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The expansion of the Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* at Ukrainian coast of the Black Sea

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Abstract. In 1950s the Common Eider was a very rare species in the Black Sea region, migrating there only irregularly. A decade later, 9–14 males wintered in Black Sea bays. A few pairs attempted to breed there but their nests were flooded by storms. The first records (2 pairs) of successful breeding come from 1975. By the mid-1990s, the total number of breeding pairs had reached almost 1000.

Key words: Common Eider, *Somateria mollissima*, waterfowl, geographical expansion, Black Sea

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INTRODUCTION

The Ukrainian Black Sea bays in the Dnieper-Buh river mouth — Tendra, Yagorlits and Dgarilgach are important sites of wintering, migrating and breeding waterfowl, especially for the Anseriformes. For the last 20–25 years the number, status and distribution of many species have changed. Among the species which recently appeared in this region is the Common Eider — the new bird species for Ukraine.

THE COMMON EIDER STATUS IN 1950–1970s

In 1950s the Common Eider was said to be a very rare and irregular migrating species (Voinstvenskyi & Kistyakivskyi 1962). First report concerned a female shot in 15 November 1950 in Kuyalnyk Lagoon near Odessa (Nazarenko 1951). Ten years later (1 July 1960) three females were observed on Beresan island near Ochakiv. In 1960s 9–14 males wintered (often together with Shelducks *Tadorna tadorna*) in the Yagorlits bay, in 1969–1970 also in Tendra bay (Sabinevskiy 1969). Separated pairs tried to breed on the Kruhlyi island but their nests were flooded by storms. First 2 pairs succesfully bred on Dovhyi island in Yagorlits bay in 1975. From that time the Common Eider population on both, Kruhlyi and Dovhyi islands increased rapidly (Fig. 1) (Ardamatskaya 1990).

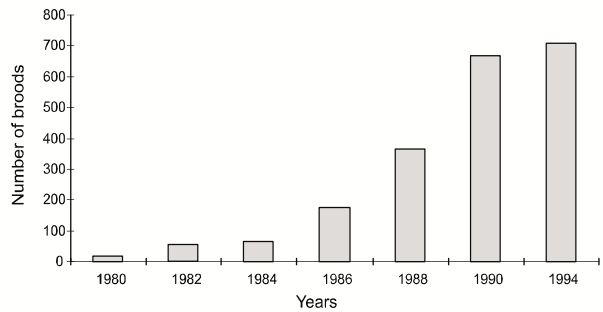

Fig. 1. Number of Common Eider broods on islands of Yagorlits and Tendra bays.

THE EXPANSION OF THE SPECIES IN 1980–1990s

In the 1980s the expansion of the Common Eider began on islands of the Tendra bay. The total number of breeding pairs in these two bays in mid-1990s reached almost 1000 (Ardamatskaya & Rudenko 1996).

In the 1990s the Common Eider continued its expansion. Several birds were observed in the Dgarilgachskyi bay in summer and autumn, but the

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first brood was recorded in 1998 (Andrushchenko & Grinchenko 1998), and in 1999 and 2000 two breeding pairs were found.

The hydrological and hydrochemical status of the Black Sea bays are stable as well as seasonal dynamics quantity and biomass of the zoobenthos (Pupkov 1972). In the past in the Yagorlits bay was very large resources of *Mytilus* mussels — the favourite food of Common Eider (Ardamatskaya 1990). Recently the number of the molluscs decreased but their density is still higher there than in Dgarilgach bay. In the Tendra bay *Miesmuscheln* molluscs were recorded in western part of the bay — flocks of 2500 (both sexes and young birds) Common Eiders were observed feeding and resting there in post-breeding period.

In 1999 10 pairs of Common Eiders were seen occupying a small high artificial island (10x10m) situated on the shallow salt lake on the Kinburn spit, close to Kruhlyi island. The nests were placed in close vicinity of Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* colony. The egg laying began in May what is very late for this species. On other islands nests with eggs were recorded usually in the end of March or in the beginning of April. Therefore it was probably the repeated clutches after the lost of the first brood. Similar was observed in 2000. Another unusual Common Eiders' breeding place was found in 1999 on the Kinburn spit's coast. About 30 pairs of this species bred in the thick grass on the land. A year later 25–28 pairs nested there again.

At the present the Common Eider is the most numerous bird among all ducks breeding on islands situated in Yagorlits bay. The species is common on several islands in Tendra bay but rare on islands in Dgarilgach bay. Eiders are also usually seen among ducks wintering in Black Sea bays (Ardamatskaya 1990). In severe winters many Eiders migrate along Balkan peninsula (Nankinov 1979).

The new, Ukrainian population of Common Eiders is increasing and wide its range on the West and East.

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STRESZCZENIE

[Ekspansja edredona na ukraińskim wybrzeżu Morza Czarnego]

W latach 1950-tych edredon na Ukrainie był uważany za ptaka rzadkiego, nieregularnie pojawiającego się na migracjach. W następnej dekadzie obserwowano kilkanaście samców zimujących w zatoce Jagorlickiej i zatoce Tendra. Notowano także pojedyncze próby lęgów zakończone niepowodzeniem z powodu zalewania gniazd w czasie kwietniowych sztormów. Pierwsze udane lęgi edredona miały miejsce na wyspie Dowhyj w 1975 r.

W połowie lat 1990-ych populację edredona w zatokach Tendra i Jagorlickiej szacowano na niemal 1000 par (Fig. 1).

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