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First record of *Bucephala albeola* (Bufflehead) for the U.S. Virgin Islands

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Photo: Victoria Mae Beasley



First record of *Bucephala albeola* (Bufflehead) for the U.S. Virgin Islands

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Cover Page: *Bucephala albeola* (Bufflehead) on Frank Pond, Saint John, Virgin Islands (U.S.), photographed on 1 Dec 2021 by Victoria Beasley (Macaulay Library ML396424501).

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Abstract

A single *Bucephala albeola* (Bufflehead) was identified on St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) on 23 November 2021. The individual resided until mid-February 2022. This represents the first record of this species for the USVI.

Keywords

Bucephala albeola, Bufflehead, pond, salt pond, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, wetland

Resumen

Primer registro de *Bucephala albeola* (Porrón Albeola) para las Islas Vírgenes de los Estados Unidos • El 23 de noviembre de 2021 se identificó un ejemplar de *Bucephala albeola* (Porrón Albeola) en la isla de St. John, Islas Vírgenes de los Estados Unidos (USVI). El individuo permaneció en la zona hasta mediados de febrero de 2022. Este hallazgo constituye el primer registro de esta especie para las Islas Vírgenes de Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave

avifauna, *Bucephala albeola*, humedal, laguna, Islas Vírgenes de los Estados Unidos, laguna salobre, Porrón Albeola, St. John

Résumé

Première observation de *Bucephala albeola* (Petit Garrot) dans les Îles Vierges américaines • Un *Bucephala albeola* (Petit Garrot) a été identifiée à Saint John, dans les Îles Vierges américaines (USVI), le 23 novembre 2021. L'individu est resté sur place jusqu'à la mi-février 2022. Il s'agit de la première observation de cette espèce dans les Îles Vierges américaines.

Mots clés

avifaune, *Bucephala albeola*, étang, étang salé, Îles Vierges américaines, Petit Garrot, Saint John, zone humide

Bucephala albeola (Bufflehead) is a small diving duck and migratory species primarily found within North America. Breeding takes place in Alaska, Canada, and some northern U.S. states with birds migrating south for the winter (Gauthier 2020). The species is a rare winter visitor to the Caribbean and specifically the northeastern Caribbean, with sporadic records in Puerto Rico between 1988 and 2013 and one sighting in St. Martin in 2004 (Colón López 1988, Raffaele 1989, Brown and Collier 2006, Santana 2013, eBird 2025). All northeastern Caribbean eBird observations were in coastal ponds, with those in Puerto Rico in semi-rural ponds, whereas St. John's and St. Martin's were both in suburban ponds. Based on eBird checklists, one individual in Puerto Rico appeared to reside in the same pond for six days in 2013, while all others were single-day observations. Notably, of the six sightings (including this paper) that recorded sex, all were female (eBird 2025).

Observation

On 23 November 2021, at approximately 0800, while on a regular bird survey for the Division of Fish and Wildlife, I observed a single female *Bucephala albeola*

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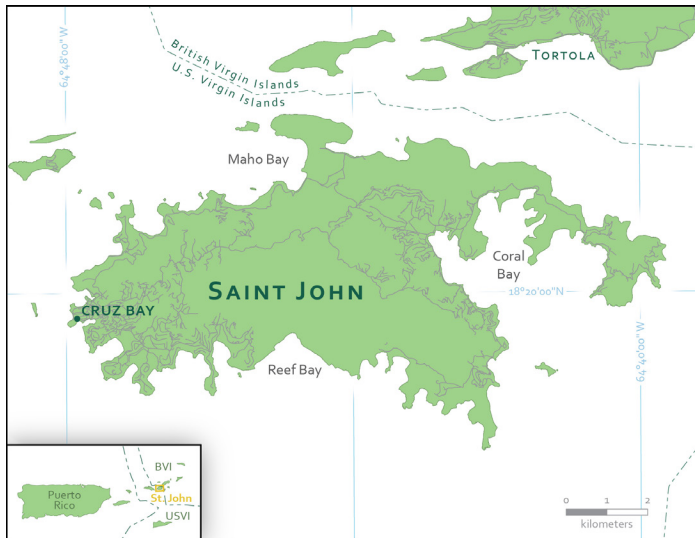


Fig. 1. *Bucephala albeola* observation site (green dot) on the west coast of St. John, USVI. Map by Alison DeGraff Ollivier.



Fig. 2. *Bucephala albeola* at Frank Bay Pond, Cruz Bay, St. John, USVI, on 23 November 2021. Photo by Victoria M. Beasley.

at Frank Bay Pond (18°19'40.0"N, 64°47'51.0"W) in Cruz Bay, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) (Fig. 1). Frank Bay Pond is a small salt pond on the western coast of St. John and is frequented by both migratory and resident birds. The *Bucephala albeola* was resting in the center of the pond and in clear sight. The record was uploaded to eBird (Beasley 2021), and Laurel Brannick, a retired park ranger and experienced birder, was notified and visited the pond on the same day to verify the sighting. The bird remained at the site for over two months, until mid-February 2022 (Huneke 2022). I recorded the same individual intermittently during this period, typically actively diving, bathing, or resting in the open water of the pond (Appendix 1).

The *Bucephala albeola* was identified as a female by its small size, dark back, white cheek patch, and rounded head, consistent with the species' field marks (Raffaele 1989). Photographs were taken to document the sighting (Fig. 2).

Discussion

This is believed to be the first confirmed record of *Bucephala albeola* for the USVI. This observation contributes to our understanding of the species' rare vagrancy into the eastern Caribbean and emphasizes the importance of small coastal wetlands for hosting and sustaining unexpected winter migrants.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Gail Karlsson for sharing the sighting with the local community, Laurel Brannick who supported the identification of this species, and Dr. Brian Currie for his encouragement and support publishing this sighting. This was conducted by VMB under the USFWS Grant F21AF03902 to DPNR Division of Fish and Wildlife.

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Appendix 1. Records on eBird of the female *Bucephala albeola* at Frank Bay Pond, Cruz Bay, St. John, USVI. Checklists with photographic evidence are shown in bold type.

Date	Observer(s)	eBird checklist
23 November 2021	V. Beasley	ebird.org/checklist/S98964314
24 November 2021	V. Beasley	ebird.org/checklist/S98964450
1 December 2021	V. Beasley	ebird.org/checklist/S98964663
6 December 2021	V. Beasley	ebird.org/checklist/S98965107
17 December 2021	V. Beasley	ebird.org/checklist/S99688882
21 December 2021	J. Strader	ebird.org/checklist/S100044791
4 January 2022	G. Zelenka-Drysdale	ebird.org/checklist/S100711352
5 January 2022	C. and L. Giaimo and Kilburn	ebird.org/checklist/S100296109
11 January 2022	M. Hamm	ebird.org/checklist/S100538912
12 January 2022	V. Beasley	ebird.org/checklist/S103971561
18 January 2022	W. Strobel	ebird.org/checklist/S101200264
19 January 2022	V. Beasley	ebird.org/checklist/S103972665
21 January 2022	M. York	ebird.org/checklist/S101194045
24 January 2022	V. Beasley	ebird.org/checklist/S103973318
4 February 2022	V. Beasley	ebird.org/checklist/S104102813
9 February 2022	C. Huneke	ebird.org/checklist/S102341512