

General Field Notes

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King Eider on Saluda River at Columbia, S.C.

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On 2 January 1979 at about 1630, I noticed a large duck on a rock in the Saluda River about 200 yards away from my home at Rising Hopes in West Columbia, S.C. Rising Hopes overlooks the river at a point just north of its confluence with the Broad to form the Congaree, about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile upstream from the Hampton Street bridge. I realized immediately that the bird was not native to the area, as I have hunted waterfowl in South Carolina for 25 years and in other places in the United States.

With the naked eye, I could see that the bird was a large, heavy-bodied duck with wing patches, an orange frontal shield, a knobbed beak, white foreparts, and a dark back and rear. When first observed, the bird faced to my left, giving me a lateral view. I then examined it with 7X binoculars and called my wife Mary, my brother-in-law Carl Roberts, and my mother-in-law Mrs. Hamilton Roberts. All observers had excellent views of the bird as it turned on the rock several times and spread its wings; the white foreparts and wing patches, the dark coloration of the rear, and especially the very bright orange frontal shield, were readily visible. With binoculars, the top and back of the head appeared off-white to pale gray; the feet and legs were orange.

The bird's size and shape suggested strongly that it was a sea duck, and probably an eider. Examination of the appropriate plates and descriptions in the Peterson field guide confirmed this belief, and furthermore indicated clearly that the bird was an adult male King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*). I called the Columbia Audubon Office and, while the bird was still in view, described it to Kay Sisson, who concurred in my identification.

We watched the bird for about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours, during which time it shifted position continually and spread its wings. The eider then flew to our side of the river and slightly downstream. Roberts and I went outside and observed the bird with 20X binoculars; there was no question of its identity. I watched it as it flew low over the water for about 100 yards before it ceased active flight and sailed out of view, apparently landing on or near the shore. Attempts to relocate the eider did not succeed; it may have been frightened by two fishermen who had just come into the area. The search was continued the next two days, but to no avail.

There are only two previous records of the King Eider in South Carolina (South Carolina Bird Life, 1970, p. 140-141). Burton obtained two immature females from the jetties in Charleston Harbor on 26 and 29 December 1936; both specimens are in the collection of the Charleston Museum. J.E. Mosimann and T.M. Uzzell Jr. observed an adult male off the Isle of Palms on 2 January 1947. The Columbia bird is the first island record for the state.