

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER RECORDS FROM WHEELER RESERVOIR

THOMAS Z. ATKESON

When A. H. Howell's BIRDS OF ALABAMA was written, over 30 years ago, only the Surf Scoter was known in Alabama. More recently there have been good coastal sight records for all three scoter species, the Common or American Scoter, the Surf Scoter and the White-winged Scoter, but the only interior scoter records come from Wheeler reservoir. The permanent bird files of the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, kept for 20 years, show three records of the White-winged Scoter in the Decatur locality.

On December 21, 1942, John H. Steenis, a Research Biologist of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Paul Bryan, of TVA's Fish and Game Division, were making hunter bag checks near Harris Station. This lies a short distance west of U. S. highway 31 and is now a part of the Swan Creek Public Hunting Area. The two came upon a hunter who had just shot a duck that he was unable to identify. Steenis and Bryan examined the bird carefully and checked it against reference books. They pronounced it a female White-winged Scoter.

On the same date, Ernest Holland, then Assistant Manager of the Wheeler Refuge and now Manager of the Kentucky Woodlands Refuge, Golden Pond, Kentucky, saw a single White-winged Scoter in the Flint Creek embayment. Holland had worked along the Atlantic Coast and was familiar with the species.

On November 2, 1954, David C. Hulse, the waterfowl artist, found a lone female White-winged Scoter swimming in the Decatur Boat Harbor. He watched the bird for some time through good 8 x 40 binoculars, part of the time at a distance of no more than 30 yards.

The birds seen by Steenis, Bryan, and Hulse were in the southern edge of Limestone County, the one seen by Holland in the northern edge of Morgan County.

So far as is known, these are the only three non-coastal scoter records for the State, but the White-winged Scoter nests in the Canadian Northwest, migrates overland to salt water and can be expected to occur occasionally on the larger bodies of fresh water throughout Alabama.

Decatur, Alabama
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GOLDENEYE, OLD SQUAW, AND GREATER SCAUP RECORDS FROM WHEELER RESERVOIR

THOMAS Z. ATKESON

Those familiar with the Tennessee Valley Authority impoundments of northern Alabama have little doubt that the creation of this 150,000 surface acres of water has had a marked effect on bird life. These reservoirs were completed in the mid 1930's and have attracted many water-loving birds that either never occurred previously in this part of the State or were rare. The establishment of the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in 1938 certainly added to the attractiveness that these acres of open water and mudflat and miles of shoreline have for the various water birds. The bulk of the information in Howell's BIRDS OF ALABAMA was gathered prior to 1920, and the book does not list goldeneyes, old squaws, and greater scaups as occurring in any section of the State except the Gulf Coast. While never common, all three are found at least occasionally, in the Tennessee River reservoirs.

A few goldeneyes visit Wheeler Reservoir each fall and winter. Wheeler Refuge employees have recorded these as early as November 18 and as late as April 24, although they are most common in late fall and in winter. Specimens have never been collected, but these birds are occasionally shot by hunters in the open backwater west of the refuge.

A few old squaws may occur each winter but, if so, are lost to observation in the mass of other waterfowl. Wheeler Refuge records list only six occurrences, ranging from single birds to a flock of five. The earliest date noted in October 24 and the latest January 29.

On January 15, 1957, David Hulse, the waterfowl artist, hunting near Finley Island, shot a male old squaw. A study skin was prepared and is now in the University of Alabama collection.

Lesser scaup, in fair numbers, are found in the Tennessee River backwaters each fall and winter. A few greater scaup are probably mixed regularly in these flocks, but escape notice. Sight identification cannot be trusted, and records have come on those rare occasions when dead or trapped birds fell into the hands of qualified observers. The refuge files list only five greater scaup occurrences. The first came on November 30, 1944, when John Steenis, a research biologist