

Species: Black Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), a female. Date: November 21, 1980.
Time: 1:20 to 2:45 P.M. Location: Northwest area of Volga Lake, in the Volga Lake Recreation Area, Fayette County, Iowa. Distance: When first seen and identified the bird was at most 1600 feet away, my subsequent movement brought me within 200 feet of the bird. Light: Excellent light conditions were in existence during the time of observation. The sky was clear, little or no wind, with the sun in the southern sky, behind me, while the Black Scoter was viewed to the northwest. Previous experience: Though I am very familiar with all species of duck that regularly occurs in Iowa and their many plumages, I have no experience with this species. However I have seen the White-winged Scoter. I observed the bird with a Bushnell Space Master Zoom 20X to 45X and through Bushnell 7X35 binoculars.

Description: On the water surface the bird was about the same size as that of a Common Goldeneye that it swam near. The shape of the bird is not distinctly remembered since I did not take notes on the shape at the time of observation; though it could be described as being typically duck-like. The drawing accompanying this documentation was made by memory shortly after the sighting and it can be considered a fairly good representation of what the bird looked like. The bill was grayish without distinctive markings. In size, the bill seemed average for the size of the duck and it had a bump (see drawing) on the upper mandible at the base. The body color of the bird was a dull dark brownish gray. With a distinct light off-white area beginning at the base of the upper part of its bill extending back through the eye, then curving downward and becoming less distinct as this patch reached the neck. The light area totally encircled the lower mandible and fusing with the dark coloration of the rest of the body on the upper breast. In flight the duck had a typical duck flight and pattered the water before taking off. While in flight the white head patch became more distinct, giving the duck a white headed look. Other than a light patch on the belly the Black Scoter was devoid of markings. The wings, tail, and back were uniformly colored--and, I emphasize, without markings. So, overall the bird was rather nondescript, with drab coloration, lacking any markings other than the patch on the head and belly. Eye color was not distinctly seen, it seemed dark however. Foot color was not noted.

Similar species: The only bird that this duck reminded me of was a Ruddy Duck female, but this bird was definitely not this species, and is mentioned because of vague plumage characteristics similarities.

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