

Real Eiderdown

by Jon Sveinsson

see also <http://eiderdown.com/>

A) Eiderdown is rare.

A1

The total worldwide annual harvest of eiderdown could be carried by one small truck, - while the total annual worldwide goose down production is counted in tens of thousands of tons or ship loads. Japan alone imports 6000 t goose down annually. From January until December 2010 Japan imported 1.7 t real eiderdown from Iceland, German speaking Europe took the remainder. There were 2700 Rolls Royce motorcars were manufactured in Goodwood in 2010 but in an average spring in Iceland only 2500 kg eiderdown (ED) are harvested and Iceland is the only country where there is an ED trade to speak of. The most common ED comforter size in the main market, Japan, contains 1 kg and other sizes usually more. So **a new Rolls is actually more common than a new eiderdown comforter**. To see what the main market, Japan, does of Icelandic eiderdown, see: <http://search.borderless.rakuten.com/borderless/search.action?k=eiderdown&tl=&l=en> Note especially this one and no, the price is not a typo: <http://en.item.rakuten.com/mitibata/578226/>

A2

Even though an eiderdown comforter may last 20 years, it is obvious that a new market would never be saturated. So even there are many who might afford an eiderdown comforter at the present price level, most of them will have to go without one forever. Eiderdown is for connoisseurs.

A3

The annual Icelandic eiderdown harvests have for environmental reasons been getting smaller. In 2002 the harvest fell to only 2000 kg and it has stagnated at a lower level than before after having been 3000 kg for decades. Altered feeding conditions in the ocean are to blame but the harvest has since stabilized at 2.5 t. There are always diamonds being mined and new farms mink sprout when demand for furs picks up, - but eiderdown is wild and impossible to farm in the conventional sense. **The eiderdown supply is naturally limited forever and if anything, it is dwindling**. The total export value of dry processed, unwashed eiderdown may in an average year pass 2 m \$ while the retail value of goods from this same lot likely passes 40 m \$.

A4

Though eiderdown harvesting was a common in Scandinavia in the Middle Ages this industry is now long dead. Archeological excavations in Norway indicate that the Vikings took silk eiderdown comforters with them on their ships and stone age remnants in Finland show that eiderdown was used in clothing. Finland and Canada also harvest eiderdown but in miniscule quantity compared with Iceland. Currently, the overwhelming **majority of eiderdown on the world market comes from Iceland.**

Proper gathering and high tech processing methods have been developed in Iceland so Icelandic eiderdown today has no contest in quality. Still there are 350 ED harvesters in Iceland , 6 main processors, ca 20 harvesters who process own lots so there are endless possibilities for erroneous material handling during gathering/processing. In addition to these there are 7 wholesale exporters who sell the eiderdown to buyers in German speaking Europe , see: <http://www.vdfi.de/mitglied.htm> as well as Japan.

B) Eiderdown is wild.

B1

Eiderdown is wild as opposed to domestic. Eiderdown is the only down on the market stemming from a **wild bird**. Every June the big, wild, arctic eider duck (somateria mollissima) returns ashore from its habitat on the ocean to nest, lay eggs and then it returns back to the sea when the ducklings have hatched.

B2

Eiderdown is the only down stemming from **live birds** that are not plucked. It is a remarkable thought that **the birds that gave the down to a new eiderdown comforter are still alive and well somewhere out in the North Atlantic Ocean** while the proud owner sleeps calmly underneath the comforter made from their down.

Due to hormonal changes during the egg-laying period, the female eider sheds 17 gram dark metal gray, incredibly light and soft down into its nest.

By doing this the female eider bares a spot on its belly through which it emits heat for incubating the eggs. An comforter with one kg filling may contain eiderdown processed from the raw material of over 60 nests.

B3

Eiderdown is the only down that solely stems from **female birds**, while domestic down is from both female and male birds. The male eiders give no down and do not sit on nests. Domestic down on the other hand comes from male and female birds alike.

B4

Since eiderdown is only from nesting birds, it is also the only down that comes solely from **fully grown birds** because eiders start laying eggs at age 4 years and may reach an age of 25 years. Down from grown birds is mature, that is fully developed. Goose down on the other hand is usually a by-product in meat farming and therefore from young infertile birds with insufficiently matured down. Does anyone eat old geese?

No, so all down harvested as a by-line to meat production is from young birds with undeveloped plumage.

B5

Eiderdown is the only commercially traded **down** that stems only from a single spot on the bird. It falls into the nest **from only one spot on the bird, on** its soft underbelly. Eiderdown falls from the birds egg-warming spot and is thus of even and high quality while other types of down come from all parts of those birds bodies and therefore vary in quality.

For instance, neck down from geese has particularly short, needle-like feathers that tend to pierce fabric in goose down jackets and cause them to leak the down filling. In ED only the down is used, the feathers are mechanically and manually sorted out for an almost feather free comforter filling while goose down is always sold with a certain percentage of feathers.

B6

Eiders nest in a few areas found on the shores of arctic countries like Alaska, Canada where it is also harvested to some degree, see

http://www.seaduckjv.org/meetseaduck/eiderdown_f_webversion.pdf

Greenland, Norway, and Finland, Russia. Imperial Russia was until the 1917 revolution both the biggest harvester of eiderdown for own comforter production as well as being the biggest importer buying practically all Icelandic eiderdown at that time. The biggest eider nesting colonies are still found in Iceland which borders on the Polar circle. **Eiders** have for over a century been **a protected species in Iceland**. Eiderdown harvesting is a tradition in Iceland which has been practiced for millennium. The tradition of harvesting down for comforters was brought to Iceland with the Norse settlers in the 9th century. Remains of eiderdown have been found in archeological excavation of Viking ships in Norway.

B7

In Iceland, the eiderdown is harvested from the nests and replaced with hay. Recent scientific research confirms common knowledge: no harm is done, neither to the bird nor its eggs. **Eiderdown harvesting is environmentally friendly**, it is a sustainable, green industry.

The down harvesters protect the nesting colonies from the eiders natural enemies: mink, fox, raven and seagull. **Eiders in Iceland** have generations become so accustomed to human protection that they directly **seek to nest near populated areas**. Although Icelandic eiders are completely wild and live all their lives on the ocean, they have become incredibly tame; some eiders can even be petted while sitting on their nests. Icelandic eiders thus behave quite differently from eiders in other countries where eider is considered game, therefore hunted and scared of humans just as any other wild creature. The stock of eiders in Iceland is because of the ban on hunting as well as the protection of nesting colonies bigger than it would have been without. Eiders were in the middle ages common on the Baltic coast of what is now Germany and locals harvested down but eiders retreated north to as settlement increased.

B8

Eiderdown is cleaned by highly specialized **secret dry processing technology** which Icelanders have developed and is not shared with other nations. Processed eiderdown is sold mainly to down washers in Japan and Germany who in turn sell it to comforter makers.

I am the only processor with higher education and have developed own high tech processing equipment , besides I educate those harvesters who deliver to me, so I proudly manage to maintain high an even quality in the ED I sell. For several years now I have washed all down I have processed and exported as ready fill material.

C) Eiderdown has unique qualities.

C1

The eiderdown elements, as seen in photos from an electronic microscope , cling together Velcro-like , to form a big soft, grey material that has less specific weight than other comforter fill materials. Other down falls apart into its single elements when touched while **eiderdown appears as a cohesive uniform mass**. The lightness makes it possible to use less fill material per square unit in a comforter. This way the comforter can be lighter than with common materials. Lightness characterizes luxury in bedding. Would anyone want to sleep under something heavy? Absolutely no, lightness is luxury.

C2

Eiderdown is so delicate in structure it had to be photographed through an electronic microscope with a huge degree of enhancement, which I have already had done. The very lightness of eiderdown is seen in a single eiderdown unit which measures 2.5 cm across yet weighs only 2 mg. It takes ½ million such units to form one kg eiderdown. The eiderdown unit consists of co-centric strands. These eiderdown strands are so fine that in thickness they measure only a fraction of a human hair.

C3

Eiderdown has a unique thermal insulation because eiders inhabit the ocean around the Polar Circle. The eider, being a warm blooded creature, has therefore developed it as nature's best **protection against** the literally **freezing** winter temperatures where it inhabits the rough North Atlantic Ocean where temperatures may occur below 0 °C and the ocean only stays liquid because of its salinity.

C4

Eiderdown has unique qualities for it **regulates temperature and moisture far better than other materials**. Eiderdown comforters let extra body heat and moisture through, unlike high density, high specific weight goose down - or synthetic comforters. Therefore eiderdown comforters do not make their users feel sweaty and stuffy during the night which breaks the sleep. Eiderdown comforter enables the user to sleep comfortably

warm and dry. The sleep is therefore uninterrupted and calm. This is necessary for a good rest.

Eiderdown is therefore the most comfortable fill material known for use in comforters. Since an ED comforter lets moisture better through than a synthetic one, a synthetic one is not necessarily a better choice for those avoiding allergic reactions because the synthetic one will keep moisture longer and thus become a breeding ground for allergy causing microbes.

C5

Silk has similar thermal and moisture regulating qualities to eiderdown, - so these two rare natural materials are a match and compliment each other perfectly in a comforter. Combined, they make a truly unique product. A clear witness to the unique properties of eiderdown is that even with today's superior living conditions, eiderdown still continues to be as desirable as it was a thousand years ago.

D) Eiderdown originates in a high cost western European country.

D1

Behind every dry processed, feather picked and washed kg eiderdown found in a comforter there are on the average over 9 work hours in gathering the down from the nesting sites and then processing it. Iceland is a developed country where high minimum wages are stipulated by law. There is also a specific law on quality control of eiderdown that demands that the eiderdown be fully processed locally before export, so it is impossible to outsource this time and labor demanding manual feather picking of mechanically processed eiderdown. Further work time is added by manual washing of ED.

D2

The cohesive quality of eiderdown makes it impossible to sort into down and feathers mechanically by conventional goose down industry machinery using air stream. Besides these machines never fully sort out the feathers. Therefore feathers have to be picked manually from eiderdown. To pick one kg eiderdown feather free takes a skilled worker 4 hours, 20 minutes and that is when it has already been mechanically processed free of straw and dirt in the most advanced machines. Processed with common tech originating in the 1950-ies as is used by most, it may take a worker a whole day to pick one kg clean. This work is traditionally done by women since only women have the patience required for feather picking eiderdown, a task which has to be done meticulously. What a coincidence – **eiderdown stems from female birds and is manually treated by women**. In Norway where there exist no machines for processing eiderdown and it is done only manually, it takes a week to process one kg, see photos:

http://www.bioforsk.no/ikbViewer/page/forside/nyhet?p_document_id=77612

I am the only one in the trade in Iceland who in addition to the dry processing meant to rid the ED of straw, moss and sea weed, - also washes the ED. The dry processed ED

has to be manually washed in 300 gr portions and rinsed 12 times and it takes 360 l or more than 80 gallons of clean water to wash one kg ED.

I use a combination of mountain spring water from a well on the family property and geothermal water to wash my ED, combined with world wide acknowledged down washing chemicals.

Thereby I get excellent results confirmed by <http://www.idfl.com/> , and it also **scientifically confirms the geographical origins of the eiderdown as Iceland by isotope analysis**. The IDFL reports can be read on-line as well.

This irrefutable proof is important as there are a lot of copycats around in the main market , Japan, as elsewhere in the world, peddling cheap domestic duck down as eiderdown or mixing the real and wild eiderdown with domestic down , thereby cheating the client and diluting the unique qualities of the real eiderdown.

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