

Two Black Scoters *Melanitta nigra* moulting flight-feathers in the Gulf of Valencia (W Mediterranean)

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The Black Scoter *Melanitta nigra* is a scarce winter visitor to the Western Mediterranean and summer records are rare. Though the moult of flight-feathers is to be expected in summering individuals, there were no previous records of Black Scoters undergoing moult in the Gulf of Valencia. The timing of moult is described for the two immature birds, a female that was captured and a male that was oiled, both in August 1996. Both would have remained unrecorded if humans had not interfered with them, so it seems possible that other Black Scoters moulting in the Gulf of Valencia could remain unrecorded.

Key words: Black Scoter, *Melanitta nigra*, moulting, Western Mediterranean.

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The presence of Black Scoters *Melanitta nigra* in the Mediterranean has traditionally been considered generally scarce, with birds only straggling east of the Balearic Islands (Cramp & Simmons 1977). Although the Western Mediterranean is already considered a wintering area (del Hoyo et al. 1992), numbers wintering here do not seem to be significant (Laursen 1989). Along the Iberian Mediterranean coast, the species is considered to be a regular winter visitor (Diaz et al. 1996), becoming rare in the Balearic Islands (Ferrer et al. 1986). Records from the west coast of the Gulf of Valencia extend

from 14th October to 21st January and are concentrated in December (43.6 % of the records) with recorded groups averaging 32 individuals (s.d. 33.9, n= 41, range 1-162).

In 1996 two summer records were registered in the area for the first time. The first was a female captured alive in Cullera by fishermen on 7th August (weight 738 g; bill 44 mm, tarsus 44.2 mm), released at sea and recaptured again by fishermen on two occasions, 11th (weight 591 g) and 16th August (weight 500 g), when it finally died. The second was a male found oiled at the beach of Gandia on 26th August

	PP	SS	Tert.	TF
Female	2 → 2	2 → 2	4 → 4	0005055005505000
Male	5 → 5	5 → 5	2 → 2	0550505005050550

Table 1. Moulting score of wings (both), body and tail, according to Ginn & Melville (1983). PP= Primaries; SS= Secondaries; Tert. = Tertiaries; TF=Tail-feathers.

Taula 1. Puntuació de muda de l'ala, el cos i la cua segons Ginn & Melville (1983). PP = Primàries; SS = Secundàries; Tert. = Terciàries; TF = Rectrius.

(weight 575 g; bill 47.7 mm, tarsus 45.1 mm) that died subsequently.

Both were in immature pre-breeding plumage and in active moult (Table 1). The female was flightless, with old contour feathers. The male was acquiring first adult plumage, and showed recently moulted wing feathers and new contour feathers, all appearing glossy black, with very few immature brown feathers remaining.

Thus, the male showed a more advanced moult progression than the female, which corresponds with the relative timing described for the species (Baker 1993). The female was flightless, and had it not been captured several times by fishermen (in order to save what appeared to be an injured duck) it would probably have accomplished its moult, as new grown feathers were about one week old when it was first captured.

Although non-breeding Black Scoters often summer on wintering grounds (Cramp & Simmons 1977, Madge & Burn 1988), their summer presence in the Western Mediterranean is rarely registered. Paterson (1990) recorded only 0.2% presence of Black Scoter in Malaga Bay (September 1980-December 1983; n= 465) during the period May-August, and a similar presence pattern is registered elsewhere in the Western Mediterranean (Martinez-Vilalta & Matis 1989, Gutiérrez *et al.* 1995, Isenmann 1993).

The scarcity of summer records in the

Western Mediterranean could be due to the summering population being very small, but it must be noted that the species tends to moult away from the coastline and in deeper waters than most other sea-ducks (Cramp & Simmons 1977). The continental shelf in the area of the Gulf of Valencia, stretching between the Catalanian-Valencian coast and the Balearic Islands, shows a very low gradient, 0.9% at isobath -10 m and 0.6% at isobath -20 m (Roselló 1993). Therefore, suitable feeding depths of no more than 10 or 20 m (Cramp & Simmons 1977) are provided well offshore, where the Black Scoters could easily remain unrecorded.

The summer records considered here were the first for the area, but both were registered due to human interference: the female being captured after a lengthy chase (as mentioned by the captors) and the male being oiled. Hence, both moulting individuals could have remained unrecorded if humans had not directly interfered with them. Similarly, other Black Scoters could remain unrecorded moulting in suitable areas on the open sea in the Gulf of Valencia. •

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RESUM

Dos Ànecs Negres *Melanitta nigra* mudant plomes de vol en el golf de València (Mediterrània Occidental)

A la Mediterrània Occidental l'Ànec Negre *Melanitta nigra* és un visitant hivernal força escàs i les citacions estivals són molt rares. Encara que la muda de les plomes de vol (rèmiges i rectrius) hagi d'ésser un fet esperable en els individus que hi passen l'estiu, no hi ha dades prèvies d'ànecs negres realitzant la muda al golf de València. Aquí es descriu l'estat de muda de dos exemplars immaturs, una femella capturada i un mascle petrolejat, a l'agost de 1996. Ambdós exemplars haurien passat desapercibuts de no ser per la interferència humana, de la mateixa manera que és possible que altres individus mudin en aquest lloc sense que siguin detectats.

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