Common eider (Somateria mollissima)

Identification

Big duck with greyish legs. The male is distinctive with a white upper body and black lower body, a white cap, greenish head patches, yellow bill, and a white spot on the tail.

The female is brown with streaks and a grey bill.



Distribution



The Eider duck breeds all around the arctic: in W and E Greenland, N Canada, Alaska, E Siberia and Wrangel Island, the New Siberia Islands, Novaya Zemlya, Franz Josef Land, Svalbard, the Kola peninsula, Norway, Sweden, the UK, the Faroe Islands, and Iceland. In winter, they partially migrate south, away from the sea ice.

Why this species?

- Economically important for its down feathers, used to make pillows or blankets.
- It is the most northerly breeding waterfowl with the pintail duck.
- It is big, beautiful, and easy to identify

Population

Estimated 3,300,000– 4,000,000 (2020) but population trend unknown



Fun facts

Eiders are the most maritime waterfowl, living entirely at sea except for breeding birds.

The common eider feeds mostly on mollusks. It eats mussels whole, while it removes the legs and claws of crabs before swallowing body and shell.

Common eiders were the subjects of the first bird protection laws, written in England by Saint Cuthbert in 676.

The scientific name of the eider duck comes from both Greek and Latin, translating to "softest body down"

