

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION
OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

Species: Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) Number: 3; two males, one female

Location: New Albin, Allamakee County, Iowa

Date: April 14, 1979 Time birds seen: 3:15 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Description: In direct comparison to Lesser Scaups the birds observed were distinctly larger, by perhaps an inch or two at the waterline. The Lesser Scaups showed smaller proportions. Again in direct comparison the Greater Scaup were bigger headed, had thicker necks, and a deeper bill. The bill though being about the same length as the Lesser's, and as described before deeper, or larger at the base was decidedly different, when viewed with 45-power scope at close range, than the Lesser's. In shape the head lacked the tufted or peaked look of the Lesser and showed a very smooth contour, almost an effect that could be described as domed. The difference in head shape between the two scaups was not a subtle one, it was apparent even when the birds were at a distance. Due to lack of strong light the head color of the Lesser Scaup did not show, however the Greater Scaup even in poor light showed the green head color. In plumage pattern the two scaups are identical, the Greater has a neater plumage, with no heavy barring on sides, and the white sides were more extensive as well as cleaner looking than Lesser Scaup's. The white wing stripe was seen on several occasions and definitely extended to the outer primaries, the color of the white in primaries was a clean white. Not the light gray color of the Lesser Scaups. The female Greater Scaup was much like the males in shape and size, but differed from the Lesser Scaup female in plumage slightly. Being lighter brown in color, having a crescent-shaped ear-patch, and instead of one large white patch at base of bill it had two smaller ones.

Description of behavior: The three Greater Scaup kept to themselves, surrounded by at least 75 other waterfowl, including the Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Redhead and Ruddy Ducks. The Greater Scaup dived infrequently, much less than the Lesser Scaup. The two males were in competition for the lone female, both males stayed close by as the female moved about eventually moving very close to observers, then suddenly taking wing and moving out of sight.

Distance: When first found the three birds were at a distance of over 800 feet, as the birds were observed they moved much closer, closest approach was about 75 feet.

Both observers are not familiar with the species. Very familiar with the Lesser Scaup, however. Only two observers saw the birds, Darwin Koenig and Joe Schaufenbuel. The books consulted at time of sighting; Robbin's BIRDS OF NORTH AM. and Peterson's FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS. Notes were taken at time of sighting and were used a few hours later to construct this documentation.

April 14, 1979 Joe Schaufenbuel