed my first-round acceptance and placed it in IV-A for two reasons that seemed to me did not separate it from Herring with certainty: 1. the gray mantle and forewings "equal in tone" to Herring. Under nearly all lighting conditions except extremely bright sun, the gray of Thayer's has appeared slightly darker to me. 2. ventrally, the "large white mirror showing through near the tips of the outer two most primaries." I cannot recall ever seeing exactly this effect in a Thayer's-type, nor could I find it in checking a number of reference photos.

Reid also placed it in IV-A, commenting: "Probably correct, but I have trouble accepting a very tricky bird to identify when it is at least 1/4 mile away."

This case is interesting and somewhat unusual, in which Herring rather than Iceland kept two of us a little uncertain. Considering your experience with this species and the respect we have for your knowledge in general, George and I especially emphasized that we don't feel dogmatic about our opinions.

Best regards,



P.S. I'm holding the Band-rumped Storm-Petrel record (which has not been accepted) for a third round. I'll send you a separate letter on this.

Record Nos. 145-02-1999 (King Eider), 332-01-1997 (Pomarine Jaeger), 333-01-1999 (Parasitic Jaeger), 348-01-1998 (Thayer's Gull)

145-02-1999

KING EIDER

Somateria spectabilis

Location: Presque Isle State Park

Date: December 18, 1999

Time: 2:30 to 3:15 PM

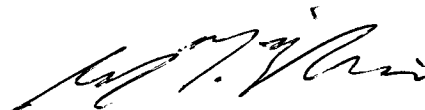
Weather: Variably cloudy, wind calm. Visibility excellent.

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Optics: TSN 4 Kowa scope at 45X

Details of sighting and description: Off of beach 10 there was a flock of over 300 Tundra Swans scattered in a long line about 3/4 mile offshore. With the swans was a resting female King Eider. I have never seen the viewing conditions as good as they were this afternoon. You could easily identify Horned Grebes over a mile offshore. Other than the Horned Grebes there were also distant scattered flocks of Gadwall, American Black Ducks, and Mallards. Since the winds were calm, most birds were sleeping. I identified the eider by the following characteristics: The bird was quite robust. It sat on the water with its head tucked over its back. It roared on the water with its back arched and its wings drooped slightly. The bird was entirely reddish brown in color. Nearby female Mallards appeared more pale brown or gray-brown. The bird was too far away to detect any barring, but it looked darkest on the breast and undertail coverts. I could also see that the tail was dark colored. I really could not be sure that it was a King Eider until it woke briefly and stood up and flapped its wings. The head was heavy and rounded and the neck was thick. The wings were broad at the base and the axillaries and underwing coverts were white which contrasted with the brown primaries and secondaries. The upperwings appeared to be unmarked and were entirely brown. After stretching, the eider went back to sleep and did not lift its head again during the duration of our viewing.

I have seen several King Eiders at Presque Isle and most have been females.



Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Ballot - Round One

Species: King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*)

Date of Sighting: 18 December 1999 to 18 December 1999

Location: ERIE

County: PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

Observer(s): Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: 1999

Submitted by: Jerry McWilliams

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

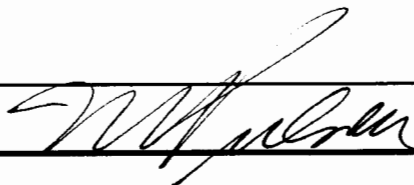
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead				X				
D. Couchman			X					
P. Hess					X			
R. Ickes			X					
M. Sharp				X				
B. Reid				X				
P. Rodewald					X			
TOTALS			2	3	2			
DECISION				X				

Comments: 2/5

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 3/12/09