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First Interior Florida Record of the Common Eider

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At about 1100 hr on 17 January 1988, M. Hartsaw and I saw a very large duck standing on the edge of a small island about 20 m from the eastern edge of the approximately 1.5 square km International Mineral and Chemical Company's Clear Spring Mine phosphate pit located about 3 km SE of Bartow, Florida. Our vantage point was the top of a 15 m dike looking down on the pit and duck with the sun over the back of our shoulders making for good light. The estimated distance from us to the duck was 50 m. With our variable-powered scopes, we observed the duck swimming and diving about a meter from the island among a male and female Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), several Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*), Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) and Ruddy Ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*), making for excellent size comparisons. We concluded that the large duck was a female Common Eider (*Somateria molissima*) which closely matched the picture in the National Geographic Society "Field Guide to the Birds of North America." We noted the overall brownish color; the rather long sloping forehead (similar to the Canvasback's (*Aythya valisineria*) profile) with a long frontal shield; a slight but noticeable light-colored eyeline; and at high magnification, fine close barring along the sides for a few inches at an area beneath where the back of the neck came down to the back. This duck differed from pictures of the King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*) with its more-rounded head, more stubby-looking bill, and the "vee"-shaped markings on the sides.

Several other local birders and I observed the Common Eider later that day and three more times during the next six days, but the duck was never as close to shore as in the first sighting. This Common Eider represents Florida's first interior, fresh-water record and probably the tenth state record.

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Gopher Tortoise Burrow Use by Long-tailed Weasels and Spotted Skunks

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Approximately 60 species of vertebrates are known to occur in association with burrows of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) as accidental, occasional, or obligate residents (Cox et al. 1987, Jackson and Milstrey in press). For this reason, the gopher tortoise may be considered a keystone species (*sensu* Paine 1969) in those habitats where it occurs (Eisenberg 1983). Jackson and Milstrey (in press) list 20 species of mammals among the known animal associates of gopher tortoise burrows, including the eastern spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*). We report another mammal, the long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*),

using gopher tortoise burrows in slash pine-turkey oak habitat, and provide additional observations on gopher tortoise burrow use by spotted skunks in scrub habitat at the Archbold Biological Station (ABS), Highlands County, Florida. A detailed description of the habitats at ABS is available in Abrahamson et al. (1984).

Three spotted skunks were captured in funnel traps placed at the entrances of gopher tortoise burrows during a survey of burrow associates. An adult female and a young adult of unknown sex were taken from inactive burrows on 2 October and 16 October 1987, respectively; and an adult female was captured from an active burrow on April 1988. The latter had killed and partially consumed five adult male gopher frogs (*Rana areolata*) that also were in the trap. Spotted skunks also have been observed taking refuge in gopher tortoise burrows after release from live traps on four occasions at ABS (J. N. Layne, unpubl. data).

During a radiotracking study of the cotton mouse (*Peromyscus gossypinus*) remains of five transmitter-equipped mice were found between 31 January and 2 February 1988 in four abandoned gopher tortoise burrows. An adult female long-tailed weasel was live-trapped near the entrance of the burrow containing transmitters from two of the mice on 2 February. As the burrow was being excavated the following morning, another weasel came out and ran to an abandoned gopher tortoise burrow about 15 m away. This individual was larger than the female captured the previous night, suggesting it was probably a male (Hall 1951).

The ecology of the long-tailed weasel in Florida is not well known; this is the first record of its use of gopher tortoise burrows. Observations at ABS suggest that spotted skunks regularly use gopher tortoise burrows in habitats generally similar to the coastal scrub in which Manaro (1961) reported spotted skunks living in gopher tortoise burrows. As both spotted skunks and long-tailed weasels use burrows of other animals in other geographic areas (Hall 1951, Chapman and Feldhamer 1982), it is not unusual to find these species using gopher tortoise burrows in southern Florida. Gopher tortoise burrows provide a ready-made shelter and a stable microclimate (Douglass and Layne 1978). In addition, as a number of species of small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates occur in gopher tortoise burrows (Cox et al. 1987, Jackson and Milstrey in press), the burrows may provide a concentrated food source. Long-tailed weasels and spotted skunks may thus be significant predators on these burrow-inhabiting animals. Weasels cache excess prey (Hall 1951) and gopher tortoise burrows, when available, may be preferred storage sites.

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First Record of the Eastern Phoebe Nesting in Florida

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On 28 May 1988, while conducting a Breeding Bird Atlas survey in Okaloosa County, Florida, six members of the Choctawhatchee Audubon Society discovered a nest of Eastern Phoebes (*Sayornis phoebe*) containing four young. Donald Ware found the nest under the Pond Creek bridge on County Road #2, about 9.6 km south of the Alabama state line in northern Okaloosa County. The nest was located on a 45 degree slanted concrete surface, about 2.7 meters above the ground. It was propped up by a mud wasp nest and was semicircular, constructed of mud, grasses and fibers, with mosses and hair in the covering. The nest contained four young which occasionally rested their mandibles on the edge of the nest. A pair of adults fed near the bridge, frequently bobbing and wagging their tails. Adult identifications were confirmed by Ware, Gertrude Oakman, Dixie Nicholson, Carolyn Shaeffer, and Jim and Susan Brickell. The "fee-bee" call was heard. Nicholson, Shaeffer and Jim Brickell observed the adults feeding the young. Jim Brickell took several photographs of the nest. On 30 May 1988, Wesley Biggs, Herbert W. Kale, II, and Larry and Judy Hopkins observed the nesting Phoebes. Photographs also were taken by Biggs and an excellent quality videotape of the nest, young, and adults was made by Larry Hopkins. By 2 June 1988, Ware observed that the nest was vacated but Phoebes were seen in the vicinity. The nest was collected on 21 July and deposited with the Florida State Museum, Gainesville, on 25 July.

In eastern North America, the Eastern Phoebe breeds from northern Manitoba, southern Nova Scotia south to central Alabama, northern Georgia, northeastern Mississippi, and northwest Louisiana (American Ornithologists' Union 1983) The closest known confirmed breeding records occur along the fall line in east-central Alabama (Lee County), with unconfirmed but suspected breeding as far south as Crenshaw and Washington counties in southern Alabama (Imhof 1976). This record establishes the first breeding record for this species in the state of Florida and is an extension of its breeding range about 190 km south of its confirmed breeding range in Alabama. It also is the southernmost breeding record for the species in eastern North America.

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