

**FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF
COMMON EIDER (*Somateria mollissima*)
IN NEW YORK STATE**

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On 5 Aug 2000, Jackie Williamson called and said that she and her son Peter had just seen a family of ducks, an adult and four young, that she suspected to be Common Eiders. As she described them to me, "eider" is what came to mind before she even mentioned the word. Jackie went on to describe the location where she had seen them and I decided to check the following day.

On the morning of 6 Aug 2000, Katherine, my wife, and I drove to the area described. It was on the east side of West Harbor on Fisher's Island, opposite a marsh filled with phragmites. Before I even stopped the car I saw the family about 30 feet out in the water of the Long Island Sound. I quickly drove to a parking space, but the family began to swim out into the Sound and was soon lost from view. I then realized that I had forgotten my camera and after a quick search along the shore for a nest and finding none, we left the scene and returned at 3 p.m. that afternoon.

Again, before I stopped the car I saw small dots in the distance about one-quarter of a mile away. Using binoculars the spots turned into a female

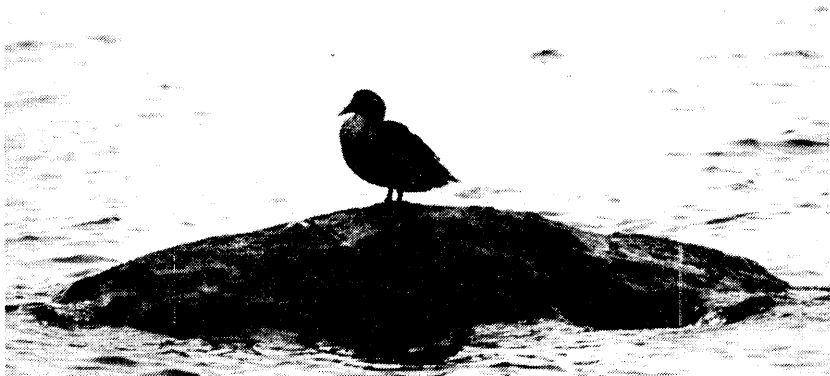


Figure 1: Common Eider

Fisher's Island, NY

6 Aug 2000

Photo by Edwin Horning

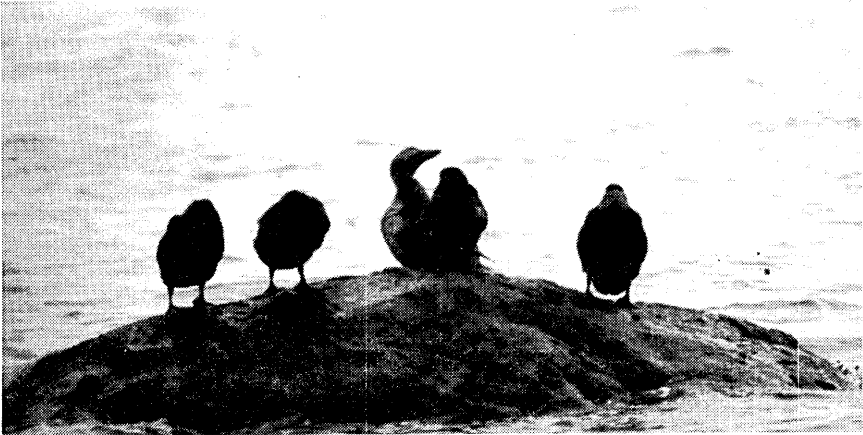


Figure 2: Common Eider with young Fisher's Island, NY 6 Aug 2000

Photo by Edwin Horning

Common Eider and four young. Needless to say I was excited and began to take photos. The family moved out to sea again and then turned and swam around a long dock and then to my surprise , swam toward where I was sitting. The family reached a large rock, about thirty feet from me , that was as flat as a table top. The adult clambered onto the rock. The young first swam past the rock but then returned and one by one made their way onto the rock where they first sat beside the female and then snuggled down as to take a nap. I was then able to photograph the family.

Now for a little history. The previous year, 1999, on 4 Jul, Dick Baker took me out to South Dumpling Island. I was taking a count of the herons on the island for the Long Island Colonial Waterbird Count. As we approached the shore of South Dumpling I noticed a different bird among the many gulls. Dick looked through his binoculars and exclaimed, "eider!". Looking more closely we noticed a duckling with it. Before I could take photos the female Common Eider and young one had moved away. I reported the sighting to Manny Levine, who stated this observation, if it could be documented that the Common Eider duckling was hatched in New York State, would represent the first breeding of an eider species in the state.

The earliest previous record that I have of Common Eider in Fisher's Island waters is 1 Dec 1969.

These reports and photos have been forwarded to NYSARC for their consideration.

Editor's Note

The ultimate decision of whether to add the species to the breeding avifauna of New York State belongs to the NYSARC. Some background material may be of interest to the reader.

The *AOU Check-List of North American Birds*, Seventh Edition 1998 pg.78, shows Maine as the southernmost breeding location in its range. It also states, "Introduced (*mollissima* group) in southeastern Massachusetts."

This introduction is amplified in the *Birds of Massachusetts* 1993 Veit and Peterson(p.112) which states "between 1973 and 1975, 175 Common Eider chicks were introduced to Penikese Island from nests in Casco Bay, Maine (Stanton 1979). Some of these birds have established themselves as breeders, and they are gradually colonizing the neighboring Elizabeth Islands...."

For the state of Rhode Island "2 female common eiders with 10 [flightless] young at Sakonnet Point, R.I. 17-30 June 1999" (F. Norton, David Emerson) were noted in *North American Birds* 53:364 (1999).

For the state of Connecticut, *Connecticut Birds* Zeranski and Baptist 1990 indicates no breeding records.

It is therefore not clear if the Rhode Island breeding record of 1999 and the New York breeding evidence presented here were the result of the breeding success of the introduced Massachusetts birds or indicate a southern extension of the general breeding range of the species.

REFERENCES

The A.O.U. Check-List of North American Birds, Seventh Edition; American Ornithologists Union, 1998.

Birds of Massachusetts; Richard R. Veit and Wayne R. Peterson; Massachusetts Audubon Society, 1993.

Connecticut Birds; Joseph D. Zeranski and Thomas R. Baptist; University Press of New England, 1990.

North American Birds; 53:364 (1999).