

1997-20

ACCEPTED 7-0

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

BLACK SCOTER

Melanitta nigraLocation: Lake Henry; Ordway; Crowley County; ColoradoDate: November 8 - 16, 1997

On November 8th I was birding Lake Henry, a medium-sized plains reservoir near Ordway, with Brandon Percival and Mark Hullinger. We discovered a pair of Black Scoters. They were initially a long ways off, perhaps a quarter mile, but they gradually floated closer, until they gave quite good views, about 200 yards away. We viewed them with our binoculars and scopes (mine is a Kowa TSN-4 10-40x) for about 15 minutes. The sun was from behind us and conditions were excellent.

Description:

These were female-plumaged birds. One was a darker, sooty black than the other, on the head and back, but otherwise they looked the same. I couldn't tell if the darker bird was an immature male, but both birds had the very white cheek of a female. These were small waterfowl -- virtually all-dark scoters about the size of a Gadwall or Lesser Scaup. They rode lower and flatter in the water than either of these species and gave the impression of being smaller. They were larger than Buffleheads. The body and head were both a dark sooty brownish-black. There was a white patch on the lower cheek and the front of the neck. This patch was whitest on the cheek and was a dirtier off-white on the neck. The bill was stubby and dark gray or blackish with a dull, vaguely yellow swelling at the base of the upper bill. The flanks were obscurely barred dark brownish. The bird flapped once to reveal an all dark, blackish upper wing.

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 four previous Black Scoters and several other scoters in Colorado.

This report is prepared from notes made after observation.

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