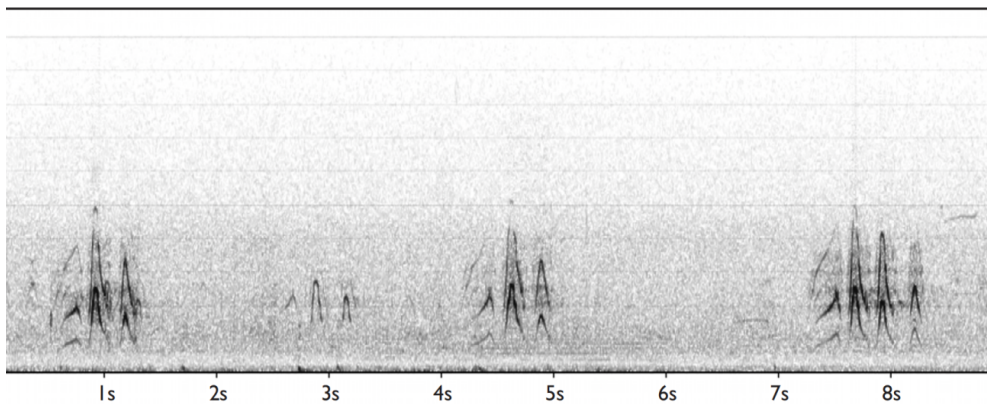


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Calls of American x Eurasian Wigeon hybrids

January 2025



Although the visual identification of male hybrids between American Wigeon *Mareca americana* and Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope* has been discussed in some detail (e.g. Harrop 1994, Gillham & Gillham 1996, 2002, Jiguet 1999, Votier *et al.* 2003, Reeber 2015), the vocalisations of these hybrids are poorly known. Carey (1993) noted that some vagrant male hybrids in East Asia, which closely resembled American Wigeon in appearance, gave calls similar to Eurasian; but, otherwise, vocalisation of

hybrids has generally been overlooked. For example, of 7,077 observations of Eurasian x American Wigeon hybrids on eBird.org, 2,011 are supported with photographs but just six with audio.

Male Eurasian Wigeon gives a loud, disyllabic whistle; this is sometimes preceded by a quiet (and often inaudible) 'inhalation' note (see, e.g., <https://xeno-canto.org/948672>). The whistle has a duration of 0.5 seconds and consists of a steep rise and a shallower, slightly stepped drop (fig. 1), transcribed in Cramp & Simmons (1977) as *whee-OO*.

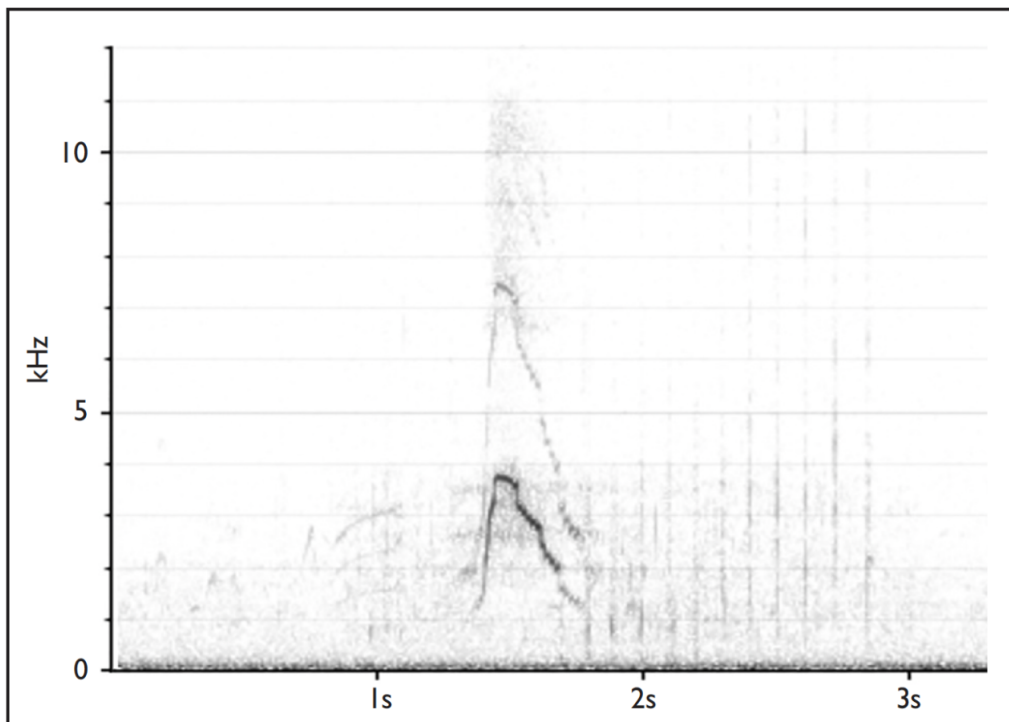


Fig. 1. Call of male Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*, Eyebrook Reservoir, Leicestershire & Rutland, February 2021 (Andrew Harrop, <https://xeno-canto.org/619085>).

In contrast, American Wigeon typically gives a louder, clearer initial inhalation note, followed by two (occasionally one or three) monosyllabic whistle notes

given in quick succession (fig. 2). These notes appear in sonograms as an inverted-V, with the slope of the rise and the fall being similar, and are typically shorter in duration than in Eurasian Wigeon, at around 0.2 seconds. The frequency of the calls is variable in both species, though American Wigeon typically sounds lower pitched than Eurasian Wigeon. This is transcribed in Cramp & Simmons (1977) as *whew-WHEW-whew*.

Call of male American Wigeon

Fig. 2. Call of male American Wigeon *Mareca americana*, Wilcox Lake, Arizona, USA, February 2007 (Peter Boesman, <https://xeno-canto.org/218524>). Note that the final call consists of three whistle notes.

Of the six examples of hybrids on eBird with recordings, five birds give a disyllabic call, similar to Eurasian Wigeon. In some cases, analysis on a sonogram showed the call notes to be shorter in duration, but it is unlikely that this subtle difference would be picked out if a vagrant bird in Europe was within a flock of Eurasian Wigeons.

One bird, however, gave a trisyllabic call, though the call components were a mix of Eurasian (a longer first note of around 0.35 seconds with a shallower downward slope) and American (a short second note with an inverted-V

shape) (fig. 3).

Call of male American x Eurasian Wigeon



Fig. 3. Call of male American x Eurasian Wigeon, Esquimalt Lagoon, British Columbia, Canada, January 2023 (Jody Wells, <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/530081291>).

Hybrids vary considerably in appearance, with some birds being more American-like while others are more Eurasian-like. However, there seems to be no correlation between plumage type and whether the call given is Eurasian- or American-like. Indeed, on the basis of the available evidence, it

seems that Eurasian-type calls are dominant amongst hybrids.

As with visual identifications, the differences between calls of females are much subtler than those of males. Pieplow (2017) suggests that the calls of Eurasian may average harsher than those of American. However, distinguishing differences in calls of hybrid females is probably impossible on current knowledge.

To help develop our understanding, observers are encouraged to sound record hybrids whenever possible (including birds in captivity).

Acknowledgments

Jody Wells sent me and allowed me to use his recording of the hybrid discussed above. Peter Boesman allowed me to use his recording of American Wigeon, downloaded from Xeno-canto, which provides an invaluable online platform for research.

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