



# DUCKS, GEESE & SWANS

## *Acknowledgements*

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Cover photo: (mallard) by Gary Zahm

# Ducks, Geese & Swans

by

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## Introduction

There is no more inspiring measure of the rhythms of the seasons than the sights and sounds of waterfowl. As much as any other group of wildlife in North America, these birds personify the beauty, grace, diversity and energy of Nature. For many people, the presence of waterfowl, however near, however fleeting, is a reconnection to wild things and wild places.

But waterfowl are more than a symbol of environmental condition; ducks, geese and swans are essential parts of our natural world. They are resources that enrich human life in numerous ways. Many of the species may be hunted, so are excellent sources of recreation and high quality food. All can be sought for viewing and photography. They are subjects of art and craft; they are featured prominently in literature and cinema; they are focal points of local, national and international conservation programs that benefit far more than waterfowl themselves.

Waterfowl and waterfowl conservation are part of North America's cultural and social fabric, but this was not always the case. Unregulated gunning combined with droughts and widespread landscaper alterations in the late 1800s and early 1900s drastically reduced waterfowl numbers theretofore considered limitless. The hue and cry for change, voiced almost exclusively by sportsmen, led to events that are the foundation of waterfowl management today.

In 1913, enactment of the Weeks-McLean Migratory Bird Act transferred legal authority for managing waterfowl from states to the U.S. government. Three years later, a treaty was signed by the United States and Great Britain protecting migratory birds in the U.S. and Canada. Although the law lacked enforcement, it essentially signaled the end of market gunning and spring hunting of waterfowl. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and a subsequent court decision (*Missouri vs Holland*) reaffirmed the newly bestowed federal responsibility and provided authority for managing waterfowl and

other migratory birds. Later, similar treaties were signed with Mexico (1936), Japan (1972) and Russia (1976).

In the 1930s, drought again ravaged waterfowl nesting grounds, mainly in prairie Canada. Congress, in response, passed the migratory Bird Conservation Act and Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act. These and other far-reaching laws (the Wetland Loan Act of 1961, for example) have provided for a system of national wildlife refuges and waterfowl production areas. Equally significant have been laws and regulations enacted to reduce the negative impacts of waterfowl habitat. Because of these combined safeguards, there exists nowhere else in the world a comparable system of waterfowl habitat conservation.

The international commitment to waterfowl's welfare has been strengthened by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Signed by Canada and the U.S. in 1986, it provided a much-needed vehicle for U.S. dollars to be spent in Canada to protect waterfowl breeding/nesting habitat. The need is obvious — *most ducks harvested by U.S. hunters are raised on the Canadian prairies.*

Management authority for waterfowl today rests with the federal governments of the U.S. (Fish and Wildlife Service) and Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service). But the complete management package, especially hunting, has been a federal/state/provincial cooperative undertaking since the 1950s. This cooperative effort revolves around four continental flyways — Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific — which are jurisdictional zones that correspond roughly to north-south migration corridors. Each state and provincial wildlife director represents his or her agency on an appropriate "Flyway Council". Serving at the Council's pleasure, state and provincial waterfowl biologists collectively function as a "Flyway Technical Committee," to provide expert advice.

In the U.S., hunting season recommenda-



*Pacific*



*Central*

tions formulated by the Flyway Councils in July are forwarded to the Fish and Wildlife Service for consideration. After public hearings, final federal hunting guidelines are proposed to and authorized by the Secretary of the Interior. Each state then develops its own waterfowl hunting regulations, within the limits of the federal guidelines. A state may be more restrictive than the federal guidelines, but not more liberal. The procedure is intended to ensure fair distribution of hunting opportunity among states within flyways and between flyways.

As products of wetland environments, waterfowl populations fluctuate from year to year, and sometimes dramatically, depending mainly on weather, especially precipitation. Also, during periods of drought, there has been a tendency of Americans to convert dry wetlands to cropland, pasture and other developments. When the rains return, the waterfowl habitat has been dimin-

ished. In parts of North America, wetland loss within historic time exceeds 90 percent.

Besides continually encouraging wildlife habitat conservation and enhancements, wildlife managers react to wildlife population fluctuation by modifying hunting regulations. The goal invariably is to maximize hunting opportunity without harming the populations that are especially low. Many of these regulations require hunters to discriminate among the species and even among the sexes of the species, in flight or in hand, so it is important for waterfowl hunters to be able to identify their quarry — not only the physical characteristics, but other aspects of uniqueness of each duck, goose and swan species.

There are 145 waterfowl species worldwide. In North America, 43 species are native and 5 others are “visitors” from Europe or Asia. This booklet features 30 of the native species.



*Mississippi*



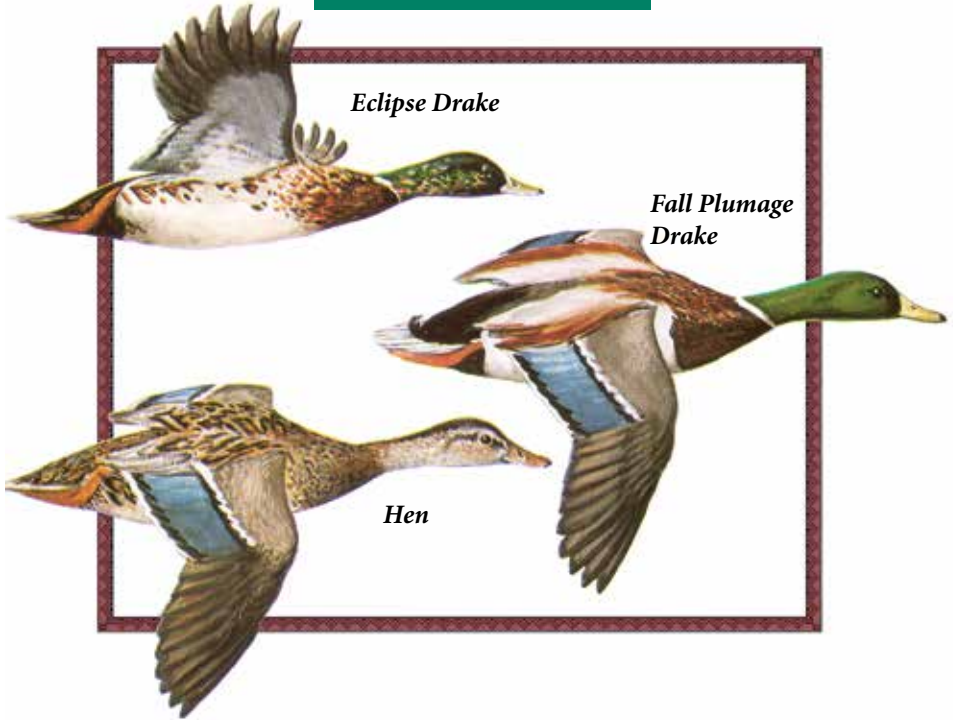
*Atlantic*

In the individual species descriptions to follow, average (or “cruising”) flight speeds have been estimated. These estimates were drawn from a variety of studies. They assume a no-wind situation and that the birds are neither chased nor otherwise alarmed. In the wild, however, waterfowl tend to fly most during windy conditions to aid flight speed and ease. In any case, waterfowl observers and hunters in particular tend to overestimate the flight speed of ducks and underestimate the speed of geese and swans. Small, low-flying ducks with very rapid wing-beats and darting movements, such as teal, appear to fly much more rapidly than they actually do. The seemingly slow and labored wing-beats of high-flying geese and swans suggest a slow “cruising” speed, whereas, in fact, these birds are deceptively fast flyers.

Also in the species description is a “table fare rating” for the game ducks, gees and swans, averaged from a survey of 85 wildlife biologists and veteran waterfowlers to get their opinion of how these birds taste. None of the respondents tasted every species, but for all species except the whistling ducks at least seven ratings were received; only four respondents were able to rate whistling ducks. Th rating criteria were approximately as follows:

- 10 = always excellent
- 9 = usually excellent
- 8 = always very good
- 7 = usually very good
- 6 = good
- 5 = just ok
- 4 = usually not very good
- 3 = edible, but never very good
- 2 = awful
- 1 = simply unpalatable

**Mallard**  
*Anas platyrhynchos*



The mallard or “greenhead” (from the drake’s iridescent green/black or green/purple head) is the most abundant duck in North American and perhaps worldwide. In most respects, the mallard usually is the standard by which all species are measured. It nests mainly in the prairie pothole region of Canada and winters throughout the U.S., but mostly in the lower Mississippi River valley. A powerful flier, with wing beats slower and shallower than other ducks, the mallard has an average air speed of 45 mph. It has been known to migrate 2,000 miles with few rest stops, but most migrations involve numerous stops. Migration flocks can exceed 200 mallards, flying in a loose V or U formation. Local flights tend to be direct and by pairs or groups of 40 to 60. The female mallard, known in some regions as “Susie” is a louder and more aggressive “talker” than drakes, so most hunter calls imitate the various hen vocalizations. Highly sociable, mallards seek sites where other ducks, especially other mallards, feed, loaf and roost. Single mallards, pairs and small flocks tend to decoy more readily than large mallard flocks. A puddle duck, the mallard eats about 90 percent vegetable matter, including aquatic plants, acorns and waste grain. Table fare rating = 9.1.

Average adult length: ♂ 25.0 inches

♀ 23.0

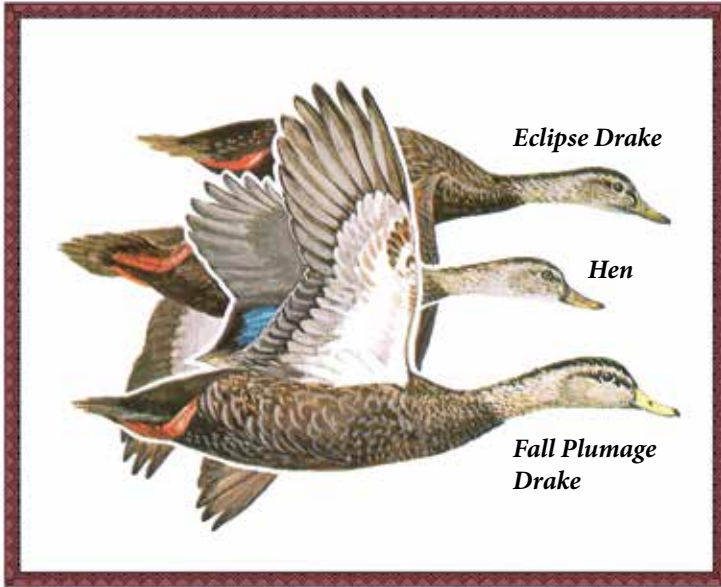
Average adult weight: ♂ 2.75 pounds

♀ 2.5



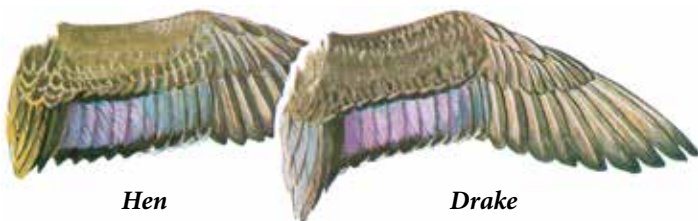


*Black Duck*  
*Anas rubripes*

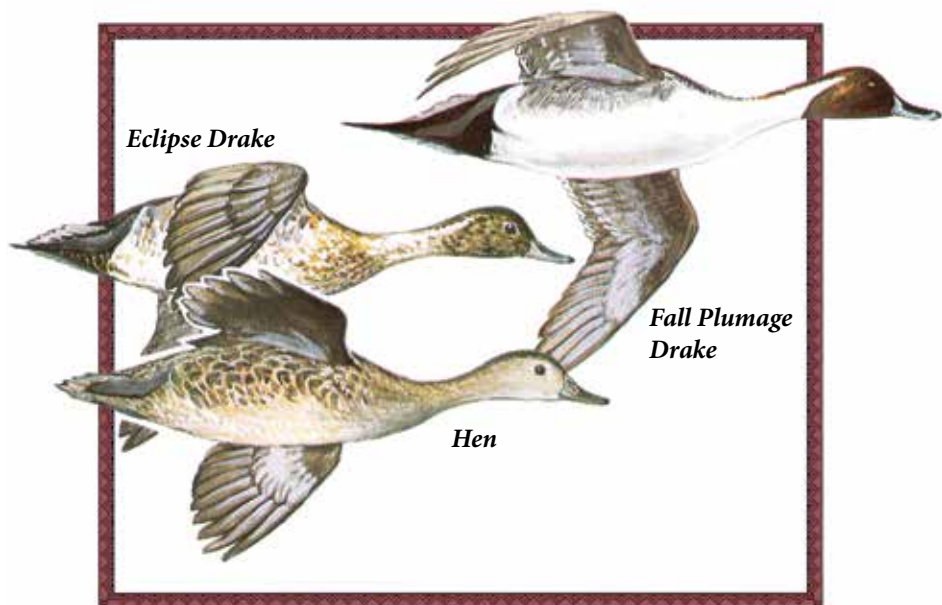


The black duck is found almost exclusively east of the Mississippi River on inland waters and in coastal wetlands. Much like mallard in size, conformation, vocalization and flight characteristics, the black duck in flight often is identified as a hen mallard. Hen and drake black duck plumages are very similar. Whereas the mallard has a blue wing speculum bordered by white bands, black duck speculums are purple and minus the bands. In flight, black ducks are distinctive because of the white undersides of their wings. Young drakes and hens have olive-green bills (the adult male's is yellow), and all have legs that are reddish, hence the species is called "redlegs" by some people. Typically in flocks of 5 to 25, black ducks are strong flyers, at a speed of 44 mph. Although the hen's calling can be loud and raucous, black ducks are not easily lured by artificial calling. They usually circle warily several times before setting in or, not uncommonly, departing. Black ducks feed mainly on aquatic plants, but those forced by hunting pressure to saltwater shift their diet to mostly animal food, such as clams and small fish. Plant-eaters' table fare rating = 9.0; saltwater idents rating = 4.0.

Average adult length: ♂ 22.5 inches    ♀ 21.0    Average adult weight: ♂ 2.75 pounds    ♀ 2.45



*Pintail*  
*Anas acuta*



Commonly known as the “sprig” in the West, the pintail is among the most abundant duck species in North America, despite significant declines in recent decades. It has greater distribution than any other species of waterfowl in the world. It nests primarily in the continent’s prairie pothole region and migrates mainly in the Pacific and Central flyways. Most winter in California’s Sacramento Valley and coastal regions of the Gulf of Mexico and western Mexico. The pintail is among the most distinctive of ducks in flight, because of its relatively long and narrow wings, long neck, and long, pointed tail. From the tip of its bill to the end of its tail, it is longer than the mallard, but weighs proximately 20 percent less. An acrobatic flier, the pintail is among the fastest of North American puddle ducks, with an average speed of about 50 mph. It’s wingbeat is deeper and faster than that of the mallard. Pintails tend to fly high and in loose formation. Adult pintails and pintails in large flocks may be the most difficult of ducks to lure over decoys. The pintail main vocalizations are a short, plaintive, one-note whistle repeated two or three times by the drake, and a low quack by the hen. The pintail diet is about 50 percent plant food. Table fare rating = 8.5.

Average adult length: ♂ 25.2 inches

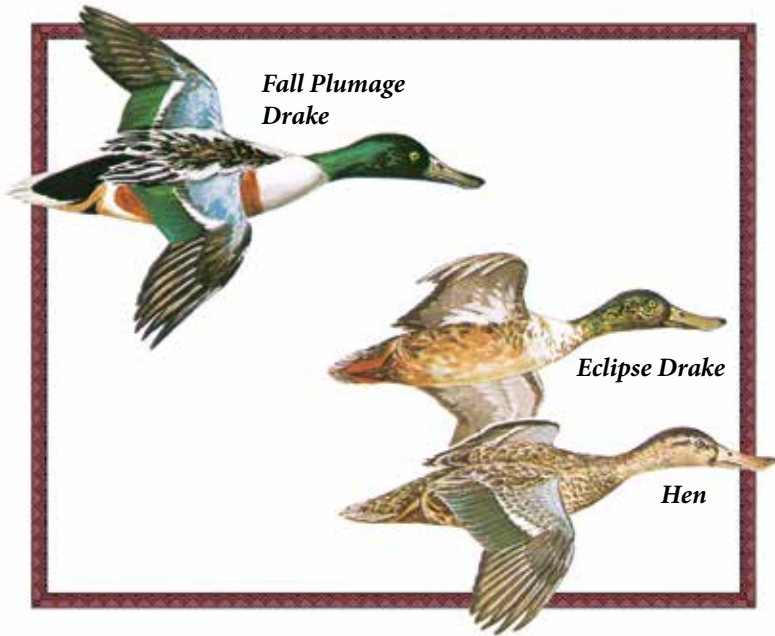
♀ 21.5

Average adult weight: ♂ 2.25 pounds

♀ 1.9



*Shoveler*  
*Anas clypeata*

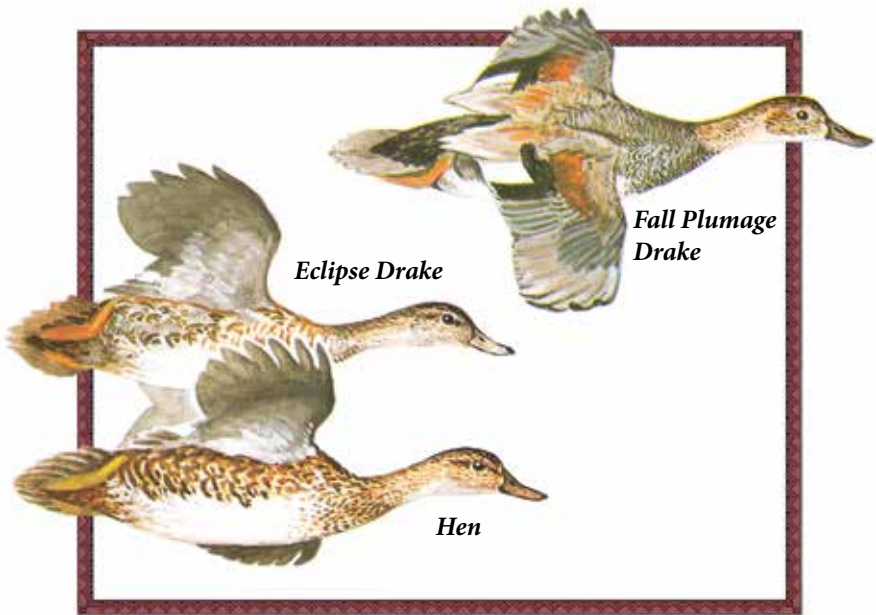


The Northern shoveler is found throughout North America, mainly in the Central and Pacific flyways and rarely in salt or brackish water environments. It is commonly known as “spoonbill,” referring to its spoon-shaped bill, which is approximately twice as wide at the tip as at its base. Although much smaller than the mallard, with who it commonly associates, the shoveler frequently is mistaken for the species. Rarely found in large numbers, “spoonies” usually fly in flocks of x or fewer, in a direct and steady course at about 40 miles per hour. If alarmed, their flight can resemble the twisting, turning acrobatics of blue-winged teal. Not especially vocal, the shoveler’s quack is similar to but softer than that of the hen mallard. Drakes also have a *took-took* call. But the most characteristic sound spoonbills make is a low, guttural *woh, woh*, which is not a call, but the noise of water pulled into the bill during feeding, then forced back out its comb-like teeth, called “lamellae.” Highly sociable and not especially wary, the Northern shoveler is easily lured into shallow-water decoys. This puddle duck us mainly a surface feeder, straining plankton, larvae, small crustaceans, insects and aquatic plant seeds through its lamellae. Table fare rating = 6.0.

Average adult length: ♂ 19.5 inches    ♀ 18.7    Average adult weight: ♂ 1.5 pounds    ♀ 1.4



**Gadwall**  
*Anas strepera*

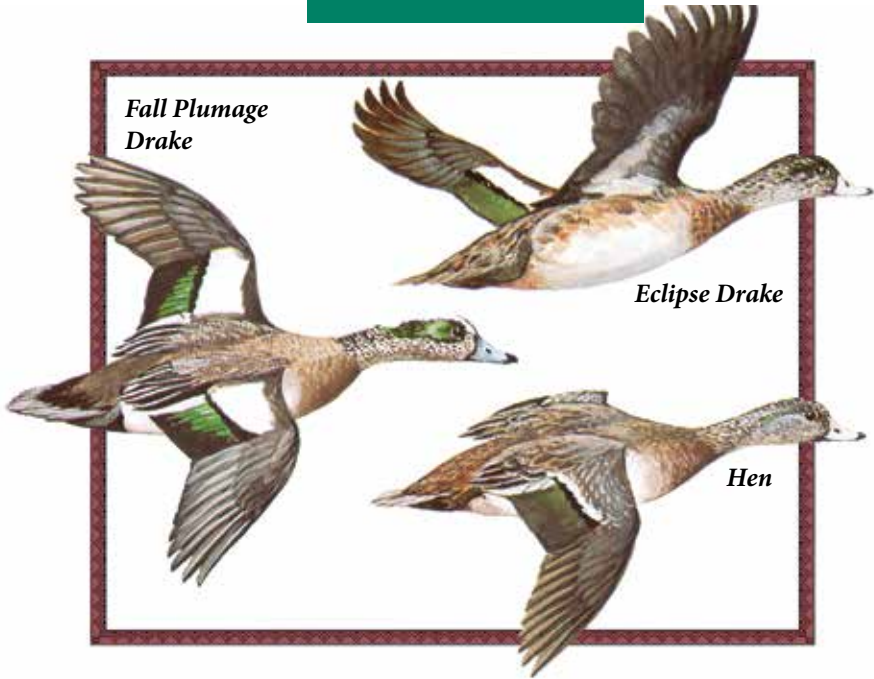


The gadwall also is known as “gray duck.” In flight and at a distance, gadwalls frequently are misidentified as wigeon or hen mallards. However, drake wigeon have much more distinctive markings and a faster wingbeat, and hen mallards are larger and have a slower wingbeat. The gal’s most distinguishing feature is three white speculum feathers, which are visible only in flight. No other puddle duck has such white feathers. Rarely seen in eastern Canada or New England, gadwalls occur mainly in the Central flyway. they prefer freshwater marshes, but can be found in shallow ponds, lakes and rivers with abundant submerged aquatic vegetation. During autumn, gadwalls are among the first ducks to abandon an area in advance of cold or stormy conditions. They migrate mainly at night and in compact flocks ss than 20. Durning other times, gadwall flocks usually are fewer than a dozen birds. Their flight is direct and at approximately 40mph. A social duck, the gadwall decoys readily and is drawn to mallard calls. Drakes have a soft but shrill whistle and, when startled, a low, reedy *kack-kack* call. The hen’s quack is much like that of a hen mallard, but hight pitched and less vociferous. Nearly all of the gadwall diet is vegetable matter. Table fare rating = 6.5.

Average adult length: ♂ 21.0 inches    ♀ 19.5    Average adult weight: ♂ 2.1 pounds    ♀ 1.85



*American Wigeon*  
*Anas americana*



**B**ecause of the drake's white crown, the American wigeon is commonly known as "bald-pate." A puddle duck, it has a fondness for roots of wild celery, which usually are found well below the water surface that the wigeon—a shallow-water, tip-up feeder—cannot easily reach. Wigeon resort to snatching the roots from diving ducks that surface with their intended food. The American wigeon is a swift flyer, averaging about 45 miles per hour. In small, compact flocks, they frequently twist and turn in flight. They also fly lower than most other puddle ducks. Elliptical white bellies and forewings, erratic flight and fairly deep wingbeats that produce distinctive whistling sound make American wigeon readily identifiable. Of average wariness, at least until exposed to shooting, adult wigeon then can be difficult to decoy, except just before daylight. The drake may quack on occasion, but its typical call is a soft, rapid three-note whistle, with the middle note of higher pitch. The hen's primary vocalization is a hoarse croak. Few hunters have success enticing these birds by simulating their calls. More than 90 percent of the American wigeon's diet is vegetable matter. Table fare rating = 7.25.

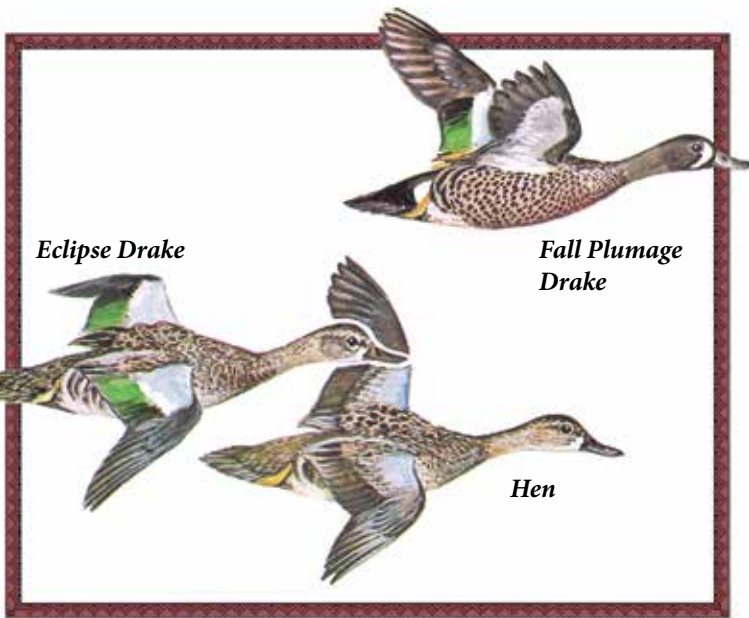
Average adult length: ♂ 20.3 inches    ♀ 19.0    Average adult weight: ♂ 1.8 pounds    ♀ 1.7



*Hen*

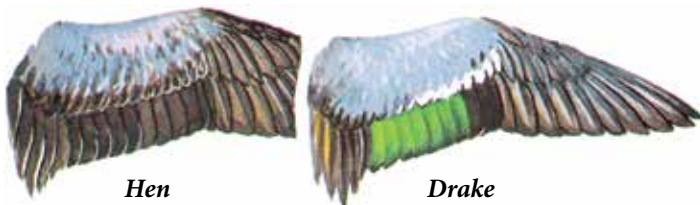
*Drake*

**Blue-winged Teal**  
*Anas discors*

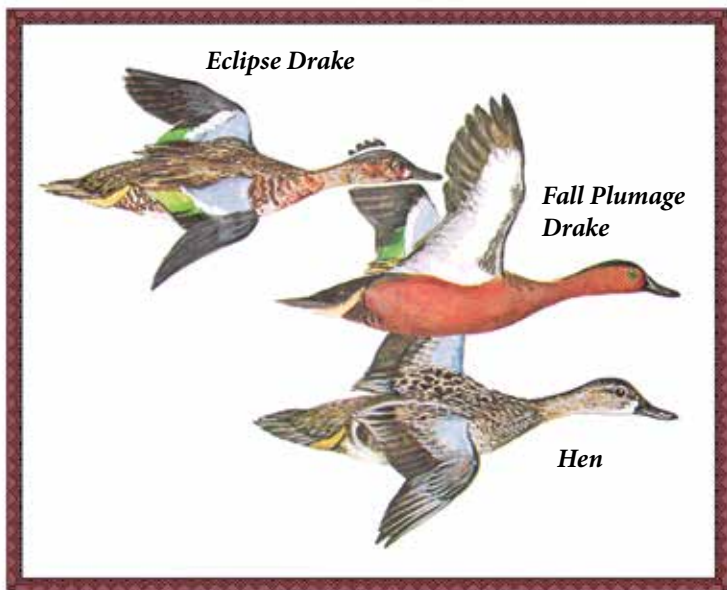


The blue-winged teal is considered a bird of the northern prairies and parklands, which is where it nests. Bluewings are rare west of the Great plains but are found across much of the rest of the US. and southern Canada during winter and migration periods. They are early southern and late northern migrants. They tend to avoid large expanses of water, and prefer potholes, bayous, flooded fields, mudflats and even ditches. The blue-winged teal is a strong flier, but not as fast as most observers believe. However at a normal speed of 48 mph, it seems to fly much more quickly, because of its small size, and low, twisting and swooping flight. These puddle ducks typically fly in small, compact flocks in irregular formation. One of the more sporting ducks because of its combined speed and agility in flight, the bluewing decoys readily, but may circle decoys several times in a swooping or roller coaster pattern before rushing to set in. Except in spring, blue-winged teal are not especially vocal. The drake makes a high-pitched peeping sound. The hen has a staccato nasal quack much like the hen mallard's, but weaker and more repetitious. In flight, bluewings often make a twittering sound. The bluewing diet is more than 70 percent plant food. Table fare rating = 8.6.

Average adult length: ♂ 15.6 inches    ♀ 14.5    Average adult weight: ♂ 1.05 pounds    ♀ 0.85

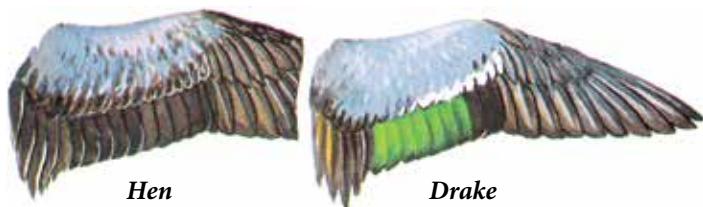


*Cinnamon Teal*  
*Anas cyanoptera*

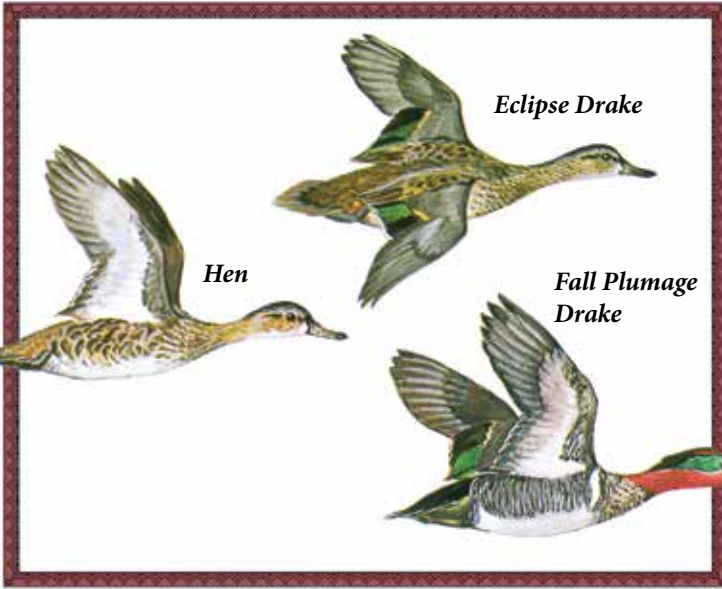


The cinnamon teal occurs mainly in the Pacific Flyway and is rarely seen east of the Rocky Mountains. In breeding (or nuptial) plumage, the drake of this species has red eyes and a spectacular reddish-orange plumage. The cinnamon teal hen is nearly identical in appearance to the blue-winged teal hen. The behavior of both sexes is similar to that of bluewings. The cinnamon teal's flight is low and darting, at an average speed of 47 mph. This teal usually is seen in pairs and in small flocks of three to five. However, it can be found in larger flocks during migration. It typically is found along the edges of ponds and sloughs, and almost never in deep water. A puddle duck, the cinnamon does not dive to feed and almost never tips up. Instead, the Northern shoveler, it strains from water surface or picks food items off mudflats. Cinnamon teal are relatively quiet, but the drake mainly engages in low, rattling chatter, whereas the somewhat more vocal hen's main call is a faint quack. Not notably social, this teal decoys readily, an is relatively incautious and slow to alarm. Mainly hunted in Mexico where most winter, cinnamon consume approximately 80 percent plant food during late summer and autumn. Table fare rating = 7.9.

Average adult length: ♂ 16.0 inches    ♀ 15.5    Average adult weight: ♂ 0.8 pounds    ♀ 0.75



*Green-winged Teal*  
*Anas crecca*



The green-winged teal, sometimes called the “common teal,” is the smallest North American duck. It can be found throughout most of the continent, from coast to coast and from northernmost Alaska (its breeding range) to southernmost Mexico (its winter range), but is most common in the Central and Pacific Flyways. Greenwings seek shallow ponds, streams, bays and marshes. More so than any other duck species, they prefer to feed on mudflats or temporarily flooded grainfields. Their average speed is 48 mph, but green-winged teal are exceptionally fast in windy conditions. Like blue-winged and cinnamon teal, the greenwing flies low, in a compact, irregular flock formation, and performs rapid twisting and turning maneuvers. Its rapid wingbeat produces a whistling sound. Greenwing flocks are relatively large, commonly including 50 to 100 birds; in migration and on winter range, flocks of several hundred are not unusual. Drakes chirp or twitter softly and have a high-pitched whistle. Hens have a mild quack. A social bird, the greenwing is attracted to decoys, but tends to land in open water 20 yards or so from decoys and swim in. Slightly more than 90 percent of the green-winged teal’s diet is vegetable matter. Table fare rating = 8.1.

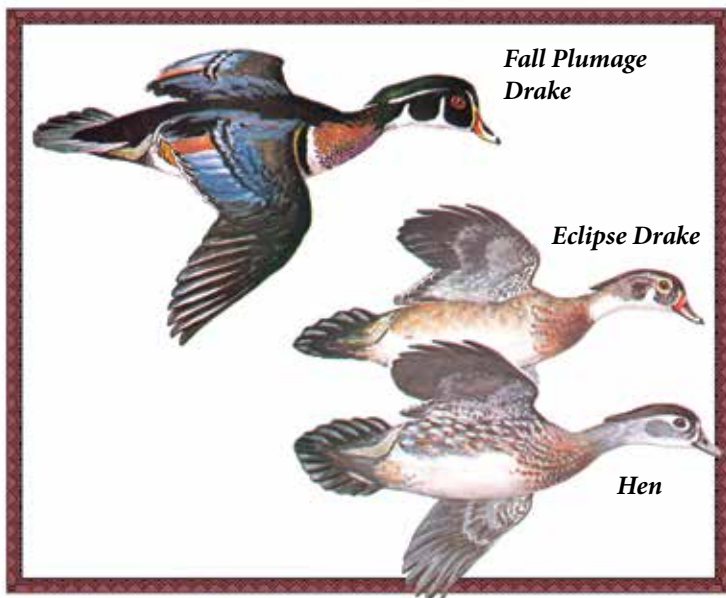
Average adult length: ♂ 14.75 inches ♀ 13.9

Average adult weight: ♂ 0.71 pounds ♀ 0.68





*Wood Duck*  
*Anas sponsa*



The wood duck has nicknames that refer to its colorful plumage (bridal duck), food habits (acorn duck), vocalization (squealer), habitat preference (swamp duck), and more. Found only in North America and mostly in the Mississippi Flyway, the “woodie” inhabits most types of wetlands, rivers, ponds and freshwater lakes. It perches and nests in trees. Ninety percent of wood ducks are hatched in tree cavities. It has the largest wing to body ratio of any duck species, which, along with a large tail, large eyes and excellent peripheral vision, enable it to fly quickly and acrobatically through woodlands. The woodie is relatively easy to identify in flight because its crest head and broad tail give it a blocky appearance. Also, it flies about 37 mph, strokes of its broad wings cause an up and down bobbing. It is seen most often in pairs or flocks of 4 to 15, but may roost by the hundreds in autumn and winter. Wood ducks have a dozen vocalizations. The hen’s high-intensity “hawk” call, *Weeeek-Weeeek*, given when alarmed may be heard a quarter mile away. The drake’s squeals and twittering calls are very soft. Even though it is not a social duck, the woodie will decoy readily and directly early in the hunting season. The diversity of its diet, which is 90 percent vegetable matter, is second only to that of the mallard. Table fare rating = 8.4.

Average adult length: ♂ 20.0 inches

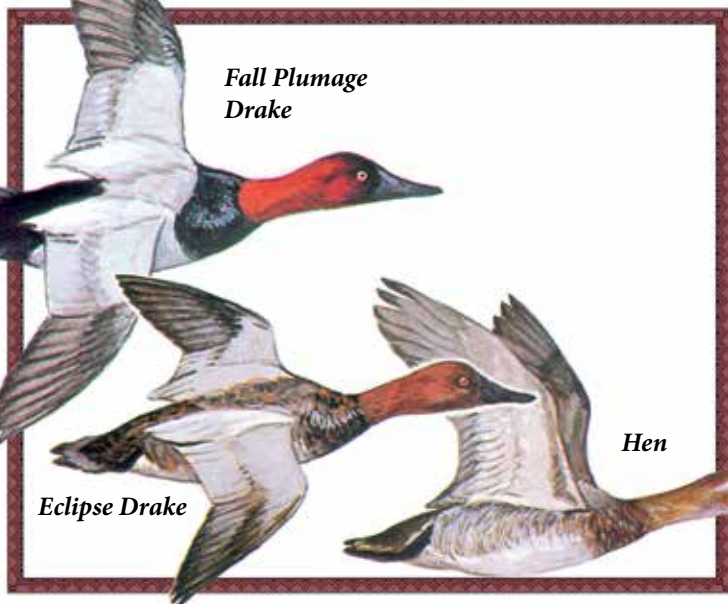
♀ 19.5

Average adult weight: ♂ 1.5 pounds

♀ 1.45



*Canvasback*  
*Aythya valisineria*



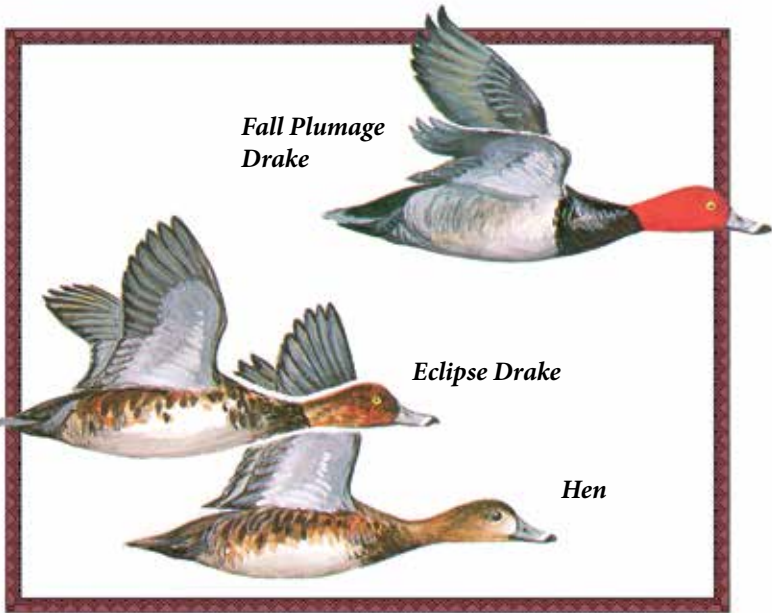
During the era of market gunning, the canvasback was the “king” of North American ducks. It lost that status when its numbers drastically declined between 1890 and 1930. The “an” nests mainly on sloughs and potholes of central Canada and the Dakotas, but in winter this diver normally is associated with open water of lakes and bays where it rafts in large numbers. Perhaps no faster or not much faster than red-breasted mergansers and pintails in wind-aided circumstances, the canvasback may have the fastest cruising flight speed, at about 60 mph. In flight, the can is distinguished by a stocky body, feet outstretched beyond the tail, a long neck, and erect head with a wedge-shaped, long, dark bill and sloping forehead. The wingbeat is rapid and noisy. Their flight is direct. Migrating cans fly high, in lines or Vs, and usually in flocks of 30 birds or less, but occasionally several hundred. Local (nonmigratory) flights are typically by compact, irregular flocks of 5 to 12. A social duck, the canvasback is fairly easily drawn to large decoy sets. It has many vocalizations. Generally, the drake coos, growls, peeps and croaks. Foremost of the hen’s call is a loud *kuk-kuk-kuk*. The canvasback’s diet is 80 per cent aquatic plants. Table fare rating = 8.5.

Average adult length: ♂ 20.75 inches ♀ 19.8

Average adult weight: ♂ 2.75 pounds ♀ 2.55



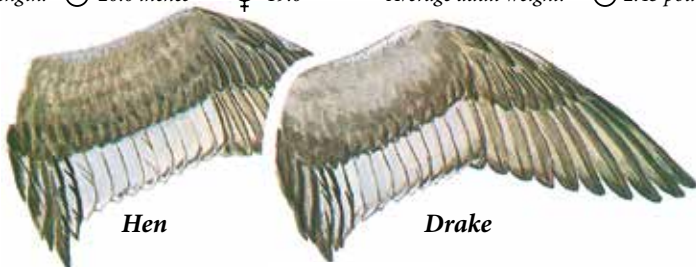
*Redhead*  
*Aythya americana*



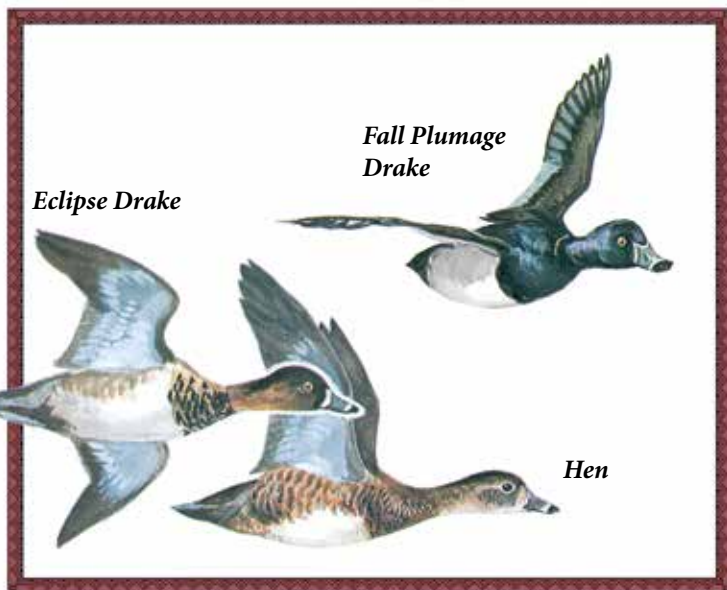
The redhead, also known as “pouchard,” occurs in all of the Flyways, but most commonly in the Central. A product of the continent’s prairie pothole region, it occupies a wide range of habitats, from shallow marshes to deep lakes and bays. It winters mainly along the Gulf Coast, coastal Mexico, and in the Chesapeake Bay and coastal Carolinas. A diver, the redhead often associates with canvasbacks and scaup. On certain traditional winter grounds it may gather on deep water in rafts of several thousand. In flight, the redhead can be easily mistaken for the mallard, because of similar body conformation, color pattern and wing beat. The redhead is slightly smaller than the mallard, but at a usual flight speed of about 49 mph, is somewhat faster. It flies mainly in pairs or in irregular lines or compact wedge-shaped flocks of fewer than 15. In migration, redheads typically fly in V formation. Redheads are social and relatively unwary; they decoy directly and fairly readily to extensive diver sets. More vocal than other diver males, the drake has a low purr and a cat-like *mee-ow*. The hen has a loud, high-pitched quack. Redheads consume a higher percentage (90) of plant food than does any other diver species. Table fare rating = 6.8.

Average adult length: ♂ 20.0 inches ♀ 19.0

Average adult weight: ♂ 2.45 pounds ♀ 2.15



*Ring-necked Duck*  
*Aythya collaris*



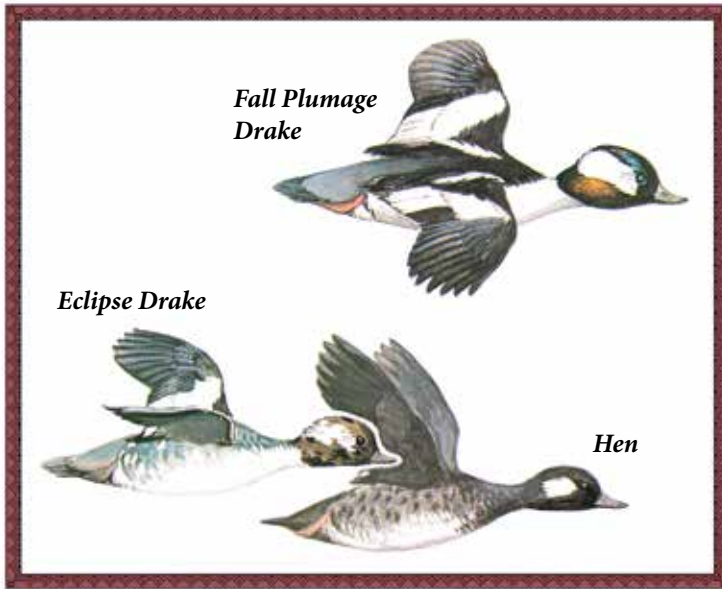
The ring-necked duck is found coast to coast in North America, but is most common in the Mississippi Flyway. In the South, it is widely known as “blackjack.” Another nickname, “ringbill,” may be more apt, because a brown ring on the drake’s neck is barely visible, whereas the blue-gray bills of both sexes have light rings—one at the base and one behind the black tip. The ringneck drake sometimes is mistaken for a lesser scaup drake. The ringneck hen is sometimes misidentified as a hen redhead. Ringnecks frequent marshes, woodland ponds, bottomland lakes, streams and swamp openings. They fly in irregular formation at an average speed of about 42 mph and rarely in flocks of more than 20. They exhibit more teal-like twisting and darting flight than do other divers. Ringnecks tend to feed, loaf and roost in small groups. They do not decoy as readily as other deep-water ducks, but when they do decoy, the approach usually is low, direct and incautious. The ringneck’s primary vocalization is a purring growl, but neither males or females “talk” much during autumn. This diver, with a mainly (80 percent) vegetarian diet, prefers to feed in shallow water, but will dive for food in water 40 feet deep. Table fare rating = 6.0.

Average adult length: ♂ 17.2 inches ♀ 16.6

Average adult weight: ♂ 1.65 pounds ♀ 1.5



**Bufflehead**  
*Bucephala albeola*



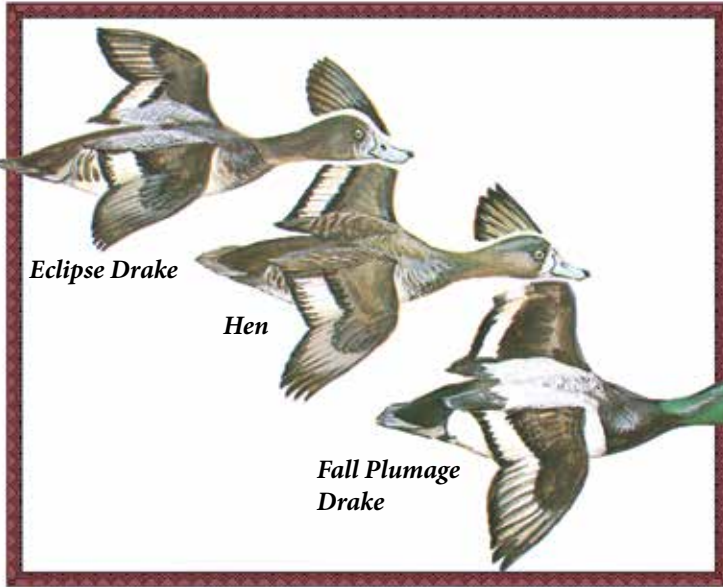
The bufflehead occurs throughout most of the continent. With a preference for nesting in tree cavities, it mainly inhabits woodland lakes and ponds in summer. In winter, it typically is found on coastal waters and interior rivers. Also nicknamed “butterball” and “little whistler,” the bufflehead received its name as an abbreviated form of “buffalo head,” referring to its large head in proportion to its body. The bufflehead’s small size, white wing patches, large white crown on the drake’s iridescent black head, a wing-beat more rapid than that of all other ducks are the main identifying characteristics. Bufflehead are fast flyers, at about 44 mph, usually as pairs, trios or in compact flocks of fewer than 10. They tend to fly directly and less than 30 feet over water. Very social, they readily set into decoys. The bufflehead can launch or spring itself airborne, as most puddle ducks can. It has the unique ability to propel itself from underwater directly into flight. Constantly moving about on water and frequently diving for food, it also has the nickname “dipper.” Not very vocal, the drake has a squeak and the hen a feeble, hoarse quack. Primarily a deep water feeder, the bufflehead has an 80-percent animal food diet. Table fare rating = 4.9.

Average adult length: ♂ 14.75 inches ♀ 13.2

Average adult weight: ♂ 1.1 pounds ♀ 0.8



**Greater Scaup**  
*Aythya marila*



The greater scaup also is known as “broadbill” and, like the lesser scaup, “bluebill.” It is primarily a coastal bird, found on large bays, sounds and inlets of the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, although some associate with lesser scaup on and around the Great Lakes. The greater scaup is somewhat larger than the lesser, but the two birds appear nearly identical in flight. The only distinction in both sexes is a single white stripe on the back of the wing that runs through the secondary feathers and about half way through the primaries of the greater scaup, whereas the lesser scaup’s stripe goes only through the secondaries. Greater scaup fly about 45 mph and in large, compact flocks, usually 30 to 100 feet over water, but very high while migrating. Greater scaup flocks tend to be somewhat less erratic in flight than those of lesser scaup. Social unsuspecting, wintering greater scaup may be found in rafts of hundreds or thousands and commonly ear canvasbacks and redheads. They decoy easily and directly. Although relatively quiet, the greater scaup’s standard call is a harsh *scaup, scaup, scaup* sound, from which its name is derived. The hen’s alarm call is *scaa, scaa*; it also produces a soft *tucka-tucka* sound. Slightly more than half of the greater scaup’s diet is animal food. Table fare rating = 5.35.

Average adult length: ♂ 18.5 inches    ♀ 17.0

Average adult weight: ♂ 2.4 pounds    ♀ 2.15

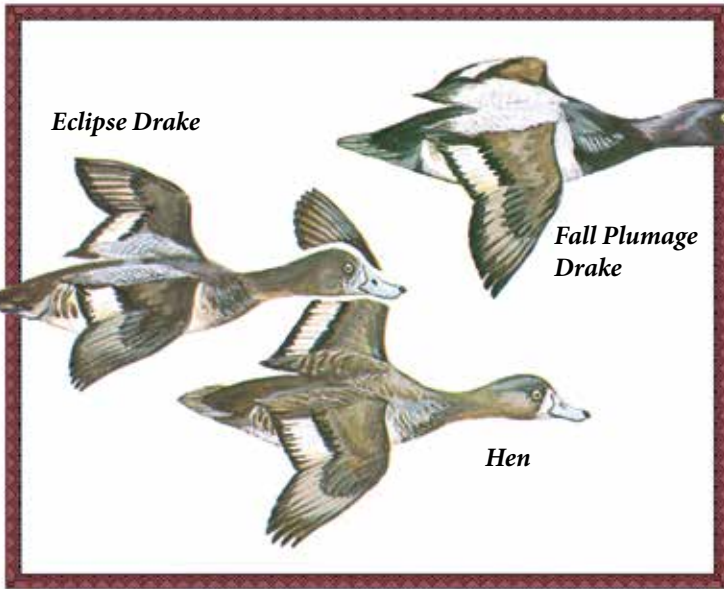


*Hen*



*Drake*

*Lesser Scaup*  
*Aythya affinis*



Commonly known as “bluebill” or “little bluebill,” the lesser scaup is mainly an interior, freshwater duck. It is the most abundant diving duck in the Mississippi Flyway, its major migration corridor between nesting grounds in the prairie pothole region the Yukon to wintering grounds along the coasts of Mexico, Texas, Louisiana and Florida. In spring and summer, lesser scaup are found in ponds, sloughs, potholes and open marshes. In autumn and winter, they frequent large lakes, rivers and bays often in rafts of hundreds or even thousands. The lesser scaup is very similar to the greater scaup. The lesser drake has an angular purplish-black head, whereas the greater scaup drake’s head is relatively round and greenish-black. Both scaups typically fly in large (20 to 50), compact flocks. Except when actually migrating, lesser scaup flight is fast—about 47 mph—low, dipping and twisting. The rapid wingbeat of these birds flying close together produces a jet-like whooshing sound. Social and unwary, the lesser scaup is not very vocal. The drake has a purr or coo; the hen also purrs or burps softly, mainly in flight, and will utter a sharp *scaup, scaup* when alarmed. About 60 percent of the lesser scaup’s diet is plant matter. Table fare rating = 5.1.

Average adult length: ♂ 17.0 inches ♀ 16.5

Average adult weight: ♂ 1.85 pounds ♀ 1.65

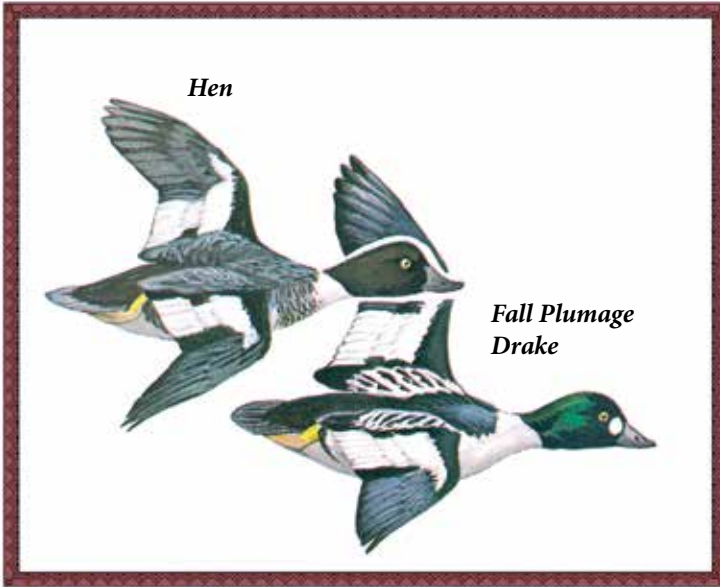


*Hen*



*Drake*

*Common Goldeneye*  
*Bucephala clangula*



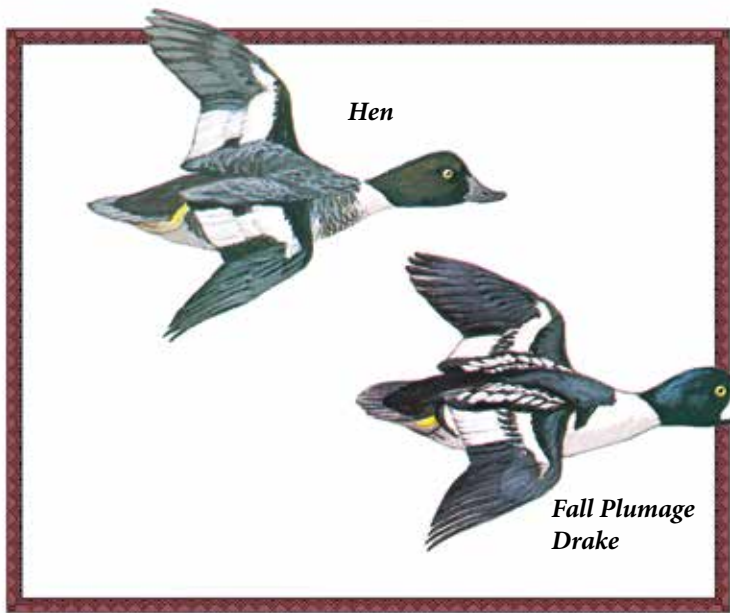
The common goldeneye is nicknamed “whistler” because of a resonant whistling it’s fast-beating wings make—which may be heard as much as a half mile away. It mostly inhabits large lakes and rivers in wooded regions. Its breeding range is throughout most of Canada and much of Alaska, where it nests primarily in tree cavities. It winters mainly along both coasts and in the Great Lakes region. similar in many respects to the Barrow’s goldeneye, the common goldeneye drake is most readily differentiated by a large, oval white patch below its eye and at the base of its bill. Also, the common goldeneye’s head is peaked and a dark, glossy green. Both birds are distinguished in flight by their large heads, short necks and chunky bodies that are mainly white on the undersides. As singles, pairs or compact flocks of 6 to 12, common goldeneye fly about 46 mph and somewhat erratically. Only semi-social, they do not readily decoy. On water, a startled common goldeneye is as likely to dive as to fly. Not especially vocal, the drake’s main call is a soft *karoo, karoo*, whereas the hen has a guttural quack. About 75 percent of this diver’s diet is animal food. Table fare rating = 4.3.

Average adult length: ♂ 19.2 inches ♀ 17.0 Average adult weight: ♂ 2.4 pounds ♀ 1.75





*Barrow's Goldeneye*  
*Bucephala islandica*



*Hen*

*Fall Plumage Drake*

The Barrow's goldeneye, sometimes called "Rocky Mountain whistler," is found mainly along the Pacific Coast from the Alaska peninsula to California's San Francisco Bay. Another population inhabits Atlantic Coast waters from southern Greenland to New York State's Long Island. Birds of the western population prefer to nest in tree cavities; those of the eastern population nest in rock depressions and fissures because most of their summer range is essentially treeless. Barrow's goldeneye drakes have a purplish-black, round head with a crescent-shaped white cheek patch. In contrast to that of the drake common goldeneye, the white portion of the Barrow's drake's wing covers only the speculum feathers. The Barrow's goldeneye hen is virtually identical to the common goldeneye hen, except in late winter and spring, when the Barrow's hen has an all yellow bill and the common goldeneye hen's bill has only a yellow tip. The Barrow's goldeneye flight characteristics are nearly the same as the common goldeneye, but the Barrow's is quite unwary. It decoys readily, but almost always only in calm water. A deep-water feeder, it eats about 80 percent animal food. Table fare rating = 3.7.

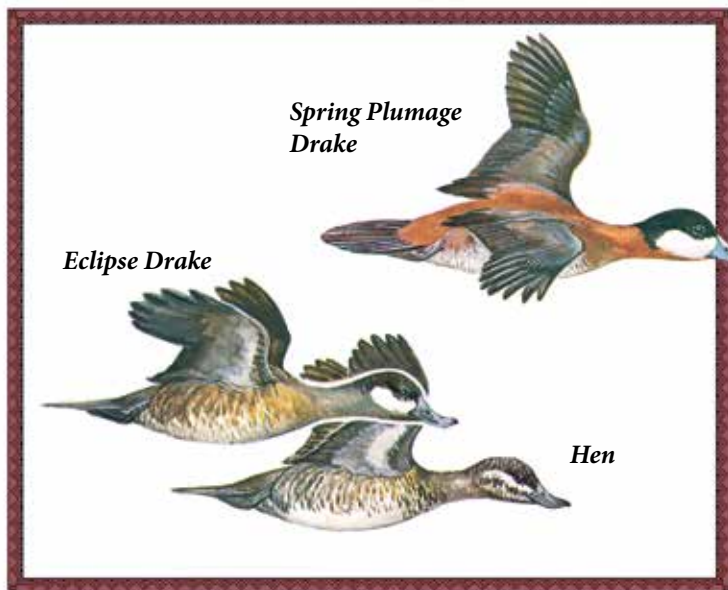
Average adult length: ♂ 19.2 inches      ♀ 17.0      Average adult weight: ♂ 2.15 pounds      ♀ 1.35



*Hen*

*Drake*

**Ruddy Duck**  
*Oxyura jamaicensis*



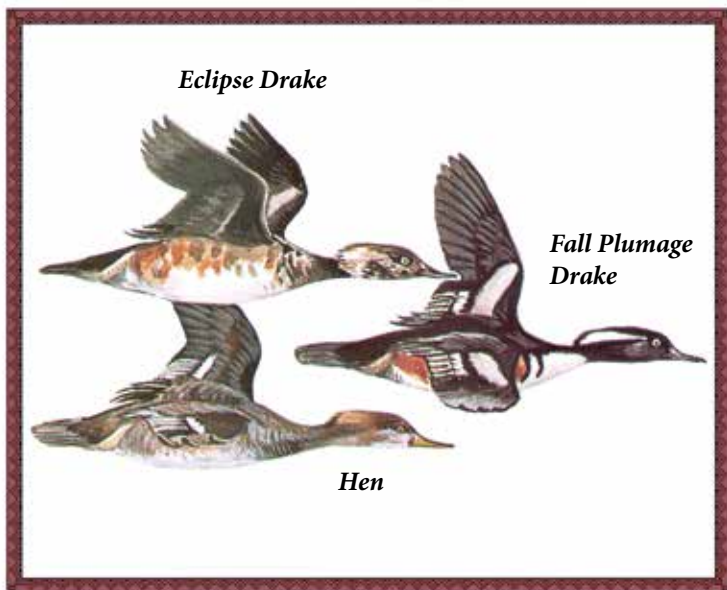
In spring and summer, the ruddy duck is found mainly in freshwater wetlands, lakes and ponds. In autumn and winter, it is found on lakes, rivers and estuaries along both coasts. On the water, the ruddy duck swims with its tail fanned out and erect at a 45 to 90 degree angle, earning it the nickname “stifftail.” It is very quick to dive or submerge when alarmed. Another characteristic feature is a concave bill that is grayish-black in autumn and bright sky-blue in spring. The ruddy duck’s short, round wings and chunky body cause it to struggle more than other ducks to take flight. Its comical, running, labored take-offs have earned it the nickname “booby coot” in some localities. It flies low in small, compact flocks at about 38 mph. Its rapid wingbeats produce a buzzing sound, so the ruddy has yet another nickname, “bumblebee duck.” Its landings are generally abrupt and graceless. Ruddy ducks are average “talkers,” but their vocalizations are so low that they seem to be silent. Hens make a weak clucking sound, and drakes have a slightly louder *ip-ip-clack-clack* call. This diver’s diet is 70 to 75 percent plant matter. Table fare rating = 4.8.

Average adult length: ♂ 15.5 inches    ♀ 15.25    Average adult weight: ♂ 1.2 pounds    ♀ 1.2



**Sexes Similar**

*Hooded Merganser*  
*Mergus cucullatus*



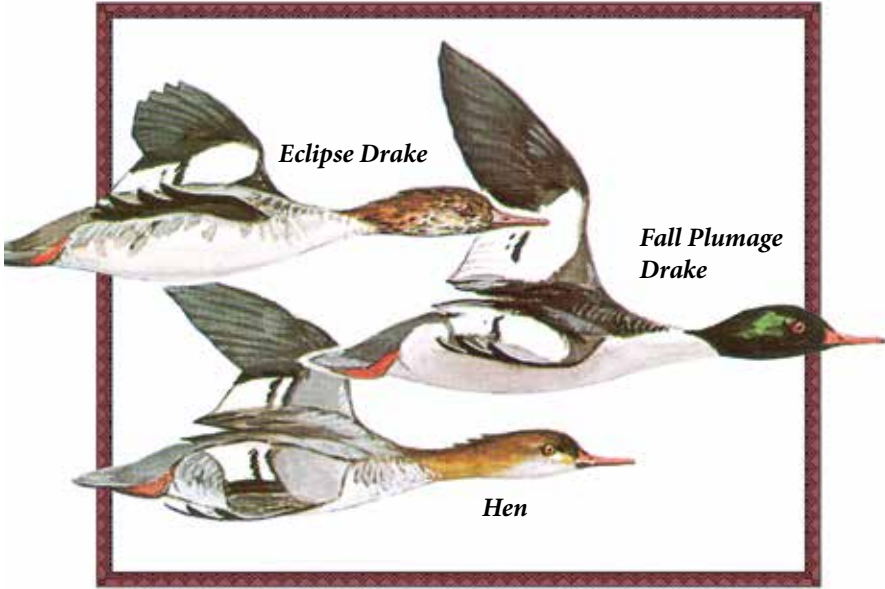
Of the three merganser species, the hooded merganser is smallest; it approximates the size of the wood duck, with whom it competes for tree-cavity nesting sites. All mergansers share the common nicknames “sawbill” or “spikebill,” referring to their long, narrow and serrated bill, and “fishduck” because the majority of their diets is fish. The only merganser to be found exclusively in North America, the hooded’s primary summer range is the glacial lake/mixed forest region around the Great Lakes. It winters mainly on freshwater ponds, streams, lakes and wetlands near the U.S. coasts. The drake hooded merganser’s most prominent feature is its fan-shaped head crest. The hen’s crest is russet brown, slants backwards and is much smaller than the male’s crest. Hooded mergansers usually fly as singles, pairs or in flocks of fewer than 10. With very rapid wingbeats, they fly about 47 mph and typically in single-file formation low over water. Their wings also help them propel underwater and catch fish. Unlike the other mergansers, the hooded can leap straight up from water. It is wary and unsociable. Its call is a low, clipped quack. This diving duck’s diet is 98 percent animal food. Table fare rating = 3.0.

Average adult length: ♂ 18.0 inches    ♀ 17.1

Average adult weight: ♂ 1.6 pounds    ♀ 1.5



*Common Merganser*  
*Mergus merganser*

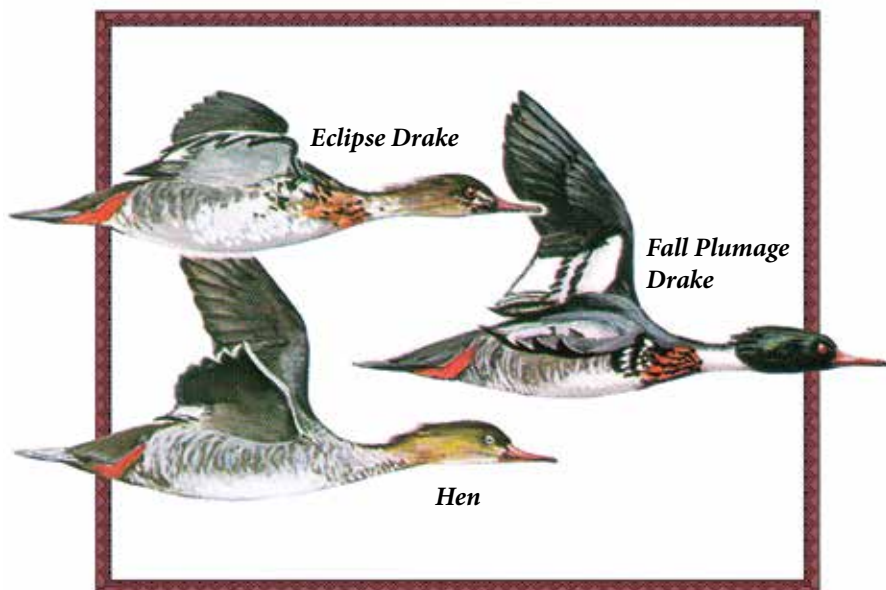


**L**argest of the mergansers this “sawbill” nests mainly in central and southern Canada, but also in the northern Great Lakes region, uppermost New England, coastal Pacific northwest and central Rocky Mountain region. It winters throughout the continental U.S. except in the Gulf Coast. It also winters in portions of southern Canada and north-central Mexico. Like the hooded merganser, the common or “American” merganser mainly nests in tree cavities, 100 feet or more above the ground. Also like its hooded cousin, the common merganser prefers freshwater ponds, lakes and streams. Common and red-breasted merganser females are nearly identical. The drake common merganser has a greenish-black teal with a slightly elevated crest. Its belly, chest and sides are white, tinted with pink. In flight, the white body contrasts sharply with the dark head. Appearing elongated and streamlined, these divers fly about 50 mph, usually low over water and in single file as pairs or flocks of a dozen or fewer. During migration, as many as two dozen fly high and in an irregular formation. Their mainly recognized vocalization is a abrupt, hoarse croak. Dextrous and speedy underwater, common mergansers feed almost exclusively on aquatic animals. It is not a social duck, nor readily drawn to decoys. Table fare rating = 2.8.

Average adult length: ♂ 25.5 inches    ♀ 23.0    Average adult weight: ♂ 3.7 pounds    ♀ 2.75



*Red-breasted Merganser*  
*Mergus serrator*



The middle-size merganser, this “spikebill” is the only one that nests on the ground. Its summer range is in eastern and northern Canada and in Alaska. It winters in the Great Lakes and coastal waters, but unlike the other mergansers, the red-breasted tends to be found in saltwater. It prefers large bodies of water on which wave action is minimal. Like the common merganser drake, the male red-breasted has an iridescent greenish-black head; like the hooded merganser, the red-breasted has a crest that can be raised. The male red-breasted merganser has many similarities to the common merganser, but a major visual distinction is the former’s rusty-red breast and a white neck collar. The common merganser has a white neck and breast. Red-breasted mergansers may congregate in groups of several hundred on bays and lakes, but they fly in pairs or flocks of 5 to 25, but mostly 5 to 12. With a rapid and shallow wingbeat, the red-breasted flies about 55 mph and in a straight line, 3 to 15 feet above water surface. A relatively quiet bird, it produces a low guttural, toneless croak. Its food is almost entirely fish and other aquatic animals. Table fare rating = 2.0.

Average adult length: ♂ 22.3 inches

♀ 20.75

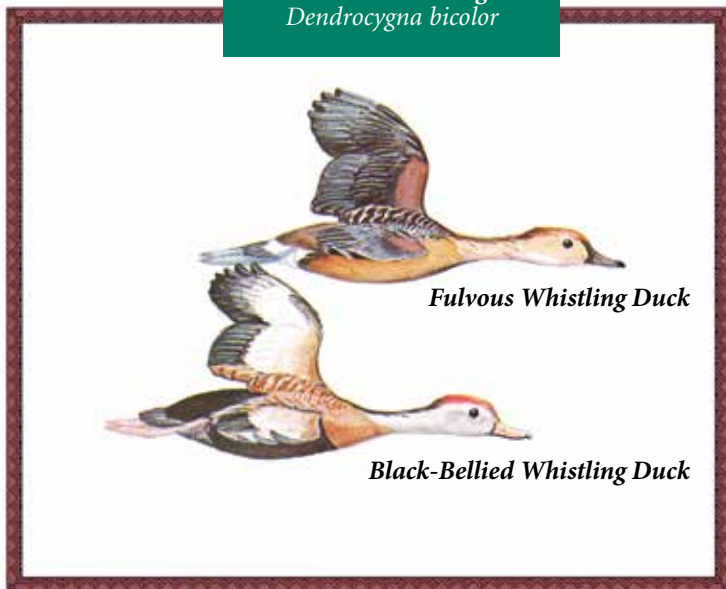
Average adult weight: ♂ 2.25 pounds

♀ 2.0



**Fulvous Whistling Duck**  
*Dendrocygna bicolor*

**Black-bellied Whistling Duck**  
*Dendrocygna bicolor*



**Fulvous Whistling Duck**

**Black-Bellied Whistling Duck**

The whistling or “tree” ducks are found mainly along coastal Mexico. Small numbers of fulvous whistling ducks also are in California, the Gulf states and occasionally along the Atlantic Coast. They are more numerous than black-bellied whistling ducks, which occur in Mexico an coastal Texas and Louisiana. The fulvous spends much of its time in and near irrigated rice fields. It also inhabits freshwater marshes and lakes. The black-bellied typically resides in grain fields and freshwater swamps, marshes, ponds and lagoons. Active mainly at night, both species perch in trees. The fulvous nests on the ground, whereas most black-bellieds nest in tree cavities. The fulvous looks more like a long-legged goose; the black-bellied, being very erect, has a heron-like profile. In flight, their broad wings, slow wingbeats, extended necks and outstretched, trailing legs and feet cause them to resemble ibises. They are very vocal in flight. The main call of the fulvous is an incessant, shrill *kee-tee*. The black-bellied’s is a high-pitched *pe-chee-chee*. Unwary and plodding flyers, these whistling ducks are not attracted to decoys, and typically are harvested as curiosities or incidental to other waterfowl. Their diets are 90 percent vegetable. Table fare rating = 8.0.

*Fulvous*  
Average adult length: ♂ 19.5 inches ♀ 19.0 Average adult weight: ♂ 1.75 pounds ♀ 1.5

*Black-bellied*  
Average adult length: ♂ 20.0 inches ♀ 19.5 Average adult weight: ♂ 1.85 pounds ♀ 1.8



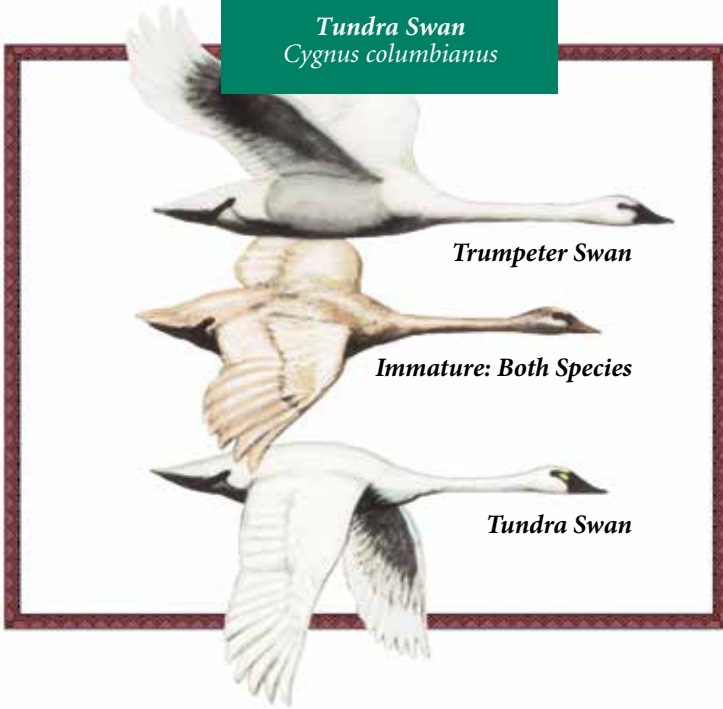
**Fulvous**



**Black-Bellied**

*Trumpeter Swan*  
*Cygnus buccinator*

*Tundra Swan*  
*Cygnus columbianus*



*Trumpeter Swan*

*Immature: Both Species*

*Tundra Swan*

These are North America's largest waterfowl. The trumpeter is larger and has a relatively longer neck. The tundra swan has a yellow marking on its bill in front of the eyes. Otherwise, these swans are difficult to tell apart. Trumpeter swans nest mainly in Alaska and winter along coastal British Columbia. The nesting range of the much more numerous tundra swan spans much of the subarctic and Arctic tundra across the continent north of Hudson's Bay. Major wintering areas of the tundra swan are the Chesapeake Bay on the Atlantic Coast and delta marshlands behind San Francisco Bay on the Pacific Coast. Both species prefer rivers, lakes and ponds, but the tundra swan also is inclined to frequent large bays and feed in grain fields. Both swans have a shallow wingbeat and fly about 43 mph. Trumpeters normally are found in groups of 3 to 6, but may form flocks of 20 to 50. Tundra swans travel in oblique lines or loose Vs, typically in flocks of 20 to 100. Their primary vocalization is a high-pitched, quavering *who oo*. The trumpeter's call is a loud trumpeting, similar to a French horn. Both swans eat plant matter almost exclusively. The tundra swan is hunted in only a few areas. Table fare rating = 7.6.

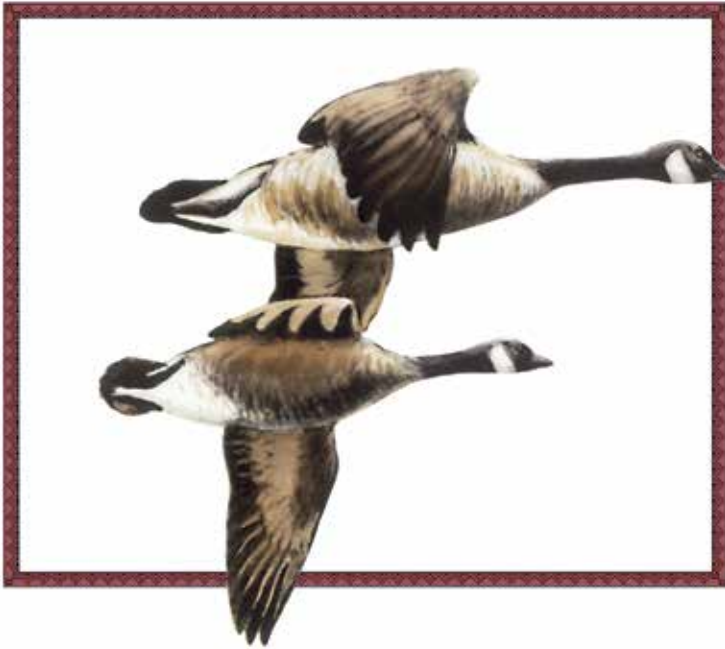
*Trumpeter*  
Average adult length: ♂ 59.0 inches ♀ 57.0 Average adult weight: ♂ 28.0 pounds ♀ 23.0

*Tundra*  
Average adult length: ♂ 53.0 inches ♀ 51.5 Average adult weight: ♂ 25.1 pounds ♀ 23.0



*Typical Adult - All Species*

Canada Goose  
*Branta canadensis*



There are 11 recognized races of Canada geese, and the major physical distinction among them is large. Largest is the giant Canada goose, with adults weighing 10 to 18 pounds; smallest is the cackling Canada goose, with adult weight ranging from 2.5 to 4 pounds. Despite size variations among the races, their appearance is quite similar, although some are darker. The sexes are nearly identical. The smaller races of Canada geese breed mainly in the Arctic tundra; the large and medium races nest throughout most of the rest of Canada. They winter throughout the continental United States. “Canadas” frequent marshes, lakes, ponds, bays, rivers and grainfields. Geese of the larger races commonly are referred to as “honkers,” which is the species’ characteristic call — a deep-throated *uhn-Whonk*. Geese of the smaller races are called “cacklers,” because their primary vocalization is a relatively high-pitched, resonant *unk unk unk* or *lik lik lik*. Highly social birds, young Canadas in particular are readily attracted to decoy sets in shallow water and feeding fields. Geese characteristically fly in irregular lines of V formations of 20 to 100 or more birds. They have deep wingbeats and, although they seem to fly slowly, Canadas are deceptively swift at about 42 mph. Nearly 100 percent of their diet is vegetable. Table fare rating = 7.9.

Average adult length: Cackling 27.0 inches; Giant 41.0  
Average adult wingspan: Cackling 52.0 inches; Giant 70.0



Typical Adult - All Races



**Brant**  
*Branta bernicla*



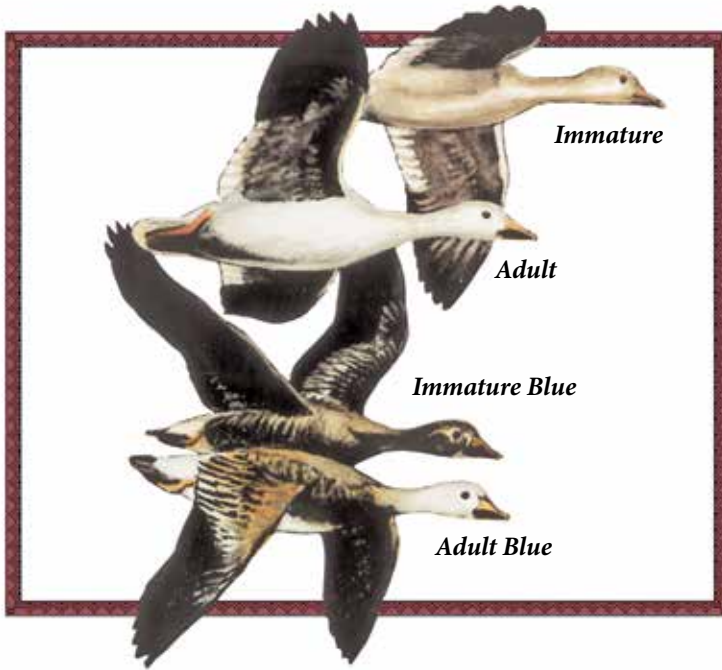
There are two subspecies of brant, and they are associated with the continent's opposite coasts. Atlantic brant nest mainly in the Canadian Arctic, especially along the west coast of Hudson's Bay, and winter along the Atlantic coast from Maine to north Carolina. Black brant nest along the Arctic coasts of Alaska and Canada, and winter along the Pacific coast, mostly in Baja California and northern Mexico. Both prefer salt-water habitat — from oceans to bays and estuaries to tidal marshes. The major physical distinction between them is the Atlantic brant's white breast and belly, whereas the breast and belly of the black brant are dark. Brant are the fastest flying geese, averaging about 47 mph. With a short, rapid wingbeat more like that of a duck than a goose, the brant flies in long, irregular line or changing masses. They are talkative in flight, making a variety of calls, growls and gabbling sounds. The most common call is a metallic *grronk grronk grronk*, which can be heard at long distances. The preferred food of the brant is eelgrass, and the balance of their diet is essentially other aquatic plants. In the bygone era of market hunting, brant invariably commanded higher prices than of any other waterfowl species. Table fare rating = 8.3.

Average adult length: ♂ 24.5 inches    ♀ 23.0    Average adult weight: ♂ 3.3 pounds    ♀ 2.9



**Typical Adult - Both Races**

*Snow Goose*  
*Chen caerulescens*



There are two races of snow geese — the greater and the lesser — and two color phases of the lesser — white and blue. Both races nest mainly in the Canadian Arctic. All greater snow geese, which winter almost entirely in the tidal regions of the Chesapeake Bay and coastal North Carolina, are white. Migrating and wintering lesser snow geese are found in all four flyways, but least of all in the Atlantic. The blue lesser snow goose — or “blue goose” — is found mainly in the Mississippi Flyway. Westward, white lessers are progressively more common than “blues.” The greater race is slightly larger and has a longer bill. Snow geese generally prefer ponds, lakes, open marshes and grainfields. With shallow rapid wingbeats, snow geese fly at about 44 mph, in flocks of 20 or more and, not uncommonly, hundreds. They typically fly high on migration and locally. Their flight formation is an undulating irregular line giving rise to this goose’s common nickname, “wavie.” Adult snow geese tend to be quite wary and are not easy to call or decoy. They are very noisy in flight, with the main call a shrill *ow-ow-ow*. Snow geese are mainly vegetarians. Table fare rating = 6.2.

Average adult length: ♂ 29.5 inches    ♀ 28.5

Average adult weight: ♂ 6.25 pounds    ♀ 5.6



*Adult*



*Adult Blue*

*White-fronted Goose*  
*Anser albifrons*



The white-fronted goose also is widely known as “specklebelly.” Both of these common names derive from physical characteristics. The white front refers to white feathers in the forepart of the face. Specklebelly comes from dark feathers scattered, speckled, or tiger striped or barred on a grayish-brown underside. Most whitefronts nest on the tundra of Alaska, the Yukon and Northwest Territories. They migrate chiefly in the Pacific and Central flyways to winter ranges along coastal California, Texas, Louisiana and in central and western Mexico. They are found on marshes, ponds, lakes, bays and, during migration, in grainfields. Typically in large V-shaped flocks, white-fronted geese fly with slow, deep wingbeats, but are agile and fairly fast flyers, at about 43 mph. White-fronted geese are seen occasionally in the company of lesser snow geese, but they are considerably less wary and more readily decoyed than these companions. The most vocal goose, the specklebelly has several highly distinctive, loud and high-pitched calls. One is a *waa-waa-waa*, which sounds like raucous laughter and has given the bird another nickname, “laughing goose.” Another is *kow-yow-kow-yow-kow-yow*. The whitefront’s diet is primarily aquatic vegetation, grasses and grains. Table fare rating = 8.8.

Average adult length: ♂ 29.0 inches    ♀ 27.5    Average adult weight: ♂ 6.3 pounds    ♀ 5.5



