

Black Scoter  
26 Oct 1984  
Le Claire, Scott Co., IA  
\*Bendorf,\*Myers,\*F. Moore,\*G. White  
IBL 54:110; 55:56, Bendorf 1985

Record Number: 84-22  
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Carl J. Bendorf, 26 Oct  
Robert K. Myers, 27 Oct  
Francis L. Moore, 27 Oct  
Gerald White, 29 Oct

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 54:110  
Bendorf, C. J. 1985. Black Scoters on Mississippi River. IBL  
55:31-32.  
Records Committee: IBL 55:56

VOTE: 7-II

II, Good description.  
II, saw birds.  
II, Apparently the same bird or birds each time.  
II, good description

Bendorf, C. J. 1985. Black Scoters on Mississippi River.  
Iowa Bird Life 55:31-32.

84-22

Black Scoters on Mississippi River — Beginning in mid-October, I had been hearing reports on both the Chicago and Minnesota bird hotlines of large numbers of scoters, especially Black and Surf. In the late morning of 26 October 1984, these reports were in the back of my mind as I drove along the Mississippi River just north of Davenport. The river was covered with hundreds of decoys set out by hunters, but I had yet to see a live bird. About one mile north of LeClaire, I finally saw two birds diving and swimming. After getting them in my scope I noted the following details: Size was that of a nearby scaup, plumage was all black with the exception of a clearly demarcated solid gray area on the lower cheek which extended down the side of the neck. The bill was dark and relatively small and held level to the water. The forehead was rounded and steep. When one bird raised up to stretch its wings I saw the wings were all black and the belly was a gray brown color.

As I watched these two birds, four more swam in to join them. All six birds were identical. By this time I had concluded these were six Black Scoters. After checking the field guides later, I could not determine whether these were immature males or adult females.

Jim Fuller of Iowa City found all six birds in the same spot the next morning. As he was watching them a motorized duck blind came by, shots rang out, and only 4 birds took off and flew downstream. On Monday 29 October, Gerald White of Muscatine, saw just one bird about ½ mile downstream. If accepted this would represent the 11th documented record for Black Scoter in Iowa. Besides those listed in IOWA BIRDS (1984) there are the following recent records:

One female shot at Amana Lake in fall 1980 (IBL 53:98)

One female at Colfax on 11 November 1983 (IBL 53:98)

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It is interesting to note that, with only one exception, all records of Black Scoter for which the sex was noted have been female birds (Dinsmore, et al. 1984). It seems to be difficult to distinguish females from immature males. Unless it is only adult female Black Scoters that wander to Iowa, some immature males are possible being misidentified as females.

Both Surf and White-winged Scoters were reported to the Iowa Birdline during the week following this sighting. As both Chicago and Minnesota birders were reporting larger than normal numbers of scoters at about this same time, it does seem we get some "overflow" birds in Iowa.

#### REFERENCES

Dinsmore, J. J., et al. 1984 Iowa Birds. Ames: Iowa State University Press., p. 88-89.

CARL J. BENDORF, 825 7th Ave., Iowa City, IA. 52240

BIRD DOCUMENTATION FORM

CARL J. BENDORF  
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IOWA CITY IA 52240

SPECIES: BLACK SCOTER NUMBER: 6  
LOCATION: 1 mile N. of LeClaire COUNTY: Scott  
DATE: 26 October 1984 TIME: 10:15 AM TO 10:35 AM

HABITAT: In Mississippi River. Few other live birds in area, but many decoys set out by hunters.

DESCRIPTION: As I was scanning the decoys, I noticed two dark birds swimming and regularly diving. I noted the following details: Overall length in water about that of a scaup species swimming nearby. Overall completely dark black/brown bird with exception of a gray cheek area which covered side of face below eye and extended down side of neck. This gray area was fairly sharply demarcated and was quite easy to see. It also made the crown and back of neck of bird look very dark in contrast. The wings were all black as was the rump. When one bird rose up in the water to stretch wings the belly appeared to be lighter.

The head and neck were held slightly leaning forward. The head was very rounded and the forehead was rounded with a small dark bill held level to the water.

As I watched, the first two birds were joined by 4 more which were identical in plumage to the first two. All six swam leisurely, dove periodically and preened a bit. I did not see them fly and left them where they were.

I am not sure whether these were females or immature males. The 1st winter male might have had a greenish area at the base of the bill and been overall less blackish. On the other hand, the lighter belly seen on the one bird would suggest immature male. I did not see the bellies of the other five birds.

SIMILAR SPECIES--COMMENTS: Surf Scoter is another all dark bird, but it would have a much larger bill that extends on the same angle as a flattened forehead. The definite gray cheek and throat are not present on Surf Scoter. Female Ruddy ducks should be much browner and again have a flattened forehead in line with a larger bill. Black wings eliminate White-winged Scoter.

AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT OF OTHERS: Jim Fuller of Iowa City found six birds at same location the next morning (27 October). As he watched a motorized duck blind came by, shots rang out, and only four birds took off flying downstream and out of sight.

LIGHT CONDITIONS: Gray overcast, but fairly good light.

DISTANCE: 75 yards (Estimated) EQUIPMENT: 20 X scope

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILAR SPECIES: Similarly plumaged bird seen November 1983 at Colfax. Also seen on Lake Michigan several years ago.

REFERENCES, PERSONS CONSULTED BEFORE WRITING DESCRIPTION: NONE

FIELD NOTES MADE? 5 minutes THIS FORM DONE? two days



What species? Black Scoter (Mehnitia nigra) How many? 1Location? Le Claire, Ia - approx 1 mi north of townType of habitat? Mississippi RiverWhen? date(s): Oct. 27 time: 9:30 AM In view for less than 5 minWho? your name and address: Robert K. Myers 1236 Sylvia Ave. Waterloo, IowaOthers with you: Francis MooreOthers before or after you: Carl Borden found birds on Oct. 26 - saw them earlier on Oct. 27 Dr. Tim Fuller

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.

The duck was first seen in flight, ~~and~~ flight was swift and very low - just above water. I noticed the entire dorsal side was very dark - blackish brown. The <sup>side of</sup> dorsal primaries ~~were~~ <sup>was</sup> lighter than rest of wing or back being more brownish.

The bird then landed in some decoys but was very alert keeping its neck very straight. The back, hind neck, sides, and crown were the same blackish-brown color. The cheek area and sides of neck and throat was whitish - (<sup>light</sup> gray). It was either an immature or ♀ and I believe a ♀ because no lighter areas were seen on sides and the cheek patch was very vivid. There were no other ducks around for size comparison - but judging from the decoys it was fairly good size. (mallard size approx.)

Similar species and how eliminated: Duck was longer than ruddy duck. No other scoter shows the combination of all dark body and light cheeks and neck.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

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

It was a gray day with light showers. Bird was est. at 200 yd. -

I used a 20x scope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: This is my first black scoter and I have seen only one white-winged.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Francis + I had the Nat. Geographic Guide with us

How long before field notes made? on spot this form completed? 1 day

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



What species? Black Scoter (Melanitta nigra) How many? 1 ♀Location? .4 mi N. of Le Claire, Scott Co., IA along <sup>U.S.</sup> Hwy 67 on Mississippi River.Type of habitat? Open water of Mississippi River.When? date(s): October 27, 1984 time: 9:30 a.m. to 9:33 a.m.Who? your name and address: Francis L. Moore, 336 Fairfield St., Waterloo, IA 50703others with you: Bob Myersothers before or after you: Carl Bendorf, Jim Fuller before

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.

Bob Myers and I were looking for some Scoters reported from October 26 at this location. There were hundreds of decoy ducks and geese out on the river but no live ones that we could see. As we were scoping the decoys I noticed a dark, large duck flying down river. As we watched the bird through our binoculars the bird landed in with some of the decoys. The bird landed in with the decoys and was extremely alert with its head held very high and always looking around. The bird was mostly black in coloration with a whitish colored area that extended from the eye area downward through the chin, cheek, throat and side of the neck. The bill was black. The ~~bill~~ rest of the bird's body was blackish (breast, sides, back, tail and upper surface of the wings. The bird flew after sitting on the water for a short period of time. The ~~flight feathers~~ flight feathers were lighter in color, a grayish (dark) color while in flight. The sides were black which would indicate a female and not an immature bird. The bird's head was rounded and not sloping as a White-winged or Surf Scoters head would be.

The bird's flight pattern was swift and fairly direct as it ran a gauntlet of hunters down river. The bird flew just above the top of the water with its wing-tips possibly hitting the water as it flew. No voice was heard.

Similar species and how eliminated: White-winged Scoter has <sup>white</sup> speculum and two light colored patches on head in female; Surf Scoter female also has two light colored patches below and in front and behind the eye but no <sup>white</sup> speculum as in white-winged. Black duck has shape of puddle duck this bird did not. White-winged and Surf Scoters also have a more sloped bill and not as rounded a head as this bird.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

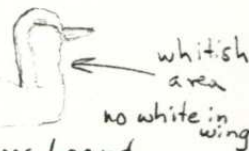
If yes, explain:

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

Cloudy, otherwise excellent viewing conditions. Seen from approx. 200 yd. using Leitz 10x40 binoculars and 20x60 Bushnell Space Master telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen many Black Scoter, White-winged Scoter and Surf Scoter along Atlantic Coast in Virginia.References and persons consulted before writing description: NoneHow long before field notes made? time of sighting this form completed? 7 hrs.

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



Documentation of Black Scoter Number seen (ome)

Where; Mississippi River, 1/2 mi. above Quarry Rd. at Le Claire, IA

Habitat: Open river with residential area on Iowa shore.

When Oct. 29, 1984 from 3:50pm to 4:30pm.

Who: Gerald White 1505 E. 5th. St. Muscatine, IA. 52761  
Noone was with me but Carl Bendorf of Iowa City, IA and Peter Petersen of Davenport, IA observed Black Scoter at this location on Oct. 26, 1984.

Description: The bird was floating near a small group of decoys and it would alternate between sleeping and holding its head up to check out passing outboard boats. As it moved around I was able to note the following features. "Round head, dark bill with no marks, dark eyes, short neck, a body that seemed wide for its length." I estimated the bird to be slightly smaller than a Mallard Duck. At times it would hold its tail up. (Color) "The head was very dark, nearly black, from the bill over the top and part way down the back of the neck where it faded into a dark brown. It also faded into lighter tones at a point slightly below the eye. The face and the front and side of the neck was much lighter tone (nearly gray). The wing, back, and tail were dark brown. The sides were lighter tones turning darker near the breast. The legs and feet were very dark or black".

Similar Species: Ruddy Duck, the check color would have been confined to the head or there might have been a line below the eye.

Viewing conditions: Bright sun on the bird, while to my back. Bushnell Spacemaster Zoom lens from est. 120 yds..

Life bird.

References: Golden at site, Audubon Master Guid and National Geographic field guides. Nat. Geo. page 85 Black Scoter 1st. winter male was identical except for the yellow on the bill.

Field notes at site, documented on 11/3/84.

Gerald White

*Gerald White*

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