

EURASIAN × AMERICAN WIGEONS IN WESTERN OREGON

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In February and March 1991, while censusing American Wigeons (*Anas americana*) at Alsea Bay in Lincoln County along the coast of central Oregon and at McFadden's Marsh in Finley National Wildlife Refuge, Benton County, in the central Willamette Valley of western Oregon, I observed three Eurasian (*A. penelope*) × American Wigeons. I sketched each hybrid and noted its colors in detail. The birds were too distant for vermiculation, details of mottling, and axillars to be visible.

The first hybrid was at Alsea Bay on 3 and 10 February (Figure 1A). Its forehead and crown were bright cream. The bright iridescent rufous postocular band faded into the noniridescent cream of the cheek. The pinkish brown of the breast extended farther back along the sides than on a typical male Eurasian Wigeon. The back and sides were a homogeneous blend of gray and pinkish brown.

A second hybrid was also at Alsea Bay on 10 February (Figure 1B). Its forehead and crown were off-white. The postocular band was iridescent rufous but less intense than on a typical male Eurasian Wigeon. The cheek was noniridescent grayish brown, possibly resulting from black mottling over a brownish background. The breast was pinkish brown, and the sides were gray in front and back and pinkish brown in the middle.

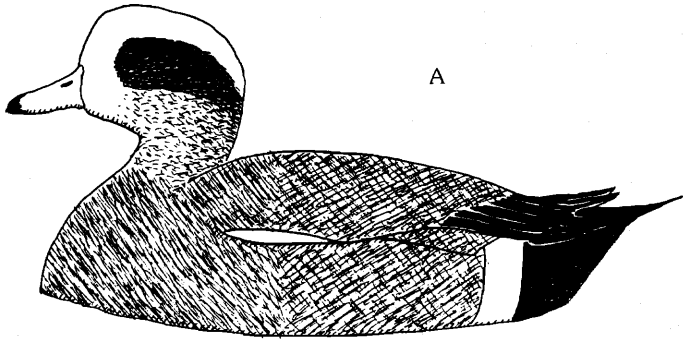
The third hybrid was at McFadden's Marsh, Finley Refuge, on 13 March (Figure 1C). The forehead, crown, and cheek were light cream, fading to reddish brown toward the nape. The rufous postocular band became gradually darker toward the back. Iridescence was not discernable. The sides were gray above and pinkish brown below, and the back was gray.

In the three hybrids described in detail in the literature (Bailey 1919, Watson 1970, Hubbard 1971, Aubry 1981), the cheeks were lighter than described for Eurasian Wigeons (Kortright 1953, Johnsgard 1978, Madge and Burn 1988), and the postocular band contrasted with the cheek. Watson (1970), however, documented variation in cheek color within the Eurasian Wigeon. In addition, variants among thousands of Eurasian Wigeons observed in England exhibit several cheek colors and degrees of contrast between the postocular band and cheeks (John Kemp pers. comm.). Thus, although light or buffy cheeks and contrast of the postocular band with the cheek apparently occur often in hybrids, they appear to be within the normal range of variation of Eurasian Wigeon plumage. These unusual head patterns, however, may call attention to hybrids.

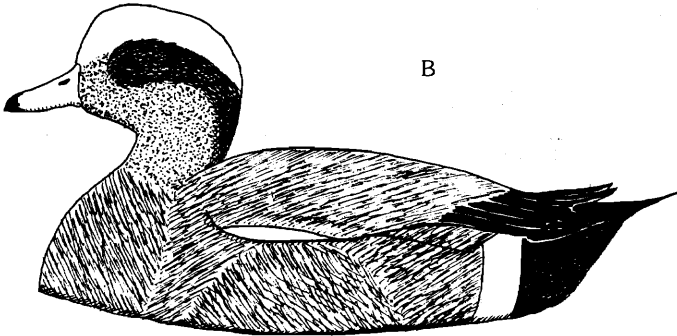
All three hybrids described in the literature also had some combination of both American (pinkish brown) and Eurasian Wigeon (gray) color on the back and/or sides, either as a blend or as discrete areas of gray and pinkish brown. Like these hybrids, the sides and back of the first hybrid seen at Alsea Bay appeared to be a blend of gray and pinkish brown, and the sides and backs of the other two hybrids I saw had discrete areas of both gray and pinkish brown. The literature contains no suggestion that any combination of American and Eurasian back and side color is within the range of variation of either species (Kortright 1953, Johnsgard 1978, Madge and Burn 1988). Mixed or blended gray and pinkish brown backs and/or sides thus appear to indicate hybrids reliably.

Several Eurasian × American Wigeons have been reported in western North America over the past decade (Mattocks 1985, Campbell et al. 1986, 1988, Force and Mattocks 1986, Weber and Cannings 1990, Yee et al. 1991), and these hybrids may be becoming more frequent (Force and Mattocks 1986, McCaskie 1989). Tweet

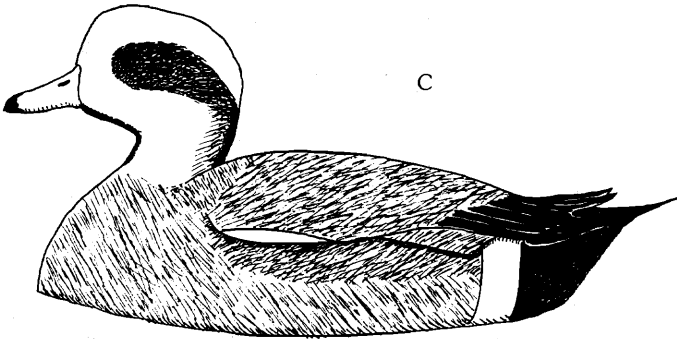
NOTES



A



B



C

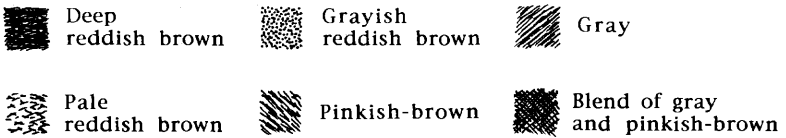


Figure 1. Hybrid wigeons seen in Oregon in 1991. A, Alsea Bay, 3 and 10 February; B, Alsea Bay, 10 February; C, Finley National Wildlife Refuge, 13 March.

NOTES

and Johnson (1991) suspected that many observers are not checking for hybrids. Few guidelines for discerning hybrids are available, however.

I thank Jean Roch Guigere for references, John Kemp for descriptions of variant Eurasian Wigeons in England, and Range Bayer, Deborah Clark, John Hubbard, Guy McCaskie, Mary Powelson, and Philip Unitt for constructive criticism of earlier drafts of the manuscript.

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Accepted 15 December 1992