

An Apparent Common x Barrow's Goldeneye Hybrid from the St. Lawrence River

by

Paul R. Martin and Bruce M. Di Labio

Hybridization has been frequently documented in the family Anatidae, particularly in the subfamily Anatinae (Gray 1958; Johnsgard 1965, 1968). Not only has interbreeding between species of the same genus occurred, but also between different genera and even different tribes (Gray 1958; Johnsgard 1968). Despite their close relations, however, hybrids between the Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) and the Barrow's Goldeneye (*B. islandica*) have been rarely documented. There are two previous reports for Ontario of hybrid goldeneyes: a male (specimen in the Royal Ontario Museum) from the Niagara Gorge (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965); and a sight record of a possible male in Peterborough County (Sadler 1983). This paper documents an additional sight record of an apparent Common x Barrow's Goldeneye hybrid which represents, to our knowledge, one of very few in eastern North America.

On 27 November 1988, we observed an apparent hybrid adult male goldeneye at the Moses-Saunders Power Dam, both on the Canadian and American sides of the St. Lawrence River near Cornwall, Stormont County, Ontario. The bird was observed from approximately 1030 h to 1045 h, both in overcast conditions and in direct sunlight, through two telescopes (highest power 25X) and binoculars. It was observed swimming from a distance of about 150 m, and as close as 30 m

while flying. Throughout the observation period, this goldeneye swam amongst a mixed raft of over 300 Common Mergansers (*Mergus merganser*) and 25 Common Goldeneyes, thus offering direct comparison with adult male Common Goldeneyes.

Description

At first glance, this bird appeared to be a dark Common Goldeneye drake. It was approximately the same size, or slightly larger, than the male Common Goldeneyes swimming nearby. The eye colour was typical of both goldeneye species - bright yellow with a small black pupil. Upon closer examination, however, several characteristics (head shape, facial and scapular patterns) were noted which were intermediate between the two goldeneye species (see Figure 1).

The head shape was similar to the "triangle" shape of the Common Goldeneye (Cramp and Simmons 1977), but not as pronounced. The forehead rose from the base of the bill at an angle intermediate between those of the Common and Barrow's goldeneyes. Sloping gradually back from the crown, the head feathers just above the nape projected towards the back. This projection was similar to, but shorter, than that found on adult male Barrow's Goldeneyes.

The head was dark and showed no iridescence, although nearby Common Goldeneye drakes clearly

showed green iridescence in the strong sunlight. The white crescents on the hybrid goldeneye's face were widest at the base, tapering slightly near the top. They were more elongated than those of the Common Goldeneye, curving slightly closer to the eye. The crescents were rounded at the top, extending barely beyond a line from the top of the upper mandible to the eye.

The bill was dark (perhaps black), and slightly stubbier than the bills of nearby Common Goldeneyes.

The black-and-white pattern on the scapulars was similar to that of drake Barrow's Goldeneye, except that there was more white present and the white areas were separated by thin black lines nearly identical to those found on the scapulars of adult Common Goldeneye drakes. Between the white breast and sides, anterior to the bend of the wing, there was a black "spur" that extended forward and down. This "spur" was about half the size of the "spur" typical of adult male Barrow's Goldeneyes. The flanks were white, extending back to about the end of the patterning on the scapulars. Here the sides were black beginning from the waterline diagonally backward to where the wings rested, through to the undertail coverts.

The wings appeared black at rest, but showed a white pattern in flight. The white patterns on the upperwing coverts were like those of an adult male Common Goldeneye, except for a thin black line extending half way across from the outerwing that separated the white areas in the median and greater upperwing coverts. This separation is more pronounced in adult male Barrow's

Goldeneyes.

The tail was black and noticeably longer than those of nearby drake Common Goldeneyes. Average tail lengths in Palmer (1976) show the tails of drake Barrow's Goldeneyes to be shorter than those of drake Common Goldeneyes (with overlap), making the tail length of the hybrid goldeneye seem somewhat odd.

Behaviour

The apparent hybrid goldeneye was observed preening, swimming, resting and displaying, but never diving or feeding. When the entire flock of ducks was flushed by passersby, this goldeneye flew with a female Common Goldeneye. Otherwise, it was never observed to associate with any particular duck or ducks, but rather swam randomly through the flock.

The most interesting behaviour of this bird was what appeared to be a courtship display directed at no particular bird and with no female Common Goldeneyes nearby. The display was observed three times with a gap of at least several seconds between each display. In the display, the goldeneye extended its head upward and backward so that its bill was perpendicular to the water while the back of its head touched its back. The bird then threw its head directly upward into the air until its neck was fully extended. The bill remained perpendicular to the water and was kept open. The bird's bill movements suggested calling - perhaps constantly while performing the courtship, although no vocalizations were heard. This "head-throw" movement usually occurred two times per display. Between displays, the hybrid

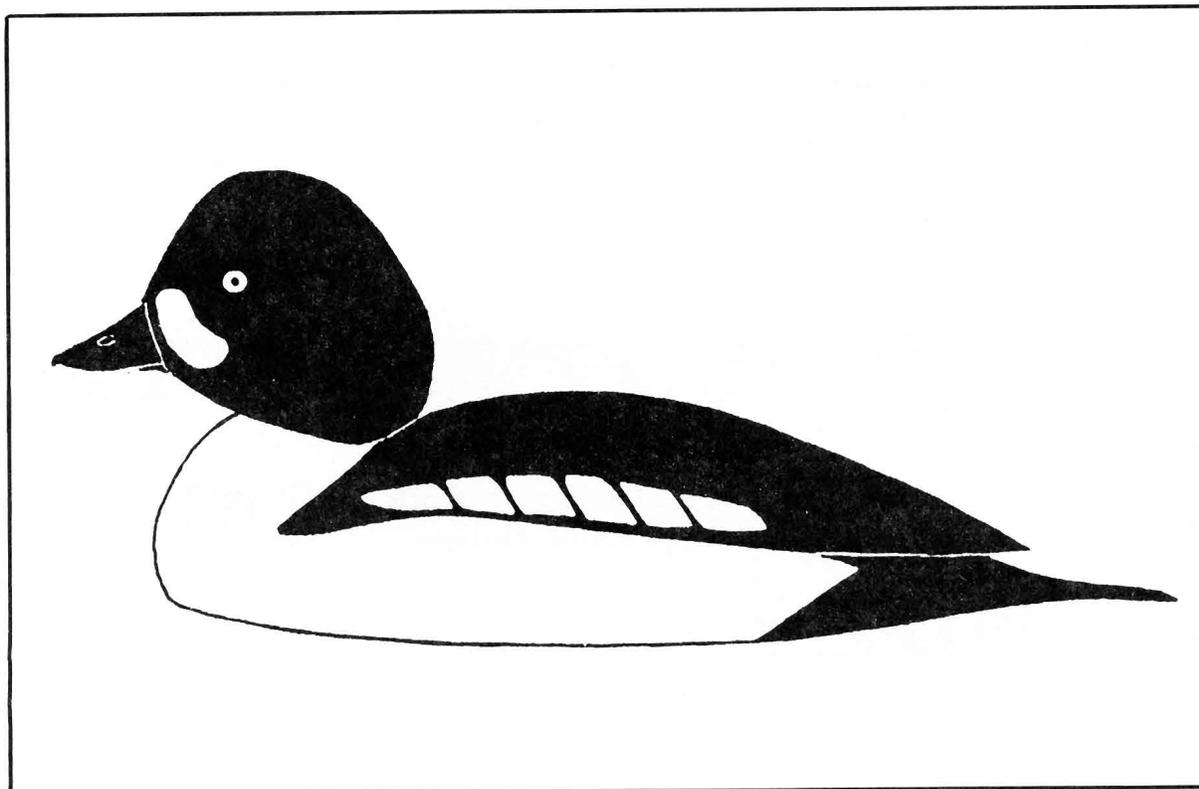


Figure 1: Presumed Common x Barrow's Goldeneye Hybrid. Drawing based on field sketches and notes made on 27 November 1988 by the authors.

goldeneye looked alert, moving about restlessly with its neck fully extended and head held high. The tail was held up at an angle of approximately 40 degrees to the water during the display and for most of the period of observation.

This display was almost identical to the "fast head-throw-kick" display of the Common Goldeneye as described by Townsend (Bent 1925), Johnsgard (1965) and Palmer (1976). The Barrow's Goldeneye has a similar display, which differs in that the head is brought back into an upright position after touching the back (Bent 1925; Johnsgard 1965; Palmer 1976). The Common Goldeneye, on the other hand, often thrusts its head straight upward, as seen in the hybrid goldeneye's display (Bent 1925; Johnsgard 1965; Palmer 1976).

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Ross Harris, Michel Gosselin, and Melisa Kamibayashi for their valued assistance and constructive comments.

Literature cited

- Beardslee, C.S. and H.D. Mitchell* 1965. Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region. Bulletin of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences 22: 1-478.
- Bent, A.C.* 1925. Life histories of North American wild fowl. Order Anseres (Part). Smithsonian Institution, United States National Museum Bulletin 130.
- Cramp, S. and K.E.L. Simmons (eds.)* 1977. Handbook of the birds of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa: the birds of the Western Palearctic. Volume 1. Ostrich - Ducks. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gray, A.P., 1958. Bird hybrids. A check-list with bibliography. Technical Communication No. 13 of the Commonwealth Bureau of Animal Breeding and Genetics, Edenborough, England.

Johnsgard, P.A. 1965. Handbook of waterfowl behaviour. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Johnsgard, P.A. 1968. Waterfowl: their biology and natural history. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.

Palmer, R. (ed.) 1976. Handbook of North American birds. Volume 3. London & New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sadler, D. 1983. Our Heritage of Birds: Peterborough County in the Kawarthas. Orchid Press, Peterborough.

Paul R. Martin, 25 Beechmont Cres., Gloucester, Ontario K1B 4A7

Bruce M. Di Labio, 62 Grange Ave., Ottawa, Ontario K1Y 0N9

In Memoriam: Bill Hutchison (1932-1991)

by
Doug McRae

On 5 November 1991, Bill Hutchison passed away. Bill wasn't widely known in the birding community, but for anyone who travelled to Moosonee, he will be remembered as having the best bird feeder in town. And for those of us who had a chance to get to know this interesting man, Bill will also be remembered as a tremendous host and friend to visiting naturalists.

Bill's feeder had many rarities over the years, but was also the mainstay for the small populations of House Sparrows and Starlings in Moosonee. In 1982, a Yellow-

throated Warbler came to his feeder (see *Ontario Birds* 1:13).

Bill was also active in many community events and organizations. One endeavour in which Bill was involved in 1991 was the development of the position of "Town Naturalist" for Moosonee. The creation of this interpretive post is just one indication of Bill's unique talents and abilities that will be so sorely missed by those of us who had the privilege of knowing him. Needless to say, our warm wishes are extended to Bill's family and friends.

Doug McRae, Box 130, St. Williams, Ontario N0E 1P0