

Smew
22 Apr 1990
Pool # 13, Clinton Co., IA
B. Blevins
IBL 60:64, 66, 62:22

1

Record Number: 90-04
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Brian Blevins

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:64, 66

Records Committee: IBL 62:22

VOTE: 4 A-E, 2 A-D, 1 NA

A-E: Acceptable document. I do not believe we can rule out an escapee. These birds are even raised locally just north of Saylorville so one can not be ruled out in central Iowa.

NA: After I was unable to find this particular location in any references, I sent a request to the observer along with a map to mark and a self-addressed envelope. After not getting any response, I feel there is no evidence this record occurred on the Iowa side of the state boundary, so I can't accept at this time. If it is established to have occurred in Iowa I would accept as A-E.

A-D: Sometimes when a very distinctive bird is seen, there is a tendency for the documentor to assume the reader will know exactly what the observer is referring to. This documentation lacks description of the bill, shape of bird, and uses generalities such as "black and white pattern" and "black and white back". I would also like to have seen a discussion of how Oldsquaw was eliminated. However, assuming by the description of head and flight pattern that this was indeed an adult male Smew, the question becomes "was it a genuine vagrant?" I will admit I am totally unfamiliar with this species and its pattern of vagrancy. To my knowledge, however, there has not been a record in the Midwest; certainly not in Nebraska, Kansas, or South Dakota. Lack of previous sightings does not preclude this being a wild bird, of course, but I would like more information before accepting it as such.

A-E: I checked through recent literature regarding Smew sightings, but found very little. I presume this is because sightings are presumed to be escapees, not because there are no sightings. As I myself have seen this species in captivity, I must relegate this well described bird to A-E. While plumage quality and apparent wildness are certainly suggestive of a wild bird - and I don't doubt that a wild bird could occur in the Midwest - I feel we should take the conservative view.

A-D: The view (20 meter), the description (especially the black line pattern), size comparisons, and flight pattern establish this bird to be a male smew. The excellent condition of the plumage of this bird also indicates it to be a wild bird not an escapee. Also the bird did not remain for any length of time.

A-E: This description is adequate for Smew. I do think that the origin of this bird should be in question. I realize that this species is kept in captivity (though rarely) and wonder if

this particular made it to this part of the midwest by itself. I am not completely convinced that this is a completely wild bird that got to this location without the help of a game farm or exotic waterfowl breeder.

A-E: A good documentation of a Smew. However, it is very rarely seen in the lower 48 states and then usually along the northern coasts of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and then usually in fall and winter. Very likely a spring sighting of a Smew in Iowa is an escaped bird.

REVOTE: 3 A-D, 4 NA

A-E: I believe A-E still fits this bird the best. As to location of bird I do not know where it was when viewed, but if it moved at all it could easily crossed to either side of the Mississippi.

NA: No evidence this bird occurred in Iowa. The Mississippi and Missouri River boundaries must be carefully considered when reporting birds for particular states.

A-E: My original vote as shown on my computer file was A-E, not A-D as shown on the comments sheet. I seem to remember a plea from the field reports editor several years ago for observers not to use colloquial names for places. Please, please follow this procedure especially when viewing birds along the border. I am aware, however, that it is sometimes difficult to judge just exactly where the bird is on water. The observer indicates that the bird was seen in both Iowa and Illinois by his listing of counties. I am retaining my original A-E vote on this one.

NA: I view of my questions about the location of this bird - Iowa or Illinois - I am changing my vote to NA.

NA: Location not definitely established.

NA: I agree with the NA review from the first round. It would seem that Illinois should be the reviewing body on this record. If the documenter would not reply to the inquiry then it puts the location in doubt for Iowa or at least makes this suspect for an Iowa record.

A-E: The documentation lists both Clinton County, Iowa and Carroll County, Illinois, in Pool 13 on the Mississippi Rivers as areas where the bird was seen. I feel the strong possibility of an escaped bird must relegate this sighting to A-E category.

90-04

1. Species: Smew Number seen: 1
 (If known) Age: Adult Sex: ♂ Plumage: Adult breeding
 (Gomer's Lake, Potter's Marsh) Clinton County, Ia.
 2. Location (including county): Pool 13 on Mississippi River. Carrol County, Ill.
 3. Date(s): April 22, 1990 Time of day: 3:13 PM. to 3:36 PM.
 4. Observers -- Your name: Brian Blevins Phone: (319) 324 - 7326
 Address: 2003 East 12th Street, Davenport, Iowa Zip 52803
 Others present: Corey Blevins
 Others before or after you: None that I know of.

5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat:
 The bird was in a big river pool situation with hundreds of other divers mostly comprising of Redheads, Scaup, Buffleheads, and Goldeneyes. This particular area offers large extensive flats adjacent to both sides of the channel.

6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.

The observation included a predominantly white duck when on the water. The black facial patch extending from the bill to a little beyond the eye, and the black lines at the bottom of the tuft and at the nape extending down to the lower chest and belly, were highly visible. The black and white back as similarly seen in the bufflehead was also very apparant. In flight the bird seemed very much like looking at a bufflehead with its black and white pattern. The big difference in flight was the contrasting the heads of the two species, (the buffleheads showing much more dark area; and the over all shape a flight (the smew seemed to fly with a more elongate postoir and more stiffness similar to a Hooded Merganser.

The size of the bird was apparant as about the same size as the Lesser scaup. It seemed a bit bigger than the Buffleheads it was with, and smaller than the Goldeneyes and Redheads.

This particular bird did not appear to be that of an escaped bird, the bird was in very fine condition, did not show feather wear on either the tail or wings, and finally there were no bands or other identification markers present (this includes leg bands).

Species: Smeu Date seen: 4-22-90 Observer: B. Blevins 90-04

7. Similar species (explain how eliminated): About the only thing that is close is the Bufflehead and they were feeding with this bird, thus contrasting them was easy. The head difference was unmistakable with the buff's having an all dark head with a white spot, where as the smeu had a white head with a Black patch.
8. Describe the bird's behavior: Feeding frequently with other divers. It did not seem to be as spooked as the Scaup and buffleheads.
9. Describe the song or call notes heard: No notes heard.
10. Viewing conditions:
Optical equipment used (type, power): 10X40 wide Angle Bushnell's
Closest distance to bird (how measured): 18 to 20 meters (by Eye)
Lighting and weather: Bright sunshine on the bird at all times.
Was the bird photographed? NO By whom? _____ Attached? _____
11. Summarize previous experience with this species and similar species: None with this species. However, we basically live on the Mississippi in the spring and spend countless hours observing the typical migration.
12. Other observers who did not agree with the identification (explain): None
13. List books and illustrations consulted and advice received. How did these influence this description? We did not consult books until we went back to shore, and this only reaffirmed our previous conclusion.
14. How long after observing the bird(s) before field notes completed? While observing bird
15. How long after observing the bird(s) before this form completed? That night.

Mail this completed form to: Avian Ecology Program, Natural Heritage Division
Dept. of Conservation, Springfield, IL 62701

If you have observed a common bird species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season or at an unusual location, and you wish to share this experience with the scientific community, special documentation is necessary. An acceptable documentation consists of one or more of the following: a collected, diagnostic specimen; a diagnostic photograph; a diagnostic recording of the bird's voice; or, an accurate and detailed written description of the observation. It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.