

## COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

## BLACK SCOTER

Melanitta nigra

Location: the fish ponds below the Colorado state fish hatchery near Valco Ponds; Pueblo; Pueblo Co., Colorado

Date: December 11, 1995

This bird was first discovered by Bob Dickson and had been seen by others, including Brandon Percival, before I saw it at 8:15 a.m. on the 11th. I observed it for about 5 minutes on a small unfrozen fish hatchery pond along the Arkansas R. in the "Valco Ponds" vicinity. I found it swimming there with an assortment of other ducks, including Gadwalls, Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads and Lesser Scaups. I watched it with my B & L Elite 10x40 binoculars while it swam on the opposite side of this small pond -- at a distance of about 30-40 yards. I had excellent sun from my back and got really good, close views -- this is the closest I have ever been to a Black Scoter under any conditions. The bird actively dove but spent more than half of its time floating on the surface of the water. When the small flock of ducks became alert and aware of my presence, the Black Scoter stretched its head up and stayed on the surface giving me great views, until I turned and left.

Description:

The bird was an immature male. It was a smallish, all dark scoter about the size of a Gadwall or Lesser Scaup but it rode distinctly lower in the water than either of these species. It was larger than the 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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