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***Birds of the Rocky Mountains*—Species Accounts, pages 76–109:
Swans, Geese and Ducks**

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Tundra (Whistling) Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)

Identification: This is one of two swans native to the area, and the only one likely to be observed in large migratory flocks. It is best told from the very similar but larger trumpeter swan by its higher-pitched, more yelping voice, which lacks the resonant tones of the trumpeter. At close range a yellow spot may be visible just in front of the eye.

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Status: A migrant throughout, ranging in abundance from rare to fairly common. Probably more common in northern areas, and especially in prairie marshes rather than in forested areas, where trumpeters are more likely to occur.

Habitats and Ecology: On migration, tundra swans frequent favored stopover points that are used every year on their way to and from arctic nesting grounds. These are usually shallow marshes rich in submerged vegetation, which is the major food source for these birds. Field-feeding on dry land has also been observed rarely in migrating birds.

Seasonality: Montana records are from March 27 to May 3, and from September 26 to December 1. Wyoming records are from March 20, peaking in April, and with fall migrants usually gone by the end of November, but with birds rarely overwintering. The nearest breeding grounds are along the west coast of Hudson Bay, in northern Manitoba.

Comments: The swans are among the earliest of the spring migrant waterfowl, often following the breakup of ice by only a few days in order to arrive on their tundra breeding areas as soon as possible after they are snowfree. This allows them the longest possible breeding season, which is required because of their long incubation and fledging periods—often longer than the frost-free periods of the region.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975.



Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*)

Identification: This is the largest of all swans, and the one with the most sonorous and penetrating calls, which provide for easy identification. At close range the entirely black bill, without any yellow near the eye, aids in identification. Young swans are much more difficult to identify to species, but are virtually always accompanied by adults.

Status: An uncommon to rare permanent resident in the vicinity of Yellowstone and Grand Teton parks, generally rare or accidental elsewhere. In the late 1970s Yellowstone Park supported about 20 nesting pairs in or very near the park, while Red Rock Lakes Refuge to the west of Yellowstone contained about 27 nesting pairs. Up to a half dozen pairs nest in Grand Teton Park or the general vicinity (including the National Elk Refuge), usually on isolated lakes or beaver ponds. Only local nestings occur outside this region.

Habitats and Ecology: In the Rocky Mountain area this species is mostly limited to fairly large (usually over 30-acre) ponds having considerable aquatic vegetation and relative seclusion from disturbance by humans. Beaver ponds are most often used in the Jackson Hole area, and nests are sometimes built on their lodges.

Seasonality: In the Red Rocks–Yellowstone–Teton area the birds are relatively sedentary, moving off breeding ponds as they freeze over and onto ice-free areas of lakes or rivers. Egg-laying usually begins in late May, and hatching typically occurs before the first week in July. Fledging requires about 100 days, resulting in initial flights by about the end of September.

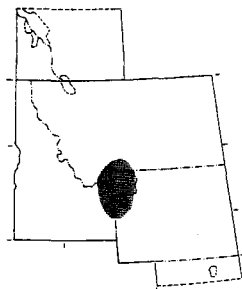
Suggested Reading: Banko, 1960; Shea, 1979.

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Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

Identification: This is the more uniformly brown goose in North America, lacking the black head and neck of the Canada goose, and the white head of the blue-phase snow goose. Adults and young have orange-pink bills, and adults have black belly-spotting. The distinctive call, sounding like high-pitched laughter, is perhaps the best fieldmark, and often allows recognition before the birds are even seen.

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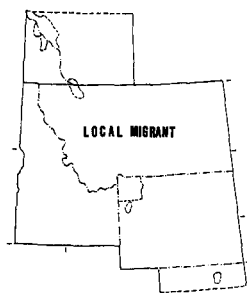
Status: A local and relatively rare migrant in the region, becoming more common eastwardly on the Great Plains. Only vagrant birds appear over the montane parks on migration.

Habitats and Ecology: While on migration these birds sometimes fly in company with Canada geese, especially in the case of birds separated from their own flocks. Like Canada geese, they field-forage in grainfields and other croplands, and usually roost in large, open marshes. Breeding is done on open arctic tundra, and in general the birds avoid forested areas.

Seasonality: Migration through the region occurs in March and April, and again in October and November. In some areas of eastern Alberta, such as at Beaverhill Lake, large numbers of these geese stage every year on migration in company with Canada geese and snow geese. The nearest breeding area is only about 50 miles north of the Manitoba border.

Comments: Like other arctic geese, this species varies greatly in its reproductive success from year to year, and the proportion of young birds in the fall and winter flocks provides a valuable index to the success of the previous year's breeding season. Such "age ratios" are important tools in managing goose populations, such as in setting harvest limits and estimating population trends.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975.



Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*)

Identification: This small goose is found in two color phases; the "snow" phase with a white plumage except for black wingtips, and a "blue" phase, in which only the head and sometimes the neck are white, while most of the body is brownish to dark grayish. In the Rocky Mountain region the vast majority of the birds are of the white plumage type. Interbreeding sometimes occurs, producing birds of intermediate appearance. In all cases, the calls are the same, a dog-like barking or yelping that is easily recognized.

Status: An uncommon to rare migrant throughout the region, becoming more common east of the Rockies, especially to the north.

Habitats and Ecology: Generally associated with large marsh and wetland habitats; feeding in dry fields is done less frequently than in Canada geese, and rootstalks and tubers of marshland plants are more regularly eaten.

Seasonality: In Montana the spring records are from late March to early May, and the fall records are from mid-September to late November. Spring migration in Wyoming peaks in April, and fall migration records are from October 25 to November 11. The nearest breeding grounds are along the west coast of Hudson Bay, in north-eastern Manitoba.

Comments: The snow goose is one of the few North American species that exhibits plumage dimorphism unrelated to sex in adults. The plumage type is genetically determined, but these differences do not influence reproductive fertility. Nonetheless, individuals do tend to mate with others of their plumage type, apparently as a result of early imprinting on the plumage type of their parents.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975; Cooch, 1958.

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Ross' Goose (*Chen rossii*)

Identification: This goose looks like a miniature white-phase snow goose, but additionally has a much higher-pitched call, and a shorter bill, that at very close range can be observed to have a bluish base. However, general size differences of Ross' and snow geese are probably the most useful fieldmark, especially where other geese or ducks are nearby to provide a size comparison.

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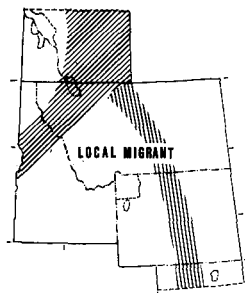
Status: A highly localized and generally uncommon to rare migrant in the area, with Glacier being the only montane park having any records for the species. However, large flocks of snow geese often have one or more Ross' geese among them, especially in more northerly areas.

Habitats and Ecology: Migrating birds have similar habitat needs to those of snow geese, and often mingle with them, especially in spring. During that time both species often field in grain stubble, where the shorter bill of the Ross' goose presumably allows for closer cropping of grasses or other vegetation.

Seasonality: Montana records are for March 3 to April 25, and again for October. In Alberta the birds usually peak during the last two weeks of September, with some lingering on into October, or somewhat earlier than the main flights of snow geese. They are also regular in late April and early May in such areas as Beaverhill Lake, to the east of Edmonton.

Comments: The Ross' goose populations have apparently increased greatly in recent years, although census data for this species are difficult to obtain accurately, because of its great similarity to the snow goose. Hybridization between Ross' goose and the snow goose has also been documented in recent years, and adds additional problems in recognizing and managing these birds.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975.



Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Identification: This is the most familiar of all geese, and is easily recognized by the black head and neck, with a white throat and cheek patch. The larger races of Canada geese utter low-pitched honking calls, but the smaller arctic-breeding forms have high-pitched yelping sounds not very different from those of snow geese or Ross' geese.

Status: A widespread, virtually pandemic breeder throughout the area, nesting in nearly all of the montane parks.

Habitats and Ecology: This extremely adaptable goose sometimes nests within the city limits of large cities, but also occurs on prairie marshes, beaver ponds, and forest-edged mountain lakes. Beaver lodges or muskrat houses provide safe and favored nest sites in many areas.

Seasonality: Essentially sedentary over much of the region concerned, moving to open water of large lakes or rivers as breeding areas freeze over, and back again to their breeding territories as soon as weather permits in spring. However, migratory movements do occur in the region, with spring and fall peaks usually in late March and November in the Montana-Wyoming area. Egg records for these two states extend from late March to June 29, while in Jasper Park there are egg records from the first week of May until July 12.

Comments: Populations of Canada geese have increased greatly in recent decades, and the species has now returned to many previously occupied areas from which it was long absent. Canada geese of the Rocky Mountain area represent one of the largest races of this species, while those migrating through the region to and from arctic breeding areas are among the smallest of the races.

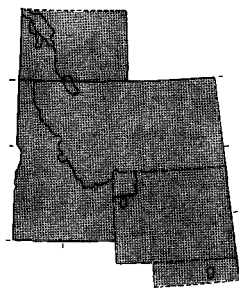
Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975; Brakhage, 1965.

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Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)

Identification: In breeding plumage the male is unmistakable; the full crest, white throat, and yellowish flank pattern are among the most obvious features. Females and immatures or late-summer males are more difficult, but have a large white eye-ring and generally dark upperparts. In flight the female often utters a squealing alarm whistle, and males also have a whistling note that increases in pitch. Neither sex utters the usual quacking calls associated with ducks.

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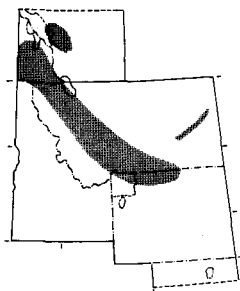
Status: A local summer resident in much of the region, at least from Yellowstone Park northward. To the south it is a local migrant, with rare breeding in eastern Colorado.

Habitats and Ecology: During the breeding season these birds are found among woodlands having fairly large trees offering nesting holes, and frequently also those having acorns or similar nut-like foods in abundance. Even outside the breeding season the birds are usually associated with flooded woodlands rather than open marshes.

Seasonality: Montana records extend from March 29 to early May in spring, and from September 14 to November 17 in fall. Most nesting in that state apparently occurs between late May and early July.

Comments: This is the only species of perching duck native to North America, and its relatives are mostly tropical to subtropical species. As in most ducks, pair bonds are reestablished each year during a prolonged period of courtship activity, which in this species is highly developed and spectacular. Females nest in hollow trees, where the inner cavities are at least 8 inches in diameter and with an opening at least 3.5 inches wide.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975; Grice and Rogers, 1965.



Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*)

Identification: The smallest North American duck; males in breeding plumage have conspicuous yellow triangles at the base of the tail and a white vertical stripe up the side of the breast in front of the wing. Females and late-summer males are best identified by their very small size and a green and black wing speculum pattern (best seen in flight). In spring males often utter sharp *krik-et* whistles; the female has a soft quacking note.

Status: A summer resident over nearly the entire region, probably breeding in all the montane parks except perhaps Rocky Mountain, where it is rare in summer. Also very common on the prairie marshes and foothill areas.

Seasonality: Nearly a year-round resident over much of the region, although the vast majority of birds leave in winter. Montana records are from March 23 to October 30. Spring migration in Wyoming peaks in March, and fall migration in November, with some birds overwintering. Montana nest records extend from May 7 to July 20, and in Wyoming newly hatched ducklings have been observed as late as August 8.

Comments: This small species is able to nest on tiny water areas, usually placing its nest under dense grasses or shrubs that often are some distance from water. The nest is always extremely well concealed from above, and is incubated by the female only. The tiny young grow very rapidly, and in some northern areas may fledge in as few as about 35 days after hatching.

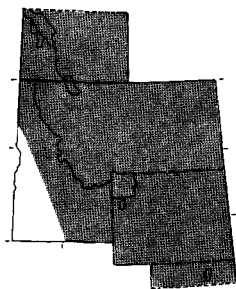
Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975; McKinney, 1965.

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American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*)

Identification: This mallard-like duck closely resembles a female mallard, but is much darker throughout, and the wing speculum lacks white borders. The only white areas are the underwing coverts, which flash conspicuously in flight. The calls are like those of mallards, and hybrids between the species are relatively common.

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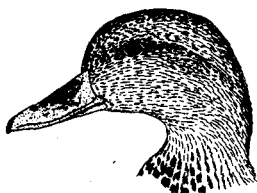
Status: A rare migrant or vagrant over much of the region, but breeding very locally in eastern Alberta. There, nesting has been reported in the vicinity of Kelsey and Hanna, and hybridization has been reported near Calgary.

Habitats and Ecology: This species is similar to the mallard in its foods and general behavior, but is more closely associated with the forests of eastern and northeastern North America. The western edge of its normal breeding range is in eastern Manitoba, with very little nesting in the Canadian prairies.

Seasonality: Migration data are few for this region, but generally black ducks migrate at the same time as mallards, and often with them. Nesting also occurs at about the same time.

Comments: This species has shown a marked population decline in recent years, apparently as a result of habitat losses, hybridization and competition with mallards, and possible overhunting. Only in extreme northeastern parts of its range is it still fairly secure from hybridization and competition effects, which may eventually spell the end of this form's existence.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975; Coulter and Miller, 1968.



Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Identification: This familiar "green-head" drake hardly needs description, but females and late-summer males are easily confused with other species, unless the bluish speculum, bordered in front and behind with white, can be seen. Hybrids with black ducks are sometimes present in wild flocks, and are often confusing.

Status: An abundant permanent resident throughout the region, breeding nearly everywhere ponds or marshes occur, and in all of the montane parks.

Habitats and Ecology: This highly adaptable species nests on nearly aquatic habitats, but prefers non-forested areas over forested ones, and shallow waters over deeper ones. Mallards quickly locate and utilize protected areas, even when close to human activities, and thus remain common in spite of intensive hunting pressures on them.

Seasonality: Mallards are virtually resident in this region, although most birds may leave for the winter. Migration peaks in Montana and Wyoming are in early April and again in October. Nests in Montana and Wyoming have been reported from April 15 to July 21, and in Banff and Jasper parks downy young have been seen between June 8 and July 9.

Comments: This is one of the commonest breeding ducks of the region, and certainly one of the most abundant migrants. During much of the fall and winter mallards are actively forming pairs, and courtship continues on in spring right up to the nesting period. Males abandon their mates as soon as incubation begins, and thereafter the female tends the eggs and young alone. Females often attempt to renest if the first effort is not successful, which accounts for the long spread of nesting records indicated above.

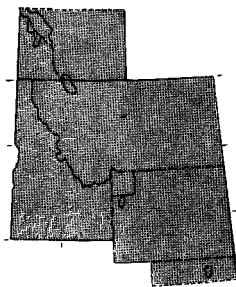
Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975; Girard, 1941.

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Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

Identification: Males in breeding plumage have brown heads, a white foreneck with a narrow stripe extending up the side of the nape, and a black rump and elongated black "pin" feathers. Females are almost mallard-sized, but are slimmer, have a narrow blackish bill, and a more uniformly brown head. In flight pintails show grayish underwing linings, and have white only on the trailing edge of the speculum. In spring, males utter fluty whistles both on the water and in the air, during courtship.

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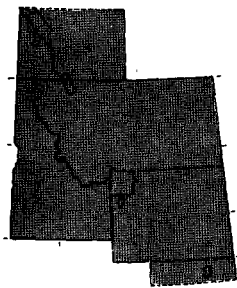
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Status: A year-round or summer resident throughout the region, breeding in suitable habitats in most and perhaps all the montane parks.

Habitats and Ecology: This is a tundra- and prairie-adapted breeding species, and it is rarely found in heavily wooded wetlands. It can breed on small and temporary ponds as well as permanent marshes, and frequently nests on dry land in extremely exposed situations well away from water.

Seasonality: Together with the mallard, this is a very early migrant that often overwinters, especially in mild winters. Spring migration in Wyoming and Montana peaks in late March or early April, and is over by early May. Fall migration begins in September or October, peaks in November, with some birds usually remaining until December or wintering on open waters. Egg records in Wyoming are from April 24 onward, with newly hatched young seen as late as July 21. This three-month breeding period is a reflection of early nesting and frequent renesting attempts following initial nest failure.

Suggested Reading: Sowls, 1955; Fuller, 1953; Smith, 1968.



Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*)

Identification: Males in breeding plumage have a distinctive white crescent in front of the eye, and an otherwise slate-gray head. Females and late-summer or fall males have a more uniformly grayish brown plumage; females resemble female cinnamon teals but have a pale whitish spot just behind the bill. Both sexes exhibit pale blue upper wing coverts in flight, with a darker speculum behind. Identification of the two teal species during late summer and fall is extremely difficult, and is perhaps best achieved by the somewhat shorter and less spoonlike bill of the blue-winged teal as compared to the cinnamon teal.

Status: A summer resident throughout the area, breeding in most if not all the montane parks. Also common on the grasslands and foothills, especially in the prairie pothole country.

Habitats and Ecology: This species favors relatively small, shallow marshes over larger and deeper ones, especially those that are surrounded by grass or sedge meadows. Migration in spring is fairly late, as is pair formation, but nonetheless re-nesting efforts are fairly common following nest failure.

Seasonality: Montana migration records are from April 23 to May 20; Wyoming records extend from April 15 and peak in late April. The fall migration peak in these states is in late September or early October, with few birds remaining beyond the end of October. Wyoming egg records are from June 1 to July 15; Montana records extend from mid-May to August 20. In southern Alberta, newly hatched young have been observed as late as August 1.

Comments: This is a species that is largely eastern in geographic orientation, while the cinnamon teal is more western in distribution. Both are late spring and early fall migrants, with long migration routes that in this species sometimes reach South America.

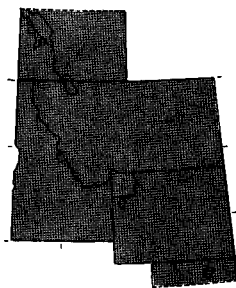
Suggested Reading: Dane, 1966; Johnsgard, 1975.

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Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*)

Identification: Males in breeding plumage are mostly copper-colored, with reddish eyes. Females closely resemble female blue-winged teal, but lack the whitish spots just behind the bill typical of that species. Both sexes resemble blue-winged teal in having pale bluish upper wing coverts that are visible in flight.

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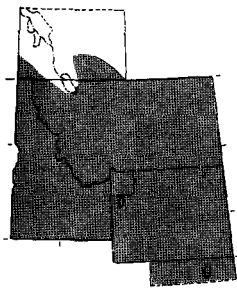
Status: A summer resident virtually throughout the entire region, except in the northernmost areas. In Alberta, nesting occurs north to the Tofield area, but apparently not to Banff.

Habitats and Ecology: Associated with small, shallow and often somewhat alkaline marshes of western North America, overlapping with but generally replacing the blue-winged teal in drier regions.

Seasonality: Spring records for Montana are from April 6 to May 31, and fall records are from August 11 to September 11. Wyoming records are from March 27, peaking in April, to October 9, peaking in late September. Wyoming egg records are from June 5 to 15, with young seen as early as June 11, and 15 of 22 Montana nest records are for July. Colorado egg records are from May 3 to June 27.

Comments: Cinnamon teal overlap greatly with blue-winged teal in their nesting ranges, and the two species probably compete with one another. However, they hybridize only very rarely in the wild, in spite of rather similar courtship postures. Male calls and breeding plumages are quite different, however, and this presumably provides an important means of species separation. Where they occur together both often nest on the same marsh areas, and pairs sometimes share adjoining territories.

Suggested Reading: Spencer, 1953; Johnsgard, 1975.



Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)

Identification: The heavy, spoon-like bill provides a good fieldmark in all plumages, as do the pale blue upper wing coverts of both sexes (also in blue-winged and cinnamon teals). In spring, the male's green head and white breast provide easy identification.

Status: A summer resident essentially throughout the entire region, although uncommon to rare in the montane parks, and common only on wetlands of the plains and foothills.

Habitats and Ecology: The specialized bill of this species allows for filter-feeding of surface organisms, and submerged plants sometimes also provide a supply of organisms that can be reached from the surface.

Seasonality: Spring records in Montana extend from March 24 to May 3, with a peak in late April, while fall records range from late August to late September, with a peak in early September. Wyoming records are from February 26 to November 26. Montana breeding records are from April 18 to the end of July, and Wyoming egg records are from May 25 to June 8.

Comments: This interesting species has a worldwide distribution pattern almost as large as that of the mallard or common pintail, and is replaced by very similar species in South America, Africa, and Australia. All forms forage in essentially the same manner, probably on very similar foods. In spite of their specialized bill shapes, they are all very close relatives of the blue-winged and cinnamon teals.

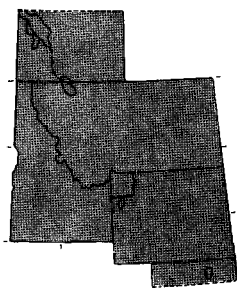
Suggested Reading: Poston, 1975; March, 1967; Johnsgard, 1975.

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Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)

Identification: This rather inconspicuous duck is often overlooked or misidentified, but in flight can be recognized easily by the white wing patch or speculum on the inner wing feathers. Males in breeding plumage appear mostly gray, except for a black rump, and females are very much like female mallards but have an unspotted orange bill that grades to blackish on the upper ridge.

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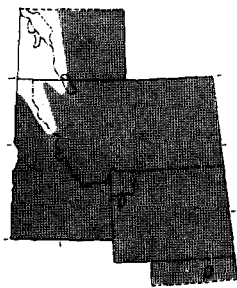
Status: A widespread but only occasional nester in the montane parks, becoming much more common on the prairie marshes to the east. Relatively rare in the Canadian mountains.

Habitats and Ecology: This prairie-adapted dabbling duck prefers shallow marshes with grassy or weedy nesting cover, especially where islands are present.

Seasonality: Spring migration records for Montana are from April 1 to May 10, and fall records are from September 1 to November 18. Wyoming records are from March 14 to November 30, with peaks in April and November. Nesting in Montana extends from late April to the third week of August, and Wyoming egg records are from June 10 to August 1.

Comments: Gadwalls are inconspicuous but extremely interesting ducks that are widespread through the northern hemisphere in grassland and other open-country habitats. Although males lack brilliant coloration, they have a complex courtship display repertoire, and their distinctive throaty calls and whistles add great interest to the spring sounds of the prairie marshes.

Suggested Reading: Oring, 1969; Johnsgard, 1975; Gates, 1962.



Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

Identification: Only males of this species should be identified in the field, since females are extremely similar to those of the next species. Breeding males have a rusty brown head except for a cream-colored forehead and crown, and are grayish rather than reddish brown on the flanks.

Status: This accidental Old World species has occurred rarely in the region, with the largest number of records from Montana, where it has been seen in at least 13 latilongs, while in Wyoming and Colorado it has been reported in 4 and 7 latilongs, respectively.

Habitats and Ecology: This species is most likely to be observed in flocks of American Wigeon during spring migration. Its habitats and behavior are virtually the same as in that species.

Seasonality: Too few records are available for estimating migration, but it is only when males are in full breeding plumage from winter until late spring that records for this species are likely to be obtained.

Comments: Although there are still no breeding records for North America, this species is seen every year here, especially in coastal areas. It seems likely that eventually proof of North American breeding will be obtained.

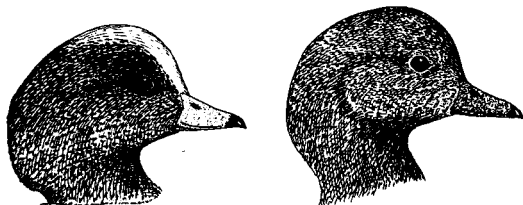
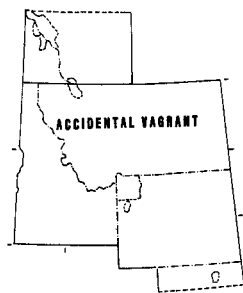
Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975.

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American Wigeon (*Anas americana*)

Identification: Breeding-plumage males of this species have white foreheads and a white patch in front of the black rump, but at any distance otherwise appear to be mostly gray to brown. In flight, both sexes show brilliant white upper wing coverts, which easily set them apart from other North American dabbling ducks. Males often utter sharp whistling calls in spring during courtship, which are three-noted, with the middle note loudest.

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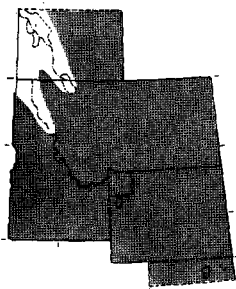
Status: A common to rare summer visitor throughout the region, but less common in the montane parks than on the plains, and relatively rare in the Canadian parks, at least in summer.

Habitats and Ecology: Associated with relatively open marshes and lakes having abundant aquatic vegetation at or near the surface, and in the breeding season favoring areas with sedge meadows or with shrubby or partially wooded habitats nearby. Wigeon are strongly vegetarian, and spend more time grazing grassy vegetation than do most ducks.

Seasonality: Spring Montana records are from March 14 to May 14, with a peak in mid-April, and fall records are from early September to November 23, with a peak in late September. Birds sometimes overwinter in Wyoming, but most records are from March 22 to late November, with peaks in April and November. Montana nest records are from mid-May to mid-August, with a peak in early July.

Comments: Social courtship in wigeon is marked by loud calling by males and frequent aerial chases during winter and spring migration. Nests are well hidden, often in sedge cover, and as with other ducks the eggs are tended only by the female.

Suggested Reading: Sows, 1955; Johnsgard, 1975.



Canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*)

Identification: The long, sloping forehead profile is typical of both sexes, and in breeding males the whitish (not grayish, as in redheads) flanks and red eye color are distinctive. Females are considerably grayer than female redheads, and have a sharper contrast between breast and flank color.

Status: A local and uncommon to rare summer resident over much of the area, being relatively rare in the montane parks (and not known to breed in any), and most abundant in prairie potholes and marshes.

Habitats and Ecology: In the breeding season, canvasbacks are found on shallow prairie marshes with abundant growths of emergent vegetation and also open water areas that frequently are rich in aquatic plants such as pondweeds.

Seasonality: Spring migration records in Montana are from March 30 to May 9, and fall records are from September 24 to November 24. Wyoming records are from March 9 to November 30, with peaks in April and November. Breeding in Montana occurs from early May to the end of July.

Comments: This fine diving duck has lost much of its breeding range in recent decades, and the prairie pothole country of eastern Alberta is one of its last major nesting grounds. Added to this are heavy hunting pressures on this highly sought after species, which is a major trophy duck among sportsmen.

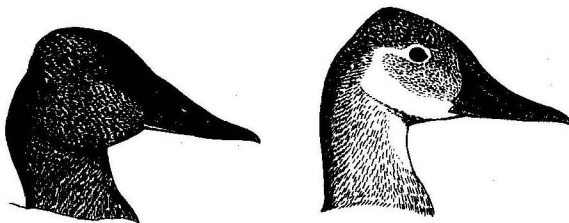
Suggested Reading: Erickson, 1948; Olson, 1964; Hochbaum, 1944.

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Redhead (*Aythya americana*)

Identification: Easily confused with canvasbacks, male redheads in breeding plumage have much grayer flanks and more yellowish eyes, as well as a rounded head profile. Females are more uniformly brown, without the marked contrast between breast and flank color typical of female canvasbacks.

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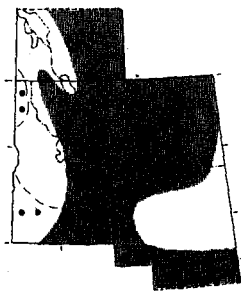
Status: A summer resident over most of the region, and a locally uncommon to rare breeder; rare in the montane parks but fairly common in prairie marshes.

Habitats and Ecology: Breeding habitats consist of nonforested country with water areas sufficiently deep to provide permanent, fairly dense emergent vegetation as nesting cover. Water areas at least an acre in size are preferred for nesting, with substantial areas of open water for taking off and landing.

Seasonality: Spring migration records in Montana are from March 27 to May 9, and fall records are from September 8 to November 29. Some birds overwinter in Wyoming, but there are spring and fall migration peaks in March or April and October or November. Nesting in Montana extends from early May to early August, and in Wyoming flightless young have been observed as late as September 4.

Comments: Like the canvasback, this species is largely associated with shallow prairie marshes, but also occurs in more alkaline wetlands of semi-desert regions. Both species often nest in the same marshes, and sometimes females lay their eggs in the nests of the other species.

Suggested Reading: Low, 1945; Olson, 1964; Johnsgard, 1975.



Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*)

Identification: Males in breeding plumage resemble scaups, but in addition to having blackish heads, breasts and rumps, their backs are also blackish. Females closely resemble female redheads, but have more definite pale eye-rings, more grayish heads, and more grayish and less brownish flank and back coloration.

Status: Relatively common in woodland ponds from the Tetons northward, but rare or absent from prairie marshes during the breeding period.

Habitats and Ecology: Unlike any of its near relatives, the ring-necked duck is strongly associated with beaver ponds and other forest wetlands, where it is often among the commonest of breeding ducks. Sedge-meadow marshes and boggy areas are preferred for nesting, and the presence of water lilies and associated heather cover seem to be an important part of breeding habitats.

Seasonality: Spring migration records in Montana are from April 10 to May 12, and fall records are from September 15 to November 17. Wyoming records extend from April 14 to December 31. Brood records for these states are from June 9 to July 28.

Comments: These birds frequently nest on boggy islands, or hummocks of vegetation in marshy areas, rather than on dry land in the manner of scaups. Ponds that are surrounded by shrubby vegetation seem especially favored.

Suggested Reading: Mendall, 1958; Johnsgard, 1975.

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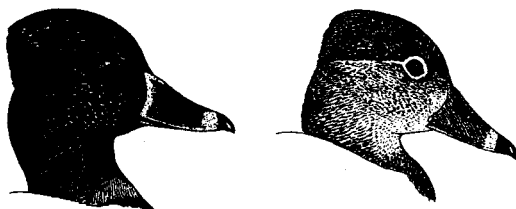
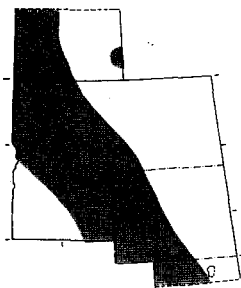
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Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*)

Identification: Males in breeding plumage closely resemble lesser scaup, but have a flatter, less peaked head profile, paler gray back color, and are slightly larger than lesser scaup. Females have more white evident around the base of the bill, and both sexes show more white in the primary feathers during flight. While on the water males of both species of scaup tend to appear white in the middle and black on both ends, in contrast to male ring-necked ducks, which have whitish flanks but are relatively dark on the back.

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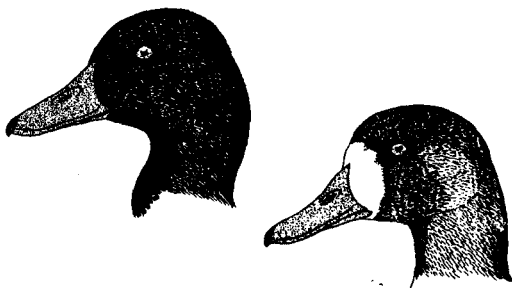
Status: A relatively rare wintering migrant or vagrant throughout the area.

Habitats and Ecology: To be expected on rather large water areas, such as lakes and deeper marshes. The nearest breeding areas are in the Mackenzie District of the Northwest Territories. There, breeding occurs on arctic tundra or in low forests closely adjacent to tundra.

Seasonality: Wyoming records are from October 25 to March 8; Montana records are few, and Colorado records are apparently mostly for October, November, and April.

Comments: Probably this species regularly migrates through the region in small numbers, but is easily mistaken for the lesser scaup, since the birds are rarely seen close to shoreline, and at any distance the two species can be very easily confused.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975.



Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*)

Identification: Male "bluebills" in breeding condition have a rather peaked head profile (reflecting purple in good light), a distinctly barred grayish back pattern, and slightly smaller body size than typical of greater scaups. Females have less white evident behind the bill, and in flight both sexes lack white speculum patterning extending out onto the primaries (which may be pale, however).

Status: A regular migrant and local summer resident through the region, except in the most montane or driest areas. In the montane parks, common only in Yellowstone as a breeder.

Habitats and Ecology: This is largely a prairie-adapted breeder, and is associated also with ponds in the foothill woodlands, especially those supporting good populations of amphipods and other aquatic invertebrates.

Seasonality: Montana migration records are from late March to the end of May, and from September 6 to November 29. Wyoming records are from March 17 to December 11, with peaks in April and November. Montana breeding records are from late May to August 20, and Wyoming egg records are from July 21 to August 7.

Comments: This species, usually called "bluebill" by hunters, is much more adapted to invertebrate animal life than are the redhead, canvasback, and ring-necked duck, and thus has a quite different habitat preference.

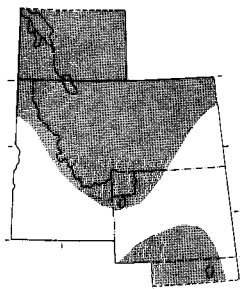
Suggested Reading: Gerhman, 1951; Rogers, 1962; Trauger, 1971; Hines, 1977.

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Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

Identification: Males in breeding plumage are unmistakable; they have a gaudy array of white and slate-blue head and body markings, and chestnut flanks. Females are more uniformly grayish brown, with a white spot behind the eye and less clear white markings between the eye and bill. Usually found on torrential mountain streams, where few other ducks occur.

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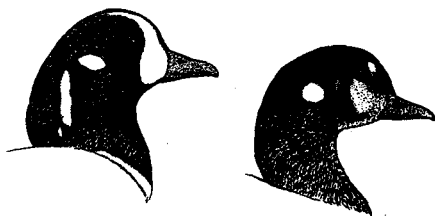
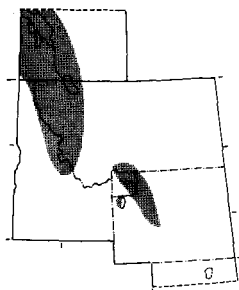
Status: A local summer resident on mountain streams from the Wind River Range northward, becoming commoner to the north. Infrequent and an apparently rare breeder in the Tetons, but regular at LeHardy Rapids in Yellowstone Park. Common at Glacier (Avalanche and Two Medicine Lakes, Roes Creek) and Watertown (Watertown River) and in the rapid streams of the other Canadian parks.

Habitats and Ecology: Associated with clear, rapidly flowing streams, where aquatic insects such as caddis larvae abound; often found where dippers also occur.

Seasonality: There is no good information on migration; the species may be a permanent resident, at least in Wyoming. A few Montana breeding records are for June; young have been seen in July and August. Broods in Jasper Park have been seen from July 19 to August 30.

Comments: This is one of the most beautiful and elusive of all ducks; in spite of the male's bright color he is often hard to see in turbulent water, and the female is even harder to find.

Suggested Reading: Kuchel, 1977; Bengston, 1966a, 1966b.



Oldsquaw (*Clangula hyemalis*)

Identification: Males in fall or winter plumage are mostly white, with elongated tail feathers and a black breast band. Toward summer the entire neck and much of the head turns dark brown. Females are quite variable too, but in winter have mostly white heads with a broad dark patch on the cheeks.

Status: A rare migrant or winter vagrant over much of the area; probably more common to the north. The nearest breeding areas are in north-eastern Manitoba, near Hudson Bay.

Habitats and Ecology: Likely to be observed on reservoirs, lakes, or large rivers, usually far from shore, while on migration. During the breeding season the birds occur on arctic tundra in the vicinity of lakes, ponds, coastlines, or islands. Most wintering occurs in coastal areas, although some deep and large lakes are also used by wintering birds.

Seasonality: Montana records are from mid-October to late April; in Wyoming the birds are most often seen during winter, and in Colorado they have been seen from October 16 to March 7.

Comments: This species is a regular migrant across northern Alberta, but is rather infrequently encountered in more southern areas of that province.

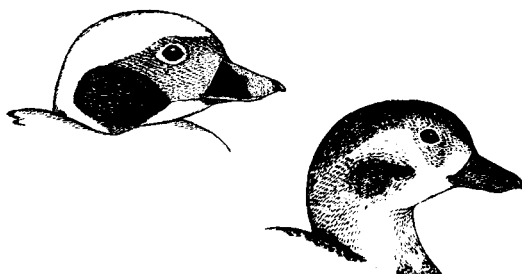
Suggested Reading: Alison, 1975; Johnsgard, 1975.

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Black Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)

Identification: Adult males have a uniformly black plumage with a bright orange bill-knob. Females and immatures (which are usually seen in this region) are rather brownish and somewhat resemble a female red-head, but the top half of the head is considerably darker than the bottom half, producing a two-toned appearance.

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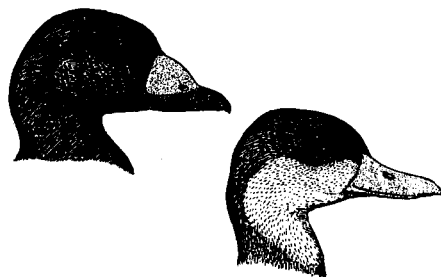
Status: An accidental vagrant throughout the region. Reported from two Montana latilongs, from 5 in Montana, and 4 in Colorado.

Habitats and Ecology: Likely to be seen on large rivers, lakes or reservoirs in this region. The nearest breeding areas are probably in the Northwest Territories, although most of the North American population breeds in Alaska.

Seasonality: Montana and Wyoming records are for October, November and May; in Colorado there are also October and November records, and probably some birds overwinter on large lakes or reservoirs.

Comments: This is probably the rarest of the scoters in the region, and females may be the most easily overlooked of the three species. Like the other two scoters, this species winters primarily on coastal waters, where it forages for mollusks in tidal areas. In such regions the birds are sometimes called "coots" by hunters, but are quite different from the true coots.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975.



Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*)

Identification: Adult males have distinctive white nape and forehead patches, and white eyes. Females and immature males, which are likely to occur in this region, have a dark brown body and head, with whitish spotting similar to that of a female harlequin duck, but the spot behind the eye is much larger and more diffuse.

Status: A rare migrant or winter vagrant in the region, more frequent in northern areas. The nearest breeding areas are in northern Alberta, near Lesser Slave Lake. Nonbreeders sometimes summer on montane lakes of Canada.

Habitats and Ecology: Like the other scoters, this species is most likely to be encountered on large lakes or reservoirs while on migration, and full-plumaged males are almost never seen in this region.

Seasonality: There are no good migration records for Montana or Wyoming; Colorado records are from October to December.

Comments: This species, like other sea ducks, requires two years to attain sexual maturity, and first-year birds may summer south of the breeding grounds. Probably young birds are responsible for most of the U.S. records as well.

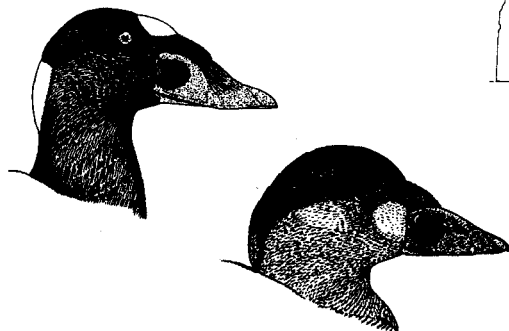
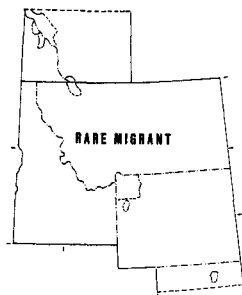
Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975.

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White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*)

Identification: This is the largest of the scoters; males in breeding plumage appear nearly entirely blackish except for a white eye and eye-ring, and a white wing-patch or speculum. Females also have a white wing-patch, but otherwise are rather uniformly brown, with white head markings similar to those of the surf scoter. In flight the scoters are all rather ponderous, and this is especially true of this species.

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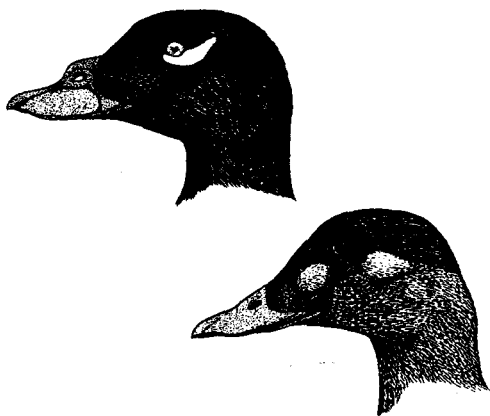
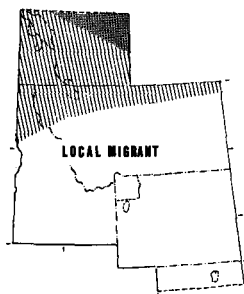
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Habitats and Ecology: Likely to be seen on lakes, reservoirs and large rivers in this region, mainly during fall and winter in southern areas, but through the summer in Alberta, especially around large prairie lakes where nesting occurs.

Seasonality: Wyoming records are for the latter half of May and the first half of November; Montana records are from late May to October. Summering birds are also regular in southern Alberta, with some breeding south almost to the Montana border. There are no Montana breeding records.

Comments: This is the most southerly nesting of the three scoters, and it often nests on islands of large lakes in forested as well as grassland habitats.

Suggested Reading: Brown and Brown, 1981; Rawls, 1949; Johnsgard, 1975.



Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

Identification: Males in breeding plumage are mostly white, with a large greenish black head having an oval patch between the eye and bill. Females are almost uniformly grayish, with a dark brown head and a yellow-tipped bill. Immature and non-breeding males closely resemble females.

Status: A local summer resident from approximately Yellowstone Park northward, becoming common in Alberta, and a widespread migrant and wintering species throughout.

Habitats and Ecology: During the breeding season goldeneyes of both species are usually found in forested wetland habitats, where large trees offer nesting sites. At other times they occur on deeper and larger bodies of water such as lakes. The breeding status in Grand Teton and Yellowstone parks needs confirmation, as do breeding reports from the Wapiti and Dubois latilongs.

Seasonality: This species is resident in Wyoming and Montana, but migration peaks are evident in April and November. Breeding in Montana is from early May to mid-July.

Comments: The common goldeneye has a much broader North American range than does the Barrow's goldeneye, which is largely limited to the western states, plus a very limited Atlantic coast population. The two species overlap greatly, but rarely hybridize.

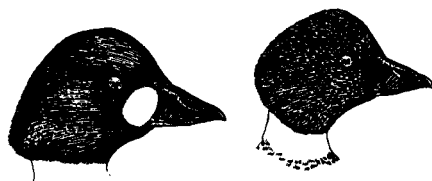
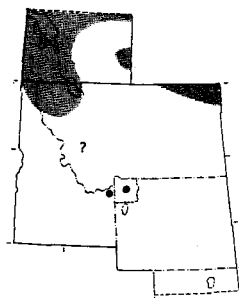
Suggested Reading: Gibbs, 1961; Carter, 1958; Johnsgard, 1975.

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Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*)

Identification: Males in breeding plumage resemble common goldeneyes, but have crescent-shaped facial patches, black extending farther down on the flanks, and exhibit small white wing patches in flight. In this region females of Barrow's goldeneye are best separated from common goldeneye females by their all-yellow bill color (except for a black nail) and slightly flatter head profile.

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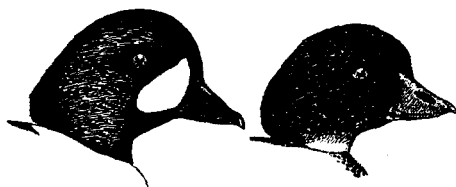
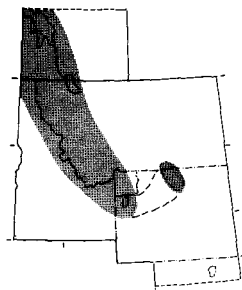
Status: A common breeder through the montane wetlands of the region, from central Wyoming northward. Elsewhere a common migrant or resident in most locations.

Habitats and Ecology: Breeding birds are associated with forested montane lakes, beaver ponds, and slowly flowing rivers in this area; in some regions nesting in cliff or rock crevices also occurs.

Seasonality: Resident in Wyoming and Montana, with migration peaks in April or early May and November. Some birds overwinter as far north as southern Alberta. Broods in Montana and Wyoming from June 28 to late August; in Alberta and Saskatchewan brood records are from June 13 to August 10.

Comments: This is probably the most common breeding duck species in Grand Teton National Park, and also is very common in Yellowstone and Glacier parks. Good data on the relative abundance of Barrow's and common goldeneyes are still lacking for these areas.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1975; Munro, 1939.



Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*)

Identification: This tiny diving duck is easily identified; breeding males are mostly white except for a large dark head with a wedge-shaped white patch behind the eye. Females are very small and dark grayish brown, with a diffuse whitish patch behind and below the eye. Immature males closely resemble females.

Status: A local breeding summer resident from the Tetons northward, mainly in wooded wetlands where tree cavities (especially woodpecker holes) offer nesting sites.

Habitats and Ecology: This species is so small that females can use the old nest holes of flickers (which are also used by bluebirds, starlings, and similar-sized birds) for nesting. Otherwise the birds are generally found on larger and deeper waters.

Seasonality: Montana records are from March 18 to May 31, and from August 27 to November 24, with peaks in late April and October. Wyoming records are mostly from mid-March to late November, with peaks in April or May and October or November, and birds sometimes wintering. There are a few brood records, but a brood on Christian Pond (Grand Teton N.P.) was observed from July 13 until late that month.

Comments: This is the smallest of the North American diving ducks, and one of the most beautiful. In spite of its small size, two years are required to attain sexual maturity, just as in the larger species of sea ducks.

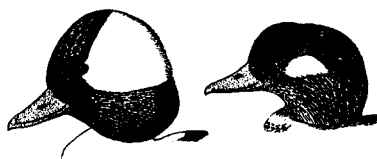
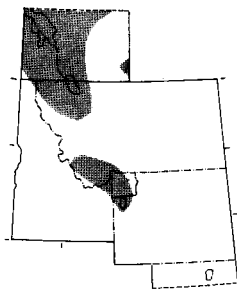
Suggested Reading: Erskine, 1972; Johnsgard, 1975.

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Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*)

Identification: Males in breeding plumage have a large, erectile crest that is white, bordered with black, and an otherwise black head. They slightly resemble male buffleheads, but have reddish brown flanks. Females have a full, rusty brown crest that is also somewhat erectile, but are otherwise mostly grayish to brownish. Both sexes have rather slim, pointed bills.

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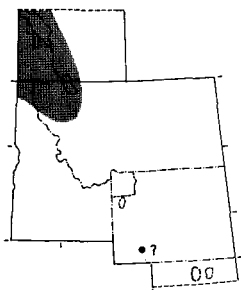
Status: A local summer resident in wooded areas from western Montana northward; southern breeding limits uncertain. Elsewhere a generally rare migrant, although breeding has been reported for the Powell latilong of Colorado.

Habitats and Ecology: Generally found in river areas bounded by woods and supporting good fish populations associated with clear water.

Seasonality: Montana records are from late February to early April, and again from September to October. In Alberta the birds usually arrive in early May, and sometimes remain on into early November. Breeding in Montana occurs from late June to the end of July. There is a reputed record of a brood near Green River, Wyoming, on June 4, 1929 (McCreary, 1939).

Comments: Hooded mergansers are the smallest North American mergansers, and ecologically approach the goldeneyes, to which they are closely related.

Suggested Reading: Kitchen, 1968; Morse, Jakabosky and McCrow, 1969.



Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*)

Identification: The largest merganser; males in breeding plumage appear mostly white except for a massive greenish black head and a bright red bill. Females are smaller and mostly brownish, with a contrasting white throat and lower neck. Immatures closely resemble females.

Status: A common resident in most montane rivers during the breeding season, and extending out into nonforested rivers, lakes and reservoirs at other times.

Habitats and Ecology: This fish-eating species occurs in areas of clear water supporting large fish populations, and is much the commonest merganser of the region. Nesting occurs in tree cavities, rock crevices, and sometimes under boulders or dense shrubbery.

Seasonality: A year-round resident throughout the area except perhaps the most northerly regions, but with migration peaks in April and October. Nesting in Montana occurs from late March to late May; Wyoming brood records are from June 12 to July 24, while brood records for Jasper Park are from June 29 to August 8.

Comments: This is one of the commonest ducks of the montane parks, and one of the most beautiful and elegant of all North American waterfowl. Yet it is often wantonly shot by hunters, who usually consider it a "trash duck."

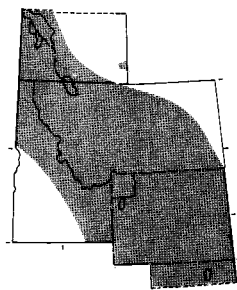
Suggested Reading: White, 1957; Johnsgard, 1975.

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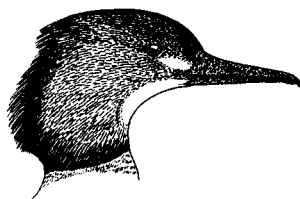
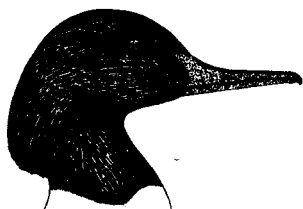
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Common Merganser



Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)

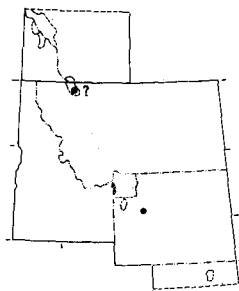
Identification: Males in breeding plumage have a rather shaggy greenish crest, a brownish breast, and black in front of the flanks. Females closely resemble female common mergansers but are smaller, have a thinner bill, and their head, neck, and breast colors grade into one another gradually, rather than being sharply demarcated.

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Status: A rather uncommon to rare migrant over most of the area, with a few possible scattered breeding records.

Habitats and Ecology: Generally found in similar habitats as the common merganser, but with a more northerly breeding distribution and a more coastal wintering distribution.

Seasonality: Wyoming records are mostly from February 4 to late April, peaking in April, and from October 4 to December 22, while Montana records are from late March to June, peaking in April, and from August to November, peaking in late October.

Comments: Similarities of this species and common mergansers make breeding records suspect, but in addition to reported breeding in Glacier Park (seemingly undocumented), there was an apparent breeding near Dubois, Wyoming (*American Birds* 35:964) and an early but undocumented report of breeding at Yellowstone Park (Meagher, 1963). There have also been other unverified reports of breeding in western Montana and the Green River area of Wyoming.

Suggested Reading: Hilden, 1964; Johnsgard, 1975.



Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Identification: Males in breeding plumage have a unique ruddy body color, with a bicolored black-and-white head, and a bluish bill. Females are much more uniformly brownish, but have a bicolored brown and white, vaguely streaked head, and a long tail, which is sometimes partially cocked. Non-breeding males resemble females, and lack the bright blue bill coloration.

Status: An occasional to rare summer resident over much of the region, mainly in grassland marshy habitats, becoming rarer in montane areas, and a migrant more or less throughout. Breeding in the montane parks is known only for Grand Teton (Christian Pond).

Habitats and Ecology: Nonbreeding birds are found on larger and generally deeper waters that have silty or muddy bottoms; breeding is on overgrown shallow marshes with abundant emergent vegetation and some open water.

Seasonality: Montana migration records are from April 9 to May 18, and from September 12 to November 3. Wyoming records are from April 6 to November 30, with peaks in April and November. Nest records in both states range from early June to mid-August, with newly hatched young seen from July 15 to August 6.

Comments: This "stiff-tailed" duck is fascinating and amusing; females lay remarkably large eggs for their body size, and are prone to drop them in the nests of others of their species as well as those of other diving ducks.

Suggested Reading: Joyner, 1975; Johnsgard, 1975.

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