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## Minnesota's third tufted duck

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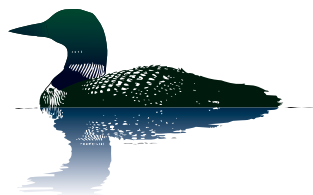
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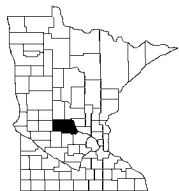
Chu PC. 2019. Minnesota's third tufted duck. *The Loon* 91(1):181-182.

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# Notes of Interest



**MINNESOTA'S THIRD TUFTED DUCK** — At 10:10 A.M. on 15 May 2019 I was about to leave



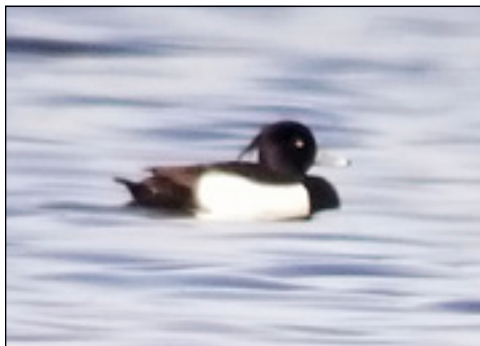
the Albany sewage ponds in Albany Township, Stearns County — I had just put my telescope in the trunk of my car and taken a step or two toward the driver's-side door — when a small group of *Aythya* ducks flew in and

landed 300 yards away. I put my binoculars up to my eyes, thought, "That looks like a scaup with a black back," and then, "I guess I'd better get out my scope to make sure that it's really NOT a Tufted Duck" — because, 99 times out of 100, when think you see something interesting, it turns out not to be.

The scope revealed a one-in-a-hundred exception: the scaup-like duck with a black back was indeed a male Tufted Duck. With three male Lesser Scaup and two male Redheads, it was about the same size and shape as the scaup, except that (1) the top of its head was smoothly rounded in profile, and (2) a long crest hung downward from the back of its head like a tapering ponytail. The head, neck, breast, back, scapulars, rump, upper tail-coverts, under tail-coverts, and tail were black; at no time did the back and scapulars appear paler — less black — than the head/neck/breast or the upper/under tail-coverts. In contrast, the flanks and belly were immaculate white, lacking even a hint of darker sully. This overall black-and-white scheme was relieved by orange-yellow irises and a bluish bill — the bill was a light blue-tinged gray, paling to whitish as it neared the tip, with the tip itself (including not only the nail but also the distal maxilla on either side of the nail) being black. The legs and feet were dark, appearing blackish; the under surface of the wings, viewed twice when the bird reared up and flapped while facing me, was white; and the upper surface of the wings, seen during the bird's single flight, was black with a scaup-like white stripe that crossed the secondaries and extended far out into the primaries. Regarding this last feature, I noted that the inner primaries were almost as white as the secondaries, much as in a Greater Scaup, i.e., there was no Lesser-Scaup-like sharp decrease in whiteness from the outer secondaries to the inner primaries.

There were no bands on either leg, and the reduced rearward-pointing first digit — the so-called hallux — was unambiguously present on the left leg; I never saw the other leg well enough to be sure if the right hallux was present or not.

For perhaps a third of the three-hour observation period the Tufted Duck was foraging, diving over and over again, with the dives lasting 20 to 30 seconds apiece. With the duck diving frequently, it was hard not to notice that diving had an effect on head shape, and even head color. When wet the top of the Tufted Duck's head, instead of being smoothly rounded in profile, appeared squarish, with a steeply rising forehead, flat crown, and sharply falling hindneck; at such times the crest, instead of being obvious, was not even visible, being plastered against the hindneck. This phenomenon, of head shape changing when the head is wet, is probably familiar to anyone who has tried to judge head shape in scaup that have just surfaced after a dive. Moreover — and more unexpectedly to me — diving seemed to affect the color of the gloss on the head: when the black head was dry it had a weak purple gloss, but when wet (as during periods



**Tufted Duck, 15 May 2019, Albany, Stearns County. Photo by Dan Orr.**

of diving) it had a strong green gloss.

The Tufted Duck remained at the Albany ponds into the evening of the 15th (L. Korte, pers. comm.), but was not seen thereafter.

When trying to identify a Tufted Duck the greatest identification challenge is probably a hybrid between a Tufted Duck and some other *Aythya* species. Such hybrids — I've personally seen two, both in southeastern lower Michigan — betray their "mixed blood" by having an unusually short crest, by having the back and scapulars perceptibly paler than the head/neck/breast and the upper/under tail-coverts, and/or by having grayish or brownish sully on the otherwise white flanks. However, the bird described here had none of these intermediate characteristics.

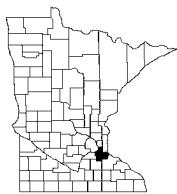
The Albany Tufted Duck is Minnesota's third. It is also the only spring record, with both the first and second coming from the winter: 7–18 January 2018 in Goodhue County (Tustison 2018; Fall and Towle 2018; Zakelj and Engdahl 2018) and 11 December 2018 – 15 January 2019 in St. Louis County (Tustison 2019; Eckert 2019; Fall et al. 2019).

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— Philip C. Chu, Collegeville, MN.

**COMMON RAVEN IN DAKOTA COUNTY** — On 28 November 2018, Mike Majeski observed



two Common Ravens in flight at Miesville Ravine Park Reserve, at approximately 10:00 A.M. The following is his description of the event: "While conducting a stream survey of the recent Trout Brook restoration project, I heard a low croaking call from overhead that immediately got my attention as a possible Common Raven. I looked up and saw two large black corvids flying down the river valley, both birds flying in close proximity to each other and calling with low pitched, gurgling kaw notes and other unusual sounds (grating notes, clicking sounds), much different than American Crow sounds. Both birds had

well-defined wedge-shaped tails. The flight style of both birds consisted of both flapping and soaring on flat wings, much different than the rowing flight of American Crow. About an hour after this observation, I saw two American Crows fly overhead from a similar perspective. The American Crows were smaller, lacked a wedge-shaped tail, gave higher pitched kaw notes, and had the classic rowing flight style."

This represents the first documented record of this species in Dakota County. The addition of this species to the county's avifauna has long been anticipated due to its recent southeastward range expansion in Minnesota. Common Ravens have steadily moved into the Twin Cities area, becoming resident in most of the northern tier counties there and documented in nearly every county adjacent to Dakota. Interesting is an earlier report in Dakota from 19 April 2013, but unfortunately no documentation was submitted, nor were any descriptive details included with the observer's submission to the Seasonal Report. Without any documentation, such a report is best discounted for a species that previously has been considered out of range in the state.

There were no additional observations of Common Ravens in the park until mid-December 2018. After an unsuccessful attempt, I saw a single Common Raven in the parking lot area off