

GENERAL NOTES

Observations on the day-old young of the Spectacled Eider, *Somateria fischeri*.—In the summer of 1963 at the Round Lake Waterfowl Station, Round Lake, Minnesota, I observed and painted from life four newly-hatched downy young of the Spectacled Eider. The birds were hatched (28 June, 1 bird; 6 July, 3 birds), after artificial incubation, from eggs collected at Igiak Bay, Alaska, by Glen Smart, resident biologist at the station. I measured the birds at 24 hours of age, then placed them in an observation pen for several days. The correctness of all sketches and notes was tested against the live bird in the hand.

The four birds were large-headed, heavily-built ducklings with strong, muscular legs. The crown, back, wings, and tail were dark grayish brown; the wing-linings were light grayish brown; the face, chin, and lower cheeks were light to pale pinkish smoke gray; the breast was smoke gray, becoming lighter and grayer toward the tail. Superimposed upon the light face color was a large disc-like patch of smooth grayish-brown down, completely surrounding the eye and leaving only a narrow circle of the light color between it and the dark color of the crown. The brown patch, not the light color, formed the major part of the "spectacle" of the downy young (Figure 1). There was an irregular wash of light grayish brown in the auricular region. The culmen was feathered to a point even with or slightly beyond the rear edge of the nostril; these feathers had a silvery cast. The bill was light, opaque grayish blue, straight-sided, with a brownish-red nail; the egg tooth was creamy white to pinkish yellow; the iris was dark brown; the tongue and the lining of the mouth were dull, pale pink; the feet were dark amber gray, lighter on the sides of the toes.

These observations differed widely from most published accounts of this species in two respects: bill color and the description of the "spectacle." Regarding bill color, the only description which agreed with mine, and, apparently, the only one based on live young, appears on p. 351 of Herbert Brandt's *Alaska bird trails* (Cleveland, Ohio, Bird Research Foundation, 1943), where the bill is described as pale blue. Other descriptions and illustrations are incorrect in this respect.

In the matter of the "spectacle," the only correct account of its character that I have found appears in Dementiev, Gladkov *et al. Birds of the Soviet Union* (Moscow, Soviet Acad. Sci., 1951-1954, 6 vols.), vol. 4, p. 540. I quote here a translation: "Around the eyes [are] brown spots *in place of future spectacles* [emphasis mine] and on this background behind the eyes [is a] dark wash." I found Bent's description (*U. S. Natl. Mus., Bull.* 130, pp. 76-77, 1925) ambiguous, because relative areas of color are not given nor is the relation of the dark-colored "spectacle" of the downy young to the light-colored "spectacle" of the adult mentioned. Other descriptions are incorrect, at least for downies of less than two weeks of age.

From two to four weeks of age, there is a gradual molt of the down feathers, including those of the "spectacle." An examination of three downies at Round Lake which died at the beginning of the molt period showed that replacement of the brown "spectacle" by light golden buff contour feathers was irregular, leaving various streaks and patches of smooth dark down around and behind the eye. Since I have found no published illustration which shows correctly the brown "spectacle" of the young downy, but rather illustrations by Peter Scott (pl. 11 in Delacour, *The waterfowl of the world*, London, Country Life Ltd., vol. 3, 1959), Allan Brooks (pl. 80 in Phillips, *A natural history of the ducks*, vol. 4, 1926), and T. M. Shortt (pl. 34 in Kortright, *The ducks, geese, and swans of North America*, Washington, D. C., Amer. Wildlife Inst., 1943) which show a sort of dark "question mark" around and behind



Figure 1. Spectacled Eider duckling approximately 24 hours of age. From a watercolor drawing by Colleen Helgeson Nelson. $\times \frac{3}{4}$.

the eye, I suggest that the specimens from which these artists worked were probably already in molt. Furthermore, it is conceivable that the molting "spectacle" would take on an even more linear appearance in a dried specimen, and the artist, faithful to his eye, could justifiably interpret this as a narrow circle or "question mark."

Only one of the four Spectacled Eiders survived at Round Lake. I observed this bird frequently, and found that at four weeks of age, it was almost completely feathered (largely chestnut brown, barred with black) and the "spectacle" had become entirely light, golden buff. The bill was still light grayish blue, but was duller in tone, lacking the shine and freshness of color of the downies' bills; the feet had lost their shiny dark scutes and had become light bluish gray with nearly black webs and joints.

From these observations as well as from published descriptions, I have concluded that the "spectacle" is present in the same form in the downy young as it is in juvenal and adult Spectacled Eiders, and furthermore, that previous descriptions and illustrations of a "question mark" and postorbital streak around the eye of the downy young represent not the true "spectacle," but rather a stage in the molt from natal down to juvenal plumage.

In early behavioral characteristics, of which I can find no published description, these young eiders walked nearly erect, with heads held a little down and forward, giving them a long-legged, flat-bellied appearance suggestive of a pugilist heading for his adversary. Generally quiet, they occasionally gave a single call note, a peculiar, clear, flat-sounding, *Geep!*, low in pitch, without discernible overtones. In distress, the call became *Geep-eeep!* or *Geep-eeep-eeep-eeep!*, rapidly repeated, the second and subsequent syllables rising in pitch to a major third above the first syllable.

The eiders "sat" a good deal during their first two days, usually resting on the belly, but sometimes on the heels, with backs nearly upright and breasts high, the bills touching the puffed-up breasts and the heads drawn back. Sometimes they would stand, legs far apart and backs upright, heads drawn backward at a near-impossible angle, wagging their bills from side to side in what I took to be a form of preening. Figure 2 shows these various attitudes. In temperament, the birds were neither aggressive nor overly docile, but seemed to be quite self-contained, whether with birds of their own or other species.

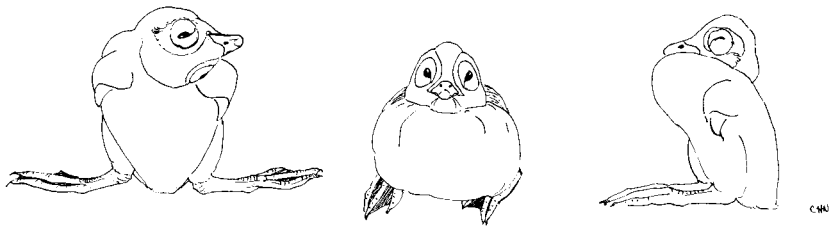


Figure 2. Characteristic attitudes of a Spectacled Eider duckling. Left, preening (?); center, resting on belly; right, resting on heels. Drawings by Colleen Helgeson Nelson. $\times \frac{1}{4}$.

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Flycatching by Wandering Tattlers (*Heteroscelus incanum*).—The habit of catching live insects by certain kinds of shorebirds has been observed by a number of persons. W. M. Tyler (*in A. C. Bent, Life histories of North American shore birds*, Pt. 2, *U. S. Natl. Mus., Bull.* 146: 85, 1929) gives an excellent description of the method employed by the Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) in approaching and capturing insect prey. It was with interest, therefore, that I made observations of a