

Eurasian Wigeon

1 Apr 1985

w. of Spirit L., Dickinson Co., IA

*LaVonne Foote

also 04/02; IBL 55:61; 56:44

Record Number: 85-02
Classification: A-E

DOCUMENTATION

LaVonne Foote

LETTERS

Bruce Peterjohn to Tom Kent, 10 July 1985

Doug Harr to T. H. Kent, 25 July 1985

Thomas H. Kent to Michael C. R. Edgell, 5 Aug 1985

Michael C. R. Edgell to T. H. Kent, 5 Sep 1985

Bruce Peterjohn to Tom Kent, 5 Oct 1985

VOTE: 6-III, 1-VI

III, I visisted that pond 3 days earlier. Wish I had looked more carefully.

VI, 5 birds is very unusual. Could they be escapes?

III, Presume observers not independent.

III, Perhaps this accidental will eventually approach a more regular status with more obervers "out there" monitoring waterfowl migrations.

III, assumption that birds were wild.

III, ID is OK. Status? Date of spring migrants in Iowa Birds are 13 Apr, 13 May, 18 Apr. This seems to fit in.

REVOTE (at meeting, 5 Oct 1985, with letters from Peterjohn and Edgell which dealt with possibility of escapes): 5-III, 1-IV, 1-V.

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 Leasts 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,

B. me

85-02

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July 25, 1985

T.H. Kent
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Dear Tom:

Just got your note about the Eurasian Wigeons seen in Dickinson County this spring. I don't really know of anyone keeping exotic waterfowl in the area right now, but I'll see if I can run anything down through the local conservation officers.

Up until a few years ago, the Sather Family (Sather Cookie Company) at Round Lake Minnesota had quite a collection of exotic waterfowl, but I believe their operations with wildlife were dropped some time ago, due to some problems with Minnesota's DNR, I believe. Anyway, that would be roughly 15 mile west and 10 miles north of the location where the 5 wigeon were seen this spring. Other than that I'm afraid I cannot tell you much else for the time being. I will let you know if I find anything else on the subject.

My summer, as yours, has been a bit short on birding. I have been doing a survey block for the breeding bird atlas project, and picked up a nest of Loggerhead Shrikes in Lyon County, but other than that have not seen anything of real great interest. Got a new camera and 400 mm lens last year, but have not really had much time to do a lot of bird photography with it yet. Hope to remedy that by this time next year.

Sincerely,

Doug Harr
Wildlife Mgmt. Biologist
301 $\frac{1}{2}$ 1st Ave.
Rock Rapids, Iowa 51246

copy
85-02

August 5, 1985

Michael C. R. Edgell
Department of Geography
University of Victoria
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada V8W 2Y2

Dear Mr. Edgell:

I have read your article on the movements of the Eurasian Wigeon in the Journal of Biogeography several times with great interest.

Now we have a practical problem that you might be able to help us with. On April 1, 1985 3 male and 2 female Eurasian Wigeon were seen in northwest Iowa near Spirit Lake. The Regional Editor for American Birds claims that these are most certainly escaped birds, as there is no precedent for a group this large in our area. I'm inclined to agree with him, but would like to have more facts.

From the numbers in your paper, the vast majority of sightings must be of single individuals. When more than one was seen, what were the group sizes. How many times have several birds been seen together in the midwest?

Do you have any information on Eurasian Wigeon escaping from captivity in North America? What is your opinion on the likelihood of these birds being escapes? As usual, an inquiry turned up no definite leads on captive birds.

Would you be willing to share the references to the Mississippi and Central Flyway sightings? This would save us a lot of time in trying to get a better feel for these questions.

Any help you can give us will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Kent
Secretary,
Iowa Ornithologists' Union
Records Committee



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September 5, 1985

Mr. T.H. Kent, Secretary
 Iowa Ornithologists' Union
 Records Committee
 211 Richards Street
 IOWA CITY, IA 52240
 U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Kent:

Your letter of August 5 was an intriguing and interesting one. I shall try to answer you queries as fully as possible, although I am not sure how many "facts" I can supply!

I can understand the excitement generated by the sighting on April 1, given the paucity of wigeon records for Iowa. However, I am strongly inclined, unlike your Regional Editor, to regard these birds as naturally occurring individuals rather than escapees. While there may be no precedent for a group that large in your area, if the emerging pattern of the species in North America over the past two decades is considered, then there is ample justification (although no absolute proof) for rejecting the suspicion that they were escapees.

You are correct in surmizing (and I was remiss for not emphasizing in the paper) that most sightings -- at least away from the Pacific Flyway, are of individual birds. Group sightings are, however, by no means unusual, and in B.C. (admittedly the Eurasian wigeon capital of North America!) sightings of two to three birds are as common-place as single sightings. Groups of six to ten individuals are reported each year from many locations in the province, and to a lesser extent in the Pacific Northwest. In the eastern (intermontane) portion of the Pacific Flyway, and the western section of the Central Flyway, sightings of two to three birds have been recorded almost annually from a number of locations in the past six or seven years.

Particularly relevant to the Iowa sighting are ~~two to three individual~~
 group Spring sightings ^{of 2-3 birds} in the past few years from Montana and southern Alberta, and a few from Saskatchewan. Most of the Central (and Mississippi) Flyway

Mr. T.H. Kent
September 5, 1985
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records are in Spring, and since the paper was written, further Spring records have begun to come in from northern Alberta, Saskatchewan, Yukon and the Northwest Territories due to increased observer coverage.

There is no doubt that there is a strong movement of "Palearctic" species (and not just wigeon) into North America via eastern Alaska and the Central Flyway. What is intriguing is that for wigeon, most Central Flyway records are in the Spring, with a relative paucity in the Fall. I am not sure how to explain this, as male wigeon are easily identifiable by early Fall. Perhaps Spring records in the Central Flyway are augmented by aberrant east coast visitors redirecting their return via the Great Plains/Alaska rather than Iceland. But I also suspect a significant Alaska → Central Flyway → Alaska Fall/Spring movement for the following reasons.

Relative to the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, there is a much larger area and far fewer observers in the Central Flyway. The much greater abundance of records on the two coasts, I am sure, reflects to some extent the much more concentrated habitat availability and observer effort relative to the situation in the Central Flyway. Many birds occurring in the Central Flyway simply are not recorded because there are fewer observers spread over a larger area. Support for this idea is given by the wigeon records from the northern Prairies/Yukon/Northwest Territories area that have resulted from recently extended observer activities in those areas. These records, in my interpretation, suggest a marked return Spring movement of wigeon via the northern Central Flyway and eastern Alaska. The Iowa April sighting fits right into this pattern.

I'm afraid that this response has been more descriptive than substantive, and that due to time limitations, I have not been able to ferret out specific records for you. However, if you peruse the Spring Regional Reports for the past ten years, concentrating on the Prairie, Northwest Territories-Yukon Central Flyway and perhaps ~~western~~ Great Lakes areas, then you should get a better feel for the problem.

Unfortunately, there is virtually no information on the status of captive Eurasian wigeon. However, even in the absence of that negative/positive information, I still regard the Iowa sighting to be of naturally occurring individuals.

Yours sincerely,

Michael C. R. Edgell

Michael C.R. Edgell
Associate Professor

85-02
105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081
5 Oct. 1985

Dear Tom,

Sounds like the remainder of your California trip was productive. Its too bad the Davidson Seamount trip was poor but I would imagine that the juvenile Little Stint partially compensated for both of the pelagic trips.

I was not very impressed with the information in Dr. Edgell's letter. Excuse me for not commenting at great length on his speculative notions. However, I have several remarks as a rebuttal:

1. I suggest you examine the migration patterns of Am. Wigeons in Bellrose's Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America. These patterns are based on banding records and observations, not speculative notions. Since most Eur. Wigeons are associated with Americans, I would expect their movement patterns to be similar. My impression from reports in American Birds is that spring Eur. Wigeon are migrating from the east coast across the Great Lakes region and then proceed in a northwest direction (to Alaska? to Canada?).
2. His notion of " a significant Alaska-Central Flyway-Alaska" movement is not substantiated in fact. Even if the birds were undetected in migration, at least some would be discovered in their Texas wintering grounds. Given the considerable birding activity in Texas and the scarcity of Eur. Wigeon records from the state, I doubt that "significant" numbers are being overlooked. Instead, the scarcity of records from the Central Flyway is a real phenomenon..
3. Comparing records from Montana, Alberta and Saskatchewan with sightings farther east is absurd! Waterfowl migration patterns, wintering grounds and possibly breeding areas are quite different between that region and Iowa (see Bellrose). Large numbers of waterfowl migrate from California through that region which could explain the greater numbers of Eur. Wigeon records.

My treatment of the Iowa record as probable escapes is based on the following facts. In the Great Lakes area, most Eur. Wigeon records are of small numbers mixed among large numbers of Am. Wigeon at areas where waterfowl congregate. The Iowa sighting does not fit this pattern of vagrancy, being by themselves in a small marsh by the side of a road. While a flock of 5 is not out of the question in the Great Lakes, the circumstances surrounding the Iowa sighting are suspicious. Given this uncertainty, I admittedly took a conservative stand. Given the absence of similar sightings elsewhere in the midwest, I felt such an unprecedented record should be beyond reproach. Had the birds been observed among a large wigeon flock at Forney Lake or any other waterfowl staging area in Iowa, I would feel differently about the record. Lastly, Eur. Wigeon are not unusual in captivity. Both large waterfowl breeders in Ohio that I have contact with have several pairs and I am

Tom Kent
5 Oct. 1985
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told they can be "regularly obtained" (whatever that means in the terminology of captive waterfowl breeders).

The Sage Thrasher record is a good sighting although I'm a little surprised there aren't a few more sightings from Iowa and Missouri. The birding has been very dull here, only a "possible" Black-headed Grosbeak which I haven't received the full details. Hope some more good birds turn up in Iowa this fall.

Sincerely,

Bruce

85-02

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

by the Records Committee

of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: Eurasian Wigeon

DATE SEEN: 1 April 1985

SITE OF OBSERVATION: Dickinson County

OBSERVERS: LaVonne Foote

DATE OF REVIEW: October 1985

METHOD OF REVIEW: Committee discussion

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: IV

COMMENTS: While there is no problem with the identification of these birds, the Committee was concerned about whether the birds were indeed wild birds. Because there was some doubt, the record was judged a IV, rather than a III.

There is considerable debate in interior States and Provinces about the status of Eurasian Wigeon seen there. It is generally accepted that a few may migrate with American Wigeon, especially in spring. The conservative position is to accept only records of one or a very few birds, usually males, which are found with large groups of migrating American Wigeon. This is the position the IOU Records Committee has taken in this case. Fall Eurasian Wigeon, individuals or flocks, especially unaccompanied by American Wigeon, are suspected by most authorities to be escapes.

The most doubt regarding your record resulted from the fact that there were 5 Eurasian Wigeon, and no American Wigeon were said to be with them. Even though this was a spring record, the flock size and absence of American Wigeon left enough doubt that the Committee decided on a IV for the record. Eurasian Wigeon are not uncommon in captivity in the midwest.

Please continue to report occurrences of Eurasian Wigeon, as at some time in the future breeding and regular migration in the North American interior may be proved, and records such as yours may be re-examined in that light.

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

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available for review by the Committee

- I: 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.

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Eurasian Wigeon 2. Number: 3 Males 2 Females
 In a marsh about 7 miles west of Spirit Lake, Iowa
3. Location on Highway No 9 - on the south side of the road
4. Date: April 1 and April 2 - 1985 5. Time Bird seen: 4/1/85 - 1:00 PM to 1:30 PM
4/1/85 - 3:30 PM to 4:05 PM
4/2/85 - 11:21 AM to 12:15 PM
6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field): About 17 inches in length.
Males: Rusty red head and neck, with a buffy forehead stripe
pinkish breast, gray body, black under tail, white patch on wing.
blueish bill with black on tip.
Females: Rusty brown head + neck.
7. Description of voice, if heard: no voice heard
8. Description of behavior: Swimming in marsh and Preening - allowing us very good observation.
9. Habitat - general:
 specific: marsh
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
American wigeon - Easy to tell apart as male colors are so different.
11. Distance (how measured)? Estimated about 200 feet 12. Optical equipment: see back of page
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): see back of page
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
First time to see an Eurasian wigeon, however I see American wigeons each spring in April.
15. Other observers:
see back page
16. Did the others agree with your identification? yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: see back of page
same as No 15
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
Books and illustrations confirmed our identification, however we checked in all our books, as we wanted to find out everything that we could about the Eurasian wigeon, since it was a first for all of us - I have listed the books we consulted on the back of this page.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? April 3-1985

LaVonne FooteAddress: RR 7248 Marble Beach

Signature

Date: 4/3/85 Spirit LakeCity, State: Iowa 51360

12 - Optical equipment
2 pair Bushnell 7x35 Insta Focus binoculars 85-2
Sears 10x50 Extra wide angle binocular
10x30x Zoom Telescope

13. Light: Excellent light all 3 times -
Marsh is on South west corner - Observed when
sun was in the east and when it was in
the west while the wigwags were in the south
and south west corner.

15. Other observers: -

Marie Thunder - Heather Ridge - Milford, Ia 51351
Jan Ortmeier - Emerson Bay - Milford, Ia 51351
La Vonne Gorte RR 7248 Marble Beach - Spirit Lake, Ia 51360

17. Same as No 15

18. Books consulted: -

Birds of North America "Golden" - Robbins, Bruen, Zim, Singer
Field Guide to the Birds - Roger Tory Peterson
Did further study, checking at home the night of April 1 -
returned on April 2 - and were able to observe again.
Further checking + study of this species in
Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds by John Terres
Waterfowl in Iowa - State Conservation Commission
Ducks - Geese - Swans of North America - Frank C. Bellrose
Audubon Society "Master Guide to Birding" John Farrand Jr. Editor
Birds of North America - National Geographic Society
When we checked on April 3 - the ducks had moved on.