

Barrow's Goldeneye
Ed Pierce

My wife and I generally have been very lucky in getting away from Akron each Saturday for the last eight years to bird watch. It is after all our common basic interest and a way to enjoy being with each other away from our daily routines of work and the children.

Saturday, January 7, 1984 was no different. We dropped the children off at Grandmas and proceeded to the "hot waters" at Lorain. Just the drive alone usually relaxes me and I knew it would only be an hour long. Usually we would drive at least two and one half hours to Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. It is a wonderful area we both enjoyed but in the winter with the water frozen the open water around the Lake Erie power plants provided the best birds.

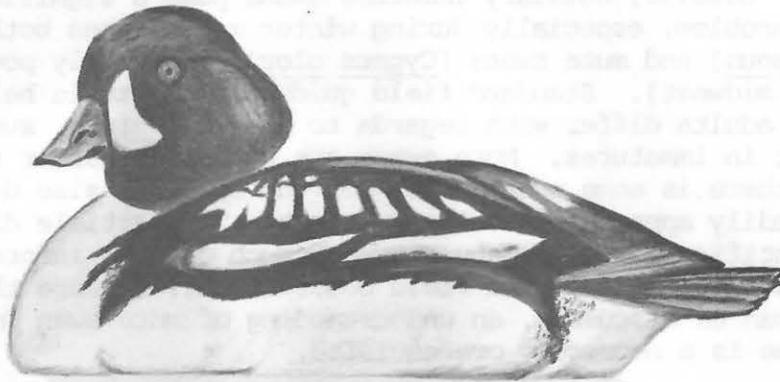
"Hot" water surrounds the Lorain Municipal pier. Apparently an electric power plant adjacent to the pier uses water from the Lake in the process of generating power and returns the water to the harbor basin around the pier at a temperature in excess of 32° F. This warmed water keeps the harbor basin from the end of the Municipal pier out to a distance of about 150 yards free from ice, once the Lake freezes.

Here congregate the winter gulls and ducks and an occasional mute swan or cormorant.

Somehow the process of using the water kills a number of fish, usually shad, which float near the surface at the end of the pier. This of course attracts numerous fighting and stooping gulls to fly by the pier end making them very visible to birders parked here in their cars. I find it very relaxing to sit in a warm car drinking coffee, listening to the radio, talking and of course always watching the passing show of gulls for the "odd" ones: glaucous, Iceland, lesser blackback, kittiwake, little; hoping for the spectacular, like the year of the Heerman's, or the yet unseen (to me) California. Pleasant winter hours.

My thoughts were on these images as we drove to the pier and parked at the end. We saw Dick and Jean Hoffman as we parked next to their car and said hello but saw few others. It was an unusually pleasant day, lightly overcast with patches of blue and good visibility. Often conditions outside your car on the pier are frigid with high winds and low temperatures causing steam to rise from the water. Often ducks can only be glimpsed as they enter and exit this steam. But winter had not yet hit Ohio on this day so I set up my scope outside the car and began to scan the ducks.

An unusually large (500+) flock of common goldeneyes were present in the basin area about 150 yards away. Enjoying the weather, my day off and my favorite pastime I slowly canvassed these goldeneyes with my scope. Mentally I played a little game of looking for a Barrow's. No real hope, for I knew that one had never been documented in Ohio although there were some undocumented sightings early in the century, but still something to look for when scanning 500 goldeneyes. I hadn't scanned more than fifty birds when there it was, a male Barrow's goldeneye, in my scope. It was hard to believe, I looked again. Perfect. On the edge of the goldeneyes nearest to me swam the duck. The crescent on the face was apparent. The "piano key" back was obvious. It seemed impossible



Sketch by Tom Kellerman

but there it was. I had only seen my first such bird the preceeding November at Niagara Falls.

Jean and Dick and my wife heeded my call and also saw and identified the bird. None of us had cameras so Jean drew a quick sketch.

Quickly my pride swelled. I had found this bird among all the others and actually knew what I was looking at. Birding headlines flashed through my mind "Ed Pierce finds Barrow's Goldeneye at Lorain" when Kirk Alexander and Rick Counts pulled up and asked if we had found the Barrow's. What! Yes, it was seen earlier in the morning by some Lorain birders who were away from the pier reporting it to others. Ah, fame is so fleeting.

But still a nice feeling on a nice day in January doing what you want to do.

Editor's Note: This bird was accepted by the Ohio Records Committee, certainly not on the above report, but rather on documentations submitted by several other individuals.