

ACCEPTED 7-0

RARE BIRD REPORT sent to Mark Janos, Chair, CRBC, 10 Sedum Ct., Pueblo, CO 81001

BLACK SCOTER

Melanitta Nigra

DATE OF OBSERVATION: November 8, 1997

TIME OF OBSERVATION: All morning.

NUMBER OF BIRDS SEEN: Two

SEX: Female

PLUMAGE: Adult

LOCALITY: Big Johnson Reservoir

ELEVATION: 5,500' (this is a guesstimate)

COUNTY: El Paso

OTHER OBSERVERS WHO INDEPENDENTLY IDENTIFIED THE BIRD:

Bob Goycoolea, Richard Bunn, Vern Dayhoff, Ben and Sally Sorensen, Norman Lerch. Alan Versaw saw one of these birds a day or two later.

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: Swarovski AT 80 HD scope with 20x to 60x eyepiece. Swarovski 10x42 WB Binocs. Other folks had scopes and binocs, but I don't have the particulars on them.

WEATHER CONDITIONS: Mostly cloudy but bright, with the sun peeping through off and on. Wind 5-10 mph out of the north- northwest. Temp. in the 50's.

BIRD/SUN ORIENTATION: Sun, when it was shining through the clouds, was at observers' backs, with the birds offshore to the north. There was no glare, since it was mostly cloudy.

DISTANCE FROM BIRD AND HOW MEASURED: The birds were out about 1/3 of the diameter of the reservoir, estimated at between 60 and 100 yards.

BEHAVIOR AND DEMEANOR: First there was only one bird to be seen. She was sleeping with her head under her wing, floating. After a time, she began to preen her neck, breast, back and wing feathers, occasionally scratching her head with a foot. Then she began feeding, diving underwater and splashing much with her feet as she went down. The feeding was leisurely. After some time (1 hour?) another female came into view and was also feeding/preening. After the second bird arrived, the two stayed in the same general area, but did not hang closely together, coming as close as a couple of feet. When we left, the two birds were sleeping again.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION: Large, chunky, very dark brown (looked almost black) body. Dark brown crown and nape of fairly short neck. Creamy/white face and sides of neck, with fairly sharp delineation between the white and the dark brown. Foot seen when scratching head was a dark,

muddy color. Bill was dark, with no knob.

HABITAT: Surface of reservoir.

VOCALIZATION: None.

ELIMINATION OF SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES: ? Can think of no similar species.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES: I, myself, have no experience with Black Scoters. Bob Goycoolea and Richard Bunn have much experience. I don't know the experience level of the other observers.

BOOKS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND ADVICE CONSULTED THAT INFLUENCED THIS REPORT: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America. All the observers talked about a rare bird report, and I volunteered to write it up for all the observers. Bob G. said he was going to contact Brandon Percival about the sighting.

THIS REPORT WAS WRITTEN FROM NOTES MADE DURING THE OBSERVATION.

NAME: Barbara (BB) Hahn

SIGNATURE: BB Hahn

DATE: 11-11-97

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

BLACK SCOTER

Melanitta nigraLocation: Big Johnson Reservoir; Fountain; El Paso County; ColoradoDate: November 15 - 30, 1997

These birds were discovered by others, but I observed them on November 15th and 30th at Big Johnson Reservoir. Big Johnson is a large plains reservoir that hosted a good variety of diving birds (loons, scoters, Oldsquaw, goldeneyes and grebes) the fall of 1997. I observed the birds on the morning on the 15th at about 9:05 - 9:45 a.m. The birds swam and frequently dove together at distances of 200-400 yards. I observed them with my Kowa TSN-4 20-60x scope. The birds were seen by many others, including Brandon Percival, Alan Versaw and Richard Bunn. I had excellent sun from my back and got very decent, though distant views, including in close company of other ducks.

Description:

The birds were apparently immature females. They were rather small, compact (frequently) diving ducks, about the same size as adjacent Mallards. They were all charcoal black except for a dull white patch on the lower face (cheek) and foreneck. The bill was small, sort of goose-like, pointed and all dark. It met the dark, steep forehead at a deep angle. The wing was dark, without any marks, and sooty black (observed when the birds flapped).

Similar Species:

No other diving duck is all blackish-brown with a white cheek and neck patch. White-winged Scoter shows a white wing patch and two white smudges on the face. The Surf Scoter has two white face spots and lacks the white on lower face and neck.

Experience with Species:

I have seen several (~six) previous Black Scoters and several other scoters in Colorado.

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

Mark Janos
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