The Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union reconsiders old records of rare birds as part of its ongoing work. Reviews may also be initiated when new information is brought to the Committee's attention. The recent review of the Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* in Britain (BOU 2001) came about when Peter Allard, of the Great Yarmouth Bird Club, informed us that there were apparently two museum specimens of the first British record of the species, from Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, in 1830. He also queried the identification of a 1932 Norfolk sight record (Allard 1997). The Committee undertook a reassessment of the 1830 claim and a general review of other

**ABSTRACT** The BOU Records Committee reviewed 16 British records of Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* up to 1950 and the first two records after that date. Of the older records, many were clouded by fraud or by lack of detail, and only one was considered to be acceptable for Category B of the British List: a female shot on Tresco, Isles of Scilly, on 17th January 1920. The two later records were accepted into Category A: sight records of males at Foxcote Reservoir, Buckinghamshire, from 28th February to 8th March 1961 and, rather more satisfactorily, at West Loch Bee, South Uist, Western Isles, during 14th-18th March 1980. The numbers of this species kept in captivity increased significantly after 1980, and the likelihood of Buffleheads seen in Britain having a captive origin has become much greater.
older records, both accepted and rejected ones. It turned out that most were no longer acceptable, and that they included instances of likely and certain deception and of probable escapes, as well as cases of insufficient documentation – sometimes of birds that may well have been correctly identified and genuinely wild individuals.

This paper summarises the records reviewed, and describes in some detail the case of the 1830 claim from Great Yarmouth.

**Older records considered by the Committee**

Sixteen records from the period up to 1950 were reviewed, along with a further two after that date. A summary of the comments of the Committee is given (in *italics*) after each record. There was confusion in the older literature concerning the names applied to some duck species, including the Bufflehead. It was important during the review to eliminate several other ducks, and to establish a positive identification when considering female and immature Buffleheads in particular.

**Pre-1819** Donovan (1819) illustrated the species in his book on British birds and noted that it was ‘very rare in Britain’, but gave no further information.

*In the absence of further specific details about Donovan’s claim, the Committee regarded it as unacceptable.*

Yarmouth area, Norfolk, early 1800s Lubbock (in Yarrell 1843) reported that Buffleheads (more than one) had been seen in the Yarmouth area. Lubbock (undated) stated that he had seen Buffleheads [killed] ‘two or three times’. Girdlestone ([1829] 1879) claimed that he had sent one to Lubbock in 1828, although Southwell (in Lubbock & Southwell 1879) recognised the Miller/Rising bird (Yarmouth, about 1830, see below) as ‘the only authentic Norfolk specimen’. This could be taken to mean the only skin or stuffed bird, and not to refer to sightings or to birds not preserved. Lubbock seemed to have been familiar with the species, but there was some confusion at that time between the Bufflehead and the Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*.

*No real details seem to be available, and it is impossible to disentangle the 1830 Great Yarmouth record from this information. The records, as presented here, were considered to be unacceptable.*

Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, winter, about 1830, adult male Specimen in Saffron Walden Museum (see page 67).

Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, winter, about 1830, adult male Specimen in Norwich Castle Museum (see page 67).

Orkney Islands, autumn 1841 Obtained by Stephen Mummery for Margate Museum (Yarrell 1843; Baikie & Heddle 1848). The Margate Museum collection was sold by auction in 1868 (Ticehurst 1909), and the fate of the Bufflehead specimen is unknown. Mummery’s honesty has been questioned, and a number of his records of rare birds are clouded by doubt (Ticehurst 1909). Not that this matters: Gurney discovered that the ‘Orkney’ bird had been collected abroad, and not even in Europe (Harting 1872; Yarrell & Saunders 1885).

*No details/not British: not acceptable.*

West Mud, Hamoaze, near Devonport, Devon, winter 1841, adult male Reported in Harting (1872). There may have been a muddle with some skins from North America: the bird was in the collection of Dr Tripe of Devonport, who had other American birds in his collection; purchased from Dr Tripe’s collection by Rev. W. S. Hore, Barnstaple (Yarrell & Saunders 1885; D’Urban & Matthew 1892). Information about this specimen emerged only about 30 years after its collection, when Harting visited Rev. Hore in September 1870; he saw the bird and got the details from the then owner, not the collector.

*Confusion may have been possible over the origin of the specimen, although it was seen by Harting and was presumably correctly identified; no further details are available: not acceptable.*

Norfolk, 1850, adult male (plate 34) This specimen in the Natural History Museum, Tring (NHM), was bought from a person called Hubbard, and the bird is listed in Gray (1863). Harting (1872) considered that ‘the authenticity of [the record] is very doubtful’,
without giving any reasons whatsoever. An index card for this specimen at the NHM at Tring reads:

379
Adult male Norfolk 1850.
Purch. Hubbard
1850.4.8.1

The specimen was temporarily re-registered as 1996.41.208 during its transfer in 1996 from the Museum’s store of mounted specimens to the main collection. The Bufflehead was unlabelled, but it was clearly identified from photographs of the Natural History Museum gallery display in South Kensington, from which the bird had been taken some years previously.

There is no mention of Hubbard in Sharpe (1906). The only other specimen acquired from Hubbard at that time was a Snowy Owl Nyctea scandiaca, from Orkney, with registration number 1850.4.8.2.

The NHM Bufflehead is quite unlike the Norwich and Saffron Walden specimens (see page 67). It is poorly set up, squat, and looking up and to the right. It has a short neck, a lop-sided head and asymmetric eyes. The wings are tight across the back and the tips cross extensively. The bill is varnished and the legs and feet are painted red. The eyes are dark brown.

Lee Evans (in Allard 1997) incorrectly stated that this bird was labelled as having been shot in Great Yarmouth in 1830, and that the specimen was at South Kensington.

Identification satisfactory; Harting doubted the authenticity: considering the lack of detail available, this record is not acceptable.

Loch of Strathbeg, Aberdeenshire, ‘many years ago’, adult male. This bird was obtained by the Rev. Smith of Monquhitter, who died in 1854. The specimen went to Banff Museum (Thomas Edward, in Gray 1871). Sim (1903) observed that the bird was not listed in Edward’s account of the birds of Strathbeg (Edward 1854) nor in the list of birds given in his biography (Smiles 1877). The latter is based on Edward’s list of the birds of Banffshire (Edward 1856-1860). Sim therefore square-bracketed the record, and, following him, all later authors did the same. Strathbeg is, however, in Aberdeenshire, not in Banffshire. Even though Edward included some Strathbeg records in the Banff lists, the Bufflehead record might not necessarily be expected to have appeared in the Banff compilation. The omission from the Strathbeg article may have been an oversight, or Edward may not have been fully aware of the bird in (or around) 1854, when the article was compiled (although this seems unlikely). He told Gray about the specimen (which Gray himself saw) after 1865. Sim, in the poorest of the Scottish regional-fauna series, attempted to discredit much of Edward’s work and records. Recent examination of Edward’s many contributions shows, however, that he was a careful and experienced observer and recorder. When he had doubts, such as over a Hooded Merganser Lophodytes cucullatus and a number of other rare birds, he stated these quite clearly. Sim’s rejection of the Bufflehead, a specimen seen by Gray (a reputable author and naturalist), was quite unwarranted. The record is as good as are many other wildfowl records of the time, although no description of the bird is now available.

Dr David Bertie (Peterhead Museum, responsible for Banff Museum) says that this specimen is no longer at Banff. The collec-
tion suffered from neglect at various stages, and the duck, along with many other important specimens, was probably destroyed during one of the periodic clear-outs at the museum.

*Gray saw the specimen, but few details are now available and there is no description: not acceptable.*

**Bridlington, Yorkshire, winter 1864/65, adult male** (plate 35) Report ed in Cordeaux (1865, 1872) and Harting (1872); shot by Richard Morris on the Bessingby beck, close to town, and passed to Mr Machin (bird-preserver); later in the collection of Mr J. Whittaker, Rainworth Lodge. Now with the Whittaker collection at Mansfield Museum (Naylor 1996).

Vicky Barlow (at Mansfield Museum and Art Gallery) located two catalogue cards, apparently for the same Bufflehead in the collection there (MASMG: BB337 & BB546). The bird was brought to Tring, where we examined it. The specimen is adequately mounted, and unlike the other available ‘British’ specimens in style. It is greasy, with a dirty, mid-ventral incision. The legs and feet are poorly painted and the bird is mounted on a painted fibrous base. No labels or other marks are attached to the bird or the base to associate the specimen with the original data.

There is limited information about the status of the species in captivity at that time. There were certainly a number of large waterfowl collections in Britain, and many species were brought in from North America. No Buffleheads, however, were kept at London Zoo between 1828 and 1927 (Low 1929), which suggests that they were probably not very common, and Tim Inskipp has commented that breeding in captivity was unrecorded anywhere until the late 1920s or 1930s. As such, an escape from captivity would seem to have been unlikely.

*Inadequate evidence of association of specimen with data: not acceptable.*

**Loirston Loch, Aberdeen, January 1865, adult male** In Gray (1871): formerly in the possession of Mr Angus; square-bracketed by Sim (1903), again without reason, although possibly because of the personal antagonism that existed between him and Gray (AGK). Sim’s book related to the Dee faunal area, and he noted that Loirston, despite its proximity to Aberdeen, fell outside this. Even so, his square-bracketing was in turn followed, without discussion, by Harvie-Brown (1906), Witherby *et al.* (1940) and Baxter & Rintoul (1953). Gray (1871) saw this bird (‘a beautiful male’), and its rejection may have been unwarranted.

*Again, Gray saw the specimen but few details are available: not acceptable.*

**Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, about December 1869, adult male** Specimen at Norwich Castle Museum, number 31.71. The museum accession register records that this specimen was said to have been shot on Dial Pool (Geo. W. Russels), Cheltenham, by G. F. White, son of the Cheltenham bird-stuffer Mr [T.] White. It was claimed to have been seen in the flesh by several local notables. Gurney contacted one, the Rev. H. Price, ‘who said he would vouch for it but I doubt it for all that as White said another was got & the tarsi are much split’. The closeness of the date and location to those claimed for the Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula* mentioned on page 66 is of concern. Fraud or escape from captivity may have been possible.
Norwich Castle Museum specimen 31.71: insufficient information, and doubted by Gurney: not acceptable. Second specimen said to have been obtained by White: not acceptable.

Eriskay, South Uist, Western Isles, June 1870, adult male (plate 36) Shot; the specimen was earlier reported to be in the Carnegie Museum, Wick (Pennie & Gunn 1951). This record was accepted by Baxter & Rintoul (1953) but, for some reason, it was not included in the fifth edition of the BOU list (BOU 1971). The Committee is unaware of this record having ever been formally assessed. It was accepted by Sharrock & Sharrock (1976) and by Dymond et al. (1989). The bird was collected by Eric Sinclair Mackay, and forms part of the Mackay collection of ducks.

The Mackay collection includes the following other birds (from Pennie & Gunn 1951). Note that all are listed as adult males, and all were said to have been collected in May, June, July or August:

- Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, ad male, South Uist, Western Isles, June 1868
- Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, ad male, Skye, Highland, May 1898
- King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*, ad male, Shetland Islands, August 1869
- Smew *Mergellus albellus*, ad male, Shetland Islands, August 1885
- Hooded Merganser, ad male, Shetland Islands, July 1884

There seems to have been some doubt about all of these. The North Highland Archive in Wick holds a manuscript volume based on articles written by Mackay, copied by hand some time after their publication in a local newspaper (Mackay, no date). Inserted into this volume is a photocopy of Pennie & Gunn (1951) carrying the anonymous annotation ‘These are all obviously bogus’ (B. Lees and R. Walker *in litt.*). Evans (1994) mentions that Mackay was suspected of fraud, although he does not say by whom; he notes that all the rare ducks are adult males in pristine plumage regardless of the time of year at which they were said to have been collected; no more specific evidence is offered, however.

The Carnegie Museum no longer exists under that name. The collection is now housed in the Bruce Building, Wick. The local authority (Highland Council) has no curator at the moment. In July 1997, Hugh Clark visited the Bruce Building and photographed some of the Mackay specimens on behalf of the Records Committee. Most of the birds of interest are in glass-fronted cases fixed to the walls of the gallery, which was not at that time open to the public. The Bufflehead was in a case with a Garganey *Anas querquedula*, and the nearby label (dating from perhaps around 1990) fixed to the wall states, apparently erroneously, that the Bufflehead was reputed to be the only record ever from Caithness (it is supposed to have been from the Hebrides). Clark was unable to locate the Smew. He reported that the King Eider was in full breeding plumage, with no immediately obvious signs of moult.

After examining Hugh Clark’s photographs, Keith Vinicombe commented that the plumage of the Hooded Merganser appeared to be incompatible with the claimed date of collection. The Ruddy Shelduck and Bufflehead plumages might possibly be consistent with the claimed dates, but the described plumages of the King Eider and Smew would certainly be incon-
gruous. As such, the provenance of the whole group must be dubious.

On the evidence available, the Mackay ducks would seem to be suspect: not acceptable.

Shetland Islands, 25th November 1912, adult male The specimen is in the Booth Museum, Brighton, Sussex. This bird was originally thought in error to have been from Orkney (Booth & Griffith 1927), but the details were later clarified (Griffith 1931). It was shot in Shetland, and was sent to Clarke, the Cheltenham taxidermist (see Frost 1987), who sold it to Sir Vauncey Harpur Crewe in January 1913. It was then purchased from the Harpur Crewe collection on the latter’s dispersal and was presented to the Booth Museum. The case that housed this bird was broken up in the 1970s because of woodworm, but the specimen is still at the Museum, number 207.393 (November 1996). This record appears not to have reached the wider literature.

Clarke and Harpur Crewe featured in previous Committee discussions relating to unacceptable Ruby-crowned Kinglet records. A relevant extract is repeated here (from Knox 1994):

A second Ruby-crowned Kinglet was said to have been shot at Highnam Court, near Gloucester, on 21st September 1871, and is now preserved at the Booth Museum in Brighton (Booth & Griffith 1927). This specimen never received the exposure of the Loch Lomond bird, although it was listed by Alexander & Fitter (1955). It was regarded as probably having come off a ship in Gloucester Docks by Mellersh (1902). Indeed, its provenance is rather questionable. It was shot by the ‘... head gamekeeper named Spring, ... stuffed by White, whose grandson, E.T. Clarke, the Cheltenham bird-stuffer, bought it of Spring and sold it in 1899 to Sir Vauncey Harpur Crewe, on whose death it was bought back by Clarke, from whom it was thereupon bought and presented to the [Booth] Museum by A.E. Griffith (Booth & Griffith 1927). It is now mounted in a case and appears to have no original labels. Sir Harpur Vauncey Crewe [sic] ‘spared no expense in acquiring ... rare species for his collection, but unfortunately took much less care in testing the genuineness as British of the rarities offered to him; and the high prices he was prepared to pay without close investigation offered a great temptation to dealers, so that many of the birds he obtained as British-killed are of very doubtful authenticity’ (Booth & Griffith 1927). Even though Griffith believed the kinglet to have been properly authenticated, the BOURC has been unable to trace any supporting documentation either at the Booth Museum or through the Derbyshire Record Office where the Harpur Crewe family archives are deposited. Some doubt must remain about this kinglet and the record is best forgotten once more.

The Shetland Bufflehead, too, would appear to be open to some doubt.

The association with Clarke and Harpur Crewe is sufficient to place doubt upon this specimen: not acceptable.

Orkney Islands, December 1918, female This specimen was formerly in the Church Street Museum, Brighton (Booth & Griffith 1927; Griffith 1931). It is now at the Booth Museum, number 206.732 (November 1996). As with the preceding record, this one appears not to have reached the wider literature. In Booth & Griffith (1927), the ‘Orkney’ records (this one and, by mistake, the Shetland bird above) are listed as requiring corroboration. The Committee was unable to trace any evidence in support of this Orkney claim.

‘Needing corroboration’: not acceptable.

Tresco, Isles of Scilly, 17th January 1920, female (plate 37) Shot by Miss Dorrien Smith (Anon. 1920; Langton 1920), later in the Tresco Abbey collection (Penhallurick 1969). In Penhallurick (1969) and Evans (1994), the date is given incorrectly as 7th January. The specimen is now in the Isles of Scilly Museum, St Mary’s (contra Evans 1994). No description has ever been published, but David Cottridge provided a photograph of the specimen for the Committee to examine. The Dorrien Smith family held the lease on Tresco from the mid-1800s and frequently shot rare birds on the island. Will Wagstaff, as recorder for the Isles of Scilly, is familiar with material collected by the Dorrien Smiths and is unaware of any doubts concerning this or any other birds which they obtained (W. Wagstaff in litt.).

See the 1864/65 Bridlington record, on page 64, for comment on escape likelihood.

The Committee accepted the identification of this bird, sexed as a female; the circumstances seem generally to be satisfactory. It was considered likely to have been a natural
vagrant, and this record was placed in Category B of the British List, and is the earliest British record.

Hunstanton, Norfolk, seen on several dates in February 1932, immature/female In Riviere (1933). Seen by Mr C. T. M. Plowright; watched through a telescope, once as close as 40 yards. Plowright was described by Riviere (1933) as a good observer. The bird was also seen by Nat Tracy (see E. W. R. 1955 for biographical details). Allard (1997) has drawn attention to the brevity of the existing description, although he misquotes it in one important detail, changing the original oblong white patch on each side of the cheeks to an obvious white patch. The duck was seen with Velvet Melanitta fusca and Common Scoters M. nigra, and observed down to 40 yards, by a good observer with a telescope. The description is, however, very short. Even so, both the ‘very noticeable’ small size in direct comparison with Common Scoter, and the description, seem to support the claimed identification. Nevertheless, this is a very rare species and some more detail would have been preferred.

See the 1864/65 Bridlington record, on page 64, for comment on escape likelihood.

The briefness of the description, though typical of the period, was felt on balance to be insufficient for such a rare species, and the identification was not accepted.

The 1830 Yarmouth specimens at Norwich Castle and Saffron Walden Museums

The two specimens claimed to represent the first British record, collected at Yarmouth in 1830, were brought to Tring, where they were examined in detail.

The Saffron Walden Museum specimen (plate 38)

This specimen is on a circular wooden stand, painted green and fixed to a rectangular wooden block with sloping front, also painted green. There


38. Buffleheads Bucephala albeola, said to be from Great Yarmouth, 1830. Left, Saffron Walden Museum, registration no. SAFWM:(NB 127); right, Norwich Castle Museum, registration no. 22.85.
is a label on the front slope, although there are also marks and the remains of pins from a previous label. The rear of the base block has paint over what appears to be the handwritten number 308a (the 1883 catalogue number for the Bufflehead). The label on the front slope reads:

**Buffel-headed Duck**
*Bucephala albeola* (L.)
* male, from Yarmouth, winter 1830

There is also a gummed label on the rectangular base:

**NB**
127

Written in pencil under the base block is:

**Buffel-headed Duck**
* male
  * Yarmouth
  * winter 1830

It is an adult male, standing fairly upright, head turned slightly to the left, neck reasonably stretched. Narrow head, wide back; wings wide, the tips about 15 mm apart. The bend of the wing is not under the flank feathers at the moment, but may have been earlier.

The irides in the glass eyes are pale blue. The bill has apparently not been painted, although it may have been varnished at some stage. The legs and feet are painted dull red, except where they were later overpainted by green when the base was painted.

**The Norwich Castle Museum specimen (plate 38)**
The specimen carries a single circular label:

Norwich Castle Museum [printed]
22.85

It is a good mounted bird, well prepared, which was removed from the public gallery in 1996 for our examination. The shape and posture are very like those of the Saffron Walden specimen, although the bird is less bulky. The head is less full and the neck is slightly longer. The wing tips are about 5 mm apart. The bend of the wing (only) is concealed under flank feathers.

The specimen was not on a base when it was examined, and was presumably removed from an individual base some time ago when it was put into the public gallery. The legs are wired, but the left leg wire is broken off at the foot; the right wire is intact. The undersides of the feet have wisps of cotton and moss adhering to them. The primaries are quite faded by light. The specimen is not particularly worn, except for parts of the tail. There are a couple of small spots of blue paint on the upperparts.

The irides of the glass eyes are yellow. The upper mandible is painted blue, as also are the legs and feet.

The specimens feel very similarly stuffed, but the birds were not examined internally. The most striking features are, however, the overall similarities in their style and posture. This would be a remarkable coincidence, unless the skins had been prepared by the same taxidermist. To determine if these similarities extended to their internal structure, the birds were x-rayed.

**X-ray comparison of the two specimens**
X-rays of the two specimens were prepared at the Natural History Museum, showing each bird from the left side and in dorsal view (plates 39–42). Details from the x-ray images are summarised in table 1 (on page 70). The similarities in the internal structure of the two specimens are striking, and are consistent with the suggestion that the skins had been prepared by the same taxidermist. The differences are largely trivial, or may be accounted for by their being within the range of variation to be expected from one taxidermist. The most significant difference, in the humeri, may have been due to damage to one of the bones during collection or preparation, and the other bone having then been treated to become the same. This would be expected. The combined evidence from external and x-ray examination very strongly suggests that the birds were prepared by the same taxidermist. From the colour of the eyes and the other bare parts of both these specimens, there must be some doubt that the taxidermist saw either of the birds when they were freshly dead, unless he had an odd sense of humour.

**The history of the two specimens**
The records are quite well documented; the key points being the following:

- Paget & Paget (1834): Mr Miller has a specimen; adult male.
- Yarrell (1843): male shot near Yarmouth, passed to Mr Stephen Miller, ‘who prized it very highly’. Mr Joseph Clarke of Saffron Walden is reported to have sent Yarrell a drawing of
Miller’s bird, and to have loaned him a male and a female which he described (Yarrell 1843). There is no contemporary written evidence that Miller’s bird was actually at Saffron Walden Museum at that time, but there are sufficient similarities between the Saffron Walden specimen and Yarrell’s illustration (plate 43 on page 71) to make this connection. The plate was apparently engraved as a faithful reproduction and, in the process of printing, was reversed on the paper (hence, the bird in the book is looking to the right, whereas the specimen, and its image on the engraved plate, were facing left). The bird’s posture and several details of its plumage make it almost certain that the Saffron Walden specimen was the model for Yarrell’s plate. This would confirm the much later statement in Anon. (1883) that the Saffron Walden bird had been figured by Yarrell.

- Anon. (1845): The Saffron Walden Museum catalogue lists a male and female, but without data.
- Lubbock (1845): Mr Miller of Yarmouth has a very good specimen of the ‘Buffel-head’.
- Harting (1872), Lubbock & Southwell (1879): Mr Miller’s bird now in the collection of Mr Rising.
- Anon. (1883): The Saffron Walden bird is the one figured by Yarrell. Miller’s bird went to Mr Youell, a banker, and was then given to Joseph Clarke, who gave it to Saffron Walden Museum. Youell is not known by the staff at Saffron Walden Museum. Clarke travelled widely and obtained objects for Saffron Walden Museum from all over the country (Nick Gordon in litt.; see also Anon. 1895, Christy 1890).

39-42. X-rays of Buffleheads *Bucephala albeola*, said to be from Great Yarmouth, 1830. Left, Saffron Walden Museum, registration no. SAFWM:(NB 127); right, Norwich Castle Museum, registration no. 22.85.
Anon. (1885a): Mr Rising's collection was sold in 1885, and the Bufflehead from Yarmouth in 1830 (‘one of the gems of the collection’) went to Norwich Museum.

Anon. (1885b): The specimen belonging to Mr Rising of Horsey was purchased on 17th September 1885 by Mr J. J. Colman, Esq. MP, for 25 gs. ‘Mr Risings note on this bird in his copy of “Yarrell” is “Purchased 22 September 1853 at the sale of goods of Mr S. Miller deceased, by me R.H. Rising”’.

Southwell (no date, about 1885 or later): Miller’s duck was sold on 22nd September 1835 [a transcription error: this should read 1853] to Mr Rising for £5. Rising’s note on this bird in his copy of ‘Yarrell’ is ‘Purchased 22 September 1853 at the sale of goods of Mr S. Miller deceased, by me R.H. Rising’.

Anon. (1885b): The specimen belonging to Mr Rising of Horsey was purchased on 17th September 1885 by Mr J. J. Colman, Esq. MP, for 25 gs. ‘Mr Risings note on this bird in his copy of ‘Yarrell’ is ‘Purchased 22 September 1853 at the sale of goods of Mr S. Miller deceased, by me R.H. Rising’;

Summary of the information

1. The specimen at Saffron Walden Museum is alleged to have been collected in 1830, and acquired by Miller by 1834; it then passed to Youell, to Clarke and then to the Museum, apparently before 1843 when this specimen was illustrated by Yarrell.

2. The Norwich Castle Museum Bufflehead is also said to have started in Miller’s possession. Rising bought the specimen at the sale of Miller’s goods in 1853, and it was purchased by Colman in 1885 (following Rising’s death) for Norwich Castle Museum.

Of the named persons, Miller seems to be the most likely candidate for the source of the confusion and, possibly, fraud. Several stages in this story are, however, unclear, and genuine mistakes and misattribution of data are possible.

There is clear evidence of mischief associated with the two Yarmouth Bufflehead specimens: apparently set up by the same taxidermist and bearing the same data. Neither can be considered satisfactory in these circumstances: neither is acceptable.

As a consequence, only one pre-1950 (Category B) record of Bufflehead remains acceptable: the female from Tresco, Isles of Scilly, on 17th January 1920.

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Table 1. Similarities and differences between the Saffron Walden Museum (SW) and Norwich Castle Museum (NC) Bufflehead Bucephala albeola specimens in x-ray images.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features similar in both specimens</th>
<th>Main differences between the specimens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stuffing similar and uniform throughout; similar wads of thigh stuffing.</td>
<td>Body of SW larger and bulkier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back of the skull broken to extract the brain.</td>
<td>Artificial eyes smaller in SW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounting wires similar in type.</td>
<td>Extra straight wire down neck in NC, apparently inserted some time after preparation was complete, when the neck was broken. Lower end sharpened. Both ends protrude through skin and are concealed among the feathers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main support wire from base of bill (blunt end) gently curving down neck and body; looped sideways in lower body around right leg wire, across and around left leg wire, back to centre, then looped around itself and down to exit body just under tail.</td>
<td>Wire apparently starts higher in bill base in SW; the other end of the wire (under tail) is pointed in SW, but blunt in NC. It may have been cut after mounting if the wire had simply been too long.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous leg wire used for both feet, looped inside body to the level of the bend in the wing.</td>
<td>Humeri intact (disarticulated) in SW; both humeri broken to approximately 30% of full length in NC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wing bones set similarly.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Femurs broken, and at approximately the same length.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
To determine whether the Bufflehead should be placed in Category A, the Committee also considered the earliest records after 1950.

Male, Foxcote Reservoir, Buckinghamshire, 28th February to 8th March 1961 (Swaine 1962) Although this bird did not appear in a location to inspire confidence that it was a transatlantic vagrant, a number of American ducks have subsequently turned up in late winter in the Midlands. There were hardly any Buffleheads in captivity in 1961, but four were imported into the Netherlands in October 1960. One of those four escaped on arrival; it was seen in the wild and was extremely wary, and it was at first considered to be a natural vagrant (W. Bierman in litt.). The likelihood that the Buckinghamshire bird was the same individual was excluded and, taking into consideration the rarity of the species in captivity, the probability of its having been an escape was considered to be very low (P. Scott, T. Inskipp, R. Wilkinson).

On review, the Committee confirmed this record’s position in Category A.

Male, West Loch Bee, South Uist, Western Isles, 14th-18th March 1980 (Rogers et al. 1981) The identification was accepted. The location, weather and time of year (Gauthier 1993) are all consistent with natural vagrancy. Although numbers in captivity were increasing at this time, Buffleheads
were still scarce in collections and escape was considered to have been less likely than natural occurrence.

The record was accepted for Category A.

Subsequent records are the responsibility of the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Four have been noted, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, in that committee’s annual reports. All have been males.

- Colwick, Nottinghamshire, 17th-26th March 1994 (Brit. Birds 88: 504)
- Coatham Marsh, Cleveland, 1st-7th June 1994 (Brit. Birds 88: 504)

Over the last twenty years, the number of Buffleheads in captivity has increased dramatically, both in Britain and on the Continent. Following a survey in 1991, it was estimated that over 900 were held in captivity in the Netherlands alone (van der Laar 1994). Since the 1980s, the likelihood of a Bufflehead seen at liberty in Britain being of captive origin has become very high indeed.

Rolf Christensen has compiled a useful review of European records of the Bufflehead, which can be viewed online (http://home5.inet.tele.dk/rolfc/other_stuff/boffelander.htm).

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Knox: The Bufflehead in Britain

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