

Willow

BIRD: DOCUMENTATION OF UNUSUAL RECORD

Redhead (7) (*Breeding*)

Location: Willow Slough, a public hunting area in Anderson Twp., Mills County, Iowa.

Date: June 30 and July 1, 1978, and additional sighting July 13.

Time: On June 30, the birds were observed from approximately 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm. On the First, they were also seen in the evening, for about half an hour.

Description:

Female duck: Brown, not mottled like a female Mallard. Dull brown, but body is light dull cinnamon, with the head and neck grayish tan. Bill solid colored, black. Buffy eye ~~ring~~ ring, with a more blurred light line going back from it. There seems to be a grayish patch in each mostly-closed wing, and when she flaps her wings this turns out to be a gray band along the flight feathers.

6 large downy young: Solid color, a light grayish tan (like the color of the mother's head and neck). ~~Back~~ Back and crown darker. Bill gray. Feet dark. Dive.

Behavior: At first I just saw the downies. They were close together, preening and stretching. Then the mother joined them and took them to the area ~~where~~ where they fed. The young dove. Occasionally they would also chase things across the surface of the water, ~~and~~ and in one area they reached down and brought up food without diving. The mother did not feed, and stayed with the little flock, neck stretched, alert. When they finished feeding, the mother led the young back toward the cattails. (June 30)

July 1: They never dove, since the mother sighted us as she brought the young out to feed and took them away.

July 13: The young were diving while the mother watched. They are almost her size now.

Habitat: A lake. The young fed in a fairly shallow area outside the cattail beds, where the tops of drowned weeds stick out from the water.

Similar species eliminated by the above: The diving behavior of the young, their nearly solid color, and the mother's wing pattern eliminate all the dabbling ducks.

The mother's wing pattern (dark with gray flight feathers) eliminates all the diving ducks except the Ring-necked Duck. There were a couple female ~~xi~~ Ring-necks ~~in~~ following a male around the same area the family was on June 30.

The female duck resembled a female Ring-neck in the following ways: body color, neck ~~color~~ color, contrast between ~~head and~~ body and neck color, bill color (solid black), light color below tail, tail shape, and eye ring.

Differences between the female duck and the female Ring-necks:
The female with the young is larger, with a straighter bill and lighter head. ~~xxxxxxx~~ The Ring-necks have a lighter more confined and more contrasting light patch at the base of the bill; this female does have similar light color there, but ~~ix~~ the whole side of the face is ~~ix~~ that color. The posture is quite different, but may be explained by the presence of the young ducks making the one female nervous.

The three Ring-necked Ducks swam between the family of ducks and me, quite close to the family, allowing good comparison. (June 30)

Distance: Within 60 yards. Maybe a good deal closer. Estimated from the assumption that a narrow 2-lane road (like that leading into the slough) is 60 feet wide from fence to fence. Very rough estimate.

Optical equipment: 20x telescope. w/40x lens

Light: Sky cloudless, except for some high cirrus. Breeze causes ripples, no waves. Birds were SSE of me, in the SW corner of the lake, and then moved out until they were almost directly east of me. At that point they were closest. The sun was west. Excellent viewing: I could even see the ring around the neck of a male Ring-necked Duck. (June 30)

July 1: the birds were directly east of us, time and weather similar.

Other observers: Ross Silcock, who agreed with the identification of this family as Redheads. (July 1)

Books consulted: The description was written largely June 30, when I had no book to consult. Later I consulted Birds of North America and a Peterson Field Guide to the Birds. July 1, Ross brought a book called, I think, Ducks, Geese, and Swans of North America. We used it to distinguish between the Redhead and Ring-neck and also to check and see if we'd forgotten some alternative. Really, these books only ~~add~~ caused me to add the color of the eyering, which Ross checked that day.

This description is condensed and straightened out from the ones I wrote while seeing the birds June 30 and just after seeing them that day and July 1. The original description is more repetitive and confusing, but you're welcome to it if you want it.

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