







Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

Age/sex: female, age unknown

Date: November 21, 2004, 8:00 AM; 9:15 AM; 2:20-2:35 PM

November 23, 2004, 10:10-10:20 AM

Location: Sunset Point, Presque Isle State Park

Site: Breakwaters 50 to 55

Observer: Ben Coulter
3431 Argyle Ave
Erie, PA 16505-1804
814-838-9773
aeridia@velocity.net

Other observers included: Jerry McWilliams

Distance to bird: During the afternoon sighting, I was probably within 100 feet of the bird before it swam behind the breakwater.

Conditions: cloudy and overcast, winds NW 10, waves 3 ft.

Optics: Swarovski 8.5x42 binoculars, Leica 77mm APO scope w/ 20-60x eyepiece, Nikon Coolpix 995

Description: The Harlequin Duck is a small diving duck, slightly bigger than a Bufflehead, with a long body, long pointy tail, and a small bill. In flight, it seemed quite dark, with no white in the wings, and pale markings evident on the head in front of and behind the eye. The long tail also stood out in flight.

The bird's small, round head was dark brown, with a diffuse-edged, somewhat rectangular off-white marking in front of and below the eye (where it was whitest), and a small bright white circle on the ear coverts, which stood out at great distance. The lores were mostly dark, splitting the frontal marking in two. The nape, back, scapulars, and tail were dark brown, darker than the underparts. The breast was light brown, while the belly was a contrasting off-white, with diffuse edges. The sides and flanks were light brown. The breast, sides, and flanks had pale edges to the feathers, making the flanks especially appear neat and scaly. The vent and undertail coverts were brown. The wings were dark, with no white feathers anywhere. The flight feathers, including tertial, and the wing coverts all appeared to be blackish-brown. The tail was long and pointed, and the feathers were blackish. The bird often held the tail cocked at an angle.

The bill was fairly short and blunt, with a somewhat deep base. It was medium-gray, with a bluish tint. The legs were yellowish-gray, darker grayish at the joints of the toes. The eyes were dark.

Behavior: The Harlequin was observed flying past just beyond the breakwaters, and was later seen quite close to shore diving right next to the breakwaters. It was rather furtive and shy, and it was often quite difficult to get prolonged views, especially when the bird was actively swimming or diving. It seemed to show a marked preference for breakwater 53, and was even observed there hauled out of the water resting on a rock at one point. While the bird was on the water, it rode the waves very skillfully, and dove with a noticeable wing flick. It favored the edge of the breakwaters, often diving right up to the rocks.

Similar species: Several species could potentially be confused with a female Harlequin Duck given poor viewing conditions. 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 secondaries. The white circle on the ear coverts of a Harlequin is quite distinctive, and makes it easy to separate from other species with adequate views.

Discussion: Jerry and I were at Sunset Point watching migrating waterbirds when I caught a fast-moving, small dark duck flying low to the water just beyond the breakwaters. I only saw it for 10-15 seconds, and Jerry saw even less of it. At the time, I told Jerry I thought it was a Harlequin Duck based on the dark wings and white fore and aft of the eye, and he agreed based on what he could see. After about an hour or so, I noticed a small duck with a pale belly land behind breakwater 55, but the view was extremely brief, so at the time, I assumed it was a female Bufflehead. A couple of minutes later, I spotted the Harlequin flying just above the water towards the far side of breakwater 54, but Jerry did not get on it. A minute or so after that, the bird was briefly seen bobbing around at the right end of breakwater 53, but soon vanished in the surf.

Prior experience: I have seen Harlequin Duck at Presque Isle State Park and Lake Nockamixon.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

Date of Sighting: 21 November 2004 to 29 November 2004

Location: PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

County : ERIE

Observer(s): Ben Coulter et al.

Date of Submission: 2004

Submitted by: Ben Coulter

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

Specimen: No

Recording: No

| Member | Class I | Class II | Class III | Class IV-A | Class IV-B | Class IV-C | Class V | Abstain |
|--------------|---------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|---------|---------|
| R. Wiltraut | X | | | | | | | |
| D. Heathcote | | | | | | | | |
| P. Guris | X | | | | | | | |
| J. Stanley | X | | | | | | | |
| E. Witmer | X | | | | | | | |
| R. Leberman | X | | | | | | | |
| M. Sharp | X | | | | | | | |
| TOTALS | 6 | | | | | | | |
| DECISION | X | | | | | | | |

Comments: 6/0

Signature (Secretary) 

Date: 11/12/05