

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD UNUSUAL RECORD **Species:** American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*)**Date:** 30 November 2002 **Number seen:** one **Sex:** female **Plumage:** Alternate**Locality:** SE shore, Lower Latham Reservoir **Elevation:** ~4660'**Nearest town:** Kersey **County:** Weld**Time observed:** late morning **Duration of observation:** about five minutes

Description: While counting waterbirds on Lower Latham Reservoir with Ric Olson and Jason Beason for Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's Early-winter Waterbird Count, I found a large, dark *Anas* duck foraging on the east shore (near the south end) of Lower Latham Reservoir. I immediately alerted the others that I had a probably American Black Duck. We studied the bird, at great distance, for some time to be sure that there were no apparent signs of Mallard genes. We saw the bird fly once, only to return to the same stretch of shoreline. I took a few photos of the bird through my scope, wrote a half-page of notes while studying the bird, and then we continued on our way. There were >10,000 Mallards on the reservoir, so it was very fortuitous that the American Black Duck was on the only part of the shore at which we could have safely identified it.

The bird was a large *Anas*-type dabbling duck foraging with about 10 Mallards of both sexes. In direct comparison with female Mallards, the bird in question was the same size. The overall color was a very dark brown (much, much darker than its female Mallard neighbors), but with the head and neck paler gray-brown and only very slightly darker than the heads of the female Mallards. The paler head and neck (though the crown was dark) were sharply demarcated from the very dark body. The bill was not yellow, being darkish and dull; at the long distance I could not discern the precise color, however it was not the bright yellow of a male American Black Duck nor did it have the orange patches typical of female Mallards and which I could see on such neighboring birds. In flight, the upperwing was entirely dark; I could not discern the specula at that distance. However, I could discern the blue specula bordered fore and aft with white of the female Mallards. The tail was dark with no hint of white. The wing linings were bright white and contrasted sharply with the rest of the wing, which was dark.

Similar species eliminated: I eliminated Mottled Duck from consideration, as the bird was too dark for that species – Mottled is much more similar to female Mallards in color. Additionally, Mottled Ducks have warmer, more peachy-colored heads and necks, not the gray-brown exhibited by the bird in question. The real tricky ID contender is American Black Duck x Mallard hybrids. However, though I viewed the bird at great distance, it showed not a single character inconsistent with that of a pure female American Black Duck; there was no white in the tail nor the specula. "Mexican Duck" can be eliminated on most of the characters upon which I eliminated Mallard and Mallard hybrids.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration): No vocalizations heard.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species? I have seen 10s of 1000s of American Black Ducks, >100 Mottled Ducks, uncountable bazillions of female Mallards (including >75 "Mexican Ducks"), and >15 American Black Duck x Mallard hybrids (though most of those were males).

Light conditions: sky was overcast

Optical equipment used: Leica 32x

Distance, and how estimated: estimated distance of ~700 meters

Other observers who saw the bird with you: Ric Olson and Jason Beason

Other observers who saw the bird independently: none

If photographed, type of equipment and film: Nikon Coolpix 995 through a Leica 32x


List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: none

b) after observation: none

Reporting observer: Tony Leukering

Signature:



Address: Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, 14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton, CO 80603

Date report was written: 16 January 2004 from notes written at the time of the sighting and from reviewing the pictures

A note about the pictures (next page): The bird was easily a half-mile away, thus the quality is very poor and, except for the all-dark tail, no field marks show at all well. Despite the problems, I present four pictures as supporting documentation. They do show the relative size, proportions, and, most importantly, the darkness of the bird in direct comparison to both male and female Mallards. Note that in the relevant picture one can easily determine that the female Mallards have extensive white in their tails but in a better picture of the American Black Duck, the tail is obviously all dark. **The written details are probably more important than are the pictures.**



Picture 1 shows the size and darkness relative to Mallards.



Picture 2 shows the bird's darkness and, critically, the all-dark tail.



Picture 3 shows, albeit somewhat vaguely, the dark body and paler head.



Picture 4 again shows size and darkness of the bird and a hint at the bright leg color.

CBRC FILE #: **2002-102**

Species: Am. Black Duck (Common Name) *Anas rurbripes* (Scientific Name)

Date(s) of occurrence: Nov., 30, 2002

Number of birds seen: one Sex: Probable female Plumage: basic

Exact location: SE corner of Lower Lathum Res.

County: Weld Nearest town: La Salle Elevation: 5400 feet

Length of observation: 10 minutes Time(s) of observation: About 11:45

Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: Tony Luekering, Joe Bens

Other observers who independently saw the bird(s): ?

Light conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s) and observers position: Party cloudy, winds light generally from the south.

Optical equipment used: Kowa TSN4 20x40

Distance to bird(s) (estimated, unless otherwise noted): ¼ mile

Was (were) bird(s) photographed? Yes If so, are you submitting photos? No

Who took the photograph(s)? Tony Luekering

Describe the general and specific habitats in which the bird(s) occurred: Irrigation Res.

Describe the bird's (birds') behaviors, particularly behaviors that were used in supporting the identification, e.g., flying, feeding, habits: The bird was observed feeding on the shore line.

DESCRIPTION -- This is the most important part of this report. Include in these details the overall size and shape of the bird, how you placed the bird in the general group that you did, and give as many plumage details as possible, even including those that you feel might not have relevance to the specific identification. Features to include are the color(s) and/or patterns of the head, eyes, bill, back, folded wings, open wings, tail, chin, throat, breast, sides, flanks, belly, vent, and legs. Also, please include, where possible, shape of the whole bird, of the wings - folded or open, of the bill, and of the tail. Please fill out this portion even if photos are accompanying your report. We welcome attachments of additional sheets of description, drawings, field sketches, or copies of field notes.

The duck was first observed by Tony Luekering, flying in a flock of Mallards. I first saw the bird standing in swallow water. The bird appeared very dark compared to other female mallards. You could clearly make out the lighter buffy tones of the Mallards, but none could be found on the Black Duck. The head and neck were slighter than the main body. The bill was mallard shaped and was not orange colored. It was difficult to tell if the bill was 'Olive' or 'Greenish-yellow' from that distance. At no time was any white seen on this duck (I.E. no white in the tail or speculum and the bird did not lift its wings).

Describe the bird's (birds') call(s) and/or song(s), if noted: none heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES - This is another critical part of your report. Please discuss how you eliminated similar species from consideration: Obvious confusion species would be ducks of the Mallard family. Lack of white (as above) rules out female mallard, Mottled duck being much paler over all. It would be impossible to rule out a MallardxBlack Duck hybrid an the distance we saw the bird at.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? I have seen many Black Ducks growing up in Minnesota.

List books, guides, recordings, or other sources consulted and how this influenced your identification (during and after observation): Sibley ,

Guide to Birds, 2000

This report was made from (check one) ___ notes made during observation ___
notes made after observation x later from memory.

Date and time of written report: Dec, 1, 2002 20:30

Reporting observer: Ric Olson Signature:

Reporting observer's address: 9450 N. Heather Dr. Castle Rock, 80108