

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What Species? ~~Black~~ ^{Surf} Scoter

How many? about 4

Location? Miss. River Lock and Dam 18 North of Burlington, Des Moines Co., Iowa

Type of Habitat? River

When? date(s)? Oct. 21, 1987

time: to

Who? your name and address: Bob Cecil 327 S. 6th, Keokuk, Iowa 52632

others with you: Charles Fuller. Elizabeth Christiansen.

others before or after you: Don't know.

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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Chuck Fuller called our office and reported what he thought were Surf Scoters north of Burlington. We drove to the location through Illinois but viewed birds which were clearly closer to the Iowa side. The distance was substantial, but we noted the following: Two or three dark ducks with 1), a bill that made essentially a straight line with the peak of the head, giving the head an overall triangular appearance; 2), Whitish at the base of the bill, and whitish at the nape. This whitish at the nape gave rise to some discussion--it looked at times like it could have been a reflection, but it remained visible at all angles. It finally became evident that it was actual plumage coloration. I personally didn't know if this was of much value--it does not show it well in NGS Field Guide, and I didn't know Scoter's were two year ducks (till the IOU meeting!). Finally (3), on the few occasions when the ducks reared up, they were very light underneath. No other conspicuous marks were visible, including white in the wing. I there was light white the eye (as in NGS), I didn't note in in my notes, which were made about 3 hours later. The birds appeared to be slightly larger than scaup, also present.

Similar species and how eliminated: Head pattern unlike Black Scoter. Similar to White-winged, but white in wing never noted. We view birds at rest for sometime, and saw them rear up once or twice, so should have seen white if present. Similar to female scaup but for bill shape in relation to head.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification? I had some concern about the sighting due to the distance and my inexperience with the species. What really sold me was the skins which Jim Dinsmore happened to bring to IOU. I could observe and compare with other Scoters belly whiteness, head shape, and whitish on the nape of young males. It also helped me understand the value of museum skins.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: Afternoon, sun favorable, over shoulder. Usually sunny. Distance, 400-500 yards (guess), Optics: Nikon @ 20x; also Fuller's scope at ?? magnification.

Previous experience with this and similar species: Surfer was a lifer. Some but not much experience with White-winged. No relevant experience with Black.

References and persons consulted before writing description: We used NGS and maybe Peterson's in the field.

How long before field notes made? 3 hours.

How long before this form completed? 1 month.