

## HUNTING

# A Bering Sea Rarity

The banded king eider shot by a Montana woman was at least 24 years old

Avid waterfowl hunter Brianne Rogers beat seriously long odds in January while hunting on St. Paul Island, Alaska. There, the 35-year-old president of Bird Dog Strategies, a management consulting firm in Bozeman, Montana, walked out on a point and took duck hunting's equivalent of a unicorn — a banded king eider. It turned out, the duck was at least 24 years old.

How rare is a banded king?

A check with the U.S. Geological Survey Bird Banding Lab shows a total of 5,101 king eiders have been banded in North America since 1960. That compares with nearly 140,000 canvasbacks, another trophy species high on many bucket lists. About 20,000 canvasback bands have been reported, or 14.29 percent. In the same time, a total of 42 king eider bands were returned, a rate of just 0.82 percent. By comparison, the total number of ducks and geese banded since 1960 is more than 20 million, with 3.75 million or 18.75 percent reported.

Rogers and her father booked the January 2019 hunt with Capt. Jeff Wasley of Cold Bay, Alaska. St. Paul Island is a speck of land in the Bering Sea west of the Alaskan Peninsula and north of the Aleutians known for fur seals, king crabs and king eiders.

"We managed to book the worst weather week of the season," Rogers said. "That's saying something when you're talking about St. Paul. Getting off the plane,

we had to lean at 45 degrees into the wind to avoid being knocked over."

Rough conditions reduced their five-day trip to just two huntable days, in a place where winter daylight is at a premium. Despite a couple of chances on open seas, on her final day on the island, Rogers had yet to take the bird she came so far to get.

"After a morning on the water, the wind shifted and the afternoon sent everyone in camp to the shoreline points hoping for

a bird to fly close," Rogers said. "Capt. Wasley took me down to the southwest shore of the island, just hoping some would be feeding close enough for a shot. As we rounded English Bay, I spotted something white out of the corner of my eye — there was a king! We knew my only chance was a sneak. I'd get just one shot, but it did the trick."

Rogers and Wasley were so elated, they didn't even see the band at first.

"Honestly, it took us a while to even notice it," she said. "I was so excited to have him in my hands and examine the vibrant colors of his bill, feathers and the unique fins."

Rogers learned the bird was captured and banded as an adult on St. Paul Island in 1996 following an oil spill.

She credits her father for her love of hunting and the opportunities she has enjoyed.

"Waterfowling is a wonderfully complex, yet Zen sport," Rogers said. "I was really lucky to have a dad who took time to enthusiastically share these lessons with me." — *Bill Miller*



Brianne Rogers

USGS science for a changing world		CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION AWARDED TO		BRIANNE ROGERS DUGAN	
<b>Banding Data</b>					
Band Number	1347-54951	Banded	03/19/1996		
Species	KING EIDER	Sex	MALE		
Age of Bird	HATCHED IN 1995 OR EARLIER				
Location	ST PAUL ISLAND, ALASKA, USA				
Bander	JOHN PEARCE ALASKA SCIENCE CENTER 4210 UNIVERSITY DRIVE ANCHORAGE, AK 99508				
<b>Encounter Data</b>					
Location	2.9 mi ESE of SAINT PAUL, ALEUTIANS WEST CENSUS AREA, ALASKA, UNITED STATES	Encountered	01/10/2019		