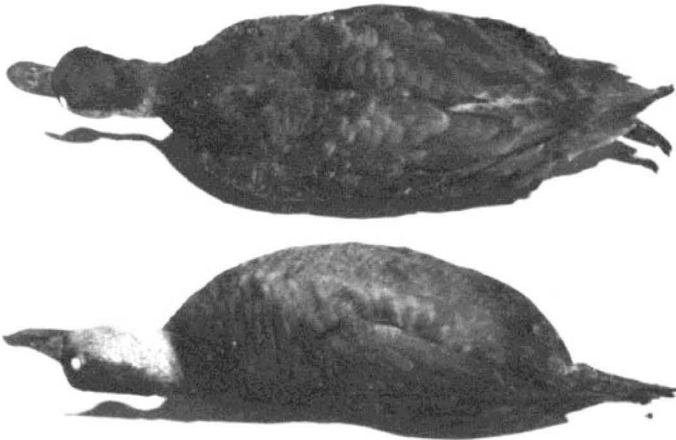


BLACK SCOTER: A NEW BIRD FOR OKLAHOMA

BY JACK CARDEN AND RANDY C. RUSHING

On 8 December 1985, while hunting ducks from a blind on the southeast-most shore of Lake Ellsworth, 3 miles (5 km) west and 1 mile (1.6 km) north of Elgin, Comanche County, Oklahoma, the authors shot two unusual, darkly colored ducks as they banked in over their decoys. This twosome was in company with, but slightly below, a flock of about 15 Lesser Scaups (*Aythya affinis*). The day was mild and calm for late fall, and temperatures already had climbed to near 40°F by 7:30 a.m., when this incident took place.

We had avidly hunted Lake Ellsworth, as well as Lake Lawtonka, which lies 8 miles to the southwest, for the past 10 years or so, yet had never before encountered any duck of this description. Both birds were of the same sex and species. Their plumage was a non-uniform brownish-black, slightly darker across the dorsum, noticeably so on crown and nape. But this darkness sharply contrasted with the cheeks, sides of head and the throat, which were a dirty



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Fig. 1. Two adult hens shot 8 December 1985 at Lake Ellsworth, Comanche County, Oklahoma, by Jack Carden and Randy C. Rushing.

white, more-or-less suffused with brownish ticks and fine streaks (Fig. 1). We were surprised that the spread wing showed no white whatsoever. At a loss for a positive identification, but suspecting that the moot ducks were scoters of some sort, we froze them and contacted Jack D. Tyler at Cameron University in Lawton.

The two specimens (CUMZ 983, 985) were prepared by Tyler and deposited in the Cameron University Museum of Zoology. Both are adult female Black Scoters (*Melanitta nigra*), formerly called Common Scoters. The measurements (total length, wing, tail, tarsus, and culmen) of CUMZ 983, followed by those for CUMZ 985, are: 449, 447; 216, 225; 82, 75; 55, 57; and 40, 39 mm. Their respective weights were 785 and 815 g and neither was very fat.

These specimens represent the first authentication for this species in Oklahoma, although it is listed hypothetically for the state, i.e., there are a few unsubstantiated sight records (Sutton, G. M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 8). Sutton (1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 82) lists the Black Scoter as a "transient and winter visitant" and cites five sightings as follows: 3 November, 1951, hen seen at Lake Yahola, Mohawk Park, Tulsa, Tulsa County, by O. W. and Ethel Letson (1952, Aud. Field Notes 6:25; Letson and Letson, 1952, Proc. Oklahoma Acad. Sci. 33:137); November 9, 10, 1963, John G. Newell and V. J. Vacin, Jr. saw one each date at Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County (1964, Aud. Field Notes 18:50); three Black Scoters were allegedly shot by hunters from a fair-sized flock of ducks at a large Canadian County pond near Geary during the fall of 1948 (Harold S. Cooksey); 11 February, 1961, Sophia C. Mery observed a single bird near Bartlesville, Washington County (1961, Aud. Field Notes 15:342); and 2 March, same year, Lewis W. Oring saw a hen at Lake Hefner. Since 1963, the authors are aware of two other sight records: on 12 November, 1977, Rodney M. Kemper photographed an adult male (with yellow knob at base of bill) and three hens at Lake Lawtonka, but photos were unsatisfactory for proper documentation; three scoters, including at least one male with "big knob on bill and no white on wings," made a low pass over decoys in front of Jack Breathwit and Kenneth Cook at Lake Ellsworth on 22 November 1981 (both from Jack D. Tyler field notes).

The Black Scoter winters in North America "primarily on the Pacific coast . . . south to southern California and . . . on the Great Lakes, and on the Atlantic coast . . . south to South Carolina and Florida . . ." and is "casual throughout the interior of North America south to Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and the Gulf coast" (American Ornithologists' Union, 1983, Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed., pp. 90-91). In Oklahoma, the species should be carefully looked for on deep areas of the numerous large impoundments scattered over the state.