

KING EIDER

Somateria spectabilis

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Location: Sunset Point at Presque Isle State Park, Erie Co., Pa.

Date: December 20, 2015

Time: 9:20 AM

Weather: Clear, wind south to about 10 mph, temp. 27 F

Distance from viewer: approximately ¼ mile

Optics: Kowa TSN 4 with variable objective lens set at 35X

Description: This description is basically identical to the Dec. 6 King Eider I recorded.

While conducting the waterbird count I spotted a large dark duck among a flock of about 150 Red-breasted mergansers moving west low over the water. As they got closer I lost the bird behind the densest part of the flock. Then when the merganser flock was straight out from me the eider came into view and I was able to identify the duck as a first cycle male King Eider.

It was quite robust with a relatively short stocky neck and had a blocky shaped head without a strong sloping forehead. The bill was orange and the rest of the head and neck were all dark. The breast was dirty buff and the remainder of the bird was sooty brown, except the under wing linings which were dirty white. The upper wings were unmarked sooty brown as the rest of the plumage. Common Eider was ruled out because the head shape was too steep in the front and not gradually sloping. Both dark-winged scoters were ruled out because of size, orange bill, and pale chest. This is the second first cycle male King Eider I have seen on my waterbird counts this season. Many of the King Eiders I have seen in the past on Lake Erie have been in Red-breasted Merganser flocks.