

A SUPPOSED NEW SPECIES OF HUMMINGBIRD IN  
THE ROYAL ZOOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF  
DRESDEN.

BY A. B. MEYER.

*Eriocnemis aurea* sp. nov.

*E. cupreiventri* (Fras.) similis, sed minor, corpore toto, gula et pectore exceptis, aureo-æneo, caudæ tectricibus longis prasinis, subcaudalibus cobaltinis plus minusve viridi marginatis, tibiarum pappis minoribus, diversus.

Long. al. 58; caud. 40; rostri 20 mm.

HAB. — Colombia.

*E. cupreiventris* measures: wing, 62 mm.; tail, 45 mm., bill of equal length. The coloration of the specimen above described differs so considerably from *cupreiventris* that it cannot be taken for an individual variation. While *cupreiventris* is only slightly tinted with bronze, *aurea* is covered with golden bronze all over, and in part of a most lively tint, even on the shorter tail and wing coverts. The throat and upper breast are lighter green than in *cupreiventris*, and in certain lights washed with bronze too, and each feather has a concealed white cross band as in *E. dybowskii* Tacz. Further, the long upper tail-coverts are not greenish blue, but green, and the under tail-coverts are not violet, but cobalt blue, only in certain lights they are hyacinth-blue, some margined with green. The color of the wings as well as of the tail is not as lively as in *cupreiventris*; and, finally, the white plumes on the thighs are much shorter and not as abundant. The specimen cannot be taken for a young *cupreiventris*, being much more brightly colored on the whole body, than the adult of this species.

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*SOMATERIA DRESSERI*, THE AMERICAN EIDER.

BY GEORGE H. MACKAY.

THIS bird is found, as far as I have been able to learn, only on the Atlantic coast from Labrador to Delaware, collecting in large

numbers in the shoal waters adjacent to the Islands of Nantucket, Muskeget and Martha's Vineyard, where they pass the winter months, and it is the only one of the Eider group which has come under my immediate notice. Resembling somewhat the Pacific Eider, and also *S. mollissima*, they are easily distinguishable from the former by their size, being much smaller, and by their having the forehead much more prominent; it is elongated and depressed in the other two varieties. *S. dresseri* also has the frontal fleshy portion of the bill much wider and more prominent than in *mollissima*.

Their favorite ground on this coast is about those low-lying, partially submerged rocks which abound with their favorite food, mussels (*Modiola modiolus*), which are from one to four miles from the mainland. Here they find the black mussel which adheres to the sunken rocks, as also sea urchins. When living near some favorite rock, they always fly out to sea after their evening meal to roost, and on their return the following morning, if we take the rock as a centre, they come from points covering some sixty-five degrees, thus showing a remarkable dispersion during the night, for they leave the rock at night in one body; and it is curious that no matter from what point they start at daybreak, or before it, they are always pointed undeviatingly for the rock. In flying they have a habit of carrying the head very low, on which account it is easy to under-shoot them. They are most observing, and notice the least thing unusual on or about the rocks or with the decoys, which must be set so as to ride very steadily, and too much care cannot be exercised if a successful issue is to be expected.

They are expert divers, and if wounded are most difficult to capture; in fact I know of no birds more so, unless it may be the Loons. They swim deeply and steadily when at ease, and are rather slow and heavy in their movements, but withal graceful; but if frightened they are very agile, and if under water at such a time will always come out flying separately, no two being together. They dive for the mussels outside of the breaker which usually lies just outside the main rock, swimming underneath the surf and pulling off the mussel, returning to the surface again outside the breaker, but never coming up in it; and when a flock has been feeding an examination of the ledge, or rocks, reveals the white threads, like the mycelium of the mushroom, adhering

where the mussels have been torn off. When coming to feed in the morning, the earliest birds arrive before daybreak, and they continue coming until all have arrived. They invariably alight outside, some distance from the rock, and swim in always in a compact body, frequently almost on top of each other, carrying a wave before them. Some days they have what I call a diving morning, when it seems impossible to shoot them. I have known a flock of seventy-five to swim up in a body to within forty-five yards, when on shooting at them, they would all get under water before the shot could reach them. Such mornings were always the precursor of few if any Ducks.

The young drakes seem to keep together, one instance of which I may mention, when my friends Messrs. Nickerson and Phillips, with only one barrel each, shot eighteen young drakes dead out of a flock of twenty-three on the Salvages off Cape Ann, in the winter of 1860. These same gentlemen also shot eighty-seven one day in December, 1859, on the same rock. The feathers of the females are more easily detached than those of the drakes.

These Ducks will not come to the rocks or decoys if a dead bird is floating in the vicinity, just the opposite, in my experience, of the effect it has on other Ducks. I have known a large flock sitting some two miles to leeward to be disturbed, and take flight, by a dead Duck drifting down past them. This, however, does not appear to affect them in Muskeget waters, for they do not mind the dead birds around, and it is a common occurrence for them to alight to dead birds drifting. When they have not been disturbed the previous day and they leave at night for the open sea to roost, it is certain they will return the following morning, but if so disturbed it is problematical if they return at all.

It is only in those waters bounded by the islands of Nantucket, Muskeget and Martha's Vineyard that the American Eider may be said to congregate, in our vicinity, as is also the case with most of the other water fowl found on our coast. Here in immense numbers they live undisturbed during the winter months, with an abundance of sea-clams and scallops, black mussels (*Modiola modiolus*) and sweetmeats (*Crepidula fornicata*). Of these last they do not swallow the shells, but shuffle the meat out, discarding the shell, empty ones of which I found in great quantities on the shoals. All these are obtained by diving. On

March 18, 1875, on a return trip from the island of Muskeget where I had been after these Ducks, I saw and started from the water adjacent to Eel Point on Nantucket Island a body of these Ducks which I computed contained twelve thousand, and near them was a flock of Scoters and Velvet Ducks which I estimated contained twenty-five thousand. The first portion of the flock—and they all followed each other in their flight—extended as far as the eye could discern towards Great Point on the same island, the distance being eleven miles from where I was. It was the largest body of wild fowl I ever saw.

The American Eiders remain in these waters until the latter part of April, when they depart for the North. Before starting they frequent the sand bars and shoals which are out of water, on which they like to crawl up and sit, and where also they obtain gravel,—to serve as ballast, according to the local gunners. At this time they are more easily decoyed than at any other, coming to bunches of seaweed rolled up and placed on the beach near the water, which seem to answer very well the purpose of decoys, also to the dead birds placed on the shore as soon as they are shot. They can also be waded in from quite a distance when flying along the shore outside, by shaking a black cloth or gun case at intervals, by which means they are frequently brought within shooting range. When flying along the shore they seem to avoid passing over sand spits where the sea is breaking sufficiently to make white water, preferring to go to either side of them. Neither will they come on shore to crawl up where there is ice or snow, that is when the shore has been bare previous to a snowstorm.

It frequently happens that the scallops in these waters change their location by swimming to other places, and oftentimes the beds of sea-clams become covered up with a layer of sand through the agency of storms, but the Eiders discover the new place, or other beds, with surprising intelligence, so quickly as to cause them apparently little inconvenience.

In these waters the American Eider is known by the name of 'Shoal Duck.' In Rhode Island and Shelter Island waters they are called 'Wamps.' To the north of Cape Cod they are known by the name of 'Sea Ducks.'

In closing I would mention as one instance of how alive they are to the presence of their favorite food, the black mussel, that

the United States Government has built out from the north shore of Nantucket, close to the harbor entrance where boats are continually passing, a rough stone jetty nearly a mile long, at the extremity of which is an iron rod with a moveable red lantern for the use of the daily steamboat. Last year the man who tends the light told me that as the mussels were growing there in considerable quantity they were attracting the Shoal Ducks, or Eiders, which were coming daily in increasing numbers to feed on them, frequently crawling out of the water onto the rocks. They continued to arrive in greater numbers until some eight hundred had collected, when they commenced to shoot them. The keeper told me that they were observing, so much so that they perceived a difference if the lantern was not in place at the top of the iron rod, and if he did not desire to have any shooting there, all he had to do was to leave the lantern half way down the rod instead of in place at the top, and no Ducks could be induced to come near the jetty to feed, although sitting off on the water in detached groups, where they could observe everything that took place. I should estimate the number of Eiders living around this jetty at present (March 27, 1890) to be about fifteen hundred.

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## ON A COLLECTION OF BIRDS FROM FORT CHURCHILL, HUDSON'S BAY.

BY W. EAGLE CLARKE.

IN the year 1845, Dr. Gillespie, Junior, presented to the Edinburgh Museum a series of bird skins collected by himself during his residence at Fort Churchill as an officer of the Hudson's Bay Company. This collection has hitherto remained unrecorded, but an account of it may, perhaps, be deemed worthy of a place in 'The Auk' since it is thought that little or nothing has been contributed to the avifauna of the district around this station — the most northerly outpost of civilized man's residence on the western shores of this great inland sea.