

## Unusual Observation Documentation

probable Oldsquaw, Clangula hyemalis

one, probably first autumn bird

This duck was similar in size or slightly larger than nearby Lesser Scaup; most of the bird was a brown slightly lighter than female Lesser Scaup, and without mottling patterns; back and breast brown, sides slightly paler brown; cap brown from bill to nape; much of face white, including the area from the bill, around eyes, to the nape, throat white, to base of head; a dark patch, brownish, was below and behind each eye, mostly surrounded by white; in flight, wings appeared all dark and unmarked, there was a pale, whitish area in the belly, and the duck then gave a white-headed appearance; eye and beak dark, beak straight, unmarked (i. e., no contrasting marks seen), moderate in length and width, but not seen well enough for detailed comparison with nearby ducks (Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Ducks, Redheads, Canvasbacks, Bufflehead, Gadwall, American Wigeon, and others).

No vocalizations were heard

I first noticed the bird when it raised the front of its body from the water and did a head shake without wing flaps, something I'd noted in various sea ducks, although the behavior is not limited to them, and seeing a considerable amount of white on the head, my first impression was Oldsquaw, but the bird spent most of its time with its beak in its back feathers, partially obscuring the head markings. Head on back, the bird swam with the other ducks in the raft, sometimes lifting its head for a moment. Nearing sunset on the 24th of October, with good light still on the bird from behind me (bird to the east), it flew with most of the the flock (a few hundred birds) and I was able to follow it with the spotting scope for the first 30 seconds or so of flight before they left the region of the lake.

Habitat was open water and the air over open water.

Among ducks that have considerable white on the face, few have white around the eye and extending back to the nape. This eliminates the scoters (also, the bill did not seem large or deep enough for most scoters), Harlequin Duck, Bufflehead, goldeneyes, smew, scaup, and Northern Pintail (which might have a similar plumage, but with white lower on the neck and side of neck, patterning on the body, speculum, and more differences). Unmarked bill and wing eliminate aberrant Ring-necked Duck and scaup, respectively, and also other divers with contrasting wing markings (including Bufflehead, goldeneyes). The possibility of an aberrant Harlequin Duck exists, but that seems less likely than a young Oldsquaw at this location.

I have seen many Oldsquaw in winter in the northeastern U. S. coastal waters, plus a few in the interior: Great Salt Lake, Utah, Lake Erie, Michigan, but none in such a dark plumage, without some white on the sides above the waterline.

The bird was observed in the west-central part of Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie County, Iowa, on October 24, from about 10:15 to 11:15 am, and again from about 5 pm til near sunset, perhaps 6:15 pm. During the longer part of each observation period, the sun was behind me, the bird in front, as I observed the bird mostly from the east in the morning, and from the west in the afternoon. I used a 22 x 60 spotting scope for all observations of this bird, except for a few views through a zoom scope, set at about 25 x. Unfortunately, the bird was at considerable distance, probably in the vicinity of 200 to 300 feet. Other people who saw the bird included Betty Grenon, Ruth Green, Loren and Babs Padelford, and Bruce Wetteroth, but none of them followed the bird as I did, saw it morning and afternoon, or saw it fly. There are no photographs.

Field guides used included the National Geographic Society's Birds of North America, which mentions and illustrates plumages suggestive of this bird, Robbins, et al., Birds of North America, Petersons eastern North American guide, and the Audubon Society guides to birds of eastern and western North America. Birds of America (T. G. Pearson, ed., 1936, Garden City Publ., NY) was also consulted, as it often has detailed plumage descriptions.

This report was prepared from notes made on the evening of October 24. Identification was never made with certainty; this species was the primary consideration while the bird was in view, and was the only one I could not eliminate.

Today's date is October 27, 1988.

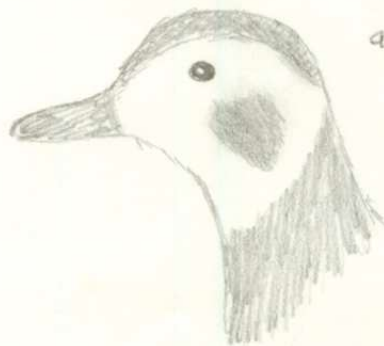
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Sketch to show approximate  
extent of light area on belly  
and throat

Sketches not intended  
to show shape or proportion



approximate  
extent of white  
and brown on  
face