

## PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES

### 4. Smew



Photograph by Dr. Donald Gunn

The 3rd edition (1910) of the A.O.U. *Check-list* records the Smew (*Mergus albellus*) as 'accidental in northern North America' (p. 68). Presumably this is on the basis of Alexander Wilson's erroneous observations (see Audubon, *Ornithological Biography*, 4: 350, 1838). In subsequent editions of the *Check-list* (4th and 5th, 1931 and 1957, respectively) the Smew is relegated to the hypothetical list: "Audubon's sight record of this Old World species, and several other alleged occurrences in America, are unsatisfactory" (5th edition, p. 646). Actually, Audubon (*op. cit.*) based his account on a bird he *collected* at "Lake Barataria, not far from New Orleans in the winter of 1819" (p. 350). Although apparently no longer extant, this is the individual which served as the model for the adult female Smew of plate cccxlvii, fig. 2. of the *Elephant Folio*. (Audubon, *op. cit.*).

A Smew (presumed to be an immature male) was discovered at Buffalo Harbor, Erie Co., on 17 January 1960 during the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs annual winter waterfowl count, by Robert D. Coggeshall, Robert F. Andrie, and Joseph F. Thill. It was seen again, by numerous observers, on the 18th, 19th, and 22nd. Two attempts to collect the bird failed. Shortly thereafter the harbor froze and the Smew disappeared only to be rediscovered by James Baillie on the Niagara River



Photograph by Dr. Donald Gunn

near Miller's Creek, Ontario, Canada. The bird was present in this area, as well as in the vicinity of Frenchman's and Usshers Creeks (also on the Niagara River) until 30 March, after which it was not seen again.

For a description and further details see Coggeshall (*Prothonotary*, 26: 60–61, Sept. 1960) and Mitchell (*Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region*, Bull. Buffalo Soc. Nat. Sciences, 22: 154, 1965).

The above photographs, taken on 26 February 1960, by Donald Gunn, originally appeared in the latter work and are reproduced here through the courtesy of both Gunn and Mitchell.

The Smew is a boreal Palearctic species which according to Vaurie [*The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna* (non-Passeriformes), H. F. and G. Witherby, London, 1965, pp. 137–138], breeds from Scandinavia east to Siberia and winters "from southern Norway and southern Sweden south to the British Isles, France . . . [the] Mediterranean . . . Black Sea, Iraq, Caspian Sea, Iranian region, northern India, Japan, Korea, and eastern China south to about the Yangtze . . ."

As pointed out by Coggeshall (*op. cit.*) mergansers are extremely rare in captivity and, so far as is known, no zoo in this country has ever had a Smew.

The footnote on p. 154 of Mitchell (*op. cit.*), referring to a bird seen at Grand Island in 1937 by Beardslee, was meant to accompany the Ruddy Duck account, but was mistakenly placed with the Smew (Mitchell, *in. litt.*)

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