

Masked Duck
14 Mar 1965
Forney Lake, Fremont Co., IA
Mr. and Mrs. Harold W. Whitmus
Whitmus 1966

Record Number: 81-HX
Classification: NA

REFERENCES

Whitmus, Mrs. H.V. 1966. Masked Duck in Iowa, a sight record.
IBL 36:55-56.

Musgrove and Musgrove 1977

VOTE (1981): 3-II, 2-V, 2-VI

V, Not experienced observers. If male, not all features seen.
Was it seen in flight. I'm not convinced.

III, good description.

VI, although a noted vagrant, description contains no definite
marks. Notes were not (apparently) taken on the spot.

VI, perhaps an escapee or misid.

III, 2 observers, 1 hr of observation at Forney. Good
description. Folded wing stripe seen. Dark head. Seems ok

V, The description seems good -- possibly influenced by books.
My major doubt is that the bird was in the open -- the Masked
Duck is extremely secretive. Also the date is very early. How
about a female Hooded Merganser? The Wisconsin record is in
November. Frankly, I don't really know how to treat this record
(V is being conservative).

81-HX
not reviewed

25 March

ms
3-28-65

Dear Fred:

A card yesterday from Russell Hays saying Harold had passed away. You had mentioned his hospital stay, but it's a shock.

Do you recall a Mr. and Mrs. Whitmus of Lincoln? I think they were at the Keokuk meeting, and possibly others. At any rate they seem to get around a lot and make ten or twelve trips a year to Forney's L. She writes that a couple of weeks ago they were there and at close range saw what had to be a Masked Duck. Said they studied it, and their books, including Peter Scott's "Coloured Key," for an hour. This southerner is a wanderer but don't think there are any other Iowa records. It was seen on one of the Fla censuses in 1963. She wrote a very knowledgeable letter and I would be inclined to accept. She said there wasn't any one else around at the time so there was no confirmation of their sight record. At her suggestion I wrote the local conservation officer to be on the lookout but figure it's a pretty remote chance.

Came home last Friday and things seem to be proceeding pretty routinely. Supposed to take it easy for a while (with this weather, what else?) and stay in town for 30 days so they can keep an eye on me.

Thoz

Brown

Whitmus, Mrs. H. V. 1966. Masked Duck in Iowa a sight record. Iowa Bird Life 36:55-56

Masked Duck in Iowa, A Sight Record—This detailed report of our findings on the Masked Duck mentioned in the Field Reports in the June 1965 issue of Iowa Bird Life (Vol. 35, p. 50) is long past due. When we arrived at Forney Lake March 14, 1965, at about one o'clock, there were hundreds of ducks there, mostly Mallards and Pintails, a few Common Mergansers, twelve Canada Geese came in an hour later, no Snows or Blues (we understand they came in late in the afternoon after we had gone) — and — one lonely little duck in the open water just in front of us.

My first thought was of a female Bufflehead because of its size and actions. On closer study I noticed there was NO white cheek spot and there was a LONG rather prominent HORIZONTAL white wing stripe (not the smaller white marking of the female Bufflehead). Ducks are my first love and I am quite familiar with the general markings of a great many species including scooters, old squaws, etc.

Harold and I watched the duck for over an hour. First we sat and discussed, as we watched through our binoculars, everything we could see about the duck — color, markings, actions, etc. This is a regular practice with us. Then, while Harold still watched, I turned to our set of books which we keep in the car at all times. Reading and checking, both Peterson and Pough, we made our identification. Pough has a good illustration of what we saw: The duck had a pointed tail, usually pointed upwards, which it wiggled in unusual fashion; it was shaped like a Ruddy Duck, had a bill the color of a Ruddy Duck; it dived and acted like a Ruddy Duck, but was not as large as a Ruddy. It had no white cheek spot; its head appeared blackish, it showed a dark body to the waterline (except for the long horizontal white stripe). However, when it rose in the water before making a dive, as it was doing constantly, it showed a white belly, not breast. This white was visible only when it rose upwards before making the dive. Because of the lack of real bright sunlight, the duck did not appear as reddish brown as the plate in our book shows. However, its size, shape, bill, tail, coloring and actions (and the white belly only) led us to our conclusions. Upon returning home we checked our many bird books. In Peter Scott's Coloured Key to the Wildfowl of the World we found the exact picture of the little duck we saw. Later we found it in Alex. Sprunt's (IV) book of Gamebirds and Peterson's Guide to the Birds of Texas. Peterson and Pough, et al, say it is a wanderer, having been found in Wisconsin, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Vermont. When at St. Mark's Refuge near Tallahassee in 1963 we looked for it as we were told it had been seen there. It was reported from West Palm Beach on their 1963 Christmas count. It is casual in lower Texas. MRS. HAROLD V. WHITMUS, 5800 Saylor St., Lincoln, Nebraska.

Musgrove, J. W. and M. R. Musgrove. 1977. Waterfowl in Iowa 5th ed. Des Moines, State Conservation Commission. p 112

MASKED DUCK, *Oxyura dominica* LINNAEUS. According to Woodward H. Brown in *An Annotated List of the Birds of Iowa* (1971), Mrs. H. Whitmus reported observation of a duck having the field marks of the masked duck at Forney Lake in Fremont County on March 14, 1965. The masked duck is a resident of northern South America, Panama, Costa Rica, and the West Indies, and there are a few records of its breeding in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida.