



149-01-1997

13 April 1997

Dear Nick,

I observed a pair of Harlequin Ducks that were first spotted by Don and Robyn Henise on 5 April 1997 in the Susquehanna River at West Fairview. I did not observe them until about 4:45 pm (the Henise's first saw them around 1:30 pm and called people about them). I was able to watch them until about 5:45 pm. I also think I saw them again in flight at about 6:15 pm.

When I first saw them they were out in the river just below Sheets Island. I was able to view them in both Leica 10 x 42 binoculars and my new Leica APO-Televid spotting scope (yes, the old Meade is finally retired). They were too far away for me to get any photographs, but I did make the enclosed drawing. Hopefully, Don Henise will be able to provide photos of the ducks. He saw them at much closer range. There was a male and female Harlequin. I concentrated on the male while I was making the drawing. We followed the Harlequins as they drifted down river back toward the West Fairview boat ramp.

The male Harlequin Duck had a rather short grayish-colored bill. The forehead rose rather sharply from the bill. There was a comma-shaped white spot just behind the bill and in front of the bill. The thicker part of the "comma" was at the bottom of the head and narrowed up by the forehead. The basic head color was a very dark gray, almost black in appearance. Another white spot occurred behind the eye. It was circular in form. Behind that at the rear of the head was a third white spot that was tear-dropped-shaped with the broader portion of the spot being toward the neck and body of the bird. There was a white ring at the base of the neck of the male. This marked the base of the dark gray color for the head and neck. Below this white neck band the basic color of the back and breast was gray (i.e., not as dark as the head). There was a white notch that delineated the breast and went up in front of the wings. Another white streak was noted on the back of the male. There were hints of black borders for all the white spots. The flank or side of the male was a reddish-color. The tail was noticeable as it sat in the water, sticking up a bit like those of Ruddy Ducks. The tail and undertail coverlets were a dark black.

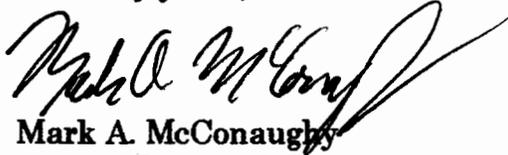
I did not concentrate as much on viewing the female and only had a chance to sketch the head before they moved down river. I decided to shift down to the West Fairview Boat ramp to continue my drawing. Unfortunately, they either took off while we were moving or got down in the islands south of the West Fairview boat ramp (which is what I think happened -- I saw two ducks in flight at 6:15 that I am reasonably certain were the Harlequins flying up river). So I did not get a chance to complete my observations of the female. The head was similar to that of the male in being rather dark gray with a

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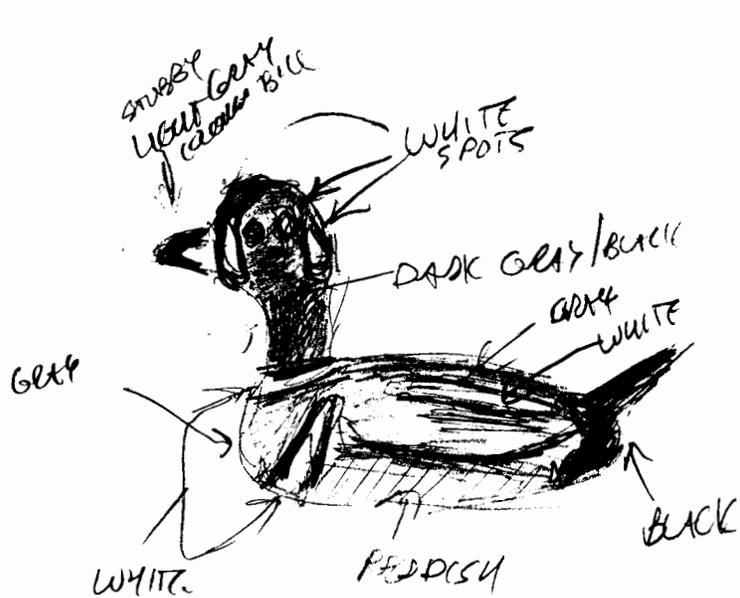
small, grayish bill. Unlike the male, the female only had two white spots on the face. It has a comma-like spot behind the bill and in front of the eye that was roughly similar to one on the male. The spot behind the eye was larger and more ovoid than the circular spot on the male. There was no third spot on the head. My general impression of the female was that it was a much more bland bird than the male. The body was browner and I don't remember seeing any noticeable white spots on it.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this sighting.

Sincerely yours,



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I COULD ONLY  
MAKE OUT  
TWO SPOTS ON  
FEMALE HEAD.

BODY WAS  
DARK - GRAYISH  
OR BROWNISH  
- BELLY ~~WAS~~  
ALSO DARK  
GRAYISH -  
BROWN,

4/5/97  
West Fairview, PA  
Max McConaughy  
~ 5<sup>30</sup> AM -

149-01-1997

## Harlequin Ducks (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) on the Susquehanna River, Dauphin County, PA - April 5, 1997

On Saturday April 5, 1997, at about 1:15 p.m., Robyn and I found a pair of Harlequin Ducks (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) while viewing the Susquehanna River from the West Fairview Boat Launch.

### Description:

The body of the male was a dark blue color. There was a large white mark on the side of the face between the eye and the bill. This mark was almost triangular, but had rounded corners and the top part of it extended up along the forehead into a crown stripe which was bordered by a rusty-red color. There was a smaller circular white spot behind the eye and behind that spot a long thin vertical white mark. On the front part of the flanks there was a vertical white stripe coming up from the water line on the swimming bird. The middle part of the flanks, beneath the wings was rusty-red. On the edge of the back was some white feathering along the base of the folded wings. The female was a dark dusky gray-brown in color. She had a white triangular mark on the side of the front her face similar to the males, but hers was more dusky, not clean white like the males. She had a single round dusky white spot behind the eye. When sitting out of the water on a rock her pale under parts were visible.



### Observation:

We had just arrived at the West Fairview Boat Launch and I began to scope the Susquehanna River, when Robyn, who was scanning with her binoculars, asked "What are these two ducks up here?". About 150 yards or so up river were two darkish ducks drifting towards us. I moved the scope to them and for a split second tried to make an id. All I could see were two dark ducks with white markings on their faces. I quickly ruled out Surf Scoter and realized that the white marks were in the right locations for Harlequin Ducks. They both had a large white spot near the base of the bill, one of them had a single spot behind the eye and the other had one small spot behind the eye and a longer more vertical white marking behind that one. All of this went through my mind in just a second or two. I said to Robyn "They're Harlequin Ducks!". She responded "No way!". I lowered the scope to her height and she took a look and of course, agreed.

In a few minutes the ducks floated closer to us and we could begin to see the vertical white stripes on the upper flanks and then we could see some of the rusty color on the top of their heads and the sides of their flanks. Robyn immediately went and made a few phone calls while I watched the birds. When they got almost even with the boat launch, they took off and flew up river.

Dick Colyer was the first birder to arrive. We relocated the birds for Dick just upriver from the boat launch. Dan Bogar arrived about 20 minutes later, but by this time the birds were not in view, so we drove north on Front Street about ½ mile and found the birds just above the rapids at the lower end of Sheets Island. Eventually, they floated down to the rapids and settled in that area for a while, even climbing out of the water onto the base of one of the rocks there and preening. I was able to take a few identifiable photographs of the birds from that location. We stayed in the area until 4:00 p.m. at which time the birds were still in the area of the rapids.

We heard that Ramsay Koury, Mark McConaughy and Grace Randolph had all seen the birds later in the evening. They were last reported just before dusk. Apparently, many birders were out looking on the next day, but the birds were not reported.

Submitted by:

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**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

**Voting Ballot- Round One**

Species: Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

Date of Sighting: 5 April 1997 to 5 April 1997

Location: WEST FAIRVIEW

County: CUMBERLAND

Observer(s): Don Henise, Robyn Henise

Date of Submission: 1997

Submitted by: Don Henise

WRITTEN Description YES PHOTO YES SPECIMEN NO RECORDING NO

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman	X							
T. Floyd								X
P. Hess	X							
R. Ickes	X							
J. McWilliams	X							
B. Reid	X							
P. Rodewald	X							
TOTALS	6							1
DECISION	X							

Comments: This record was previously accepted as Class III

6/0/11

Signature (Secretary): 

Date: 8/24/10