

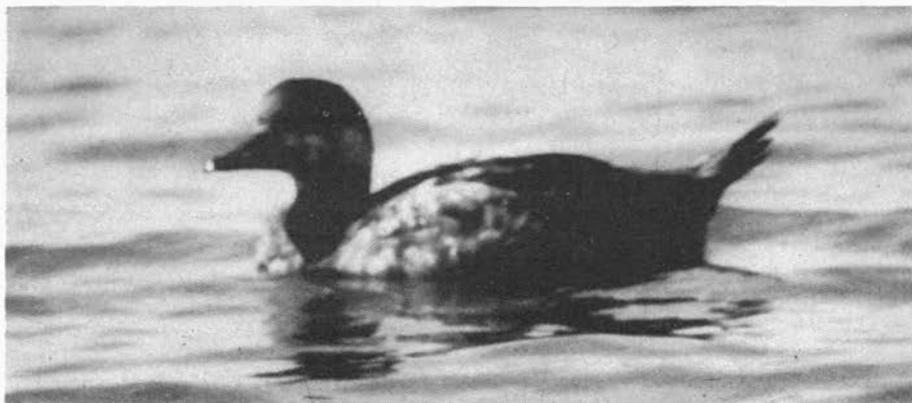
Fifty years ago, Roger Tory Peterson effectively demonstrated in his first Field Guide to the Birds that color pattern is actually more useful than color itself for identifying certain species of waterfowl. To that concept can be added the value of shape, posture, and proportion as factors influencing the proper field identification of ducks.

With these factors in mind, February's "At a Glance" duck offers several helpful identification clues. First, the rather solid, chunky body, thick neck, and long tail suggest that the bird is a diving duck rather than one of the more streamlined puddle ducks. The long, elevated tail further narrows the field to either Ruddy Duck, Harlequin Duck, or one of the scoters. A look at the dusky coloration on the sides and flanks, the pointed-tipped bill (not broad and flattened), and the elongated body shape all direct us away from Ruddy Duck, despite the suggestion of a pale face.

We are left with Harlequin Duck versus a scoter. Obviously the bird is not a drake, so we should expect two or three clearly defined white patches on the head, a tiny pointed bill, a steep forehead, a rounded head, and a bull neck for our bird to be a Harlequin female. Instead, we see a bird with a fairly long, slender bill; an obviously dark cap; and the suggestion of a pale cheek (darkened by the resolution in the printed picture); as well as a fairly slender neck and a somewhat angular head.

The combination of the dark cap and abrupt forehead tell us that the bird is a female Black Scoter, despite the seeming lack of an extensive pale cheek, a character which readily identifies the species in life.

Wayne R. Petersen, Whitman



Black Scoter (female)

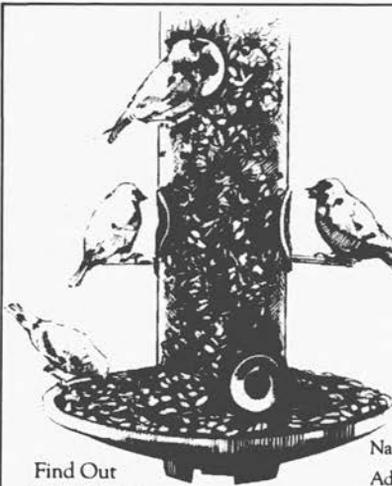
Photo by Wayne R. Petersen

At a Glance . . .

Courtesy of Mass. Division of Fisheries and Wildlife



Can you identify this bird? Identification will be discussed in next issue's *At a Glance*. Bird Observer will again award a PRIZE to the reader who submits the most correct answers in 1984. Please send your entry on a postcard to Bird Observer, 462 Trapelo Road, Belmont, MA 02178 before the answer is published in the next issue.



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