

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

1988

What species? 1 Surf Scoter with 3 White-winged scoters How many? oneLocation? South shore of West Okoboji Lake at Terrace Park, Dickinson countyType of habitat? Natural LakeWhen? date(s): Dec. 3 thru Dec. 5 time: 8:00 a.m. to first observedWho? your name and address: Ed Thelen - RR Box 7411-A Spirit Lake, Ia. 51360others with you: none on Sat. Dec. 3, Linda Thelen on Sun. Dec. 4, none on Dec. 5

others before or after you: _____

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.

Observed 4 scoters on West Okoboji Lake for a total of 4 hours on the

above dates. After observing scoters for over an hour, I was finally able to see a white wing patch on three of the 4 large, dark-brown non-descript ducks. These 3 scoters also had 2 white facial spots on the sides of its head. I then identified these as white-winged scoters.

The fourth scoter presented more of a problem in identification. The scoter had a dark brown back with lighter flanks and was approximately the same size as the white-winged scoters. It had a large dark bill which it held at an angle to the water. It had a dark brown forehead, crown and nape that contrasted sharply with the off-white patch on the sides of its head, which looked like 2 white patches that touched to make one. Its breast was pale, a light brown, as was its neck which was light in the front and dark brown on the back of the neck. It tended to carry its head a little higher than the white-wings. In all my observations in its preening, wing-flapping and diving, I failed to see a hint of white in its wings. Its legs were light-colored which I observed when it would roll on its side and scratch and preen.

This scoter stayed in the vicinity of the white-wings, but was not part of the group. It was always off by itself and also would dive at different times. It dived in similar fashion when compared to the white-wings— holding its wings up and in immediately prior to diving.

Similar species and now eliminated: I believe this bird was an immature surf scoter.

~~White-wing scoter— No white on wings, concave head~~

~~Black scoter— Rounder Head, dark legs, pale cheeks cover larger area on~~

~~Ruddy duck— smaller size, angle of beak, side of head.~~

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? yes- me

If yes, explain: I've never seen a surf scoter or black scoter and I feel the literature fails to adequately describe the different plumages of these birds.

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

Excellent- Sun to my back, 150-200 ft. (Guess). Used 10-power binoculars and 15-60 power telescope. Took several photos with 800mm lens on 35mm camera.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Observed white-winged scoters on several occasions in past years.

References and persons consulted before writing description: (See back of sheet)How long before field notes made? 2 while this form completed? 8 hrs.
observingMAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City, IA 52240

- 1.) Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding, edited by John Farrand, Jr.
- 2.) Birds of North America— Robbins, Bruun, Zim and Singer
- 3.) Peterson Field Guide to Birds— Roger Tory Peterson.
- 4.) Waterfowl at a Distance— Dept. of the Interior pamphlet.
- 5.) Waterfowl in Iowa — Jack W. Masgrove.

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Will submit photo upon request.

Observed 21 scoters on West Okoboji Lake for a total of 1 hour on the above dates. After observing scoters for over an hour, I was finally able to see a white-wing patch on three of the 1 large, dark-brown non-descript ducks. These 3 scoters also had 2 white facial spots on the edge of the head. I then identified these as white-winged scoters. The scoter had a dark brown back with lighter flanks and was approximately the same size as the white-winged scoter. It had a large dark bill which it held at an angle to the water. It had a dark brown forehead, crown and nape that contrasted sharply with the off-white patch on the side of the head, which looked like 2 white patches that touched to make one. Its breast was pale, a light brown, as was the neck which was light in the front and dark brown on the back of the neck. It tended to carry its head a little higher than the white-wing. In all my observations in its preening, wing-flapping and diving, I failed to see a hint of white in the wings. Its legs were light-colored which I observed when it would roll on its side and stretch and preen. This scoter stayed in the vicinity of the white-wing, but was not part of the group. It was always off by itself and also would dive at different times. It dived in similar fashion when compared to the white-wing— holding its wings up and in immediately prior to diving.

Similar species and how eliminated:
White-wing scoter— white on wings, concave head
Black scoter— rounder head, dark legs, pale cheeks cover larger area on side of head, angle of beak
Reddy ducks— smaller size

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Yes—no

If yes, explain: I've never seen a surf scoter or black scoter and I feel the literature fails to adequately describe the different plumages of these birds.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:
Excellent— Sun to my back, 150-200 ft. (guess). Used 10-power binoculars and 15-50 power telescope. Took several photos with 800mm lens on 35mm camera.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:
Observed white-winged scoters on several occasions in past years.

References and persons consulted before writing description: (See back of sheet)

How long before field notes made? 2 days
This form completed? 5 hrs

MAIL TO: J. M. Kest, Field Reports Editor, 411 Richards Street, Iowa City, IA 52242
Observing