

Louisiana Bird Records Committee

Rare Bird Documentation

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Species: White-winged Scoter, *Melanitta deglandi*

Number of individuals: 1

Age and Sex: Unknown age; female

Date: 12, 15, 22, 23 November, 2020

Location: Capitol Lake, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish

eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76165261> (Nov 11, photos);

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S76316519> (Nov 15, photos);

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S76569542> (Nov 22, no photos);

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S76593294>

Original Observer: Nick Ramsey

Circumstances. The White-winged Scoter was originally found by Nick Ramsey in the afternoon of November 11th at Capitol Lake. I couldn't make it that evening, so I tried mid-morning on the 12th, after someone else conveniently confirmed it was still present. It took me a while to refind the bird, as it was in the far northern arm of the lake, while I was scanning from the southern shore; once I did relocate it, I moved around to the north end, where I had great looks through my 10x42 binoculars at the bird 100–150 meters distant. I watched it for a while, swimming around and diving a couple of times before I moved on.

My next observations occurred on the 15th, 22nd and 23rd of November. Although I was not specifically looking for the scoter on these dates, I did make an effort to search for it, to confirm that it continued. Each time it took some scanning with my binoculars, but each time I was able to refind it, generally at the north end of the lake. Each encounter was about the same: the bird would be swimming around, sometimes loosely associated with other ducks, other times by itself, occasionally diving. I never saw it actually come up with food items after a dive.

Description. A large, bulk duck, about the same size as adjacent Redheads, and larger than Lesser Scaup or Ring-necked Ducks. The bird was entirely dark charcoal gray, though it was perhaps a shade lighter on the head and neck and darker on the wings (aside from the white wing patch). The most distinctive features of the bird were two white patches on the head: one at the base of the bill, the second at the rear of the head, slightly below the eye; both were oval-shaped, and occupied perhaps 10-15% of the birds face. The other distinguishing feature were the white secondaries, which the bird often kept hidden. They were visible when the bird rolled over to preen, as well as when it

dove. The overall shape of the bird was bulky, with a large, blocky head perched atop a stock neck. The bill was large and sloping, continuing the slope of the forehead so that the crown of the head and the tip of the bill were on a plane, somewhat reminiscent of a Canvasback. I never saw it fly, only swim and dive.

Discussion. This seems like a straightforward, uncontroversial identification: no other duck recorded in Louisiana is all dark charcoal gray with white wing patches and two what face patches other than a female White-winged Scoter. It may be worth pointing out that the White-winged scoter has been split recently: White-winged is a common North American species, while Stejneger's is the East Asian equivalent, recorded just a few times in North America away from western-most Alaska, and Velvet is the European equivalent, unrecorded in North America. Both Stejneger's and Velvet can be ruled out by head shape I believe (both Stejneger's and Velvet being having slightly more concave foreheads, such that the plane of the front of the head between crown and tip of the bill is not flat), though further research can be undertaken by the Committee if they feel that either species is a serious contender for addition to the Louisiana state list.

Once accepted, this will likely constitute the second record for East Baton Rouge Parish, following a bird from the winter of 2014 that spent several weeks on the lake at Pennington Biomedical Research Lab.

Photos



Fig 1. White-winged Scoter, 12 November, 2020, Capitol Lakes, Baton Rouge



Fig 2. White wing patch visible while the bird is at rest. 12 November, 2020.



Fig 3. Size comparison of the White-winged Scoter (center) to several Hooded Mergansers, Lesser Scaup, and Ring-necked Duck. 15 November, 2020