

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

Nesting in Colorado (provided by Robert Andrews)

There is now a previously unreported nesting of this species in Colorado. This is based on a specimen (Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania-#21786) of a downy young bird of 10-12 days of age, collected on Vallecito Creek, La Plata County, Colorado on July 15, 1883 by A. W. Anthony. It should be noted that "the downy young Harlequin cannot be confused with the young of any other waterfowl that could possibly breed in Colorado." Although previous workers have suspected breeding (see Bailey and Niedrach, 1965), this constitutes the definite evidence of Harlequin Duck nesting in Colorado. This information from a note by Kenneth C. Parkes (Carnegie Museum of Natural History) and Colleen Helgeson Nelson (Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature) in the Auk, Volume 93, pages 846-847, October 1976.

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A definite Colorado breeding record for the Harlequin Duck.—According to the A.O.U. Check-list (1957: 88), ~~the~~ Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) breeds "south to . . . the mountains of Colorado . . ." Bailey and Niedrach (1965: 180) reviewed the few published statements alleging that this duck bred in Colorado (all based on field work done between 1875 and 1888), and could "find no records to substantiate the belief." Of the two recently published authoritative works covering distribution of North American waterfowl, that of Bellrose (1976: 382) cites Bailey and Niedrach's rejection of the Harlequin Duck as anything other than "a former extremely rare straggler in [Colorado]." Palmer (1976: 332) states that this species breeds "in conterminous U.S.: a few in mountainous terrain down into Cal., perhaps formerly into Colo.," but his map (p. 330) has the Rocky Mountain breeding range shaded only south to southwestern Wyoming.

Bailey and Niedrach (op. cit.: 28) not only reject the supposed breeding of the Harlequin Duck in Colorado, but state that the only specimens ever collected there were those taken by Edwin Carter: a male from Park County, 15 May 1875 (specimen lost), and a male and female from Jackson County, 21 May 1876 (specimens in Denver Museum).

A hitherto unreported specimen in the Carnegie Museum of Natural History confirms the breeding of the Harlequin Duck in Colorado during the period in which the unsupported claims were published. CM 21786 is a downy young of this species, collected 15 July 1883 by A. W. Anthony at "Vallacito river, S.W. Colo.," which equals Vallecito Creek, La Plata County, in the southwesternmost corner of the state. This is one of the areas of alleged but previously undocumented breeding: "For my part I believe [the Harlequin Duck] breeds in both the San Juan and La Plata Counties, as I have had a duck described to me by ranchmen, as breeding, which I can only refer to this . . . I know of no eggs having been taken" (Morrison, 1888: 165).

The Anthony specimen is a duckling of about 10-12 days of age. As Anthony did not collect an adult, we believe it to be important to emphasize that the downy young Harlequin cannot be confused with the young of any other waterfowl that could

possibly breed in Colorado. The unmarked white cheeks and underparts, one to three small, irregular white spots above and in front of each eye, dark grayish-brown upperparts with small, inconspicuous white shoulder spots, narrow buffy wing patches, and especially the smoothly tapered, somewhat laterally compressed bill, with the long oval nail covering its *entire tip* separate the Harlequin duckling from the young of any other species. Downy Buffleheads and goldeneyes of both species, also white-cheeked, have conspicuous white wing patches and four large white dorsal spots. The downy Common Merganser is similar to the *Bucephala* ducklings, except that the crown is reddish, there are prominent dark stripes through and just below the eyes, the shoulder spots tend to be small, and, of course, the bill is long and extremely narrow, with sawlike lamellae. No other white-cheeked ducklings are known from Colorado.

It appears that the Harlequin Duck, whose North American breeding range is very much like that of Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) (see maps in Palmer, 1976: 330, 406), has had a history in Colorado virtually duplicating that of the latter species. Of Barrow's Goldeneye, Palmer (op. cit.: 407) writes: "In the late 1870's, Carter (in Brewer 1879) found Barrow's plentiful and nesting in the Colo. mts., but there have been no nesting records in the state since 1886. Possibly there was an isolated breeding unit which became extinct and the region has not been repopulated." It appears that a similar isolated population of Harlequin Ducks was extirpated in Colorado about the same time.

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