

8-92-118

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COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK

Anas rubripes

Location: Olive Marsh; Pueblo; Pueblo County, Colorado

Date: December 13, 1992

Setting:

I found the bird on December 13 and watched it with my binoculars and scope for about 5 minutes, from 9:05-9:10 a.m. I had the sun at my back and watched it from about 30 yards. On the 19th I observed the bird at 8:15 a.m. for about 15 minutes. It was feeding in the Arkansas River below the dam at Olive Marsh. It flocked and fed with a group of about 25 Mallards and American Wigeon. I watched it from the parking area for a few minutes with 10X B&L Elite binoculars. Then I unpacked my scope and set up a little further downstream. I watched the bird for about 10 minutes with a 20-60X Kowa TSN-4 scope at a distance of about 30 yards. The entire flock eventually flew and I was able to watch the Black Duck fly off up stream. I got excellent views in good light. The bird fed, like the Mallards, by wading in the faster moving water and rooting around in the submerged rocks at its feet. When not feeding, it floated in fast moving water or waded out and stood on river rocks. It appeared wary and wild.

Description:

The bird was a male. It was about the size shape of the Mallards with which it flocked. When the bird flew away, with two Mallards, I noted that it seemed slightly bigger than the Mallards, both heavier-bodied and longer-winged – but this was noticeable only in direct comparison and in flight. It looked superficially like a very dark female Mallard. It had a dark brown, nearly blackish, crown (darker laterally) that blended into a dark nape and hind neck. This was set off from a medium brown, and finely streaked face, sides of neck and foreneck. There was a darker eyeline that set the lighter lower face off from the light superciliary and then dark crown. This gave the face a vague striped effect. The eye was dark. The bill was unmarked, yellowish-olive, barely orangish at the center, and with a black nostril and nail.

The paler head and neck sharply contrasted with the nearly blackish body. The individual feathers of the body were dark sooty-brown with unmarked interiors. At close range, each feather had a narrow chestnut fringe. This was wider and more noticeable on the feathers of the flanks, scapulars, upper tail coverts and secondary coverts. The tail, rump and undertail coverts were unmarked dark brown, so dark and plain as to appear nearly black. The spread tail was dark brown without any trace of white at the sides. The underwing showed white underwing coverts and grey-white flight feathers. This contrasted sharply where it met the contrasting black body at the axillaries. The speculum was deep bluish-purple with a narrow black trailing edge about 1/4" wide. This was margined at the back by a thin white "pencil line". There was no white border at the leading edge of the speculum. The legs and feet were bright orangish red and both halluxes were present.

Similar Species:

The female Mallard and other female ducks lack the contrast between blackish body and tan head and neck. None have combination of unmarked contour feathers, plain greenish-yellow bill, bluish-purple speculum and red legs.

Experience with Species:

I have seen American Black Ducks in Illinois (1978-79), Wisconsin, and New York (1988). I have seen single male Am. Black Ducks in Pueblo in 1990 and 1991.

This report is prepared from notes made during and after observation.

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