



The Springfield Mottled Duck constitutes the first Illinois documented record with photographs, pending the Illinois Ornithological Record Committee's vote.



Mottled Duck. Lake Springfield, Sangamon County. 21 May 2004. Photos by H. David Bohlen

Mottled Duck at Lake Springfield: first state record

by H. David Bohlen

Although I occasionally see tardy American Black Ducks in spring in Sangamon County, I always check them closely to make sure they are not hybrids with Mallards. While making my rounds 21 May 2004, I spotted a dozing "black duck type" at the Lake Springfield Beach. Several drake Mallards were present but not near the sleeping duck.

The "black duck" perked up as I approached allowing me to immediately see a black gape and yellow bill. I backed away slowly and went for my scope and digital camera. I approached the duck, which was again asleep, and I could only get so close because it was on the other side of a chain-link fence.

I took several photographs of the duck which finally awoke and lifted its head so that I could note a yellow bill with a greenish tinge around the edges and nostrils and a black nail; a fairly extensive black gape; head and neck delineated from a darker body; an unstreaked, buffy-ochre colored throat; a well-defined supercilium caused by a dark streak from the upper edge of the bill which narrowed and ended well behind the eye; a light brown crown, the color which extended down the nape; brown eye; dark brown body with each feather broadly edged in buff; darker back; mottled (not white) tail; bluish speculum with black edges and a thin white trailing edge, (later in certain light the speculum would appear aqua); orange tarsi; and white underwings when the duck flapped its wings.

As I checked Sibley's field guide, these characteristics added up to a Mottled Duck (*Anas fulvigula*). After Beckie Dyer put my photographs on the computer I was sure it was a Mottled Duck. And when I looked at Websites with both Mottled and American Black Ducks, my bird definitely looked like a Mottled. Bob Montgomery e-mailed me after the photos were posted on the Illinois State Museum's Website. He said they looked good, but that I should consult a monograph by Stutzenbaker (1988) on the Mottled Duck. In the monograph, the frontispiece shows a male in which the bill was not as yellow as the Springfield duck, but was otherwise very similar. The book also eliminated a possible Mallard hybrid based on the fact that the Springfield duck did not have curled upper tail feathers, or white on the leading edge of the speculum or grayish undertail coverts (Stutzenbaker 1988).

The origin is another matter since waterfowl fanciers keep every kind of waterfowl. This duck had no bands or clipped wings. It appeared very tired and kept away from the Mallards at first. Mallards are the only puddle ducks present at this time of year and the males loaf on the beach or near the boat launches. The Mottled Duck, being a male by bill color (females have