

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES

18. Tufted Duck



Photograph by Peter W. Post

Hudson River from Fort Washington Park, New York Co., 25 January 1967

A Palaearctic species, the Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*), breeds from Iceland and the British Isles across northern and central Europe and Asiatic Russia to Siberia and the Komandorskie Islands. The species winters from the British Isles and continental Europe south to North Africa, Saudi Arabia, India, China, and the Philippines; occasionally south to Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Tanzania, the Maldives, Ceylon, Borneo, and western Micronesia [Vaurie, *The Birds of the Palaearctic Fauna* (non-Passeriformes), H. F. & G. Witherby, London, 123: 1965].

Migrant Tufted Ducks have been recorded in small numbers from the Pribilofs (Sladen, *Auk* 83: 134, 1966). Other Alaska records and recent reports from British Columbia, Oregon, California, and Wyoming have been summarized by Gochfeld (*Condor* 70: 186-187, 1968).

Six Tufted Ducks have been taken in Greenland; four birds around Godthaab, 15 and 16 October 1889; at Fiskernasset, 16 October 1889; and around Kangek, 10 November 1920 (Schioler, *Danskmarks Fugle*, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Copenhagen. Vol. 2, 1926: 94-95).

A drake Tufted Duck was present on the Merrimac River, Newburyport, Essex Co., Massachusetts, from 24 January to 15 February 1954 — the first Eastern North American record outside of Greenland (Griscom & Snyder, *The Birds of Massachusetts*, Peabody Museum, Salem, 1955: 253). "A very tame drake" present at Marshfield, Plymouth Co., was presumed to have been an escape" (Griscom & Snyder, *op. cit.*). The Newburyport bird was also relegated to the Massachusetts hypothetical list for this reason.

Single drake Tufted Ducks reappeared at Newburyport on 24 January 1958 and 1959, 29 January 1961, and 13 January 1962. Two drakes and a hen were present here from at least 20 to 28 February 1960. Departure dates were usually in the latter half of February or early March, but one year was on 20 April (various sources).

Tufted Ducks have also appeared every winter on Cape Cod, at Sider's Pond, Falmouth, Falmouth Co., since January 1962. The dates match almost exactly that of the Newburyport bird(s); usually arriving in mid or late January (25 November 1967), and departing in late February. Some years only a drake was present, others only a hen, and twice a pair was present. For the past three years single drakes have also appeared on the Cape at Red Brook Pond, Pocasset, Bourne Co.; usually during March and April. The latest date here was 30 April 1967 (various sources).

Other Massachusetts records include a pair at Carver, Plymouth Co., 24 March 1963 (*Aud. Field Notes* 17: 311, 1963) and one bird at Richmond Pond, Westport Harbor, Westport Co., 14 May 1966 (*Rec. New England Birds* 22(5), May 1966).

The first New York State Tufted Duck report was a female discovered on the Bronx-Southern Westchester Christmas Count by Walter Sedwitz and Paul A. Buckley, on the Harlem River, near Spuyten Duyvil, New York Co., 26 December 1955. This bird was present until 1 February 1956. Unfortunately, the species is not recognizable from the photographs that were taken. Both this record and a drake seen by Walter Sedwitz on Jerome Reservoir, Bronx Co., 15 March 1962 were placed on the states hypothetical list by Bull (*Birds of the New York Area*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1964: 472) as being possible escapes.

A drake Tufted Duck discovered by Fred Lohrer on 18 February 1966 was present on the Hudson River at Fort Washington Park, New York Co., and at Edgewater, Bergen Co., New Jersey, on the opposite shore, until 1 April of that year (*Aud. Field Notes* 20: 404, 1966). A drake Tufted Duck has now appeared here for four consecutive winters. Twelve December 1966 to 21 February 1967 are the only other arrival and departure dates available; in the last two years exact dates were seldom reported, although the bird was frequently seen.

The only other New York State Tufted Duck record is that of a drake seen in the East River, off Randalls Island, New York Co., by Richard E. Harrison, Ester Swayer, and Herb Kaltman on the January 1968 statewide waterfowl count (*vide* Thomas H. Davis).

Both in Massachusetts and New York Tufted Ducks are usually seen in association with large numbers of scaup.

As noted above the early Tufted Duck records were considered escapes. Gochfeld (*op. cit.*), however, mentions several factors that support the conclusion that some birds were of wild origin, especially in the light of recent occurrences. The number of Tufted Ducks reported, for example, is greater than can be accounted for by known or postulated escapes. "Although other Eurasian species kept in aviaries have been reported occasionally in various parts of the country, the Tufted Duck has apparently been the most often recorded."

The presence of birds at great distances from aviaries and the presence of pairs also support this conclusion. In addition, a bird or birds arriving in a logical wintering place for the species at a logical time of year and disappearing again at a logical time for migration is probably a wild bird. This is contrary to the usual sedentary behavior and random seasonal distribution of escapes.

Peter W. Post, 573 West 183 Street, New York, N.Y. 10033.