

with the epicures in search of delicacies for their kitchens.

Both chefs and naturalists faced one important obstacle: The distance to London from such favored hunting grounds as the marshlands of Lincolnshire was a good 150 miles, and there was no consistently effective refrigeration in those days. Birds reached the consumer in varying states of preservation, and what was edible might no longer be stufferable, and what a good taxidermist could salvage might no longer be suitable for the table.

It is possible that Donovan's duck had had its bill destroyed when it was shot, or it may have been broken or discolored on the long road to market. The specimen may also have suffered damage sometime in the eight years between its acquisition and the publication of Donovan's description: it would not have been the first or the last time that a skin was exposed to pests, dust, or light. We'll never know the reason, but what we can say for certain is that Edward Donovan didn't ignore the bill pattern of the Ring-necked Duck. It just wasn't there.

Birders have regularly suggested that it would just be logical to change the name of this familiar species to "Ring-billed Duck," reflecting its most visible field mark. Words, however, are never more than arbitrary signifiers, and names are the arbitrarists: There is no requirement that they somehow "match" the objects they denote. And more than that, changing this species' name would make it even easier to ignore the surprising story of a 19th-century duck, its bill, and its species' first encounter with science.

The eponymous "ring around the collar" of *A. collaris* ordinarily is absent or invisible.  
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