

UNUSUAL SIGHTING DOCUMENTATION

Person Submitting: August Mirabella

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149-62-2002

Species: Harlequin Duck (female or immature)

Observers: Found by: Dave Wilton and Ben Coulter

Seen by: A. Mirabella and many others

Date Seen: 10/31/02

Time: On and off from about 9:00am to 4:45pm

Location: Nockamixon State Park, Bucks Co.

Conditions: The bird was mostly far out in the lake. It was seen with light at our backs both in the morning and afternoon but the afternoon view was the closest at approx. 100 yds. Shimmer on the water caused some distortion. This view was best as it was in direct comparison to two Surf Scoters and one White-winged Scoter. The bird was viewed with 7x42 Zeiss Binoculars and Leica APO77 Zoom Scope.

Behavior & Habitat: Basically just floating around the lake all day except when flushed once by a motorboat.

Description: The bird was too far away to see any fine feather detail while I observed the bird. Finding the bird in the Scoter flock involved picking out the smallest bird. It was always easy in comparison to the White-winged Scoter it was with but not as easy in comparison to the two Surf Scoters, which were sleeping most of the time. However, in good light and side views, the smaller size of the Harlequin was obvious. It was even more obvious when the Surf Scoters would lift their heads. The Harlequin had a smaller, rounder head, and the bill was stubby compared to the two species of scoters it was with when I saw it best. The small bill proved that the right bird was in view. The bird basically looked dark but the flanks looked browner compared to the head and back. The white spot set back behind the eye was well defined and bright. There was a poorly defined large dull whitish area toward the front of the head behind the bill, which looked like one area. In the videotape, using frame advance, this area actually has a dark strip horizontally which basically separates it into two areas. This white area and the dark area were hard to see in life and on videotape. Hopefully other videotape will be submitted that will be better.

Similar Species Comparison: It is similar to female scoters but was smaller in size, had a much smaller bill, and rounder head. The face pattern would be different but at this distance, could be confused. The Surfs seemed to have two bright well-defined white spots when their heads were up and the White-winged had only one well-defined spot that was small in relation to the overall head size and more centrally located near the eye. The female Long-tailed Duck has more white in the head and body. The female Bufflehead is also small but only has one white spot on the head.

Previous Experience: Have seen many times at close range

References during ID: Sibley Guide to Birds

References after ID: Sibley Guide to Birds; Waterfowl, Madge & Burn, & my videotape

Other Documentation: Videotape submitted with this report by A. Mirabella

Date of report: 11/9/02

August Mirabella

Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

Age/sex: female or immature. Bird was not close enough to determine age.

Date: October 31, 2002, 6:30 AM-8:00 AM

Location: Nockamixon State Park, Bucks County

Site: Offshore of the marina on north side of lake, viewed from the point west of the marina reaching furthest into the water

Observer: Ben Coulter

3431 Argyle Ave

Erie, PA 16505-1804

814-838-9773

Other observers included: Bill Etter, Devich Farbotnik, Jason Horn, August Mirabella, Dave Wilton, and about 10 more people

Distance to bird: At the closest, the bird was perhaps 300 ft. out, but drifted out further

Conditions: cloudy and overcast, eventually becoming partly cloudy

Optics: Swarovski 8.5x42 binoculars, Leica 77mm APO scope w/ 20-60x eyepiece

Description: This description is based upon notes and a sketch taken while observing the bird. The duck was rather small (significantly larger than a Bufflehead, yet smaller than the accompanying Surf Scoters) and was sooty brown in color, with a small gray bill, white head markings, and dark wings. The head was dark grayish brown, with whitish head markings. There was a prominent circular spot on the auriculars, as well as a triangular spot on the supraloral, and a larger rectangular spot in front of and below the eye. The borders for the markings were rather diffuse, not crisp. The lores, separating the upper and lower facial markings, were mostly dark. The head was small and rounded compared to the blocky heads of the Surf Scoters it was with. The nape, mantle, back, scapulars, and tail were also dark brown. The tail was proportionately long. The sides and flanks of the bird were a little lighter and warmer brown than the mantle/scaps. The belly of the bird had a large whitish patch, with indistinct borders, visible when the bird leaned on its side and preened. The wings of the bird lacked white markings of any kind, with the primaries, secondaries, tertiaries, and all the wing coverts a dark gray brown.

The bill was a dark gray color. It was small and stubby, and much less massive than that of a Surf Scoter, with a different shape to the feathering at the base. The legs were gray. The iris was dark.

Similar species: Several species could potentially be confused with a female Harlequin Duck. A female or first-winter Bufflehead has a large diffuse whitish patch on the rear of the head, but the pattern bears no resemblance to a Harlequin. The wings of a Bufflehead have white on the secondaries in all plumages. A female or first-winter Surf Scoter has white spots on the head and dark wings, but is a bit larger than a Harlequin, with a larger head and massive triangular bill, with very different feathering to the base of the bill. White-winged Scoter is a lot larger, with a larger head, long sloping forehead, and white in the secondaries.

Discussion: We were at Lake Nockamixon attempting to relocate the female King Eider which had been found the previous day. While we were searching from the point at the marina, the Harlequin Duck flew in and landed on the water, accompanied by two Surf Scoters. We nearly overlooked it, but in a quick glance, we noticed that one of them looked different, and when we got the scopes on it, it was quickly identified as a Harlequin Duck. Devich got video of the duck through his spotting scope.

Prior experience: I have seen Harlequin Duck previously at Presque Isle State Park in February and March of 2002. That bird was a first-winter male. I also have experience with Surf and White-winged Scoters in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

Date of Sighting: 30 October 2002 to 31 October 2002

Location: LAKE NOCKAMIXON

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): Ben Coulter and multiple observers

Date of Submission: 2002

Submitted by: Ben Coulter, August Mirabella, Devich Farbotnik

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

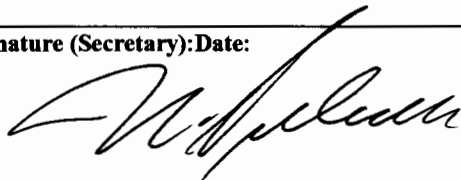
Specimen: No

Recording: Video

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
<i>R. W. TINT</i>								
G. Armistead	X							
D. Heathcote	X							
P. Guris	X							
J. Stanley	X							
E. Witmer	X							
B. Leberman	X							
M. Sharp	X							
TOTALS	7							
DECISION	X							

Comments:

Signature (Secretary): Date:



2/26/02