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## COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

AMERICAN BLACK DUCKAnas rubripesLocation: Holly, Prowers County, ColoradoDate: December 27, 1992.Setting:

Brandon Percival and I found the bird on December 27 on the Holly, Colorado Christmas Bird Count. This was a brief sighting, lasting less than a minute and was entirely in flight. We scared the bird out of a muddy slough with a little open, running water that runs along the north edge of the town of Holly. Brandon and I walked along the slough about 9:00 a.m. We scared small flocks of Mallards and Green-winged Teal out of the open water ahead of us as we walked. About a block from the car a flock of about 15 ducks sprang from the water ahead of us. They flew up from below, reached eye level and immediately turned to the right giving us a profile view at about 50 feet distance. The flock banked away from us and then turned to the left and again flew sideways to our position. Finally they turned away, gradually gained altitude and kept flying west to the limits of our binocular vision. Fourteen of the birds were clearly Mallards but one bird was much darker and, in direct comparison with the Mallards, barely larger. It looked like a Black Duck to me the moment that it flew up and I called out to Brandon. We watched it for the period that we had it in view and described the field marks as we viewed it in binoculars. It appeared wild and wary as did the Mallards.

Description:

As described above, it was much darker and barely larger than the Mallards. Its body was nearly black and evenly colored. It lacked the mottling and brown tones of the Mallards. The head and neck were tan and contrasted markedly with the black body. I noted a weak dark line through the eye as the bird turned. The upper surface of the wing was black and the speculum was purple with no trace of white borders. In the same light and at the same angle the speculum of the Mallards was blue and the white border was clearly evident. When the bird first flew out of the slough I noted its all dark tail which lacked the white borders as in the Mallard. Most noticeable of all was the gleaming white underwing linings that contrasted with the very dark body and flashed as the bird flapped. The sighting was brief and on the wing. I did not note the color or appearance of the crown, the color of the bill, nor the color of the legs and feet. The bill color and crown (to a lesser extent) are important field marks in Black Duck but I just couldn't get it all. While this sighting was short-lived, we were instantly aware that the bird was different as it rose from the canal.

Similar Species:

The female Mallard and other female ducks lack the contrast between blackish body and tan head and neck. None have combination of black upperwing, white underwing, purple, black-bordered speculum and all dark tail.

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, 1991 and 1992.

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

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