

SIGHT RECORDS OF COMMON EIDER IN SASKATCHEWAN AND NORTH-WESTERN MANITOBA

MARTIN K. MCNICHOLL, Long Point Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario. N0E 1M0

On 10 August 1969 I was surprised to see a female Common Eider ahead of our canoes as my five companions and I paddled along Granville Lake (Manitoba) in the Churchill River system. The large size, dark brown colour, sloping bill, and heavily barred sides combined to identify the bird as an eider, and the long slope of the bill and straight vertical nature of the bars separated the bird from all other eider species. The bird was seen well by all members of the party (Jim Buckingham, Ed Boudreaux, Patricia Kohlberg, George Lammers, Helen Lloyd and myself), although the others did not take notes on its plumage. As we approached, the eider flapped her wings, showing two white thin lines. She appeared to be unable to fly and was thought to be in moult. There was no sign of any white among the brown horizontal barring in the throat area, suggesting that this was not likely a male in eclipse plumage.

Although Common Eiders breed at Churchill, where they are among the specialties sought by birders, they occur only casually elsewhere in Manitoba.^{3 6 8} Godfrey listed two specimen records for southern Manitoba, but examination of several reports of trips in northern Manitoba away from Hudson Bay revealed no other records for interior areas.^{3 10} Of the two reports closest to our canoe route, Hooper had no records for the Lynn Lake area, and Weber did not include any records for Southern Indian Lake and surrounding areas.^{4 17} A survey study of Warkworth Creek, close to Churchill in 1968 failed to find any even in this location very close to its regular range.⁹ The Hudson Bay population, described by several authorities as a distinct race, is

sedentary, even wintering on open parts of Hudson and James bays, and the brown, rather than grey colouration of the bird we saw suggests that it was not a bird of this race.^{1 3 14 16} Thus, our eider had likely wandered from a point farther from its regular range than would appear from the species' range map.

On the morning of 15 June 1979 an adult male Common Eider was seen far inland from Hudson Bay. I was surveying lakes by plane in the vicinity of the McMahan Lakes in northern Saskatchewan with L. Ronald Quaife and pilot, Terry Bridle when we saw the eider on a small lake north of Henday Lake. This lake is not named on the maps that I have inspected. It is the largest of three lakes in a chain connected by small streams to the north of the northwestern-most bay of Henday. The smallest lake in the chain is directly west of a northern finger of the lake on which we observed the eider. The eider was close to the western shore, just south of the creek connecting the lake with its tiny companion. The sloping yellowish bill, white back, black tail and sides, black crown, greenish neck, and white throat and face of this bird distinguish it from any other North American duck. All three of us observed it well as we flew northwards along the lake and circled it for a double-check of the identification. The sighting was included in an environmental impact statement and mentioned briefly in a review by Houston, but details have not been published previously.^{2 5}

In my report on the birds of the area, I mentioned the unusual nature of an eider so far inland, but pending a more thorough literature search did not mention that there

were no previous Saskatchewan records.² Kreba's recent checklist does not include an eider species for the province, even on the hypothetical list, but Smith has since documented the occurrence of a King Eider on Blackstrap Lake.^{7 15} The present report adds the Common Eider to the hypothetical list as an unsubstantiated sight record.

Northern Saskatchewan and interior northern Manitoba are still little explored ornithologically, but several species generally associated with Arctic areas are known to occur and even breed far inland.^{12 13} The two Common Eiders reported here and a King Eider report for Windy Bay on Nueltin Lake in Keewatin Territory, just north of Manitoba, in 1947 suggest that observers should be alert for inland eiders, although the sedentary nature of the Hudson Bay race of the Common Eider precludes frequent sightings.¹¹

The 1979 observation was made while I was working for Beak Consultants Ltd. on a contract with Esso Resources Canada Limited. I am grateful to Wilson Eedy and Don Lush of IEC-Beak and Evan Birchard and Garry J. Mann of Esso Resources for arranging permission to publish the record. C. Stuart Houston deserves special credit for pushing me to get the Saskatchewan record published long before it might have reached the top of my priority list. My five 1969 companions and two 1979 companions made the respective trips both enjoyable and safe.

- 1 BELLROSE, F.C. 1976. Ducks, geese & swans of North America. 2nd ed. Stackpole, Harrisburg, Penn.
- 2 CANADA WIDE MINES LTD. 1981. Midwest Project environmental impact statement, supplementary document No. 1. Environmental baseline study. Beak Consultants Ltd., Calgary and Toronto
- 3 GODFREY, W.E. 1966. The birds of Canada. National Museum Canada Bulletin No. 203.
- 4 HOOPER, R.R. 1962. Birds of Lynn Lake, Manitoba. *Blue Jay* 20:158
- 5 HOUSTON, C.S. 1984. (Review of) Field checklist of Saskatchewan birds. *Blue Jay* 42:61-62
- 6 JEHL, J.R., JR., and B.A. SMITH. 1970. Birds of the Churchill River region, Manitoba. Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature Special Publication No. 1, Winnipeg.
- 7 KREBA, R. 1983. Field checklist of Saskatchewan birds. Sixth ed. Museum of Natural History, Saskatchewan Culture, Regina
- 8 LANE, J. A., and B. CHARTIER. 1983. A birder's guide to Churchill. L & P Press, Denver, Colorado.
- 9 LITTLEFIELD, C. D., and A. J. PAKULAK. 1969. Birds of Warkworth Creek, Manitoba, *Blue Jay* 24:136-140
- 10 McNICHOLL, M.K. 1985. Manitoba bird studies 1744 to 1983: a bibliography. Manitoba Department of Natural Resources and Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, Winnipeg.
- 11 MOWAT, F.M., and A.H. LAWRIE. 1955. Bird observations from southern Keewatin and the interior of northern Manitoba. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 69:93-116
- 12 NERO, R.W. 1963. Birds of the Lake Athabasca region, Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan Natural History Society Special Publication 5, Regina.
- 13 NERO, R.W. 1967. The birds of northeastern Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan Natural History Society Special Publication 6, Regina.
- 14 PALMER, R.S. (Editor). 1976. Handbook of North American birds. Vol. 3. Waterfowl (concluded). Yale University Press, New Haven and London
- 15 SMITH, A.R. 1984. First record of the King Eider in Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 42:91-92
- 16 SNYDER, L.L. 1941. On the Hudson Bay Eider. Royal Ontario Museum Zoology Occasional Papers 6.
- 17 WEBER, W.C. 1976. Birds of north-central Manitoba, 1973. *Blue Jay* 34:84-94