

Mute Swan

8 Apr 1985

S. Clay Co., IA

*Marion Brewer

P-0180, P-0184, P-0196, P-0197; IBL 55:61, 44, Peterjohn 1986

Record Number: 85-01

Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Marion Brewer

PHOTOGRAPHS

Marion Brewer, 8 Apr, P-0180

Eldon Kanago, Apr, P-0184 (IBL 56:10)

Judy Carlson, Apr, P-0196

The Laurens Sun, Apr, P-0197 (IBL 56:10)

LETTER

Bruce Peterjohn to Tom Kent, 10 July 1985

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 55:61

Peterjohn, B. 1986. Identification of immature swans. Iowa Bird Life 56:9-10.

Photographs: IBL 56:10 (P-0184, P-0197)

Records Committee: IBL 56:44

REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION

Tom Kent to Records Committee, 13 Sep 1993

VOTE (for Trumpeter Swan): 2-IV, 2-V, 3-VI

IV, Seems to be a second year bird, in which case feet should be yellow orange if Trumpeter, black if Tundra. Differences too subtle to sort out with data here. Are photos available and helpful?

VI, Documentation fits either Trumpeter or Tundra Swan. Photo might help. If Trumpeter, would be VI since it likely comes from the Minnesota population.

VI, Strong likelihood they were Minn. birds.

VI, No mention of head shape or profile. Tundra Swans hold neck erect and imm. Tundra in 2nd yr. would have grayish head and the bill would be turning to black possibly giving the "black-base" as described.

V, Not enough information to identify. Need detail on bill shape and position relative to eye. Need to see photos. Bill coloration in immatures variable and not diagnostic.

V, Lets see the photos. Nothing in the description looks diagnostic to me. Color at base of bill varies with age I think. Photos might reveal useful field mark in shape of bill. Interesting sighting.

REVOTE: Photograph (received from Brewer) circulated and discussed at meeting on 10/5/85. Determined to be immature Tundra Swan based on black feet and lack of black extending into eye (vote 7/0).

REVOTE (1993): 3 A-P Tundra, 2 A-P Mute, 1 A-P Trumpeter, 1 A-P Swan sp.

A-P Mute Swan, Bill shape and feathering of head eliminate Trumpeter Swan. If Peterjohn is correct (IBL 56:1), the pink on the bill in April eliminates Tundra Swan. This fieldmark was mentioned in the documentation, and can be seen in the first

photograph, second row. I think the amount of black at the base of the bill also noticeable in this photo favors Mute Swan. (Is there a category AE-P??)

A-P Swan sp., This may be an irresolvable problem. It's interesting that Peterjohn, our outside expert, thought this was a Mute and even used to photo to illustrate his article; the observer thought it was a Trumpeter, and the Records Committee thought it was a Tundra, the latter basing its conclusion on the black feet and the lack of black extending around the eye. All North American swans have black feet as adults, but I could find no information as to what age this transformation occurs. The bird in the photos appear to be an immature. The photos also seem to provide mixed evidence on the black not extending to the eye, and I am not convinced this is a clear diagnostic field mark. Simply, different photos suggest characteristics of different species: the way it holds the neck, slightly concave upper mandible, bill color, etc. While I am open to discussion on this one, for now, I'm only willing to go A-P for Swan species.

A-P Trumpeter Swan, Bill shape indicates Trumpeter. 1) straight angle upper mandible 2) white forehead extends anteriorly beyond eye. 3) dark base favor trumpeter.

A-P Mute Swan, Tundra Swans have black bills and have lost most of the dark on the neck and head by this date. The extensive amount of light in the bill and curved neck posture in some views makes this a Mute Swan.

85-01

13 September 1993

To: IOU Records Committee
From: Tom Kent
Re: Request for reconsideration of record

Record: 85-01 Mute Swan

Reason for request: Re-vote indicates that committee thought this was a Tundra Swan.

Comment: I find these swans very difficult. I think we should reevaluate this record and classify it correctly if we can.

Mute Swan P-0184
Larry Buether Game Farm, Webb,
Apr 1985 Eldon Kanago



Mute Swan P-0180
near Webb, Clay Co.
8 Apr 1985 Marion Brewer

Mute Swan P-0196
near Webb, Clay Co.
Apr 1985 Judy Carlson



Mute Swan P-0197
near Webb, Clay Co.
Apr 1985 The Laurens Sun



Mute Swan P-0184
Larry Buether Game Farm, Webb,
Apr 1985 Eldon Kanago

IDENTIFICATION OF IMMATURE SWANS

BRUCE PETERJOHN

Efforts to reintroduce Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) have complicated the identification of wintering swans in the Midwest. Immature swans are particularly difficult to identify. The standard field guides offer little assistance, because the differences in size and neck curvature that they emphasize may not be apparent on solitary birds. In the past young birds could be identified by the adults they were with, but now young trumpeters are being placed in nests of Mute Swans (*C. olor*) in Ontario. This article provides an approach to the identification of first year Tundra (*C. columbianus*), Mute, and Trumpeter Swans.

The Mute Swan has two color morphs determined by a sex-linked gene. The adults differ only in leg color (black in the typical morph and brown in the less common white or Polish morph). The immatures are readily separable since Polish swans are entirely white from the time of hatching, while the typical morph is washed with brown throughout the first year. An all white swan with an immature bill is a white phase Mute Swan.

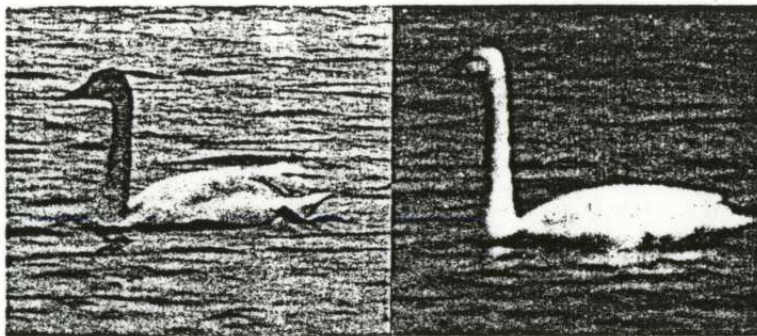
All three swan species undergo a similar molt sequence. Fall immatures arrive in juvenal plumage and molt into first basic plumage during winter and early spring. (After the first year, swans reach adult plumage and molt only once a year.) Immature Tundra Swans tend to molt earlier than the other species, providing a useful clue to the identification of mid-winter birds.

During the fall, when all three species have a uniformly brownish juvenal plumage, Mute Swans can be distinguished by their uniformly gray bills. Tundra and Trumpeter Swans both have dirty pink to reddish-pink bills with black tips. If the two species were together, the larger size of the trumpeter would be obvious. Otherwise, a solitary trumpeter would have to be identified by the flat bill and forehead profile and broad black facial skin where it meets the eye; tundras have rounded foreheads and narrow facial skin.

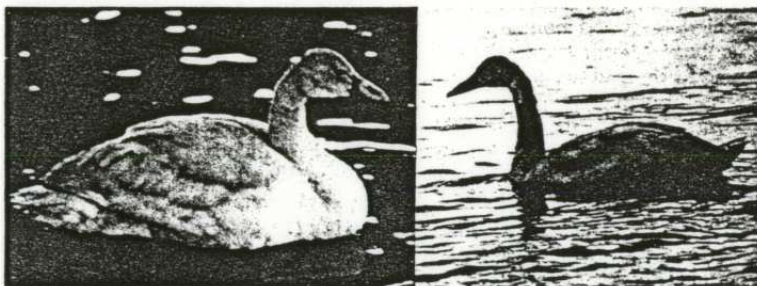
By January, most Tundra Swans have completed their first basic molt and have much whiter backs and wings than the other two species. While many Mute and Trumpeter Swans become lighter by mid-winter, they normally retain many brown feathers on the wings and back throughout the first year, although worn individuals can become fairly white by spring.

Bill colors also change during the winter. Mute Swans, in a period of a few weeks, acquire a pink or orange-pink bill that is similar to adults except for the absence of a black knob at the base. The bill color of Tundra and Trumpeter Swans changes much more gradually, darkening from dusky pink to gray mottled with pink to black. It is not unusual to observe immatures of these two species with some pink mottling on the bill during spring migration. In any event, mid-winter immature swans with white backs and wings will be Tundra Swans. Mute Swans will have some brown feathers in the upperparts with pinkish bills, while Trumpeter Swans generally have even darker upperparts and bill colors similar to Tundra Swans. In addition, the characteristic head shape and broad black facial skin of Trumpeter Swans is a useful clue.

Identification of immature swans is most difficult in mid-winter, because timing of molts is variable among the species and within individuals of each species. Swans with intermediate bill colors and mixed brown and white upperparts pose the most



Immature Mute Swan near Webb, Clay County, April 1985. Note straight neck (other photos showed it held in curved position) and light color (orange-yellow) of middle part of bill. Photos by The Laurens Sun (left) and Eldon Kanago (right).



Immature Mute Swan at Cedar Rapids, 31 December 1985. Note how front and back lighting create quite different appearances in the same bird. Photos by T. H. Kent.

difficult problems. In lingering winter birds it is useful to watch for changes in bill and body coloration.

By spring, the three species should be readily separable in the field. Only Mute Swans have pink bills. Both Tundra and Trumpeter Swans have mostly black bills; however, the backs and wings will be white in tundras and washed with brown in trumpeters. Head shape and facial skin differences will also be evident.

105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr., Westerville, OH 43081

105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081
10 July 1985

Dear Tom:

Many apologies for not responding sooner but I've been very busy finishing the spring season report for American Birds and working on our Breeding Bird Atlas project. My thoughts on some of the spring sightings from Iowa are as follows:

Trumpeter Swan: probably an immature Mute Swan based on the described bill characteristics.

Eurasian Wigeon: if the birds were correctly identified, they would have to be escapes. A flock of 5 would even be exceptional for the Pacific Northwest and unprecedented in the midwest. The species is not rare in captivity so it wouldn't be out of the question for all of them to have escaped together.

Ferruginous Hawk: definitely a Red-tailed Hawk based on the described characteristics.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: all of the mid-April or earlier reports trouble me. Semipalmateds are late migrants and normally don't appear in Ohio until the first week of May. I don't have an April sighting in the state. However, April Least retain portions of their basic plumage and can appear grayish-brown with dark legs. Any March Semipalmated report is probably a misidentification of a winter plumaged Least Sandpiper.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: definitely not!! The bird actually sounds like a California Gull (based on mantle color, leg color and bill features) but that identification is not definite (the details are too scant). Since the observers claim to have noticed different mantle colors between Herring and Ring-billed Gulls (!!), I wonder about the accuracy of this sighting. They have a lot to learn before they should start reporting unusual gulls.

By the way, I will also be in southern California during early September. I'm going on a pelagic trip out of San Diego on Sept. 7 (WFO trip) and will be birding the San Diego-Salton Sea-wherever there is something exceptional to chase in s. California area for several days before the trip. If you'll be in that area during that time and want to get together, let me know.

I'm off to se. Arizona for 10 days and a badly needed vacation. The birding has been slow here since spring migration ended but should begin to pick up as the shorebirds return. Keep in touch.

Sincerely,

Bruce

85-01

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

by the Records Committee

of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: Trumpeter Swan

DATE SEEN: 8 April 1985

SITE OF OBSERVATION: s. Clay County

OBSERVERS: Marion Brewer

DATE OF REVIEW: October 1985

METHOD OF REVIEW: Committee discussion

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: VI

COMMENTS: The written documentation originally submitted was considered inconclusive. The photograph supplied later indicated that the bird was an immature Tundra Swan, for these reasons:

- a. black legs (immature Trumpeter's are brownish-yellow)
- b. eye appears largely separated from the rear extension of the bill (looks to be part of bill in Trumpeter) (see diagram)
- c. upper rear extension of bill joins eyes almost directly (see diagram)
- d. bird is largely white (in April, immature Trumpeters are still rather brown).

These two species are often difficult to separate. Note that in the 3-volume "Master Guide" field guide, the picture labeled "adult Trumpeter" in fact shows an adult Tundra.

The opinions expressed here are based on the information available to the Committee and should not necessarily preclude an alternate interpretation by those who observed the bird firsthand.

Any action may be re-reviewed upon submission of additional evidence.

Explanation of Classification:

- I: labeled, diagnostic specimen, photograph, or recording available for review by the Committee.
- II: acceptable sight record documented independently by 3 or more observers
- III: acceptable sight record documented by 1 or 2 observers
- IV: probably correct record, but not beyond doubt
- V: record with insufficient evidence to judge
- VI: probably incorrect identification, escapee, or otherwise unacceptable record.

Classification is based on the highest category agreed upon by six of seven Committee members.



DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa - 85-01

What species? Trumpeter Swan How many? 1Location? 5 East of 71 on 37th ^(west of hill)
S. clay Co TK ~~field notes, 2 photos~~Type of habitat? Large farm pond, rolling hills most of which were in cultivationWhen? date(s): 4-8-1985 time: 2:15 pm to 2:30 pmWho? your name and address: Marion M. Brewer RR 2 Cherokee Ia. 51012others with you: Vernon Bairman

others before or after you: _____

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Large swan, body was white with immature coloring on head and neck, which was a dirty off white. Bill was pinkish in color with a black tip and base of bill (next to head). Black feet, high straight neck. was not observed in flight, was seen perched on a log that was just above the water. No voice was heard, it swam from one end of the pond to the other which was estimated to be about 4 to 5 acres. The swan was photographed.

Similar species and how eliminated: Was from the mute swan because of the straight neck and the Tundra swan because of the dark base of the bill. The wings were not held high like on the Mute swan.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Clear day, observed with a 15 x 45 spotting scope from a distance of estimated 75 yards sun was mostly overhead.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: * Tundra swan only

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Peterson, Golden, and Audubon field guides.

How long before field notes made? 4 hours this form completed? 18 hours

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240