

King Eider
17 Nov 1986
Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo Co., IA
James Hansen
Hansen 1987, Kent 1987, ISU #

Record Number: 93-GE
Classification: A-S

SPECIMENS

Iowa State University

PHOTOGRAPHS

Hansen, J. L. and Dinsmore, J. J., P-0206 (IBL 57:93, 94)

REFERENCES

Hansen, J. L. 1987. King Eiders at Clear Lake. IBL 57:94
Photographs: IBL 57:93, 94 (P-0206)

VOTE: 5 A-S

A-S, The photographs of the specimens show the diagnostic relationship of facial feathers to bill as outlined by Hansen. One bird is an immature male and the other a female./thk



Immature male King Eider, Clear Lake, 8 November 1986. Photo by J. L. Hansen.

bodies, and white breasts. The male shot by Hansen at Clear Lake (reported in this issue) would appear to be at least a second winter bird—its body and wing feathers are almost black, the breast is white, the head is quite dark, and the bill is very pale colored. I have seen immature Common Eiders in the Aleutian Islands in May that have a similar appearance at a distance. A detailed description of elder plumages is given by Palmer (1976).

Although it is important to determine the age and sex before identifying an elder as to species, the head profile and feathering in relation to the bill are constant and useful features for immatures and females. King Eiders have a rounded head, slight bump at the forehead, thin bill tip, and centrally placed eye (Figures 1, 3, 4, 6; also see Hansen 1987). Common Eiders have a very pronounced straight forehead, heavy bill tip, and eye near the top of the head (Figures 3, 5). When seen head on, King Eiders have a bifurcated upper mandible with feather extending down the culmen for some distance (Figure 4; see also Hansen 1987). This feature is easily seen on specimens, but is hard to see in the field. From the side, the feathering between the upper and lower mandibles extends into the upper mandible nearly to the nostril in the Common Eider, but not as far in the King

(Figures 3, 4, 5, 6; also see Hansen 1987).

King Eiders reported in this issue provide the fifth and sixth substantiated records for Iowa. The previous records have been reviewed (Newton and Kent 1981, Dinsmore et al. 1984). A previously unpublished photograph of one of these records was found in the I.O.U files (Figure 6). All of the birds were first seen between 7 and 18 November. These records comprise six specimens and two photographed birds. Five birds were immature males and three were apparently immature females. There is also one unsubstantiated sight record (Dinsmore et al. 1984).

I reviewed records of eiders in the Midwest as published in books covering bird distribution in nearby states and as bold-faced in *Audubon Field Notes and American Birds*. King Eiders are seen in the Midwest in most years (average 2 to 3 sightings per year); two-thirds occur in November and December, and two-thirds are on the Great Lakes. A few arrive by late October and some are found in winter and early spring.

The occurrence of Common Eider in Iowa is less well substantiated. A mounted specimen, now lost, was of an apparent female taken south of Sioux City on 1 November 1901. The specimen was examined by an expert and determined to be a Common Eider based on bill characteristics (Dumont 1934). Three other records of this species (Musgrove and Musgrove 1977) are unsubstantiated.

In reviewing Midwest records, I was surprised to find that there were more than half as many Common Eiders as compared to Kings. Without an exhaustive effort to track down details of these records, it is difficult to be sure how many might be misidentified. At least two of the Iowa specimens of King Eider were initially misidentified. The Common Eider records have a seasonal and geographic distribution similar to those of the King Eider.

It is likely that King Eider occurs much more frequently in Iowa than the few records indicate. The likelihood of Common Eider occurring in Iowa is much more difficult to judge. The identification of immature eiders is diffi-

EIDERS IN THE MIDWEST

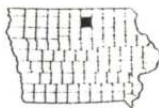
LITERATURE CITED

- Anonymous. 1986. The De Soto NWR eiders. Nebraska Bird Review 54:81.
 Dinsmore, J. J., et al. 1984. Iowa Birds. Ames: Iowa State University Press.
 Dalton, P. 1934. Iowa specimen of American Eider re-determined as Pacific Eider. Wilson Bull. 46:203.
 Newton, M. C., and T. H. Kent. 1981. Fifth record of King Eider for Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 51:126-128.
 Musgrove, J. W., and M. R. Musgrove. 1977. Waterfowl in Iowa, Fifth Edition. Des Moines: State Conservation Commission.
 Palmer, R. S. 1976. Handbook of North American Birds. Vol 2. New Haven: Yale University Press.
 Petersen, P. C. 1972. Another King Eider record for Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 42:50.
 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240

cult, but not impossible, particularly if they can be observed at close range and photographed or specimens can be obtained. Eiders that are shot in the fall by hunters should be preserved in their entirety and saved for study. If this is not possible, they should be photographed from all angles and sexed.

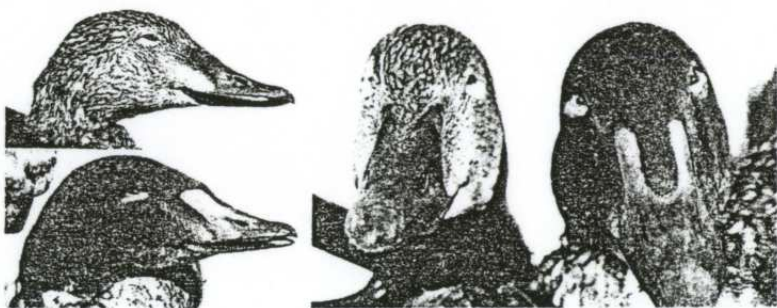
KING EIDERS AT CLEAR LAKE

JAMES L. HANSEN



On 17 November 1986, I was duck hunting on the west end of Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo County, with Rick Poole and Ron Glanville. A very strong, early cold front had hit northern Iowa on 8 November, and for the next week temperatures were as much as 30 degrees below normal. Area marshes were frozen on 10 November, and Clear Lake froze over on 13 November, except for the small hole at the end of the sandbar where we had our decoys and the two small holes at the other end of the lake. The ice was already two to three inches thick on the day of our hunt. Late in the morning we saw a flock of four ducks flying a few feet over the ice toward us. As they got closer, I knew that they were not ducks that I was accustomed to seeing. I thought of scoters or eiders. We killed 2 of the 4 ducks, and the two survivors must have left Clear Lake due to lack of open water. We identified the ducks as eiders, and they were later found to be King Eiders, based on reference books and consultation with Jim Dinsmore at Iowa State University. In contrast to Common Eider, the feathering on top of the bill of King Eider extends nearly to the nostril, while feathers on the sides of the bill do not come as close to the nostril as on the Common Eider. One of the birds was a second-year male and is preserved at Iowa State University. The other bird had the appearance of a female. The head was preserved.

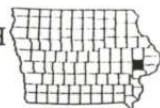
103 South 17th St., Clear Lake, IA 50428



Immature King Eider specimens taken at Clear Lake, 8 November 1986. Note feather extension on culmen, distance of nostril from facial feathers, and head profile. Photos by J. J. Dinsmore.

EURASIAN TREE SPARROW AT WEST BRANCH

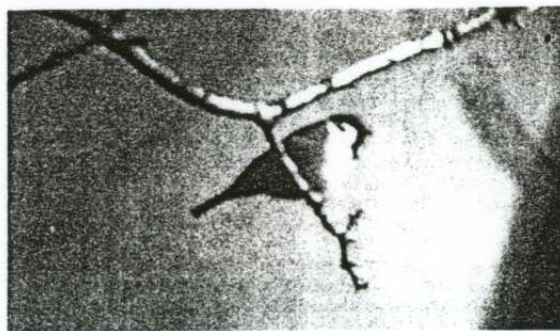
SALLY VEAL



I first observed two Eurasian Tree Sparrows in my back yard in West Branch about 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 14, 1987. As I was filling my bird feeders I noticed two birds in the silver maple behind the house that at first glance appeared to be House Sparrows. They had a neat appearance, were more active than House Sparrows, and were not associating with the flock of House Sparrows near the bird feeders. Even without binoculars I was able to see the black spots on the birds' faces. I did not see them again until about noon. At that time I was able to observe the birds through binoculars and identify them as Eurasian Tree Sparrows. I could clearly see the black spots on the cheeks, the brown caps and small black bibs of each bird.

The birds spent most of the afternoon close to the house. They investigated the hollow crossbar on my clothesline post. Eventually one bird was able to squeeze inside the post. (The slightly larger House Sparrows have attempted this but were never successful.) This bird spent much of the time inside the post. The other bird looked inside but did not try to move in. It fed in a weedy patch nearby and also picked up seeds that had fallen from my thistle feeder. Occasionally it would peek inside the post at the first bird. At one point in the afternoon both birds flew upward from the clothesline post. They faced each other either touching or nearly touching as they fluttered up about ten feet above the post. They then separated and chased each other for about thirty feet while flying very close to the ground. After this activity one bird returned to the inside of the post and remained there for most of the afternoon while the other bird fed nearby. The bird in the post was harassed by three female House Sparrows that tried to squeeze inside. It pecked at the House Sparrows but did not give up its position, and the House Sparrows eventually left it alone.

512 East Orange St., West Branch, IA 52358



Eurasian Tree Sparrow, West Branch, 21 March 1987. Photo by P. C. Petersen.

93-GE