

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

New Brighton, Beaver County, PA / March 1, 2008

This bird was present for two days before I was able to see it. It was an immature male, brown overall with the beginnings of the adult's white spots on the face and head which were obvious enough to instantly recognize the bird as a harlequin. It lacked the other white markings on the back and wings as well as the chestnut flank patch that an adult or an immature that is further along in plumage shows. Other points of identification were the rather small size and stubby bill.

The bird was associating with other ducks that gathered along the Beaver River near a small dam where the turbulent waters may have attracted it. When I saw the bird it was actively feeding with an adult male Ring-necked Duck. The harlequin made repeated dives to hunt for food; each dive began with a flick of the wings, behavior shared with Long-tailed Duck and White-winged and Surf Scoters. Later it joined a male Bufflehead and flew a short distance upriver with it, passing by while I had excellent views.

Description:

- A small diving duck, actively feeding when I first saw it where it would dive with a flick of the wings. It was just about the same size as a Ring-necked Duck and Bufflehead it was associating with. The overall build was similar to the Bufflehead.
- Bill stubby and dark gray.
- Head brown with two large white, almost tear shaped patches on either side of the face, between the eyes and the bill. There was a thin white line that extended from these patches over the eye that faded into the brown on the head. A white circular patch was present on either side of the head on the ear coverts. A white stripe extended along both sides of the neck and along the sides of the breast. The head was rounded with a steep forehead.
- The wings, back, breast and tail were uniform dark brown. While the bird was in flight, it was dark brown overall with white patches on the head providing the only obvious pattern of color.

Separation from Other Species:

Immature and female Surf and White-winged Scoters have white patches on the head and are dark brown. The obvious difference is the shape and boldness of the spots on the face of the harlequin duck, as well as the round rather bright white patch on the ear coverts and the vertical white stripe on the neck and sides of the breast. The bill is smaller on a Harlequin Duck and the head is more rounded with a steeper forehead compared to any scoter. Overall, scoters are also larger in body size.

Female Buffleheads approach the size and shape of a harlequin but have a single white patch on the side of the head which is different in shape from a harlequin's multiple white patches.

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Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) at New Brighton, Beaver County, PA, 29-Feb-2008

Observer:

Geoff Malosh

450 Amherst Ave.

Moon Township, PA 15108-2654

412.735.3128

pomarine@earthlink.net

Facts:

Temperature: 30 F

Wind: calm

Sky: high overcast

Time: 6:30 AM to 9 AM

Optics: Leica Ultravid 10x42 binoculars, KOWA TSN-824 82mm spotting scope

Camera: Canon 20D Digital SLR, 100-400mm IS

Photos or audio recordings: 5 photos submitted, taken from a distance of 30-40 feet, attached to this message

Accompanying observers: at various times, Mark Vass, Dave Wilton, Scott Kinzey, Malcolm Harter

Documentation date: March 2, 2008

Submission date: March 2, 2008

Photos:

- PORC1_Duck_Harlequin_BeaverPA_20080229_20D2_5408S.jpg (back view with stretched wings)
- PORC2_Duck_Harlequin_BeaverPA_20080229_20D2_5428S.jpg (back view with folded wings)
- PORC3_Duck_Harlequin_BeaverPA_20080229_20D2_5485S.jpg (profile right, facing slightly forward)
- PORC4_Duck_Harlequin_BeaverPA_20080229_20D2_5491S.jpg (profile left)

- PORC5_Duck_Harlequin_BeaverPA_20080229_20D2_5494S.jpg (profile right)

Please note: all submitted pictures are reprocessed and sometimes cropped down from the original camera file, then resized and JPEG compressed to reduce file size. As with all JPEG compression of digital pictures, in some cases, subtle detail is lost. Uncompressed, full resolution TIFF images are available on request.

Observation:

A Harlequin Duck had been reported on the Beaver River in Beaver County, in the vicinity of New Brighton, on 28-Feb by Mark Vass. On the morning of the 29th, I arrived at first light and quickly relocated the bird near the Fallston Bridge about 1/2 mile upstream from the New Brighton Boat Launch. The bird made a close approach to the Fallston Bridge before quickly swimming downstream toward the boat launch. I drove down to the boat launch at 7:15 and waited approx. 15-20 minutes before the bird finally appeared on my side of the river within 20 feet or closer of the shore. I observed it from this location for the next 90 minutes, and photographed it from within 30 feet at times. During this time the bird either stayed with 4-5 Mallards, or swam off on its own, occasionally diving but mainly just resting on the river. Eventually it moved off to the far riverbank and began swimming upstream and out of sight.

At the Fallston Bridge, observation was made from the bridge deck 30 feet above the water, to which the bird made a closest approach of about 60 feet. At the boat launch all observation and photography was done from the driver's seat of my car, which I parked at various locations nearby to the riverbank.

Description:

A small, dark diving duck clearly smaller than all other nearby waterfowl, which included Mallards, an American Wigeon, and a few Canvasback and Redheads. It was basically very dark gray or dark muddy brown overall but with distinctive white markings, the most prominent of which was on front of the face, consisting of a wide white face patch forward of and extending below the eye, and from which an indistinct white stripe extended toward the crown before fading quickly. It had a round spot on the side of the head behind the eye, and farther back from this spot, toward the nape, another white streak extended down the neck. Finally, a jagged white bar was in evidence on the side of the breast, visible on the resting bird forward of the wings, similar in position to the white bar on the side of an American Green-winged Teal. It had a rather small, grayish-green bill.

The bird was skittish when people moved nearby, but was otherwise unwary of quiet observers concealed in cars. It was heard calling once, a high and plaintively whistled squeaking sound.

Discussion:

Harlequin Ducks are very distinctive; the combination of distinctive facial markings and overall size of this bird eliminate superficially similar Long-tailed Duck and scoter species. Lack of the bold and tightly patterned white, blue, and rufous markings eliminate adult male Harlequin, but the beginnings of white neck and breast markings also eliminate female Harlequin of any age. The bird is an immature male Harlequin Duck.

Interestingly, an immature male Harlequin Duck was photographed on the Allegheny River in Warren, Warren County, in early Feb 2008. Based on photos of that bird (see <http://www.pabirds.org/PORC/HarlequinDuck.htm>), the Beaver bird is certainly a different individual. It lacks all white markings on the wings and back, unlike the Warren bird, which not only showed these markings but was just a little more cleanly patterned overall.

Prior experience:

I have seen four Harlequin Ducks in PA, two immature males and two adult females. I have also seen large numbers of this species on both coasts of North America.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*

Date of Sighting: 28 February 2008 to 4 March 2008

County : BEAVER

Location : NEW BRIGHTON

Observer(s): Mark Vass m.obs

Date of Submission: 2008

Submitted by: Geoff Malosh, Mike Fialkovich

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

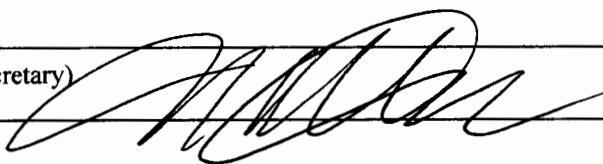
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut	X							
A. Guarente	X							
T. Johnson	X							
B. Coulter	X							
E. Witmer	X							
J. Heller	X							
G. Malosh	X							
TOTALS	7							
DECISION	X							

Comments: 7/0

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

8/30/08