

THE COMMON EIDER REACHES CALIFORNIA

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Late in the morning of 5 July 2004 Charles E. and Barbara Vaughn found an adult male Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) swimming in the ocean off Battery Point at Crescent City, Del Norte County, California. They quickly notified interested persons about their find, enabling local birders such as Alan Barron and Ron LeValley to see and photograph it that afternoon. The eider was then widely seen through 18 July, during which time it ranged over about 3 miles from Battery Point northwest to Castle Rock.

Male Common Eiders in breeding plumage are relatively easy to identify, and the Crescent City bird was no exception. It was a large, heavy-bodied, black and white duck, with eyes set high on the sides of its face. The head was mostly white, with black on the crown extending down to just below the eyes. A pale greenish wash was visible on the nape at close range. Photos also show a black "V" marking on the chin. The long, wedge-shaped bill was orange with a whitish tip, and the legs and feet were the same bright orange as the bill. When on the water, the body appeared white with black sides and rear end. Although the bird appeared to be a strong flier, it stayed close to the water's surface as sea ducks typically do. It looked mostly white but with a black belly, rear end, and flight feathers (primaries and secondaries); the upper and under wing coverts were white. When McCaskie observed the bird at close range on 6 July, he saw no obvious signs of missing flight-feathers, but the primaries appeared worn and dark grayish. A handful of dark-tipped feathers on the scapulars seemed to be traces of eclipse plumage. When last seen on 18 July, this duck had acquired noticeably more dark-tipped eclipse plumage feathers. The record (CBRC record 2004-101) was unanimously endorsed by the California Bird Records Committee and is the first substantiated record for a Common Eider on the Pacific coast south of British Columbia. What may have been this same male, molting into eclipse plumage, was photographed at Port Angeles, Washington, 3–13 August 2004 (S. Mlodinow pers. comm.), shortly after the California bird disappeared.

The Common Eider breeds along the arctic coasts of Europe, Asia, and North America, south to the northern British Isles and the Netherlands in Europe, to the southern Chukchi Peninsula and the Commander Islands in Asia, to the Aleutian Islands in western North America, and to New Hampshire in eastern North America. In winter most Common Eiders remain within the species' breeding range, but some move south to northwestern France and Kamchatka in the Old World and to southeastern Alaska and New York in the New World.

At least six subspecies of Common Eider are generally recognized (Palmer 1976, Cramp 1977). In the Atlantic Ocean and adjoining waters, *S. m. borealis* occurs from northeastern Canada to Spitsbergen, *dresseri* occurs to the south from Labrador to Maine, and *sedentaria* is resident within Hudson and James bays. In the Pacific and northward, *v-nigrum* occurs from Victoria and Banks Islands in northern Canada west through coastal Alaska to northeastern Siberia. Away from North America, *mollissima* occurs around the North Sea from the British Isles to Scandinavia, and *faeroensis* is resident at the Faeroe Islands. Males of *v-nigrum* differ from those of the other subspecies in having an orange bill and a black "V" on the throat. The Common Eider in Crescent City, which appeared to be an adult male, had an orange bill and a black "V" on the throat, so was evidently the expected *v-nigrum*.

NOTES



Figure 1. The Crescent City Common Eider on an inshore rock near Battery Point on 6 July 2004. The dark markings on the scapulars are evidently the first of the dark-tipped feathers of eclipse plumage to emerge. The black "V" on the chin is also partially visible, showing the bird to be of the expected subspecies *v-nigrum*.

Photo by Mike San Miguel

Birds from the Atlantic populations (*borealis* and/or *dresseri*) have wandered south along the coast to as far as Florida and inland to the Great Lakes, with vagrants recorded in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Nebraska. The Pacific population (*v-nigrum*) rarely reaches extreme southeastern Alaska and has been recorded on the coast of British Columbia only four times (Campbell et al. 1990, Mlodinow 1999), but vagrants have been found inland in southern Canada, North and South Dakota, Kansas, Minnesota, and Iowa (A.O.U. 1998, Mlodinow 1999). An eider reported as a Common at San Francisco on 12 December 1982 was inadequately documented (Roberson 1993), and was in fact published as a King Eider (*S. spectabilis*) (*Am. Birds* 37:333).

The King Eider, nesting farther north than the Common, is found on the Pacific coast south of Alaska almost annually, with 36 California records endorsed by the California Bird Records Committee through 2003 (McKee and Erickson 2002; unpubl. data), including one from as far south as Imperial Beach/Coronado, San Diego County (an adult male 4 December 1982–25 January 1983; Morlan 1985). In addition, Steller's Eider (*Polysticta stelleri*), also nesting farther north than the Common, has reached California on three occasions, with one female as far south as Bodega Bay, Sonoma County, 27 October 1991–2 May 1992 (Patten et al. 1995). As often happens among related birds nesting over a range of latitudes, these two more northerly eiders tend to move south of their normal ranges more than does the more southerly Common Eider.

NOTES

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EXPANSION OF THE BREEDING RANGE OF THE ACORN WOODPECKER EAST OF THE SIERRA NEVADA, CALIFORNIA

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Resident and breeding Acorn Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) were first found on the east side of the Sierra Nevada in Lassen County, California, in 1959 (McKeever and Adams 1960). Currently, that area is the only published site of breeding and residence of this species in the eastern Sierra. In Inyo County, California, approximately 416 km south of Lassen County, the Acorn Woodpecker has been considered a regular vagrant and possible resident (Garrett and Dunn 1981, Small 1994), but long-term residence and breeding have never been confirmed. Here we provide evidence of Acorn Woodpecker residence in native oak (*Quercus*) habitats near Independence, Inyo County, as well as the first county breeding records for the species.

Inyo County is separated by the Sierra Nevada from most of California's native oak populations and the Acorn Woodpecker populations closely associated with those oaks. However, stands of three native oak species, the Black Oak (*Q. kelloggii*), the Interior Live Oak (*Q. wislizenii*), and the Canyon Live Oak (*Q. chrysolepis*), thrive along streams and at springs on the east face of the Sierra Nevada from north of Independence at Division Creek to Inyo County's southern border.

Grinnell and Miller (1944) reported what was then "the only trans-Sierra record" of one female Acorn Woodpecker "from Carroll Creek at 5500 feet, near Lone