

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* Hogganfield Loch, October-December 2008 - the first multiple occurrence for Clyde

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In October 2008 two Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* were found at Hogganfield Loch in east Glasgow, the first occasion that more than one bird of this vagrant Nearctic species has been found at the same place in the Clyde recording area. Both were adult males, one in bright plumage, with the other in partial eclipse when it first appeared. The first, brighter bird was found on the 19 October and it was joined by the second on the 21st October. The two remained together until the 28th October, when the first bird left, with the other remaining until early December. By the time the second bird departed it, too, had achieved pristine adult plumage.

This is not the first multiple occurrence of this attractive North American diving duck in Scotland, with other records from Shetland, Dumfries & Galloway and the Outer Hebrides. But these individuals were at times both very approachable, and their extended stay at such a convenient central location allowed many observers to enjoy their visit.

Description

General

Smallish male *aythya* diving ducks which, when sitting in water, showed dark heads and breasts, pale backs and flanks, and greyish brown tertials, undertails and tails, giving the impression of Scaup-type birds. However, both were about the same size as the Tufted Ducks *Aythya fuligula* with which they were present, and did not have the “bulky” and “strong/heavy” feel of Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*. Structurally, the two were identical in shape and size.

Bare Parts

Eyes bright yellow. Bills, pale blue grey, with very small black nibs, much smaller than that seen on Greater Scaup. Bills also much lighter and thinner when viewed head on, again compared with Greater Scaup.

Head/breast

Black heads and breasts, with a purple sheen apparent in bright sunlight on heads, although a green sheen was occasionally visible about the ear coverts. Head profiles usually rounded, especially during active feeding and diving, but never as flat rounded as seen in Greater Scaup. Occasionally, peaked crowns were apparent, when the birds were “relaxed”. This latter feature became more obvious with the second bird by the end of its stay, in late November and early December.

Body

Bird 1: mantle/scapulars white, but with heavy black vermiculation. Flanks also white, but with lighter black vermiculation, along whole length. Tertials pale grey brown, as was the folded wing tips and tail. Belly white, when seen occasionally as the bird turned over and preened its underparts.

Bird 2: mantle/scapulars white, with heavy black vermiculation, but with a brown wash to feathers. Flanks also white, with lighter black vermiculation, along whole length, but again with a brown dirty wash. Tertials pale grey brown, as was the folded wing tips and tail.

Wing pattern

Upperwing pattern discerned when birds prepared to roost and flapped their wings, or during brief flight views. Forewings grey, with dark trailing edge to greater and primary coverts. White band only in secondaries, with grey inner and outer primaries. Dark trailing edge to wing, from secondaries through to primaries.

Age

Both birds were aged as adults, based on having bright yellow eyes. One individual also showed clean breeding plumage, whereas the other was in incomplete breeding plumage being in partial eclipse. However, a 1st-winter male Lesser Scaup in October/November would have a duller eye colour, and show even more incomplete breeding plumage.

Eliminated from similar confusion species:

Hybrid ducks

- 1) Small neat black nib in bill, confirming a Scaup spp.
- 2) White, but heavily vermiculated back, not light grey with light vermiculation, as is seen in similar looking hybrids.

Greater Scaup (GS)

- 1) Head shape, with peaked crown, but only visible occasionally when in relaxed posture.
- 2) Heavily vermiculated back - not lightly marked as in GS.
- 3) Vermiculated flanks - these are always clean white in adult male GS.
- 4) Relatively light, narrow bill, with tiny black nib - heavier, broader bill with larger nib in GS.
- 5) White wing bar on upper wing restricted to secondaries, pale grey in primaries.
- 6) General smaller size, and lighter feel. Not a heavy looking duck.

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Lesser Scaup, Hogganfield Loch, Glasgow, October 2008. A. First, brighter male, 20 October.
B & C. Second, duller male, 24th October. **D & E.** Two together, 24 October. (*Chris McInerny*).



