

King Eider

10 Nov 1985

DeSoto NWR, Harrison Co., IA

*Kent*****

Record Number: 85-15

Classification: A-P

to 11/24, P-0194 Kent; IBL 55:123; 57:77, Kent 1987

DOCUMENTATIONS

Tanya Bray, 10 Nov

Steve Dinsmore, 11 Nov

Jim Dinsmore, 12 Nov [sic]

Robert K. Myers, 13 Nov

Francis L. Moore, 15 Nov

Thomas H. Kent, 15 Nov (includes notes on vagrancy and identification)

Beth Proescholdt/Mark Proescholdt, 16 Nov

W. Ross Silcock, 20 Nov

Peter C. Petersen, 24 Nov

PHOTOGRAPHS

T. H. Kent, 15 Nov, P-0194 (IBL 57:89)

LETTERS

Bruce Peterjohn to Tom Kent, 23 Dec 1985

Noble S. Proctor to Rose, 8 Feb 1986

Thede Tobish to B. J. Rose, 23 Feb 1986

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 55:123

Records Committee: IBL 57:77

Kent, T. H. 1987. Eiders in Iowa. IBL 57:88-93.

Photographs: IBL 57:89 (P-0194)

VOTE: 1-I-P King, 1-III King, 2-I-P Sp., 3-wait for photos/experts

I can't make up my mind. Can we see photos and then use daggers at 20 paces?

I-P King, Head shape is diagnostic. See my complete analysis.

I-P Eider sp., While I still think the head profile and description of bill fits the Common Eider best, the doubts raised by Kent and Moore seem to indicate that maybe Eider sp. is the logical choice.

King III, Seemed odd that Moore and Kent, making observations together, had very different comments regarding viewing conditions--some rain, heavy o.c. vs. bright overcast, no mention of rain. Myers sketch looks more like King although he concluded Common. Note--listing of King Eider record 11/18/50 records refer to same specimen.

Eider sp. I, Most descriptions point to Common, some contradicting. Kent's photo tracings are strongly suggestive of King. However, two of the tracings have strongly shaped foreheads more closely resembling Common. Size, likelihood, and wavy flank pattern may indicate King, but I am not thoroughly convinced. Photos could clear up doubts.

Until experts examine photos, I vote "sp" or abstain. B. J. Rose sent photos to Noble Proctor (east coast), Larry Balch (Chicago), Thede Tobisch (Alaska). As of 1/8/86, no replies.

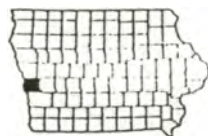
I am withholding my vote right now. The Common Eider

documentations are convincing. The King Eider documentations are convincing. We need to look at the photos, if only to ask ourselves how many birds were there. We need to have the photos reviewed by experts too. The King Eider records cited are north and east of here. The western records are all Common Eiders. The Common could be more expected on the Nebraska border than the King. Assuming there are just two birds documented here, we have the makings of an interesting article here. Birds hard to ID and seen at the limits of the optical equipment. Written documentations convincing, well written by competent, careful observers, and contradictory. Photos-well, diagnostic? Useless? We'll have to see.

REVOTE (at meeting, 6 Sep 1986, with review of photos): 6-II.

EIDERS IN IOWA

THOMAS H. KENT



Two of the four species of eider ducks occur as vagrants in the Midwest. The Common Eider nests along the coasts of North America south to New England and Alaska. It has little tendency to migrate south (no California records, rarely to Maryland, accidentally to Florida) or inland (it prefers salt water). The King Eider nests across the arctic circle and along Hudson Bay. In winter it has a tendency to stray further south, as far as southern California, Florida, and the Great Lakes. King Eiders have a less strong preference for salt water. Midwest birds of both species are almost always immatures and are thought to reach the Midwest from Hudson and James Bays.

Adult male Common and King Eiders are striking birds that are easy to identify. Females and immatures are drab and difficult to identify. In this article I will present two King Eiders that occurred in Iowa in the fall of 1985, discuss identification problems, and review the occurrence of eiders in the Midwest. Two more King Eiders are reported in this issue (Hansen 1987).

TWO EIDERS AT DE SOTO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, FALL 1985

From 10 to 24 November 1985, two immature eiders were present at Lakeview Area of De Soto National Wildlife Refuge on a backwater that forms the Iowa/Nebraska border. By advanced arrangement, birders were allowed into the refuge area to study the rare ducks. Five documentations identified the birds as Common Eider, three as King Eider, and one as one bird of each species. Francis Moore and I observed the birds from 8:35 a.m. to noon on 15 November. The birds had been reported to us as Common Eiders, but we left convinced that they were Kings. The two birds were feeding in the backwater, often together, where they would raise their wings, kick their feet, and dive in unison in typical eider fashion. Both birds were overall brown, quite plain, and larger than nearby Mallards and a White-winged Scoter. The darker bird (male) had a two-toned face, an indistinct crescent over the eye, an oblique line running from the back of the eye down the neck, dark bill, and lighter plain buff-brown breast. The second bird (presumed female) was slightly lighter brown and grayer, lacked the line down the neck, and the breast color was similar to the rest of the bird. These birds lacked the heavy black marks on the body that characterize adult female eiders. We noted two faint gray wingbars and white axillaries when the birds raised their wings. We spent a long time trying to judge the head profile and bill features. We tried to determine how far feathering extended down the top of the culmen and down the side of the face toward the nostril, but the similar color of the bill and facial feathers, and the activity of the birds (diving), made it difficult to judge these field marks. The culmen appeared rather straight with slight bulge at the forehead and slightly upturned bill at the tip. Our identification of these birds as King Eiders was based almost entirely on the head and bill shape, rather subjective judgments. I took photos using a 1500 mm lens and 1000 speed ASA color film that show the profile (Figure 1). B. J. Rose also photographed these birds (Anonymous 1986).

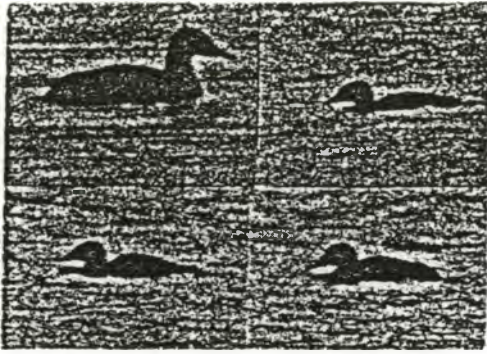


Fig. 1. Eiders at De Soto N.W.R., 15 November 1985. Photos by T. H. Kent.



Fig. 2. Four drawings of the eiders submitted with documentations.

During the ensuing months there was extensive discussion, research, and consultation on this sighting. The documentations included some conflicting observations. Most thought there were no or indistinct markings on the body, but one mentioned straight marks suggesting Common Eider and another crescent-shaped marks suggesting King Eider. Descriptions of the head included the following: "sloping, resembling a Canvasback", "wedge-shaped heads with long-straight-sloping forehead almost like Canvasback", "forehead was sloping down toward the tip of the bill but had an upswing near the tip about 3/4 of the way down", and "very straight culmen with tip of bill turned upward; the forehead is straight or sticks out a little." The four drawings that were submitted (Figure 2) illustrate varying perceptions of the birds' head shape. Independently, B. J. Rose sent color photographs to two well-recognized experts; they were later shown to a large group of experts in Alaska.

On first evaluation, the I.O.U. Records Committee failed to reach a conclusion about these birds. The regional editor for *American Birds*, Bruce Peterjohn wrote (letter to author), "the photos clearly show their head shape which positively identifies both as Kings." Thede Tobish, a leading Alaska expert, wrote (letter to B. J. Rose), "I would like to read field descriptions of both birds to more comfortably assess these records. I currently feel both birds to be King Eiders." He was more firm about this opinion during the later discussions in Alaska. Noble Proctor, a world expert from Connecticut, wrote (letter to B. J. Rose), "Although it seems implausible, it almost appears that you have two eiders of two species! I have looked at them a number of times and can only draw these conclusions from what I can make out from the photos." The I.O.U. Records Committee eventually accepted both as King Eiders.

IDENTIFICATION OF KING AND COMMON EIDERS

Eiders are large ducks that are recognized by their size, shape, and diving habits. Identification begins with determining the sex and age of the bird. One look at a field guide will confirm the identity of adult males, but the chances of seeing one of these in Iowa is remote. Adult females are distinguished by head shape, bill features, and body markings. Head and bill

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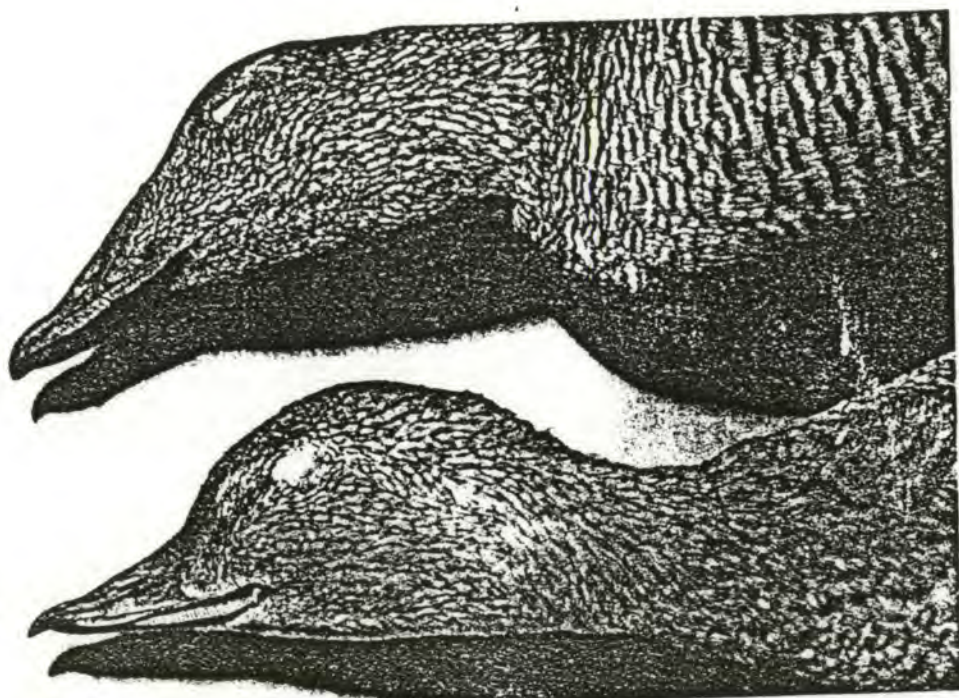


Fig. 3. Adult female Common Eider in Breeding Plumage (top) compared with immature first-winter female King Eider shot in Louisa Co., Iowa, on 8 November 1970. Specimens at University of Iowa.

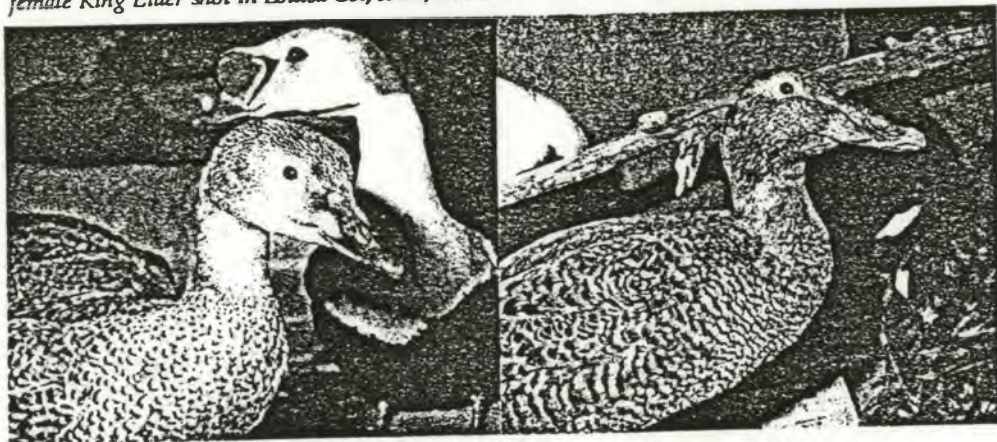


Fig. 4. Adult King Eiders in breeding plumage.

Fig. 5. Adult female Common Eider.

are similar to immatures (see below). Adult females of both species have strong black body markings, straight in the Common, crescent-shaped in the King (Figures 3-5).

Immatures lack the strong markings of adults, although body markings may be useful for birds in the hand (Figure 6). First-year birds are in juvenal plumage into late fall, when they molt to first basic plumage and differences in the sexes become evident. In first basic plumage, males of both species become lighter on the breast than females. As fall progresses, male Common Eiders develop barring on the flanks and male King Eiders develop a distinctive light colored bill. The timing of these changes may be variable, but the light bill of the first-year King Eider should be evident by

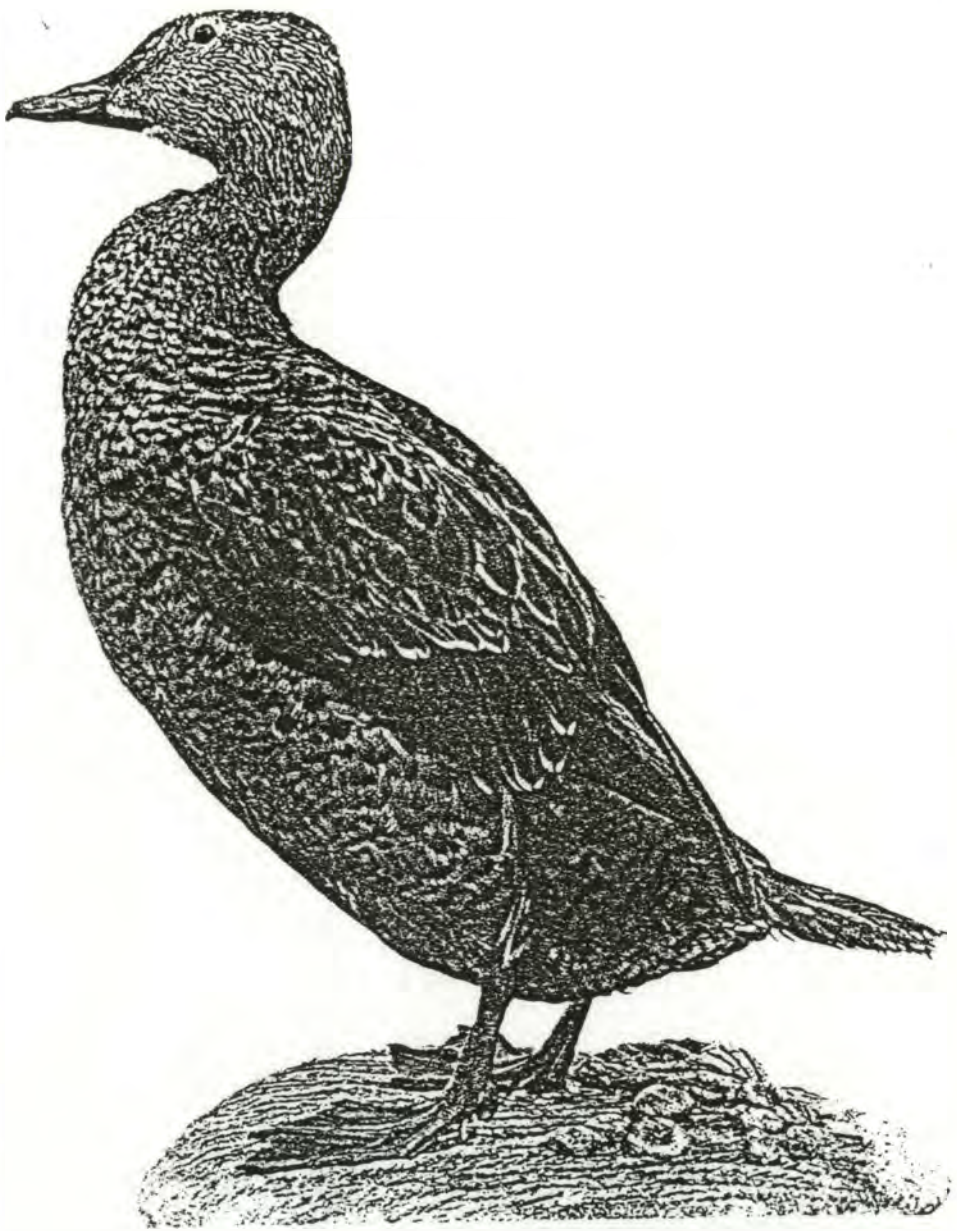


Fig. 6. Immature female King Eider shot by John Goecke at Ingham Lake, Emmet County, Iowa, on 7 November 1971. Photo by Kenneth Formanek. Date on photo differs from that previously reported (Petersen 1972).

mid-winter. Most observers agreed that the two De Soto birds were male and female, the male having a light breast and more pronounced facial features, but not a light bill.

Males attain full adult plumage in the fourth winter. It is difficult to get a clear picture of what second and third winter males look like. In general, immature males of both Common and King eiders have brown heads, dark

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bodies, and white breasts. The male shot by Hansen at Clear Lake (reported in this issue) would appear to be at least a second winter bird--its body and wing feathers are almost black, the breast is white, the head is quite dark, and the bill is very pale colored. I have seen immature Common Eiders in the Aleutian Islands in May that have a similar appearance at a distance. A detailed description of eider plumages is given by Palmer (1976).

Although it is important to determine the age and sex before identifying an eider as to species, the head profile and feathering in relation to the bill are constant and useful features for immatures and females. King Eiders have a rounded head, slight bump at the forehead, thin bill tip, and centrally placed eye (Figures 1, 3, 4, 6; also see Hansen 1987). Common Eiders have a very pronounced straight forehead, heavy bill tip, and eye near the top of the head (Figures 3, 5). When seen head on, King Eiders have a bifurcated upper mandible with feather extending down the culmen for some distance (Figure 4; see also Hansen 1987). This feature is easily seen on specimens, but is hard to see in the field. From the side, the feathering between the upper and lower mandibles extends into the upper mandible nearly to the nostril in the Common Eider, but not as far in the King (Figures 3, 4, 5, 6; also see Hansen 1987).

EIDERS IN THE MIDWEST

King Eiders reported in this issue provide the fifth and sixth substantiated records for Iowa. The previous records have been reviewed (Newlon and Kent 1981, Dinsmore et al. 1984). A previously unpublished photograph of one of these records was found in the I.O.U files (Figure 6). All of the birds were first seen between 7 and 18 November. These records comprise six specimens and two photographed birds. Five birds were immature males and three were apparently immature females. There is also one unsubstantiated sight record (Dinsmore et al. 1984).

I reviewed records of eiders in the Midwest as published in books covering bird distribution in nearby states and as bold-faced in *Audubon Field Notes* and *American Birds*. King Eiders are seen in the Midwest in most years (average 2 to 3 sightings per year); two-thirds occur in November and December; and two-thirds are on the Great Lakes. A few arrive by late October and some are found in winter and early spring.

The occurrence of Common Eider in Iowa is less well substantiated. A mounted specimen, now lost, was of an apparent female taken south of Sioux City on 1 November 1901. The specimen was examined by an expert and determined to be a Common Eider based on bill characteristics (DuMont 1934). Three other records of this species (Musgrove and Musgrove 1977) are unsubstantiated.

In reviewing Midwest records, I was surprised to find that there were more than half as many Common Eiders as compared to Kings. Without an exhaustive effort to track down details of these records, it is difficult to be sure how many might be misidentified. At least two of the Iowa specimens of King Eider were initially misidentified. The Common Eider records have a seasonal and geographic distribution similar to those of the King Eider.

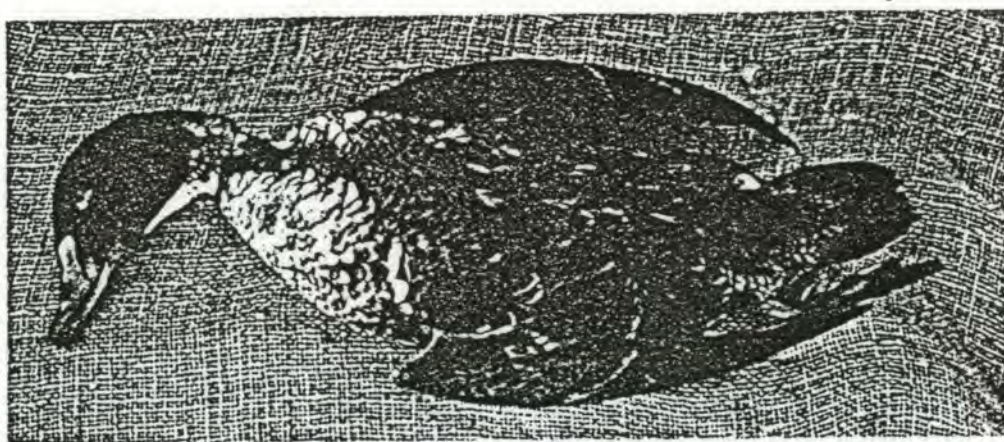
It is likely that King Eider occurs much more frequently in Iowa than the few records indicate. The likelihood of Common Eider occurring in Iowa is much more difficult to judge. The identification of immature eiders is diffi-

cult, but not impossible, particularly if they can be observed at close range and photographed or specimens can be obtained. Eiders that are shot in the fall by hunters should be preserved in their entirety and saved for study. If this is not possible, they should be photographed from all angles and sexed.

LITERATURE CITED

- Anonymous. 1986. The De Soto NWR eiders. Nebraska Bird Review 54:81.
Dinsmore, J. J., et al. 1984. Iowa Birds. Ames: Iowa State University Press.
DuMont, P. 1934. Iowa specimen of American Eider re-determined as Pacific Eider. Wilson Bull. 46:203.
Newlon, M. C., and T. H. Kent. 1981. Fifth record of King Eider for Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 51:126-128.
Musgrove, J. W., and M. R. Musgrove. 1977. Waterfowl in Iowa, Fifth Edition. Des Moines: State Conservation Commission.
Palmer, R. S. 1976. Handbook of North American Birds. Vol 2. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Petersen, P. C. 1972. Another King Eider record for Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 42:50.

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240



Immature male King Eider, Clear Lake, 8 November 1986. Photo by J. L. Hansen.

85-15

105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081
23 Dec. 1985

Dear Tom,

It was indeed an interesting fall throughout the region. In Ohio, we had unprecedented movements of Red-throated Loons, Brant, Black Scoter and Laughing Gulls plus good numbers of many other species (including King Eiders). However, our best birds turned up during the first weekend of December with an Arctic Loon (first state record) and adult Mew Gull (second state record) creating quite a stir. Unfortunately, winter arrived shortly thereafter which put an end to one of the better migrations in the past 10 years. I just hope the birding remains somewhat interesting this winter.

With regards to your eiders, the photos clearly show their head shape which positively identifies both as Kings. I cannot sex the birds from the photos but the written descriptions would indicate one to be a first winter male but the other is unknown (see below; possibly a first winter female, I can't conceive that an adult female would ever wander into Iowa). The following information might be useful for your analysis of eider identification. This discussion is mostly restricted to birds in their first fall/winter as most fall records from the midwest pertain to these plumages.

Age and Sex

1. There is a lot of misinformation in the literature (especially older references). The best sources are Cramp, Palmer and Godfrey. The recent field guides (National Geographic and Master Guide) are accurate but their discussions are too limited; they are most helpful only if you are somewhat familiar with eiders to begin with.
2. The molt sequence in eiders shows an incredible amount of individual variation (which explains some of the confusion with their identification). In fact, some birds almost appear to be in a constant state of molt during the several years required to attain full adult plumage.
3. Sometime during fall, all young birds will molt from their juvenal into first basic plumage. Timing is extremely variable. Some birds will have nearly completed this molt by mid-November while others will only begin molting in late January. For November birds, the appearance of a lighter breast, darker head or other male features indicate the bird is a male. A bird still in juvenal plumage could be either sex.
4. The juvenal plumage is generally a brighter rusty brown than the gray-brown basic plumages of older females. The differences are fairly obvious when the two are together but may not be when only one is present. In any event, the descriptions of the second Iowa eider vary so much from observer to observer that I would be reluctant to guess whether it was still in juvenal plumage, molting or whatever.

Identification

1. To me, head shape is the most reliable (and observable) field mark separating the two species. I like your description of the Common Eider head shape. Kings have a more vertical forehead and rounded crown (as shown in the photos). These differences are visible at long distances, even when other characteristics can not be discerned.

2. There are several pitfalls in using bill characteristics besides being hard to critically observe beyond close range.
 - A. The main problem stems from the fact that Common Eider bill characteristics vary between the different races (see the illustration in Palmer). In most races, differences between the two species are fairly distinct although some races can be fairly similar to Kings. The illustration in Palmer shows how similar the two species can be. Hence, birds with the long extension of the upper mandible are undoubtedly Commons while the other birds can be either species (most likely Kings but that is why I use head shape as the determining factor).
 - B. From my limited observations, I've gotten the impression that bill characteristics may not be fully developed on all juvenals in autumn. These are just impressions from casual observations. However, I am not aware of any studies to prove or disprove these impressions.
3. Barring on the sides is useful but very difficult to see due to the bird's posture and their sitting low in the water. It is also very difficult to determine at any distance. However, when it is visible, it is an useful field mark.
4. Ignore the plumage characteristics of all first year males. They are extremely variable with no consistent differences between species. Presence or absence of the light crescent on the side of the head is not necessarily indicative of either species; Kings will frequently lack the crescent and Commons can occasionally show a similar pattern.
5. I can't comment on underwing color as I have never been able to study Kings in flight. I only know what I read in the books.
6. Head, neck and tail positions are not useful. I've seen many Commons that have not had "cocked" tails or were swimming with the bill pointed horizontally.

So much for eiders.

Arctic Loon--unacceptable. The observer failed to mention any of the distinctive plumage characteristics. His description did not eliminate a small Common Loon.

Ferruginous Hawk--unacceptable, undoubtedly a Red-tailed Hawk. Both observers described the tail as bicolored with a white base and broad reddish terminal band. This tail pattern indicated the bird was an adult hawk. Both observers mentioned the underparts were entirely white, which eliminates an adult Ferruginous Hawk which would have noticeably reddish legs.

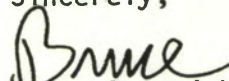
Prairie Falcon--unacceptable. Their descriptions of the head pattern are ambiguous and contradictory while the other important field marks (black axillars, wing shape differences, ...) were not noted. Hence, I don't feel confident that Peregrine Falcon was satisfactorily eliminated. The observers may not be aware that young tundra Peregrines have light brown crowns which contrast with the darker "moustache mark". (Dinsmore described the crown as lighter than the back which sounds suspiciously like a young Peregrine; Prairies should not have a contrasting crown.) To answer your question, it is very possible for experienced observers to correctly identify Prairie Falcons without viewing the axillars. Unfortunately, my impression is that most Iowa observers lack considerable experience with large falcons so that observing black axillars may have to be required in most cases (except possible for wintering birds which are much more likely to be Prairies).

Trumpeter/Tundra Swan (4/8/85--Clay Co.)--the photographed bird is definitely a young Mute Swan, based on plumage characteristics and bill color!!!

Concerning your fall report, I noticed 2 errors. Sage Thrasher was left out of the "Species Data" section and the peak dates for Solitary Vireo should be September, not August. I was also dismayed by the poor quality of documentation produced by Steve Dinsmore. They were generally very sloppy with incomplete details and mostly unacceptable. Most of his sightings would not have been included at all if they were not observed (and properly documented) by others. I would suggest that somebody in your Records Committee provide him with examples of good documentations and explain to him the importance of providing thorough details for all noteworthy observations. While you are familiar with Steve's abilities, I know his poor descriptions will not impress any knowledgeable observer who does not know him.

This letter has gotten too long. I'm about to enter the computer era which should be a great convenience for all of my writing. Hope I've satisfactorily answered your questions. Let me know if I can provide any other assistance. Best wishes for this holiday season.

Sincerely,


Bruce Peterjohn

COMMON EIDER

DeSoto Bend NWR, Washington County, Ne. -- Harrison County, Ia.
 November 10, 1985
 4:00 p.m. -- 4:30 p.m.

Description: Size: Larger than White-winged Scoter in direct comparison. This bird also seemed "heavier" and more massive than the scoter.

Color: Overall a dull brown

Head: The head was sloping, resembling a canvasback in profile. There was a paler area around the eye, not so definite as to be called an "eye ring". This whitish area formed a line above and behind the sides of the face, extending down the sides of the throat and around the nape.

Bill: The bill was long and sloping with a definite bump near the tip, and ended with a prominent hook. The horny plates of the bill extended up the upper part of the cheeks to nearly the eye. These plates narrowed in the center, but widened near the eye. There was feathering down the center of the bill. Color of bill was grayish-brown.

Wings: The flight feathers of the wing were a very dull sooty-brown, and were unmarked. The wing coverts and back were brown mottled with black.

Breast: The breast of the bird was paler than head and back, being a tanish color. Some faint black vertical barring was visible on the breast. During the time I observed the bird, I did not see the flanks (covered by the wings, and the water).

Behavior: The bird dove often, staying under the water for some time, but resurfacing in nearly the same spot. The manner of diving was distinctive. The wings were opened half-way or more and the bird rose quite far out of the water before leaning into the dive. The tail was spread out and each tail feather was bluntly pointed.

Experience with this species: none

Equipment: 7 x 26 binoculars; 25x spotting scope

Distance from bird at closest point: 100 feet

Weather: Overcast, misty,

Written from notes taken 1 hour after sighting.

Tanya Bray
 9708 Grover
 Omaha, Ne

copy to NOU records committee

Thede Tobish
Box 90662
Anchorage, AK. 99509

23 Feb 86

B.J. Rose
14937 N St.
Omaha, NE 68137

Dear B.J. -

I apologize for taking far too long to respond to your letter of 24 Dec. As you said these photos are of marginal quality and I would be wary and reluctant to accept a first state record based on these photos alone. Presumably substantive field descriptions accompany these photos which provide adequate details for positive ID. In Alaska at least, ♀ Common Eiders have mostly even-width vertical bars on the scapulars and flank feathers; ♀ King Eiders have crescent-shaped thinner bars on scapulars and flanks. Closer views in good condition would reveal the differing nuances in the bill configurations, which are mostly obscured in these photos.

The ♂ bird: I agree with your assessment that this is a first winter (early winter) King Eider. Most photos clearly show the King Eider posture with the thick-based tapered neck, short peaked crown (crown peak is forward, hind rectangular) and shorter body. The broad/deep bill base and bump around the nostrils is more King-like. It looks like the base of the bill shows some paleness but all immature ♂ King's have at least some dusky paleness. Photos #1 & 9 show obvious pale feathering across the chest which is found on both Common + King imm. ♂♂. This

23 Feb. 86

feathering is typically darker in King but defines a clearer patch above the water line. Bill configuration is as best as I can ascertain that of young Kings.

The ♀ bird: These photos are even less helpful but I see no strong characters that make this bird a ♀ Common. My first reaction was, because of plumage color that this was a Common. But the body size & shape (short and not robust) and bill configuration are much more King Eider like. The straight line of bill between the cutting edge and the culmen appears more King-like as does the bill extension up towards the eye which ends squarely exactly in line with the lower mandible edge. I have also seen what were probably ~~1st yr~~ ♀s with the noticeable pale patch between the upper and lower mandible. Just by size, the female is diminutive in comparison with the male in photo #1, further indicative of King Eider. This bird may be other than a 1st yr. However since the feathering lacks a rich deep rust tone typical of young females. Also more typical of Kings is the more delicate head, neck and breast, all more robust in Common Eider. Common Eider also has a long sloping nape which in non alert posture appears attenuated and distinctive unlike this ♀.

I would like to read field descriptions of both birds to more comfortably assess these records. I currently feel both birds to be King Eiders. Quite an exciting record at any rate. Please advise me of your final decisions, or, and if you require more communication of me. Thank you for including my opinions. Again I apologize for the lateness of this reply.

Best Regards
Sheela Walsh

COMMON EIDER

DeSoto Bend NWR, Washington County, Ne. -- Harrison County, Ia.

November 10, 1985

4:00 p.m. -- 4:30 p.m.

Description: Size: Larger than White-winged Scoter in direct comparison. This bird also seemed "heavier" and more massive than the scoter.

Color: Overall a dull brown

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Experience with this species: none

Equipment: 7 x 26 binoculars; 25x spotting scope

Distance from bird at closest point: 100 feet

Weather: Overcast, misty,

Written from notes taken 1 hour after sighting.

Tanya Bray
9708 Grover
Omaha, Ne

copy to NOU records committee

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

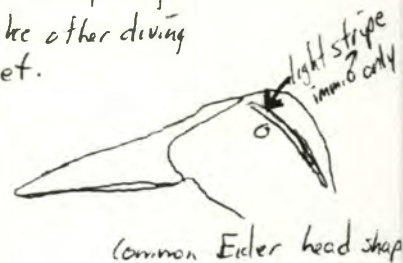
85-15

What species? Common Eider How many? 2Location? DeSoto Bend NWR, Harrison CountyType of habitat? large oxbow lake along major riverWhen? date(s): 11 Nov. 1985 time: 2:30 PM to 4:00 PMWho? your name and address: Steve Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames IA 50010others with you: James Dinsmore and Mark Dixon, both of Ames and B.J. Rege, Websterothers before or after you: unob.

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

One of the birds, the ♀, was first seen swimming about 100 yards from shore in good light. The larger size, much browner color, and the larger bill that was flat with the top of the head set it apart from the nearby Lesser Scaup and White-winged Scoters. The bird also had a peculiar habit of opening its wings just before it dove under water. Eiders (and scoters), unlike other diving ducks, use their wings to swim under water instead of their feet.

After a few minutes, a second eider joined the first. This bird was of a grayer color than the female bird. It also showed a faint light stripe above the eye and had a white breast. The large bill flat with the top of the head also identified this bird as a Common Eider, probably an immature ♂.



Similar species and how eliminated:

Scoters eliminated by larger size, larger bill, white chest (imm. ♂), faint stripe ^{above} eye (imm. ♂), barring on sides, uniform brown/gray color and head shape.
Other eiders (especially King Eider) eliminated by size, faint light stripe ~~above~~ above eye and white breast (imm. ♂), vertical barring on sides, and large bill flat with top of head.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? no

If yes, explain: _____

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Light was ok, even though it was very cloudy, poor light, and the birds were often swimming in the shade of trees. Estimated viewing distance varied from 100-150 yards. I used a B&L 20x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

I have seen Common Eiders in Massachusetts.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

How long before field notes made? _____ this form completed? 24 hours

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

85-15
✓What species? Common Eider How many? 2Location? DeSoto Natl. Wildlife Refuge (Lakeview viewing area, distinctly on Iowa side of lakeType of habitat? freshwater lakeWhen? date(s): 12 November 1985 time: 2:45 to 3:15 p.m.Who? your name and address: Jim Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Drive, Amesothers with you: Steve Dinsmore, Mark Dixonothers before or after you: B. J. Rose (same time), B. and L. Padleford (and others ?)

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

At first, saw only one individual but later when I did most of my viewing, both birds were present. Were large ducks (some scaup and mallard were nearby for size comparison. Much of color was brown with some distinct barring along side and similar type marks on back. Lighting was poor and birds were long ways off so I couldn't see lots of detail. The following are the most distinct points I noted on birds:

1. Birds were feeding, diving frequently and then surfacing for brief view before diving again. When they dove, they spread wings from body just before the dive and didn't show the looping up and down dive typical of pochards and other diving ducks I have viewed. We also saw WW Scoter and it showed this same spread wing before dive also
2. One of the birds was distinctly lighter than the other in overall color, although it certainly was a brown color with the dark barrings mentioned. The other bird was brown but much darker almost going to a light black. That bird had a distinct lighter colored slash going back from the eye and curving down on the back of the head. That bird also appeared to be lighter colored on the breast than the other bird but otherwise was overall darker in color.
3. I tried hard to see how far back the base of the bill was exposed going toward the eye but couldn't make that out. What did appear to be useful though was that the bill appeared to be quite long and almost had a Canvasback like slope to it and the forehead. It appeared to resemble the bill shape of the Common more than the King Eider

Similar species and how eliminated:

The diving pattern narrows it down to scoters and eiders and the brown color clearly was not that of a scoter. The brown color was not the rich chocolate brown shown for King Eider and also the bill shape matched that of Common more than King. (over)

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? _____

not that were expressed
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Overcast and birds were in shadows so not good light. Estimated several hundred yards
20 x spotting scope, took up to 30 power several times but hard to follow bird

Previous experience with species and similar ones: King none

Common - have seen on east coast but really no experience with this plumage pattern.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Robbins, Scott, Bellrose, Natl. Geographic guide, Peterson

How long before field notes made? _____ this form completed? 20 hours

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

After viewing the birds, I checked a number of books including Bellrose, Scott, Natl. Geographic guide, Robbins, and Peterson. Only Peterson seems to show the white slash that the one bird had although the rest of that bird's plumage did not match what I saw. The plate in Robbins seems to show the plumage I saw although the bird is turned so the light slash is not so obvious. The light slash was not the pencil thin mark shown in a number of plates for the King Eider but was a fairly wide band (easily wider than the eye).

Based on the above, I believe the bird was a Common Eider.

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Common Eider (Somateria mollissima) How many? 2 - ♀ and juv. ♂Location? DeSoto Bend N.W.R. - Harrison Co. IowaType of habitat? Old ox-bow lake of Missouri Riv.When? date(s): Nov. 13, 1985 time: 11:00 AM. to 11:30 AM.Who? your name and address: Robert K. Myers, R.R. 2, Box 153 Perry, Iowa 50220Others with you: Emil K. Nattalle + Scott PattonOthers before or after you: "mob."

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior. *I don't think anyone had problems calling the birds eider sp. I was told ahead of viewing that they were Common Eiders and this probably influenced my I.D. However, I do think what I saw does give good basis to the "Common" I.D. I noted the following:*

1. Large ducks (some longer than ♀ white-winged scoter nearby) with thick heavy necks.

2. Birds had wedge shaped heads with long - straight - sloping forehead almost like canvasback.



- fairly rounded crown.
This angle was longer + narrower than I've shown.

3. Upper part of culmen was narrow projection (long) extending toward eye.

I believe the feathered angle this created was too long + narrow to be a "king".

4. One bird was med.-brown + other was a little darker. Seemed to have some kind of darker marks (streaks?) on this background color

5. Darker bird (probably juv. ♂) had light mark on head behind eye

6. As birds dove under water they slightly spread their wings so that wing tips were last things visible.

Similar species and how eliminated: *I thought the straight flat sloping bill and the long narrow extension of upper culmen gave the I.D. edge to Common.*

It is a difficult I.D. and for us inexperienced with eiders may remain eider sp.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Yes

If yes, explain: Some think more "King" marks were visible.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Cloudy, rainy day - cold - not good light

dis. = approx. 75 to 100 yd.

used 25x scope

Previous experience with species and similar ones: None

References and persons consulted before writing description: Master Guide, Palmer Vol. 3, and Nat. Geographic Guide

How long before field notes made? 1 hr this form completed? 5 days

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

85-15

What species? King Eider (Somateria spectabilis) How many? 2 - 1 im. male and 1 female
Location? at Lakeview Drive area of oxbow lake close to Missouri River at DeSoto Bend N.W.R. Harrison Co.

Type of habitat? Open water on oxbow lake near Missouri River

When? date(s): November 15, 1985 time: 8:34 am to 11:55 am

Who? your name and address: Francis L. Moore, 336 Fairfield St., Waterloo, IA 50703

others with you: Tom Kent, Iowa City

others before or after you: m. ob.

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

We drove up to the Lakeview Drive area and started looking over the ducks that were there. We saw a large dark bird after driving North a short distance near the shoreline. After watching the bird for some time we decided that it must be an juvenile male because of the coloring. The bird was a deep brown on the head with a little lighter brown on the back and wings. The breast was a brownish-gray color. The bill was a brownish color. There was a broken eyering with the white showing above and below the eye but not in front of the eye. There was also a distinct thin white line coming from the rear of the eye and following the bend of the neck down at an oblique angle along the neck about two or three inches. We drove up the lake and found the female bird and watched it for some time. This bird was a rufous-brown color. This bird lacked barring anywhere on the body but did have indistinct barring look under the rump or vent area. This bird also had two or three thin light gray streaks, possibly light feather edging of the secondaries, on the wings. In both birds the eye color was dark. The forehead was sloping down toward the tip of the bill but had an upswing near the tip about 3/4 of the way down. The scapulars had a v-shaped edging to them of a crescent shape to them. In flight the wings were brown except for the axillaries, which were a bright white color. On the bill - the feathering came down on the upper mandible but stopped approx. 1 cm. from the nostril on both birds. In size the two birds were larger than any other of the ducks present. They were 1" to 2" larger than the White-winged Scoter that swam beside them for awhile. and much chunkier. They did not look exceptionally large as I would expect a Common Eider to look next to a White-winged Scoter. Everything taken together, to me makes the birds King Eiders and not Common Eiders. We went expecting to see Common Eiders and after looking the birds over very carefully for about four hours and putting all field marks together they look like King Eider to me.

Similar species and how eliminated: By process of elimination of Common Eider markings. The birds rode too low in the water to see the barring on the sides. The feathering on the bill did not reach the nostril. The shape of the head was quite rounded. Bill did not look exceptionally long as a Common should.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Yes

If yes, explain: There is disagreement as to the feathering on the bill and the slope of the head. To me the eye was lower on the head than on a Common Eider.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Bright overcast with very good to excellent viewing conditions. Seen from approx. 75 feet at closest using Leitz 10X40 binoculars and Celestron C90 33X telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen two other Common Eiders on coast of Virginia and have not seen King Eider before

References and persons consulted before writing description: NGS Guide, Master Guides, Cramp.

How long before field notes made? 12:10 pm this form completed? 7 hrs.

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

King Eider (2), 15 Nov 1985, DeSoto NWR, Iowa and Nebraska

Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240

Other observers: Francis Moore with me, others before and after.

Time: 8:35 (darker bird), 8:56 (lighter bird) to noon.

Habitat: backwater of Missouri River--wide area of DeSoto Bend called Lakeview area. The birds were seen on both sides of the water; i.e., they were in both Iowa and Nebraska, as this is the state boundry water.

Description: These notes are a composite of notes dictated at 8:47, 8:56, 10:30, and 11:25 AM. I learned about the birds on Sunday night, Nov 10, but was unable to go see them until Friday, Nov 15. We arrived at the headquarters at 8 AM and got a pass and key to enter the area. We found the first bird within about 10 minutes after arriving at the Lakeview area. We had been told they were Common Eiders; this may have influenced our early observations. Later we began to doubt the identification.

There were two eiders which were feeding most of the time as they moved up and down the backwater and from one side to the other. They would raise their wings, kick their feet and dive. They were together most of the time and tended to dive together. We saw them fly once when a motor boat passed by. They flew about 20 feet above the water and going away from us they showed little white under the wing. We did not note the angle of the head in flight. They flew side by side and did not sail.

Both birds were overall brown and quite plain. One bird was gray-brown and lighter colored, the other more reddish-brown and darker colored. They were bigger than Mallards. When next to a male White-winged Scoter, one was 1 to 2 inches longer and bigger bodied.

Initial description of the darker bird was as follows: "Overall brown duck, larger than Mallard. Breast light gray-brown, back darker brown. Face two-toned brown. Top of head and back of neck same color as back. Rest of face slightly more reddish-brown. There is a light, indistinct crescent over top of eye and gray line extending from the back of the eye obliquely downward along the neck, separating the neck from the face. The bill is brown. Feathers of the face extend well down below the bill almost to the nostril [We later decided this was inaccurate]. The feathering on top of the bill does not extend down very far. The bill seems to have a slight curve to the culmen." Later: "Got a profile look of the first bird showing a very straight culmen with tip of bill turned upward. The forehead is straight or sticks out a little." The darker bird had a slightly lighter, plain and buffier breast.

The lighter bird was grayer and without the gray line down the neck. It did have a pale indistinct crescent above the eye. Its lower mandible was more visible. The flanks were also more exposed above the water and did not show prominent barring. If there was any markings on the flanks they were indistinct.

On three occasions I saw a bird lift a wing to expose quite white axillaries that were white right up to the body feathers. Two very thin light gray wing bars were seen. We spent a lot of time trying to study the bill pattern, but this was difficult because the birds were active. Later in the morning, using a 30 power Celestron scope, we decided that the nostril was near the upper edge of the mandible and about 1 cm proximal and dorsal to the tip of the feathering on the bill. The culmen appeared straight except for an upward bend at the tip, where it also appeared thin. There may have been a slight bump at the forehead, but the top and back of the head appeared rounded. The eyes were dark and did not appear to me to be in the top of the head, but rather more toward the middle. See drawing I made after returning to

the headquarters (submitted with notes from Francis Moore).

Conditions: Distance was 50 to several hundred yards. At one time the darker bird filled 1/3 of the field in my Questar scope. We used 10x binoculars, and 20x, 30x, and 50x scopes. Photos were taken with 750 mm Celestron lens with 2x extender using 1000 ASA Agfa film on automatic exposure. Heavy overcast to light rain and mild wind. About 40 degrees.

Similar species: We initially thought these birds to be Common Eiders but at the end of the observation period we thought they were King Eiders. King Eider is more likely to occur in Iowa. They were not adult male males or second year males. Only females and first year male need to be considered. See below for discussion of differential.

Agreement: We disagreed with other observers who thought these birds to be Common Eiders.

Previous experience: Have seen Common Eiders in Maine and both species in Alaska.

References/time used: Used National Geographic Guide before and during observation. Other sources used later.

Time of notes/taped: Notes dictating while watching. More notes made at headquarters (with Francis Moore). Transcribed notes that evening. Typed this report 3 days later.



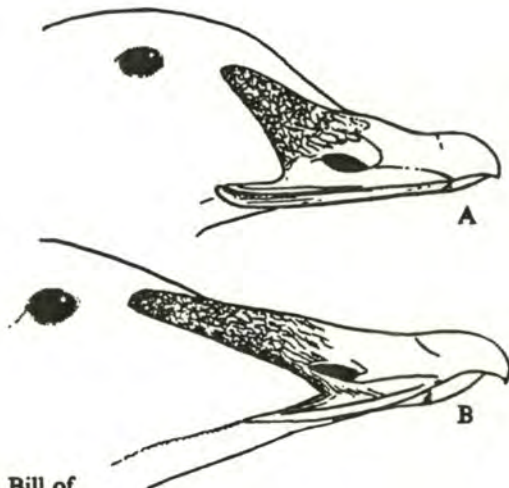
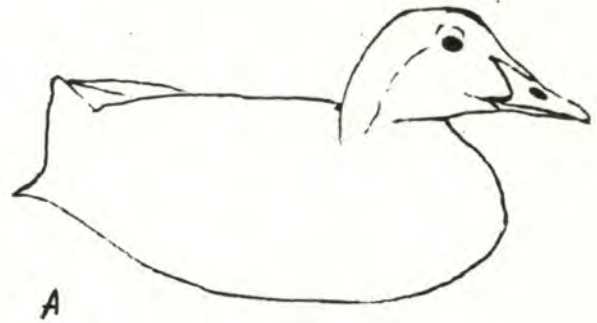
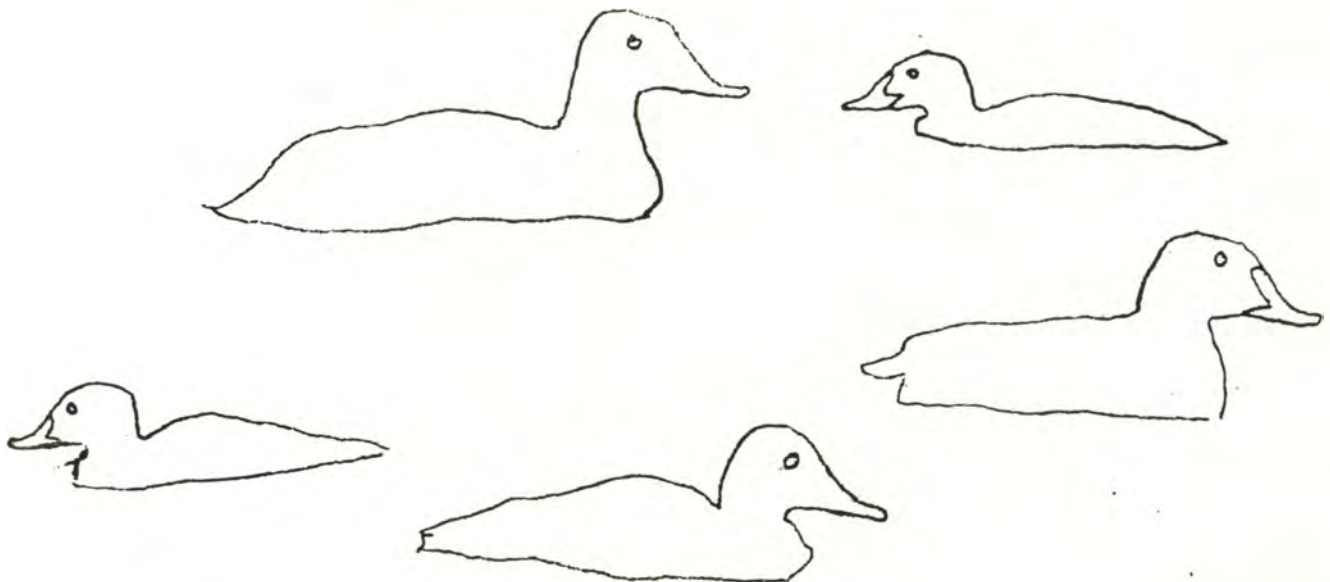


Fig. 31 Bill of
(A) King Eider female
(B) Common Eider female

From Godfrey, The Birds of Canada



Tracings of photos in Master Guide



Tracings of photos of DeSoto NWR birds 11/15/85 T.H. Kent

Midwestern King Eider Records
11/21/85

/ SD none Whitney 1978

/ MI total through 1982 15 Payne 1983

/ NE none Johnsgard 1980

/ WI Sheboygan 1 male Kumlien & Hollister 1951
1880, mounted male, full plumage

11/10/ IA Keokuk 1 imm m. Dinsmore 1984
1894 specimen at Univ of Iowa

12/25/ WI Milwaukee 1 fem. Kumlien & Hollister 1951
1899 specimen

01/07/00 WI Milwaukee 1 male Kumlien & Hollister 1951
specimen

11/28/03 WI Milwaukee 1 fem. Kumlien & Hollister 1951
spec., Bull Wis Nat Hist Soc 5:136

11/08/33 WI Muskego L. 1 male Kumlien & Hollister 1951
specimen shot by hunter

11/06/36 IN Lake George 1 Kellers 1979
specimen said to have been examined

11/27/47 KA Lawrence, Douglas Co 1 Johnston 1965
specimen

11/18/50 IL New Boston, Mercer C 1 imm m. Bohlen 1978
specimen

11/18/50 IA Mississippi R, Louisa 1 Dinsmore 1984
specimen at Putnam Mus.

12/26/56 IN Michigan City 1 Kellers 1979
to 1/12/57, Burr 1957

12/16/57 IN Lake Michigan 1 imm f. Kellers 1979
specimen

10/22/59 IN Michigan City 1 Kellers 1979
seen by many, Burr 1960

11/ /59 IN Lake Michigan 4 specs Kellers 1959
specimens at Purdue, AFN 14:39

01/13/63 MN Knife L., Two Harbor 1 Green & Janssen 1975
collected, Flicker 35:70, Lake Co., AFN 17:326, 1st MN

10/29/64 MN Lost L., St Louis Co 1 of 5-6 Green & Janssen 1975
1 shot, Loon 36:136, AFN 19:39-imm male, photo, 2nd MN

12/20/64 IA Bellevue 1 seen AFN 19:384, Iowa Birds
Myrle Jones fide Woody Brown

05/25/65 OH Hebron Fish Hatchery 1 Thompson 1983
Licking Co.

03/03/68 IL Calumet Park 1 imm m. Bohlen 1978, AFN 22:444

11/08/70 IA L. Odessa, Louisa Co 1 fem. Dinsmore 1984
specimen at Univ of Iowa, female internally sexed

02/02/71 OH near Cincinnati 1 Thompson 1983
shot by hunter

02/13/71 IL Lake Decatur 1 fem. Bohlen 1978
to 3/26/71, photographed

05/09/71 MN Lower Red L., Beltram 2 pair Green & Janssen 1975
Loon 43:90-91

11/08/71 IA Ingham L. 1 shot AB 26:71, Petersen 1972
specimen not available

10/16/73 MN Mille Lacs L. fem/imm Green & Janssen 1975
 Loon 46:34
 11/ /73 IL Rend L., Jefferson C 3 Bohlen 1978
 1 imm. male, 2 females, specimens in private collection
 12/22/73 OH Lorain 5 Thompson 1983
 maximum number
 12/23/73 WI Oshkosh 1 AB 28:642
 to 1/7/74
 12/30/73 MI Muskegon SP 1 seen AB 28:642
 02/02/74 MI Muskegon, Muskegon C 1 Payne 1983
 02/02/74 MI Harbor Springs, Emmet 1 Payne 1983
 11/24/74 IL Chicago 1 dead Bohlen 1978, AB 29:65
 12/12/74 MI St. Ignace 2 AB 29:694
 to 12/24/74
 12/12/74 MN Grand Marais 1 AB 29:694
 5th MN
 12/14/74 IL Wilmette 1 Bohlen 1978, AB 29:697
 to 12/23/74
 01/ /76 MI St. Clair Co. 1 AB 30:722
 to Feb 76
 12/18/76 MI McComb Co. 2 AB 31:334
 state given only in index
 12/18/77 MI Port Huron CBC 1 imm. m AB 32:353
 5th year in row for MI
 01/17/78 MI Port Huron 1 fem. AB 32:354
 to 2/11/78
 03/24/78 MI Monroe Co. 1 fem. AB 32:1009
 to 3/29/78, species seems regular now
 11/05/78 MI Lake Erie, Monroe Co 1 AB 33:179
 02/19/79 IL Springfield 1 AB 33:286
 to 3/17/79
 12/01/79 MI Port Huron 20 Payne 1983, JPW 58:87
 11/10/80 PA Presque Isle SP 1 AB 35:182
 06/17/81 MI Saginaw Bay 1 Payne 1983, JPW 59:143
 photos, AB 35:941, 1st MI summer
 11/07/81 PA Presque Isle SP 1 AB 36:176
 10/26/83 SASK Blackstrap L. 1 imm m. AB 38:215
 to 11/18/83, 1st SASK, 3rd regional
 11/11/83 MI St. Claire R. 1 AB 38:205
 11/13/83 MI Detroit R. 1 shot AB 38:205

Midwestern Common Eider Records

11/21/85

11/03/ KA LeCompton, Douglas Co 1 Johnston 1965
 1891 specimen, v-nigra
 12/14/ IL near Chicago 1 imm Bohlen 1978
 1874 specimen
 11/01/01 IA Sioux City 1 fem. Dinsmore 1984
 Pacific race
 11/04/11 SD Madison Pass 1 Whitney 1978
 specimen verified at Smithsonian
 11/07/40 SD Lake Poinsett 1 Whitney 1978
 shot
 10/10/42 IA Clay Co. 4 of 10 Dinsmore 1984
 shot, hypothetical
 04/12/43 IL Chicago 1 male Bohlen 1978
 dresser, Clark & Nice 1950
 12/07/45 IL Belmont Harbor, Cook 1 Bohlen 1978, Ford 1956
 11/07/53 MN Grand Marais, Cook C 1 fem. Green & Janssen 1975
 seen at close range, Flicker 25:141-142
 11/30/57 IN Michigan City 1 imm. Kellers 1979
 to 1/26/58, no detail
 10/25/59 MN Warroad, Roseau Co. 2 Green & Janssen 1975
 2 specimens
 11/07/59 MN Squaw L., Itasca Co. 1 Green & Janssen 1975
 specimen
 11/26/59 OH Erie Co. 1 shot AFN 14:39
 specimen to Ohio State
 11/29/59 OH Cleveland 1 AFN 14:39
 02/02/60 IL Chicago 1 male Bohlen 1978, AFN 14:312
 11/06/60 SD Lake Hendricks in MN 1 Whitney 1978
 specimen
 11/05/66 MN Lake Reno, Pope Co. 1 Green & Janssen 1975
 specimen
 12/ /67 NE Lincoln Co. 1 fem. Johnsgard 1980
 specimen, sedentaria, NBR 37:38
 11/10/68 WI Crex Meadows, Burnett 1 shot AFN 23:484
 11/ /70 SD Stanley Co. 1 Whitney 1978
 specimen seen by Rose
 02/21/71 MI Marquette 1 fem. Payne 1983
 photos
 01/01/75 ONT Wolfe Is. 2 ad. m. AB 29:684
 full-plumaged drakes very unusual for Great Lakes
 11/19/75 MI Marquette Bay 1 imm m. Payne 1983, JPW 49:10-11
 also 11/20,29, AB 30:73, 2nd MI record
 02/06/76 MI Marquette 1 AB 30:722
 02/ /77 IN Michigan City 1 Kellers 1979
 no detail
 03/11/78 IL Sterling 1 AB 32:1013
 to 04/08/78, well-documented
 04/16/78 MI Poet Huron 1 fem. AB 32:1009
 same bird also on ONT side

03/09/79 MI Port Huron 1 fem AB 33:773
carefully studied
10/12/80 OH Maumee Bay 1 Thompson 1983
12/01/80 ND Spiritwood L. 1 AB 35:311
01/04/81 MI St. Joseph, BerrienC 1 fem. Payne 1983, AB 35:302
5th MI record
12/05/81 ND Lake Sakakawea 1 fem. AB 36:306
1 of 4 or 5 ND records

Separation of Brown Appearing Common and King Eiders

T. H. Kent

This analysis is based on photos I took of the two eiders at DeSoto NWR (including tracings of their shape from the photos), examination of specimens at the University of Iowa Museum of Natural History, review of field guides (National Geographic, Master Guide, Pough, Peterson), waterfowl texts (Johnsgard, Belrose, Kortwright, Delacour), and general texts (Palmer, Cramp, Godfrey). Two specimens are of particular interest: a male taken at Keokuk, Iowa, on 10 Nov 1894 (#25003) and a female (internally sexed) taken in Louisa Co., Iowa, on 8 Nov 1970. The Keokuk specimen was photographed with a female *Somateria mollissima dresseri* taken at Battle Harbor, Labrador, on 9 June 1932, and the Louisa Co. bird was photographed with an adult female Common Eider from the Horr collection (date and location unknown). Other mounted eiders in display cases were also photographed. No obvious immature Common Eiders were among the specimens available. The Keokuk male was much grayer than the Louisa Co. female, but it may be in a different plumage (juvenile molting to basic vs. basic for the female).

AGE AND SEX: An adult female Common or King Eiders should be in basic plumage in November. The adult female Common Eider should be darker and more heavily barred than the birds in question. First year Common Eider would generally be in basic I plumage, but development is variable and some juvenal plumage could be retained (Palmer). The most obvious elements in the male, according to Palmer, are barred flank and scapulars and more white on breast than for juvenal plumage. The female basic I should have buffy eye stripe and distinctly barred breast. Delacour describes immatures "of both sexes much like female, but more dusky, the markings much smaller and less conspicuous." I didn't see any good illustrations of first year Common Eiders.

An adult female King Eider may not be as heavily barred as the Common Eider, but should be more heavily marked than the birds in question. First year King Eiders should be in basic I plumage in November. The male develops a yellowish to orange bill, but not until December (Palmer). The crown and nape should be rich buffy brown with somewhat paler cheeks and narrow pale buff transocular line; breast, sides, and under tail coverts buffy tan with somewhat crescentic subterminal blackish bar, hence a broken pattern; lower breast to vent more evenly dark, the tan terminal portions of the feathers being greatly reduced and soon frayed (Palmer). Pough says "Young are grayish brown, paler below than above, but otherwise like the female. In early winter the throat and breast of the young male begin to turn white, the head uniform dark brown." Belrose says "In the fall, the immature males appear gray-brown with lighter breasts and dark brown heads." Delacour describes immatures "like the Common Eider, but the head, neck and underparts lighter, and the wing coverts with deeper buff edges." The Master Guide says that "First-winter females tend to be richer orange-brown; older birds are more sandy-colored."

The lack of heavy markings suggest that the birds in question were first year birds in basic plumage or juvenile plumage molting into basic plumage. The darker and redder bird could be of a different sex than the grayer bird or in a different plumage or both. I could not judge from the literature whether differences in first year plumages are useful in separating Common from King Eider, but I got the general impression that the same criteria are used in separating immatures as are used in separating adult females.

COMMON VS. KING EIDER: According to Cramp "Details of head shape, bill feathering, and pattern of barring only certain bases of diagnosis." The head shape and bill feathering are well illustrated in the line drawing from Godfrey and photos in the Master Guide (see attached). The Common Eider has a wedge-shaped head with long bill and eye set in the top of the head giving an appearance similar to a

Canvasback. The tip of the bill is quite large and hooked. This is well illustrated in the specimens. Also Common Eiders tend to hold the head back onto the neck and point the bill downward while swimming (Kortright).

The head of the King Eider presents a more rounded appearance with the eye more centrally located. The culmen is straight to slightly concave often with a slight bump on the forehead. The bill tip may be slightly upturned and is much smaller than the Common's. King Eiders generally keep their bills parallel to the water (Master Guide). The head shape of the birds in question clearly fit King Eider and not Common Eider (see attached). The description in the Master Guide for King Eider is quite appropriate for the birds in question: "The somewhat concave bill process, slightly humped forehead, and rounded crown give this species a unique profile that is apparent at some distance; head shape is the bird's most readily identifiable feature."

The feathering on the lower side of the upper mandible on the Common Eider extends to the nostril, while the feathering in the midline above the mandible does not extend near the nostril (The long extension of the upper mandible is far above the nostril). In the King Eider these findings are reversed. In the birds in question, we felt the bill was relatively short with the lower feathering not extending to the nostril, but rather a centimeter below and posterior to the nostril. We could not confirm that the feathering at the culmen extended down very far; however, this would be a narrow band of feathering and we could have missed it. The shape of the bill was that of a King Eider.

Barring on the back, scapulars, and sides was hard to see. We eventually were able to perceive crescentic marks on the back and scapulars, but not the sides. This degree of marking would not be unlike the Keokuk King Eider specimen. I suspect that these birds were in worn juvenal or first basic plumage, and thus poorly barred.

Other less definitive features that favor King Eider over Common Eider include the eye and neck markings, underwing color, head and neck position, flight pattern, tail position, wing bars, and vagrancy pattern.

The light crescent over the eye and neck line are shown in several drawing of King Eiders, while Common Eiders are often shown with a indistinct superciliary line. Cramp describes the adult breeding female with "lighter buff spot around eye and streak behind eye to sides of neck." Both birds in question had an indistinct gray crescent over the eye and the darker bird had a distinct light line from the eye down the neck.

The axillaries on these birds were quite white, but the wing coverts did not appear light-colored as is depicted for Common Eider in the National Geographic Guide and described in other sources.

The photographs show these birds holding their bills parallel to the water, not downturned. The head is not held back into the neck and the neck does not look unusually thick as in Common Eider.

According to Bellrose, the Common Eiders "are stocky, thick-necked birds that appear ungainly in flight, alternately flapping their wings and sailing, with their heads held below body level. They customarily fly in a line very low over the water, sometimes in troughs of the waves." The birds in question did not sail and we did not note that they held their heads low. They flew at about 20 feet above the water and appeared heavy-bodied but not ungainly.

Kortright mentions that the tail of the Common Eider is often cocked upward in swimming birds. The birds in question cocked their tails when diving, but held them flat when swimming (substantiated by photos). Both species may have faint wing bars, but these may be lacking in immature Commons. The birds in question had faint wingbars.

It is well recognized that the King Eider is a more common inland vagrant; however, there are a number of records of Common Eiders from the midwest. Vagrant records for the two species are listed separately.

What species? Common Eider How many? 2Location? De Soto Bend, Horseshoe Bend, RefugeType of habitat? water of the horseshoe bend, slightly on Iowa side, middle, then Nebr. sideWhen? date(s): November 16, 1985 time: 9:35 to 10:15 AMWho? your name and address: Beth Proescholdt, Liscomb, Mark Proescholdt, Liscomb, Jim Fuller, Iowa City
(collaborating on documentation)

others with you: _____

others before or after you: Jim & Steve Dinsmore, Mark Dixon

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

When we first sighted the eiders the mass of ducks had flown, leaving only the two eiders in that one area, & they were separated from other ducks all the time we watched them. They were large, heavy ducks, about the size of a Mallard, seemingly quite unwary. They dived often, probably going far down, as they came up with force, showing dark feet.

The immature male was a chocolate brown with buffy breast (that showed when the light was right), and a light streak from the eye at an angle to the nape.

The female varied in color, to our eyes, from a grayish-brown to rusty brown, depending upon how much sunshine there was. (This caused us to wonder if indeed it was a ♀ King Eider, but Kim Eckert says ♀ commons can be as rusty brown as ♀ King Eiders). The female was finely barred on the sides, extending to the tail, with the primaries showing darker than the sides.

Both birds had a Canvasback-appearing sloping forehead (con't on back)

Similar species and how eliminated: King Eider -
See above

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Yes

We had reservations at first wondering if they were Common or King Eiders, but after watching them for 40-45 minutes we determined they were Common.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

light at an angle & behind us, PC to cloudy; 50-250 yds estimate, 3 scopes and binoculars

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Beth - no experience; Mark - has seen C. Eiders in Maine & Churchill; Jim - I don't know -

References and persons consulted before writing description: Field Guides - Peterson's, National Geographic, Robbins, Audubon Master Guide, Pough - & Kim Eckert's.

How long before field notes made? 1/2 hours this form completed? Nov. 20, 1985

flowing smoothly to the long sloping bill and frontal patch. At times a golden or slightly orange wash showed on the male's bill. (Could it be a King??) Again, Kim Eckert says an orange bill could be either species.

The bill extended back almost to the eye that was set far back on the head. It was this slope of the head and long frontal shield extending so far up the forehead that convinced us these were Common, not King, Eiders.

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING IN IOWA

SPECIES: BIRD A: COMMON EIDER (one first fall male)
 BIRD B: EIDER SP. (King or Common; one first fall female)

DATE: 20 November 1985

PLACE: DeSoto NWR; oxbow lake. Each bird in both Iowa and Nebraska.

OBSERVERS: W. Ross Silcock and Babs Padelford.

VIEWING CONDITIONS: Excellent; partly sunny, no heat distortion; Bird A about 75 yards away at closest; Bird B about 150 yards at closest. Looking north-east or east, with sun in south. Little or no wind; water calm.

TIME OF DAY: Approximately 2 hours in late morning.

OPTICAL: Bushnell scopes, 25X eyepieces.

DESCRIPTIONS OF BIRDS: Taken verbatim from field notes dictated by WRS to BP, and from field notes by both observers, written down at the time of observation by BP.
 This summary written 27 November, after extensive discussion and referral to most of the standard waterfowl references and field guides. Note that these birds were photographed by B.J. Rose, but we have not yet seen the results (which, we understand, are forthcoming).

BIRD A: Head darker brown than breast, almost chocolate-colored; breast tan; no white feathering in breast.

Eye has very pale area around it, almost a diffuse eye ring. Noticeable Garganey-like buffy stripe down each side of neck meeting at nape. Rear view looks like bird has a cap.

Chest has some darker vermiculations, concentrated at center of breast just above waterline.

Bill: upper part of bill extends almost to eye (see drawing); is yellowish near eye. Culmen darker than rest of bill. Bill overall is brown and appears elongated.

Head profile is Canvasback-like.

Flanks buffy tan, paler than back, more buffy than breast. Barring where seen near rear vertical, not crescent-shaped.



Ornithologists' Union Checklist, Fifth Edition (1957) lists specimens of dresseri from Colorado, Wisconsin, and Illinois. It is noteworthy however that the single Nebraska record of Common Eider proved to be of the race sedentaria (Nebr. Bird Rev. 37:38). This race is generally considered to be non-migratory (Palmer, 1976), and the Nebraska record may be unique south of Canada (see AOU Checklist, 1957; Palmer, 1976). It should be noted also that there are specimens of the Pacific Coast race of Common Eider (y. nigra) from North Dakota, Kansas, and Iowa (AOU Checklist, 1957). Palmer (1976) suggests that these birds may come from the Beaufort Sea via various river systems leading into the interior.

While both birds appeared to us to show little or no "forehead", i.e. the culmen and crown seemed to be in a line with no "dished" appearance, we do not consider this to be of much significance in first-fall birds, as these characters apparently become more distinct with age. Similarly, we do not consider the vertical bars we saw on the flanks of Bird A to be significant, especially as the bird was a male. Although the "bars versus crescents" is important in adult females, we are not so sure about young birds, especially young males.

In summary, we believe that separation of first-fall immature King and Common Eiders can only be made in many cases if the bill features can be well seen (nostril placement relative to feathering both on side and top of "face", as well as pattern of rearward extension of bill processes). Unfortunately we were unable to see any of these points on Bird B, but in the case of Bird A we are confident that the extent of the rearward extension of the bill identifies the bird as a Common Eider.

Wings: flight feathers uniformly chocolate-brown as are upper wing coverts.

Back uniformly chocolate-brown with paler feather edgings.

Tail feathers: chocolate-brown.

BIRD B: More uniformly-colored than A, and not seen as well.

Head and breast medium to light brown; paler than wings, which were chocolate-brown.

Bill darker than Bird A; uniformly blackish. Same Canvasback-like profile.

Secondaries and secondary coverts faintly edged with buffy giving appearance of faint wing bars.

CONCLUSIONS: The above descriptions led us to believe that Bird A was an immature male (head stripes; lack of developing wing-bars or speculum; very pale breast contrasting with darker head). Probably a first-fall bird due to total absence of any white feathers in the breast or rump area.

We believe Bird B to be an immature, probably first-fall, female (less contrast in overall coloration, especially between breast and head; beginnings of wing-bars or speculum; lack of head-stripe).

Identification of these birds to species is far more difficult than aging or even sexing. Indeed, we did not see enough bill detail on Bird B to be able to identify it to species. We could not locate the nostril on either bird, and could not get a clear view of the extent of the bony parts of the bill of Bird B.

However in the case of Bird A, we could determine that the extension of the bony part of the bill proximally was obvious and extensive; almost reaching the eye. Furthermore, it appeared to be at least as wide to the rear as it was distally. We believe that this characteristic alone identifies Bird A as a Common Eider (King Eider would rarely show as great a proximal extension as seen in Bird A, and even if it did, it would come to a point, rather than ending bluntly). Furthermore, we believe Bird A to be of one of the races sedentaria or dresseri because these races have the most developed rearward bill extension (see line drawings in Palmer, Handbook of North American Birds, Vol. 2, 1976). The race dresseri is perhaps more likely to occur in the upper midwest, as birds of this race move into the Great Lakes from the northeastern United States and Canada (see Palmer), and a few are probably forced southward most years by poor weather conditions. The American

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What Species? King Eider How many? 2
 Location? De Soto Bend N.W.R. near Missouri Valley, IA
 Type of Habitat? open patch in expanse of Mo. River
 When? date(s)? 24 Nov. 1985 time: 9:30 to 10:20 AM ^{5:54}
 Who? your name and address: Peter C. Petersen, 235 McCalla Blvd. ^{three times}
 others with you: _____ ^{Jan. 1985}

others before or after you: Tom Kent, Ross Silcock, Francis Moore
Jim + Steve Dismore

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.

Two large, brown ducks seen with 10-12,000 snow
 Geese & hundreds of other ducks. They were larger than
 nearby group, slept almost all of time under obs, about
 5 mi. total. Head rounded, bill, seen only once ^{partly} under back
 feathers, stubby looking, no tail near tip, yellowish brown.
 One bird had white streak behind eye. Extreme cold (60°F
 wind chill -20°F) made careful observation very hard.
 Also hard to stay with birds due to other ducks in open
 water area crowded together.

Similar species and how eliminated: Common Eider

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the
 identification? some debate by those who saw birds
before I saw them,

If yes, explain: ↑

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and
 optical equipment: 30-40x spotting scope, about 150 yards,
overcast,

Previous experience with this and similar species: King eider bird,
have seen hundreds of common Eiders in Canada.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Tom Kent briefly, Nat. Geog. Field guide.

How long before field notes made?

15 minutes

How long before this form completed?

7 hours.