

The Status and Occurrence of Falcated Duck (*Anas falcata*) in British Columbia.

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Introduction and Distribution

The Falcated Duck (*Anas falcata*) breeds solely in boreal regions of eastern Asia, including eastern Russia, northern Mongolia, northeast China, and Japan (Brazil 2009). It winters in eastern and southeastern Asia, especially southern and eastern China (Brazil 2009). Smaller numbers winter in Japan and on the Korean Peninsula, with even smaller numbers ranging west through northern portions of Southeast Asia to Bangladesh, eastern India, and Nepal (Brazil 2009, BirdLife International 2014). It is strictly a vagrant west to Europe and the Middle East (although the status of vagrants in this region is complicated by the presence of potential escapees) (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The Falcated Duck is a casual migrant, summer visitor, and wintering bird on the outer Aleutians of Alaska, occasionally occurring elsewhere in the Bering Sea region (West 2008). It is accidental south along the Pacific coast of North America where, in addition to the two British Columbia records (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1), there are three accepted records for Washington (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2012), four accepted records for Oregon (OFO 2012), and two accepted records for California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). Most records south of British Columbia have occurred between January and April, which is consistent with the pattern of occurrence in the province, although exceptional individuals have occurred in Washington in July (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2012) and Oregon in November (OFO 2012).

The global population of Falcated Duck is estimated at c. 89,000 individuals, which is considerably higher than previous estimates of only c. 35,000 individuals (BirdLife International 2014). Despite the evidence suggesting a higher-than expected population size, the species is classified as “Near Threatened” by the IUCN owing to moderate declines on the Chinese portion of its breeding range. The species remains relatively common throughout much of its range, however, with several breeding and wintering populations (e.g., Japan) showing little or no decline in abundance (BirdLife International 2014).

Identification and Similar Species

The Falcated Duck is a large duck that is 46-54 cm in length and has a wingspan that ranges between 78-82 cm (Brazil 2009). The adult males are one of the most beautiful ducks in the world and do not pose any identification challenges for observers. The females and immature birds are more subtle and are harder to pick out.

The adult male has a large rounded crown that is purplish and extends from above the bill to the back of the crown (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The purple also extends down in front of the eye and along the cheek (Jonsson 1992). The rest of the face is dark green (Brazil

2009). This green extends as a flaring crest that tappers on to the back of the neck (Brazil 2009). The bill is small and black with a tiny white spot at the base of the top of the bill on the face (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The throat is white with a black and white line that cuts along the base of the throat (Jonsson 1992). The chest is gray with dark-edged feathers (Brazil 2009). The gray extends down the sides and flanks with a white ventral area that has a black line that cuts through it (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The back and the wings folded are gray with long falcated (or sickle-shaped) tertails that hang down (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The upper wing, in flight, has dark primaries with a gray forewing with a light mid-line that borders a broad, dark speculum (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The underwing is all white with a darker edge to the secondaries that extends up to the primaries (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

The adult female is very different looking and has a more subdued plumage. The bill is small and all gray (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There is a slight hint of a crest on the top of the crown (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The entire head is a plain brown with a lighter brown throat (Brazil 2009). The chest, sides and flanks are dark brown with light-edged brown (Brazil 2009). The belly is pale and extends down to the undertail coverts (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The back is dark brown with small dark-centered feathers (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The folded wing is also dark brown with a thin white wing ling and a dark speculum (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In flight the primaries of the upperwing are dark with a brown forewing and a light mid-line bordered by a broad dark speculum (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The underwing is all white with a darker edge to the secondaries that extends up to the primaries (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

The only species in British Columbia that could present identification issues is a female Gadwall. This species is usually a bit bigger overall, measuring 46-56 cm in length and 84-95 cm in wingspan (Jonsson 1992). The bill is large with an even line of orange on both sides (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The top of the bill is otherwise black (Sibley 2000). The crown is dark and extends the length of the crown, and down the back of the neck (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There is a dark line that runs from the base of the bill through and behind the eye (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The rest of the face and throat is a very pale brownish-white (Sibley 2000). The chest, sides and flanks are dark brown and extend onto the undertail coverts (Jonsson 1992). The belly is white and the back is dark brown (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The folded wing has grayish-brown tertials and a white speculum (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In flight the primaries of the upperwing are dark with grayish edges with most female birds showing a white speculum along the inner secondaries (Sibley 2000). Be aware that some females can lack the white speculum along the inner secondaries (Sibley 2000).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Falcated Duck is casual in southern British Columbia, where it has occurred in both coastal and interior regions of the province. The first record of the species was a single adult male that was observed by A. Brooks at Swan Lake, Vernon in April 1932 (Brooks 1932). The individual was observed for an extended period and was well described, leaving little doubt as to its identity. Although Brooks (1932) considered the record to be of a naturally-occurring vagrant (citing the bird's wary behaviour as evidence of its natural origins), subsequent authors, including Brooks himself, have all considered the individual to be a likely escapee from captivity (Brooks 1942, Munro and Cowan 1947, Roberson 1980, Godfrey 1986, Cannings *et al.* 1987, Campbell *et al.* 1990). This notion is based on the prevalence of the species in California's wild bird trade in the early part of the 20th century and the presumption that any escapee in California would migrate north with spring migratory waterfowl. Despite this, the Falcated Duck now has a well-established pattern of occurrence along the Pacific coast of North America, and it is felt that there is no particular component of this sighting other than the conjectural hypotheses of the original observer that would suggest that it was of anything other than natural origin. The species was not observed again in the province until April 1994, when a single adult male was observed on the tidal flats of Grice Bay near Tofino on the west coast of Vancouver Island (Paterson 1994). This individual proceeded to return to the site for the following two winters, where it remained for 68 and 58 days, respectively (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1). In both 1995 and 1996, this bird arrived at Grice Bay in mid to late January, and departed in late March (Toochin *et al.* 2013a, see Table 1). The origins of this bird were more widely considered to be natural, and it was included in Campbell *et al.* (2001) as the first legitimate record of Falcated Duck in British Columbia. Since this species could occur again in the future and observers should get photographs and confirmation to properly document all future records.

Table 1: Records of Falcated Duck for British Columbia:

- 1.(1) adult male April 15-17, 1932: A. Brooks: Swan Lake, Vernon, Okanagan (Brooks 1932, Brooks 1942)
- 2.(1) adult male April 19-22, 1994: Aurora Patterson (photo) Grice Bay Mudflats near Tofino (Bowling 1994, Paterson 1994, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
 - (1) adult male January 20- March 28, 1995: Aurora Patterson, mobs: (photo) Grice Bay Mudflats near Tofino (Bowling 1995, Davidson 1995, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
 - (1) adult male January 27- March 25, 1996: Don Cecile, mobs: (photo) Grice Bay Mudflats near Tofino (Bowling 1996, Toochin *et al.* 2013b)

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