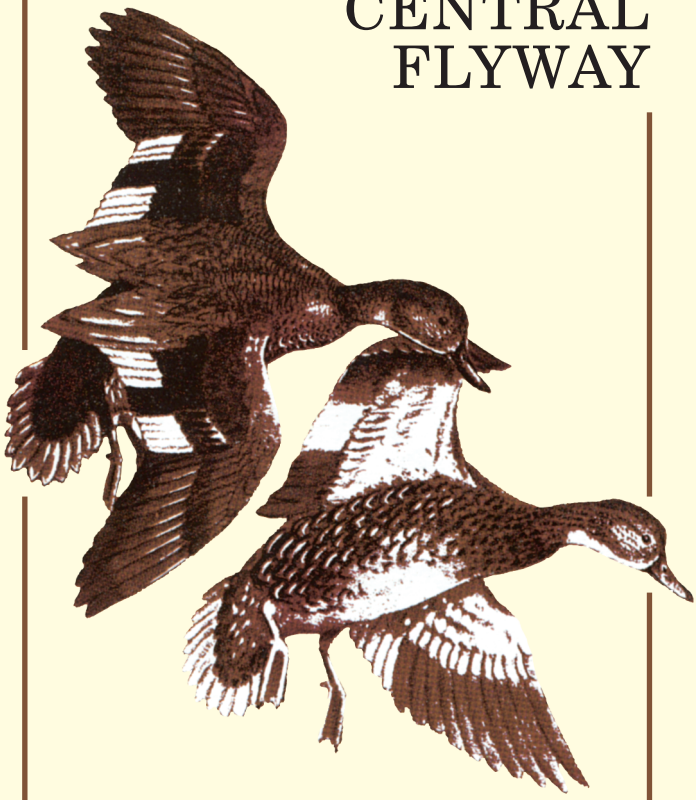
WATERFOWL IDENTIFICATION IN THE CENTRAL FLYWAY



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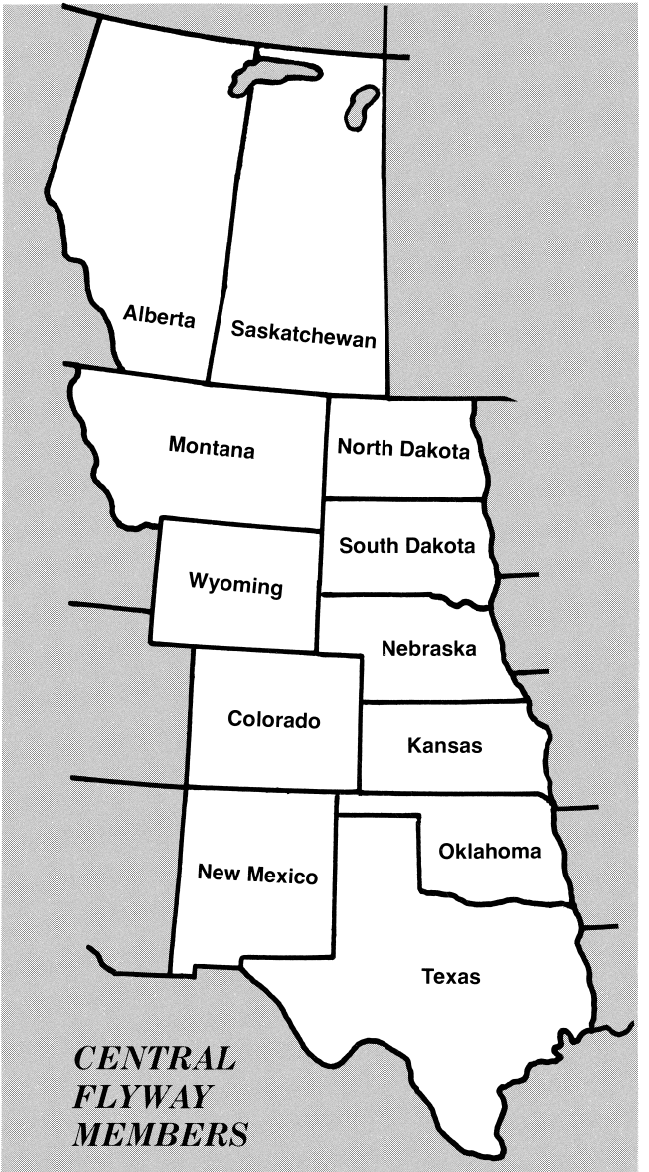
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INTRODUCTION

Waterfowl numbers have been greatly reduced since early settlement of North America. Drainage of marshlands for farmland, cities and industrial sites has been the major detrimental factor toward reduction of nesting habitat. State, federal, and provincial wildlife agencies and private conservation organizations have been attempting to offset habitat losses in the United States, Canada, and Mexico by purchase and development of wetlands for production areas. However, thousands of acres are still being lost annually.

The Flyway System was initiated in 1948 to allow differing regulations relating to individual waterfowl populations migrating through each Flyway. This was the genesis of species management. Further efforts toward species management came into being when bag limits were reduced or seasons closed on specific species that were in danger. Flock management within Flyways was put into effect to allow more refinement in regulations for specific groups of birds.

Every effort is being made to allow the most generous seasons possible with the greatest amount of freedom for the hunter. Thus, it remains up to the sportsman to take his share of the responsibility and train himself to identification of waterfowl, not only in hand, but also in flight.

This booklet demonstrates a sincere effort on the part of the Central Flyway Waterfowl Council to aid the sportsman in waterfowl identification. Paintings of ducks in various stages of plumage, photos of wings, and descrip-

tions of distinguishing characteristics have been included as an aid to identification of birds in hand and in flight.

The observer should become familiar with seasonal variations in coloration patterns of plumage. Sexes of some species are nearly identical year-round, but most species exhibit marked differences between sexes with the male being more brightly colored. However, the brighter plumage of the male is present only from fall through the spring breeding season. In summer, the male molts and resembles the hen very closely. Its coloration gradually changes from hen-like to a blotchy, partial coloration, and finally full winter plumage. Young-of-the-year males also evolve through these stages.

Thus, about the first of October when hunting seasons are likely to begin in the Central Flyway, many males may resemble females or are in various stages of molt toward full winter coloration. However, there are characteristics which will help identification. For example, the male's bill is usually quite different from the female's. The female's bill in most species will have dark spots or blotches. Wings are also different between sexes for most species. It should also be noted that wings retain similar characteristics throughout the year while the body plumage is changing. Foot coloration can also be useful in identifying species. These features as well as other distinguishing characteristics, including some to watch for in flight, are made note of in the text or otherwise pointed out in this booklet.

As with most endeavors, there is no substitute for experience. Efforts toward mastery of identification should take place in the field. The design of this booklet was specifically selected to encourage its use while hunting. Careful study and use of this guide coupled with experience gained while observing waterfowl in the field will allow identification to become automatic.

CENTRAL FLYWAY WATERFOWL COUNCIL

WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT

THE PAST—Waterfowl management during the early 1900's focused primarily on regulation of harvest and on wetland protection. With the signing of the Migratory Bird Treaty with Great Britain for Canada in 1918, federal governments assumed responsibility for this migratory resource. In the United States, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) of the Department of Interior has that responsibility, and in Canada, it is Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS).

The flyway system of management was initiated in 1948, and flyway councils and technical committees were created in 1952. During the past 25 years, the CWS and USFWS have cooperated on many surveys and studies to learn more about North America's waterfowl resource. These efforts have been funded mostly by sportsmen and conservationists through two major federal programs. The Duck Stamp was first required of adult waterfowl hunters in 1934, cost $1.00, and generated $600,000 in revenue the first year. Total revenue from stamp sales now exceeds $250 million, which allowed the acquisition of over 2.5 million acres of habitat nationwide. In 1937, a federal tax on firearms and ammunition was initiated and has since generated more than $1.3 billion, a significant portion of which has been spent on state waterfowl programs.

THE PRESENT—Currently, the lack of secure nesting cover is the primary reason for the decline of duck populations. Adequate recruitment (the addition of young birds to the population) is the key factor that will determine the future of waterfowl and waterfowl hunting. Along with secure nesting habitat, high-quality wetlands are critical to duckling survival.

During periods of above-average precipitation, many waterfowl species respond favorably to the increased availability of wetlands with increased recruitment. However, the adage that "when the water comes back, the ducks will come back" is no longer true. Important wetland margins and the surrounding uplands have been heavily and negatively affected by intensive agricultural development throughout the breeding range of most ducks, particularly prairie nesters. Because of the impact of man's action, many hen mallards fail to raise a brood of ducklings. Many are killed on the nest either directly by agricultural operations or by predators that can efficiently search the small areas of nesting cover still available.

While conditions are severe on the breeding grounds, they are no less severe on migration routes and wintering grounds. These two habitat types cover a larger geographic area than the

breeding grounds and are being impacted by farming, dams built on river courses, urbanization, pollution and logging.

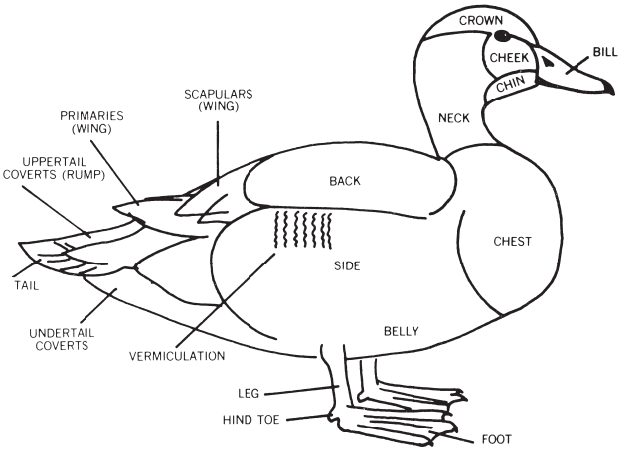
In general geese, particularly in the Central Flyway, have been increasing in numbers. Realizing that harvest regulations have a significant impact on goose populations, managers have implemented restrictive bag sizes and season dates. Waterfowl hunters have supported these harvest restrictions, recognizing their value in providing goose hunting in the future. The restoration of the giant Canada goose to its former breeding range is a success story exemplifying cooperative effort between waterfowl management agencies and sportsmen.

In addition, goose nesting habitat has been relatively secure from man's actions, though that security now appears questionable in a number of areas. Exploration for and development of fossil fuel deposits in the breeding range of white-fronted geese is progressing, mostly unnoticed, at a high rate. Without constant vigilance and a willingness to act, goose breeding habitat could soon reach the same critical level as that for ducks.

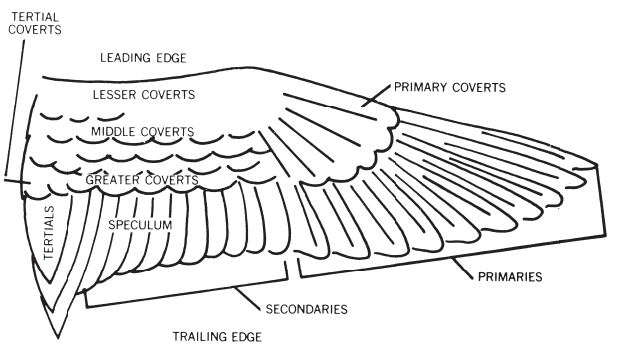
THE FUTURE—The future of waterfowl lies heavily and directly on the shoulders of man and his actions. Waterfowl hunters and conservationists need to join hands with governments in an intensive effort to ensure that this future is bright. The lead poisoning problem can be solved immediately by waterfowl hunters switching to nontoxic (steel) shot. By becoming familiar with how hunting regulations may impact the future of waterfowl populations, conservationists can assist managers in selecting the best approach to harvest management. By adopting hunting practices that encourage the identification of different species and sexes of ducks before they are shot and by keeping crippling losses to a minimum, hunters can contribute to these efforts while in the field. Sportsmen and conservationists can also contribute by supporting agricultural programs and legislation which would benefit waterfowl and by encouraging their elected officials to do the same.

Major land-use ethics need to be modified, and management on currently protected waterfowl areas needs to be intensified. This intensive management will be expensive. As a result, the waterfowl conservationist, and, in particular the waterfowl hunter, can expect to pay a higher price for the privilege of seeing and hunting waterfowl in the future. As long as we continue to focus on our goal and as long as private and public organizations and individuals work together, there is reason for optimism. Success will require cooperation from all sectors of society, but it can be realized. The Central Flyway is committed to that success.

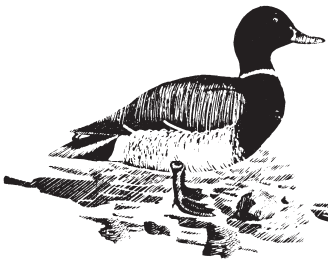
TOPOGRAPHY OF A TYPICAL DUCK



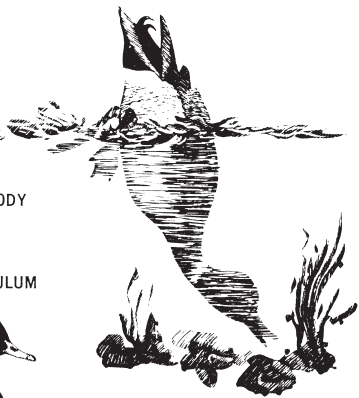
TOP VIEW OF TYPICAL DUCK WING



PUDDLE OR DABBLING DUCK CHARACTERISTICS

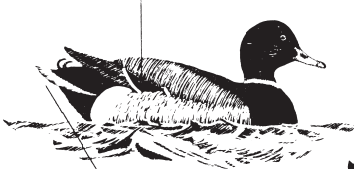


TIP UP TO FEED, RARELY DIVE

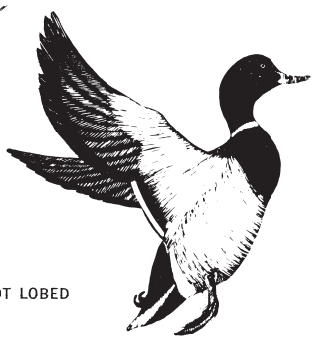


LEGS PLACED NEAR CENTER OF BODY

GENERALLY HAVE IRIDESCENT SPECULUM



USUALLY SWIM WITH TAIL HELD CLEAR OF WATER

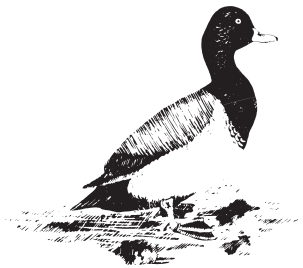


HIND TOE NOT LOBED

FOOT SMALLER THAN IN DIVING DUCKS

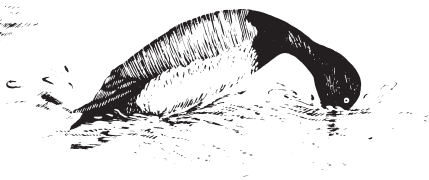
SPRING INTO AIR ON TAKE OFF

DIVING DUCK CHARACTERISTICS



LEGS SET NEAR
REAR OF BODY

DIVE COMPLETELY UNDER
WATER TO SECURE FEED



SPECULUM GENERALLY DULL,
LACKS IRIDESCENCE

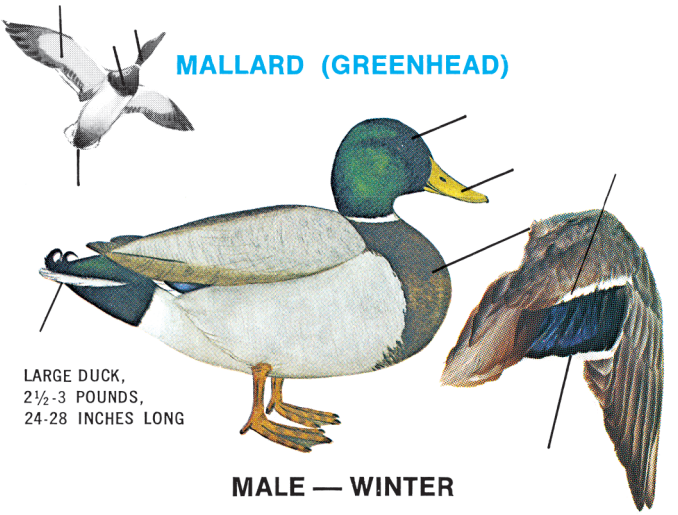
USUALLY SWIM WITH TAIL
HELD CLOSE TO WATER

HIND TOE LOBED, FOOT LARGE

ON TAKE OFF PATTER ALONG SURFACE FOR SOME DISTANCE

PUDDLE DUCKS

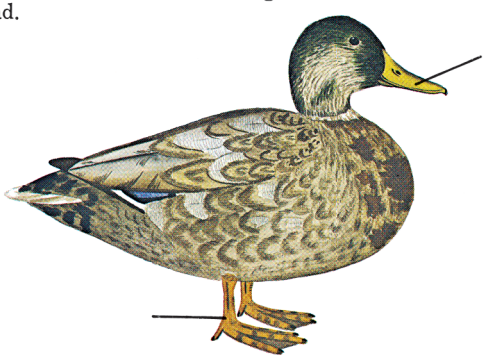
MALLARD (GREENHEAD)



LARGE DUCK,
2½-3 POUNDS,
24-28 INCHES LONG

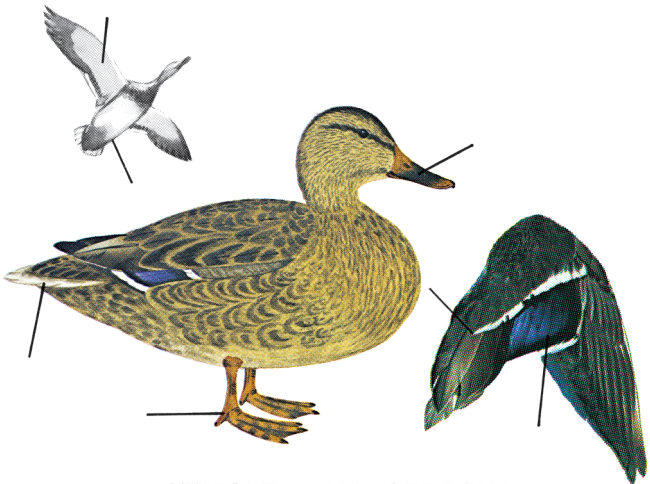
MALE — WINTER

Body: Chestnut chest, white belly, dark rump and white tail. Head brilliant green. White neck-ring. Bill greenish yellow. Feet dull to bright reddish orange. **Wings:** Grayish brown with bright blue speculum bordered on leading and trailing edges with distinct white bars. **Voice:** Low raspy *rink*. **In flight:** White tail and underwings contrast with dark chest and head.



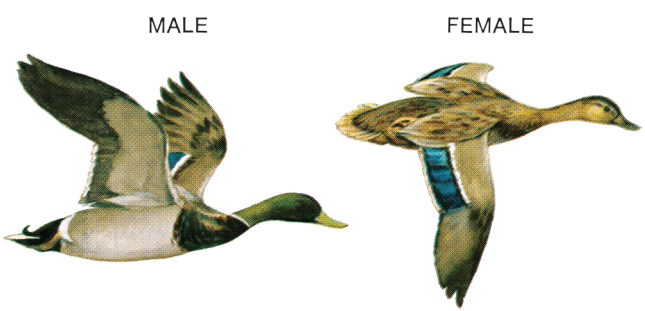
MALE — FALL

Ranging from drab hen-like appearance to blotchy near-winter coloration. Bill, wings and feet same as in winter.

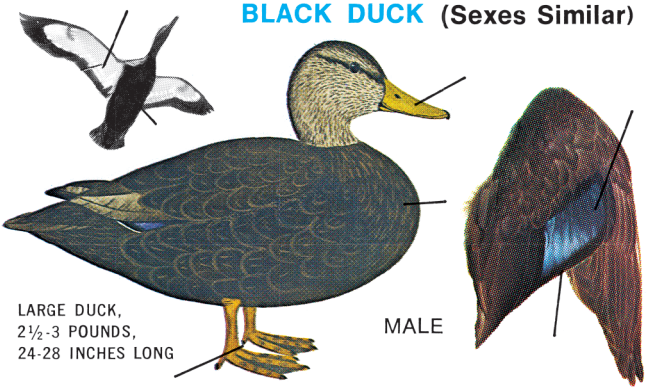


FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Drab brown with whitish tail. Bill orange with black spots or blotches. Feet orangish. **Wings:** Similar to male but usually more buffy-edged coverts. White bar on leading edge of speculum extends over the tertial coverts. **Voice:** Loud resonant *quack*.



BLACK DUCK (Sexes Similar)

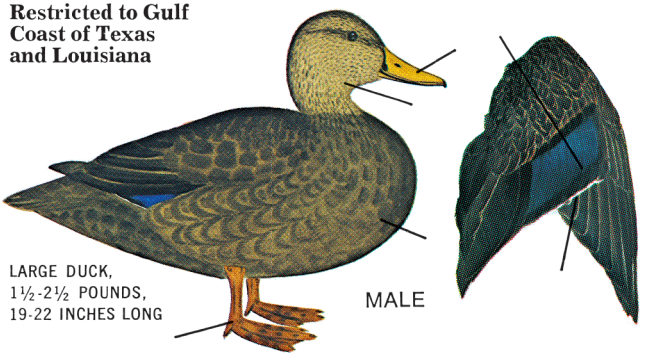


LARGE DUCK,
2½-3 POUNDS,
24-28 INCHES LONG

MALE

MOTTLED DUCK (Sexes Similar)

Restricted to Gulf Coast of Texas and Louisiana

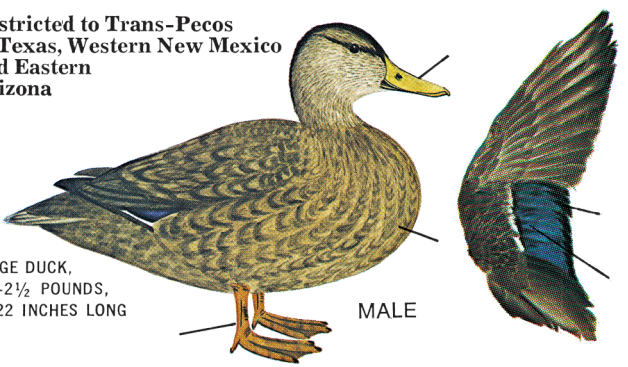


LARGE DUCK,
1½-2½ POUNDS,
19-22 INCHES LONG

MALE

MEXICAN DUCK (Sexes Similar)

Restricted to Trans-Pecos of Texas, Western New Mexico and Eastern Arizona



LARGE DUCK,
1½-2½ POUNDS,
19-22 INCHES LONG

MALE

BLACK DUCK, (BLACK MALLARD, BLACK)

(Black, Mottled and Mexican Duck)

FEMALE

Body: Dark sooty appearance with lighter head. Bill of male yellow to greenish yellow; female bill greenish olive with blotches. Feet orange to reddish orange. **Wings:** Dark with purplish blue speculum bordered with black bars on leading and trailing edges. **Voice:** Female, loud *quack*; male, low raspy *rink*. **In Flight:** Black body contrasts with white underwings.

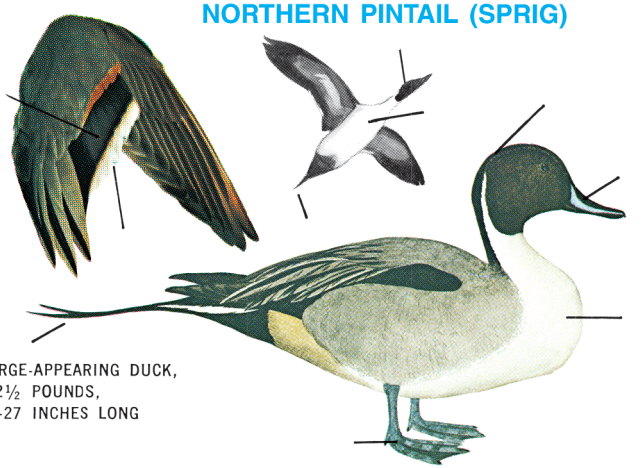
MOTTLED DUCK (SUMMER MALLARD, BLACK)

Body: Dark but lighter than Black Duck because of more buff edging. Head and neck buffy with thin streaking. Chin of female lacks streaking; male chin slight to moderate streaking. Bill of male yellow to greenish yellow; female bill orange with black spots or blotches. Feet orange to bright reddish orange. **Wings:** Similar to Black Duck although lighter. Trailing edge of speculum often bordered with faint white bars. **Voice:** Female, loud *quack;* male, low raspy *rink*. **In Flight:** Identical to Black Duck.

MEXICAN DUCK

Body: Dark appearance similar to Mottled Duck. Head and neck buffy with distinct streaking. Bill of male yellow to greenish yellow; female bill orange with black spots or blotches. Feet orange to reddish orange. **Wings:** Purplish blue to greenish blue speculum bordered with black and white bars on leading and trailing edges. White bar on leading edge sometimes indistinct or buffy. **Voice:** Female, loud *quack*; male, low raspy *rink*. **In Flight:** Similar to Black and Mottled ducks.

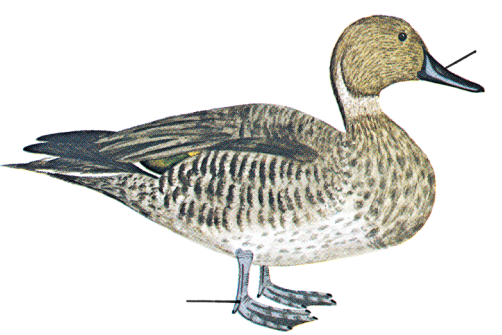
NORTHERN PINTAIL (SPRIG)



LARGE-APPEARING DUCK,
2-2½ POUNDS,
22-27 INCHES LONG

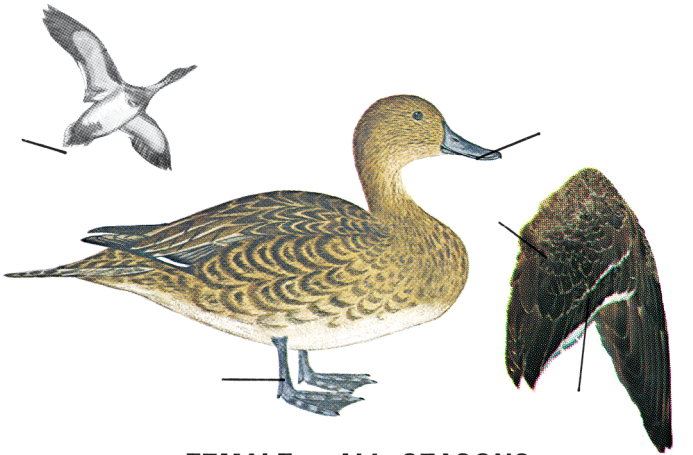
MALE — WINTER

Body: White over neck, chest and belly. Head brown. Bill bluish with black strip down middle. Feet gray. Elongated black tail. **Wings:** Distinct gray with iridescent green speculum bordered on leading edge with buff and trailing edge with white. **Voice:** *Whistle.* **In Flight:** Very elongated body. White neck and belly contrasts with dark head.



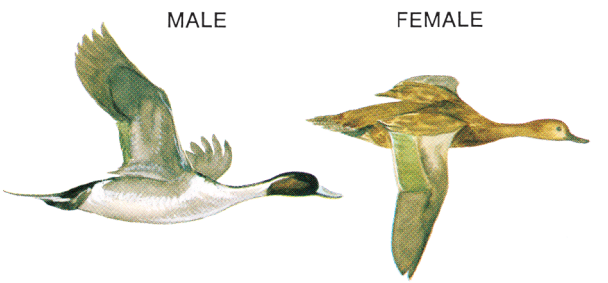
MALE — FALL

Ranging from mottled drab grayish brown plumage to a blotchy near-winter coloration. Bill, feet and wings same as in winter.

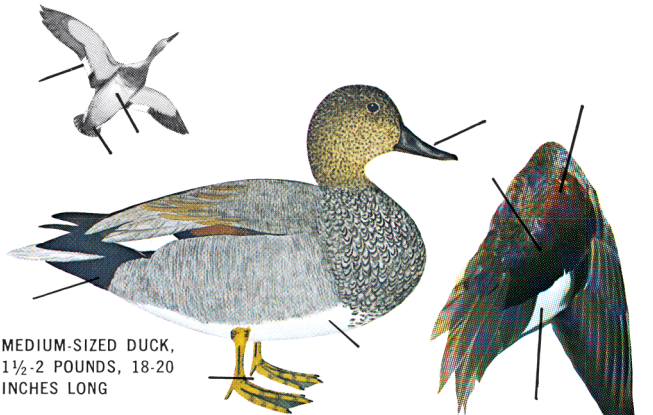


FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Mottled drab brown. Head dull brown. Bill gray with small black spots. Feet gray. **Wings:** Mottled brown and buff with dull brownish speculum. **Voice:** Hoarse *quack*.



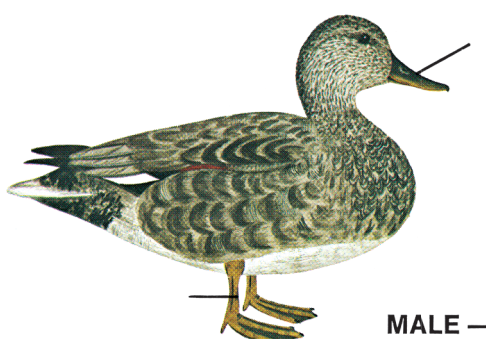
GADWALL (GRAY DUCK)



MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK,
1½-2 POUNDS, 18-20
INCHES LONG

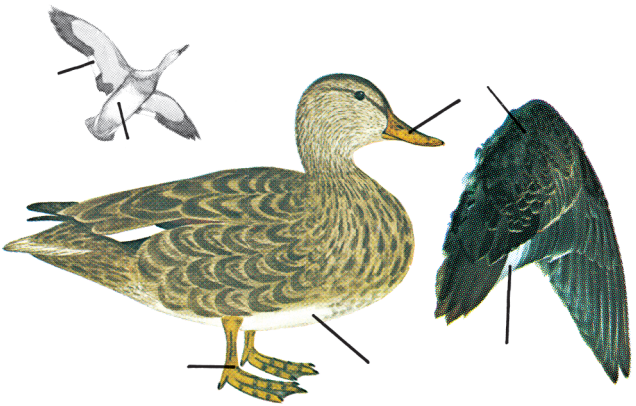
MALE — WINTER

Body: Gray-brown appearance. White belly. Black upper- and undertail coverts. Bill black with trace of orange at base and on lower edge. Feet bright orangish yellow. **Wings:** White in speculum (only puddle duck with such). Greater coverts black; part of middle and lesser coverts chestnut. **Voice:** *Whistle* and *nyaak*. **In Flight:** White belly and dark rump. White and black wing speculum evident.



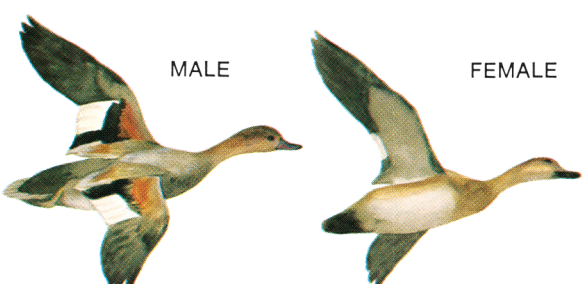
MALE — FALL

Ranging from mottled grayish brown to near-winter coloration. Dark gray, crescent-marked feathers on chest. Black in tail coverts. Bill orangish. Feet and wings same as in winter.

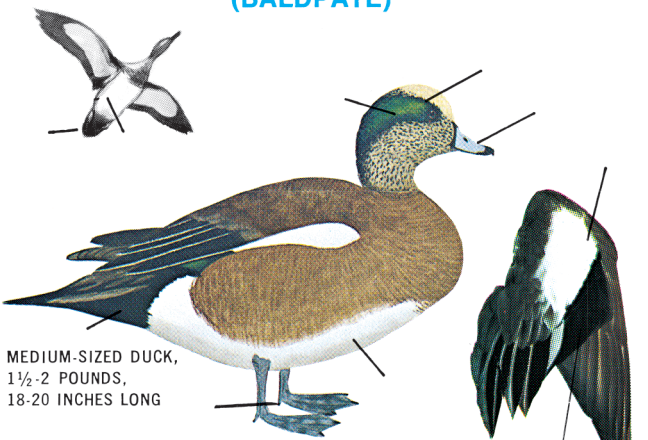


FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Mottled buff and brown. White belly. Bill yellow-orange with black spotting. Feet bright orangish yellow. **Wings:** Mottled gray similar to male but with less black and chestnut in coverts. Speculum white and black. **Voice:** Soft high-pitched *quack*.



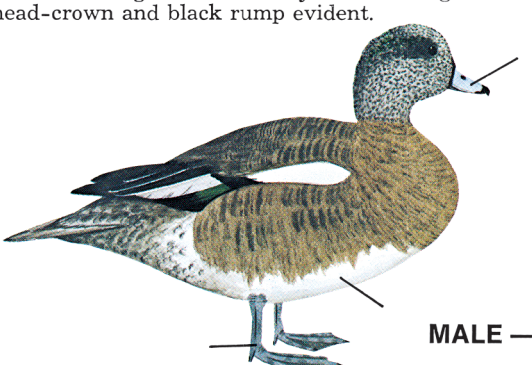
AMERICAN WIGEON (BALDPATE)



MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK,
1½-2 POUNDS,
18-20 INCHES LONG

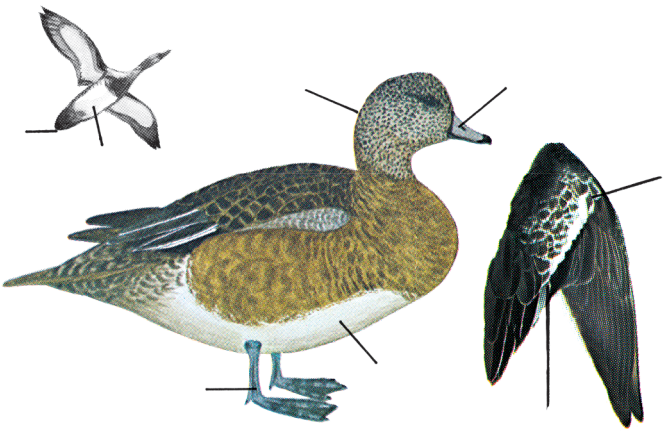
MALE — WINTER

Body: Pinkish brown back and sides. White belly. Crown white or buffy. Glossy green eye-mask. Bill short, grayish blue with black tip and base. Feet grayish blue. **Wings:** Greater and middle coverts form white shoulder. Speculum glossy green shading to black. **Voice:** *Whistle* repeated in threes. **In Flight:** White belly. White wing-shoulder. White head-crown and black rump evident.



MALE — FALL

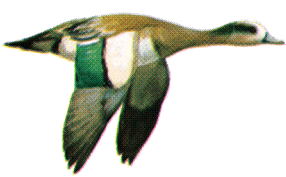
Ranging in appearance from mottled pinkish brown over back and sides to blotchy near-winter coloration. Crown and eye-mask faintly evident. Bill, feet and wings same as in winter.



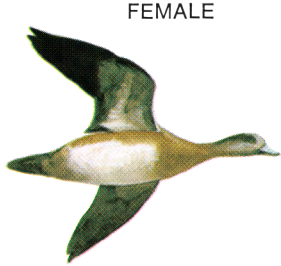
FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Mottled brown. Distinct white belly. Head grayish with dark speckles. Short grayish blue bill with dark tip. Feet grayish blue. **Wings:** Lesser, middle and greater coverts brownish, edged distinctively in white. Speculum dull greenish black. **Voice:** *Qua-awk.*

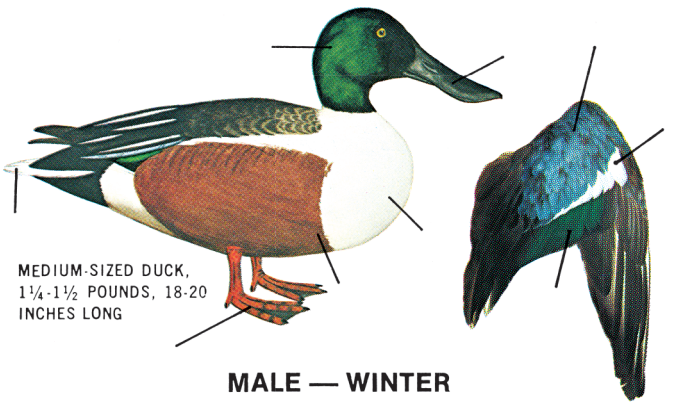
MALE



FEMALE



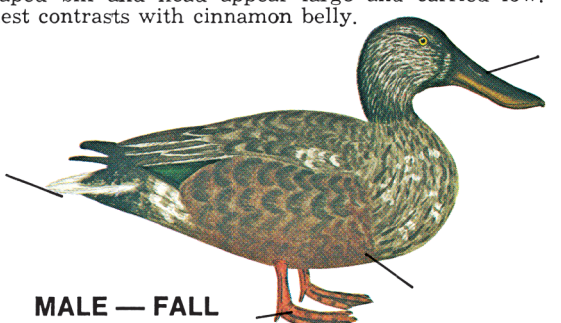
SHOVELER (SPOONBILL)



MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK,
1¼-1½ POUNDS, 18-20
INCHES LONG

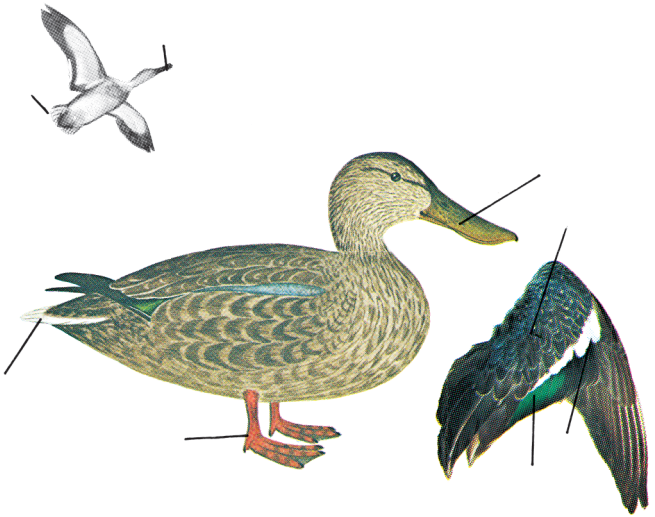
MALE — WINTER

Body: Rich cinnamon belly. White chest and tail. Head iridescent green. Bill black, long, broad and spoon-shaped. Eyes yellow. Feet orange. **Wings:** Lesser and middle coverts sky blue; greater coverts form distinct white bar. Speculum iridescent green. Central shaft of primaries distinctively white. **Voice:** Silent or weak *took-took*. **In Flight:** Spoon-shaped bill and head appear large and carried low. White chest contrasts with cinnamon belly.



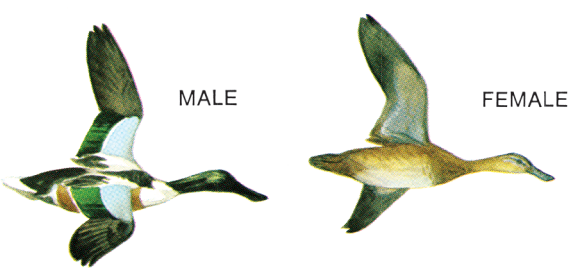
MALE — FALL

Ranging from mottled dull gray-brown to near-winter coloration. Belly and sides usually retain some cinnamon. Tail dusky white. Bill remains dark with tinge of orange. Eyes, feet and wings same as in winter.

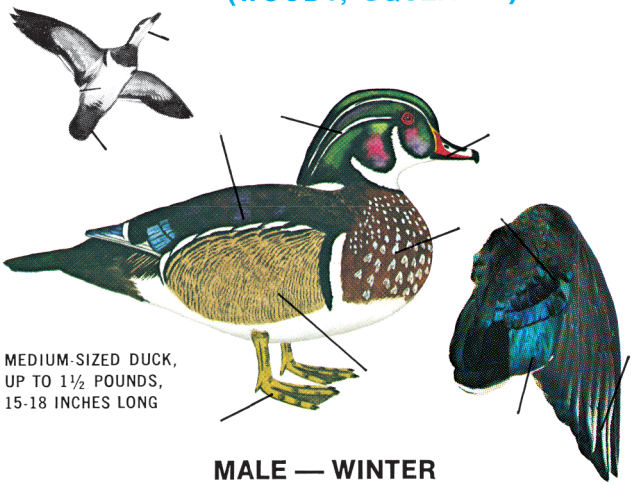


FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Mottled drab brown. Bill large, spoon-shaped and orangish green, usually with black spots. Tail dusky white. Feet bright orange. **Wings:** Lesser and middle coverts brownish, tinged with sky blue; greater coverts form distinct white bar. Speculum subdued green. Central shaft of primaries distinctively white. **Voice:** Feeble *quack*.



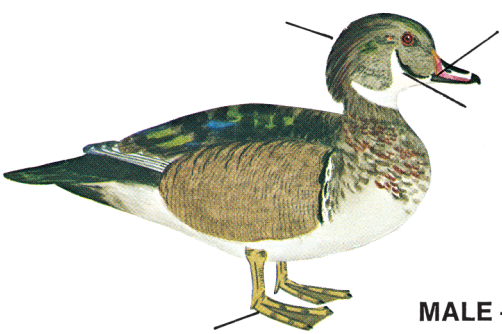
WOOD DUCK
(WOODY, SQUEALER)



MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK,
UP TO 1½ POUNDS,
15-18 INCHES LONG

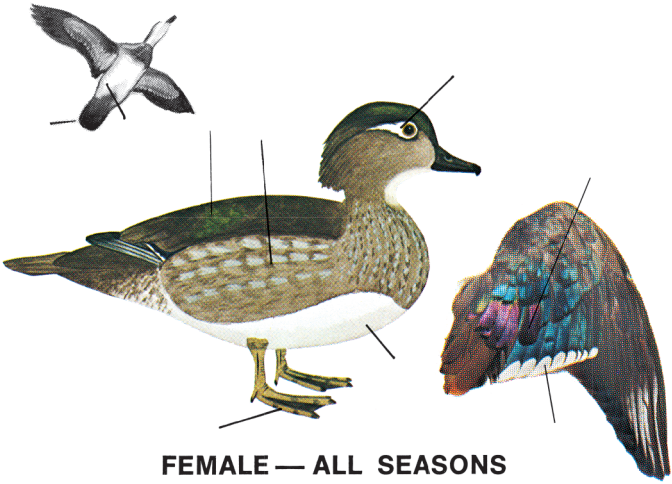
MALE — WINTER

Body: Dark iridescence showing white flecking on cinnamon chest. Sides vermiculated tan. Belly white. Head-crest with distinct white stripes. Eyes red. Short multicolored bill. Feet dull gold. **Wings:** Coverts and speculum iridescent green, purple and blue. White bar on trailing edge of speculum. Silver-edged primaries. **Voice:** Plaintive *squeal.* **In Flight:** Large head held high. White belly. Large square tail evident.



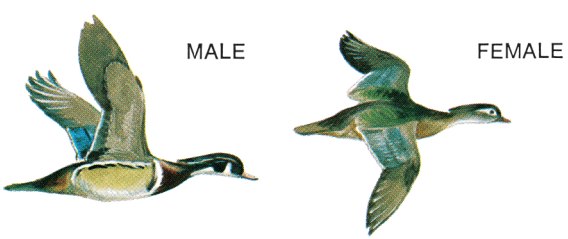
MALE — FALL

Ranging from blotchy dull coloration to near-winter plumage. Belly, throat and chin whitish. Eyes, feet, bill and wings same as in winter.

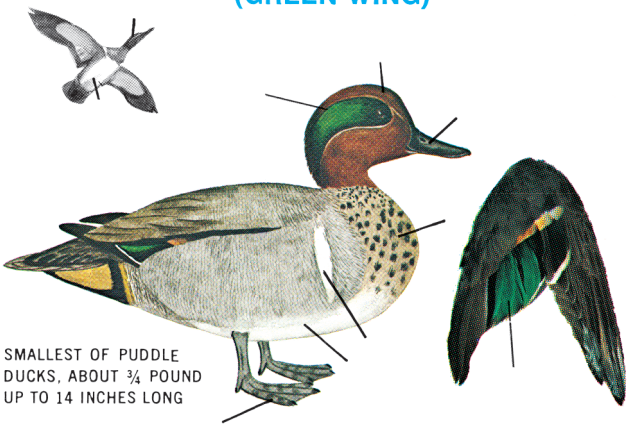


FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Drab brown. Belly white. Back showing iridescent bronze. Chest and sides with white flecking. Head with crest and distinct comet-shaped white eye-ring. Bill dusky black with traces of orange. Feet dull gold. **Wings:** Similar to male but speculum with teardrop-shaped white trailing edge. **Voice:** Variety of *whistles*.



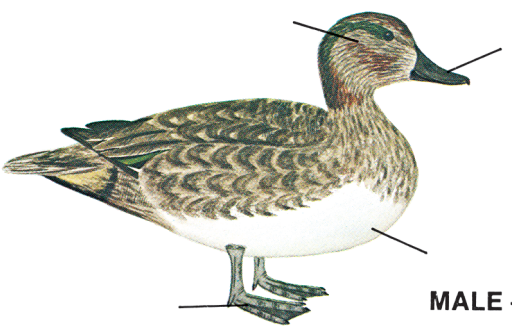
GREEN-WINGED TEAL (GREEN-WING)



SMALLEST OF PUDDLE DUCKS, ABOUT ¾ POUND UP TO 14 INCHES LONG

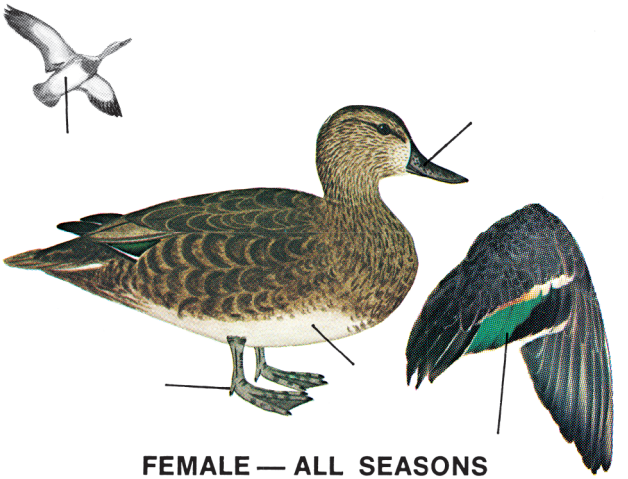
MALE — WINTER

Body: Grayish with much vermiculation. Chest tan with dark spots. Belly white. White vertical bar on sides. Head cinnamon with iridescent green eye-mask. Bill and feet grayish black. **Wings:** Mostly brown with iridescent green and black speculum. **Voice:** *Twittering whistle.* **In Flight:** Very small. Flight swift and erratic. Males show white belly opposed to dark belly on Blue-wing and Cinnamon Teal.



MALE — FALL

Ranging from mottled brown to near-winter coloration. Belly white. Head may have traces of green and cinnamon. Bill, feet and wings same as in winter.

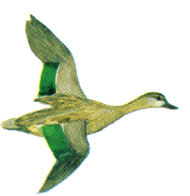


FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

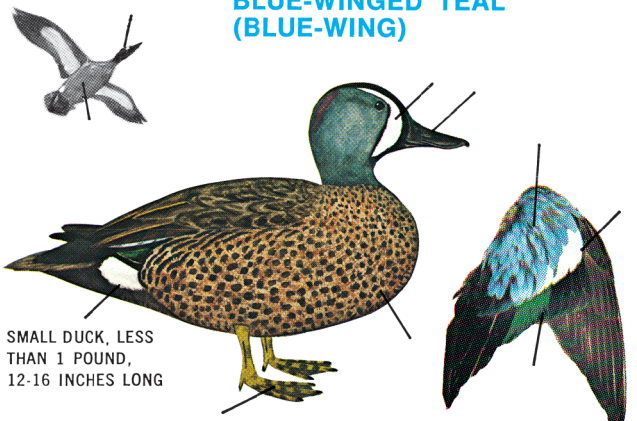
Body: Mottled brown with white belly. Bill grayish black with small black spots. Feet and wings similar to male. **Voice:** High-pitched *quack*.

MALE

FEMALE



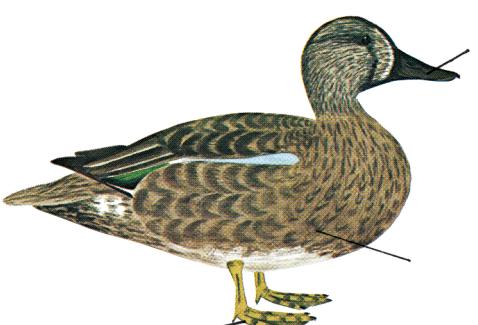
BLUE-WINGED TEAL (BLUE-WING)



SMALL DUCK, LESS THAN 1 POUND, 12-16 INCHES LONG

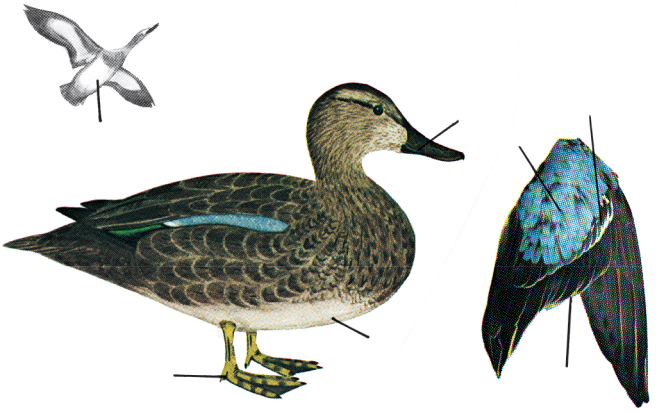
MALE — WINTER

Body: Pale grayish cinnamon with numerous black spots. Head purplish with distinct white crescent. White spot on flank. Bill black. Feet dull gold. **Wings:** Lesser and middle coverts sky blue; greater coverts form distinct white bar. Speculum green. **Voice:** Whistling *peep*. **In Flight:** Small, erratic flyer. Blue wing-patch and white crescent visible up close.



MALE — FALL

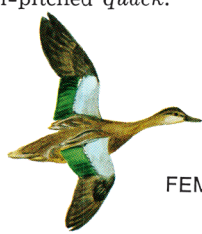
Ranging from mottled dull brown to near-winter coloration. Bill, feet and wings same as in winter.



FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Mottled brown with white belly. Head somewhat lighter brown. Bill grayish black with black spots. Feet dull greenish yellow. **Wings:** Similar to male except white bar blotched with gray. **Voice:** High-pitched *quack*.

MALE



FEMALE

CINNAMON TEAL

Rare east of Rocky Mountains.

MALE — WINTER

Cinnamon body. Wing identical to male Blue-wing.

MALE — FALL

Similar to Blue-wing with blotches of cinnamon.

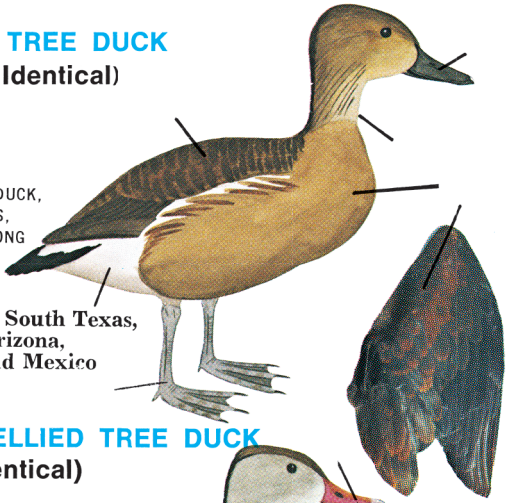
FEMALE

Cannot be distinguished from female Blue-wing.

FULVOUS TREE DUCK
(Sexes Identical)

MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK,
UP TO 2 POUNDS,
18-22 INCHES LONG

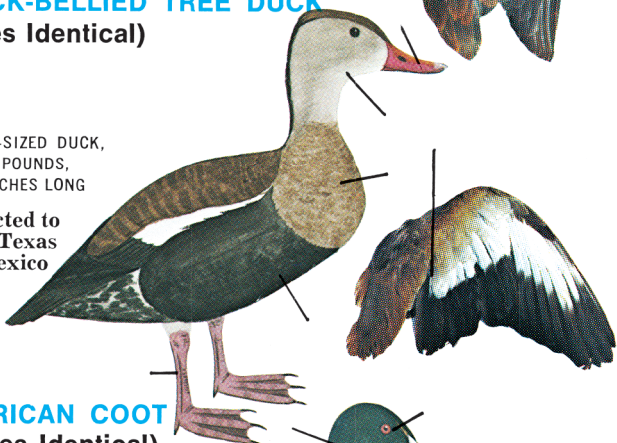
Restricted to South Texas, Southwest Arizona, California and Mexico



BLACK-BELLIED TREE DUCK
(Sexes Identical)

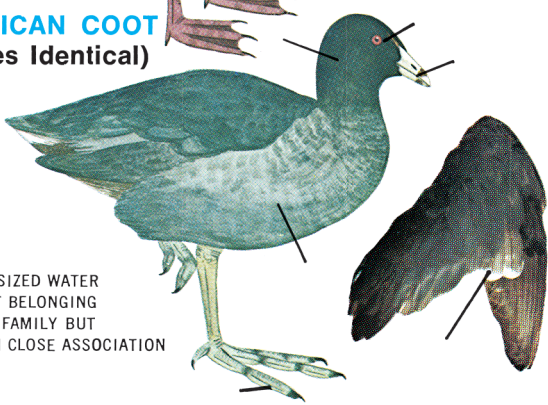
MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK,
UP TO 2 POUNDS,
18-22 INCHES LONG

Restricted to South Texas and Mexico



AMERICAN COOT
(Sexes Identical)

MEDIUM-SIZED WATER
BIRD NOT BELONGING
TO DUCK FAMILY BUT
FOUND IN CLOSE ASSOCIATION



FULVOUS TREE DUCK (MEXICAN SQUEALER)

Body: Light cinnamon with dark back. Very long neck. Short dark tail with white upper- and undertail coverts. Bill bluish black. Long bluish gray legs. **Wings:** Lesser and middle coverts cinnamon; remainder dusky black. **Voice:** High-pitched whistling *ka-tee*. **In Flight:** Long legs extend behind body.

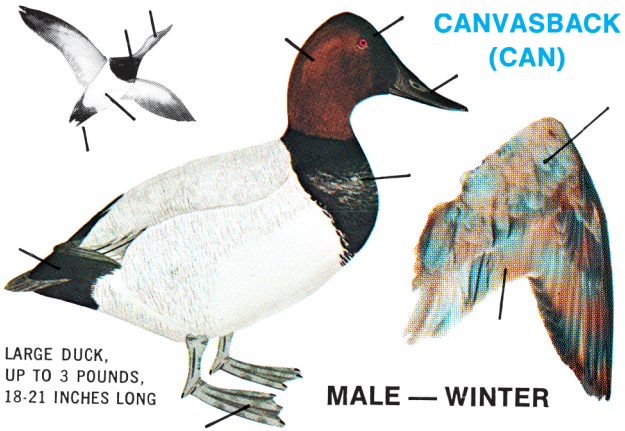
BLACK-BELLIED TREE DUCK (PE-CHE-CHE-NE DUCK)

Body: Light cinnamon chest and lower neck with distinct black belly. Sides of head ashy gray. Bill bright pink. Long pinkish legs. **Wings:** Lesser, middle, greater and primary coverts white. **Voice:** Shrill whistling *pe-che-che-ne*. **In Flight:** Long legs extend behind body. Black belly evident.

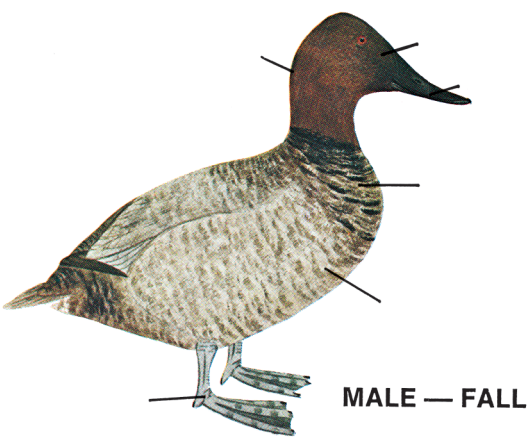
COOT (MUD HEN, POULE D'EAU)

Body: Sooty gray with somewhat darker head, back and wings. White undertail coverts. Feet with lobed toes and sharp claws. Bill whitish or ivory with red markings. Eyes red. **Wings:** Overall sooty gray. Secondaries tipped with white. **Voice:** Quarrelsome high-pitched *twittering*. **In Flight:** Dark body contrasts with white bill and undertail coverts. Strong but reluctant flyer.

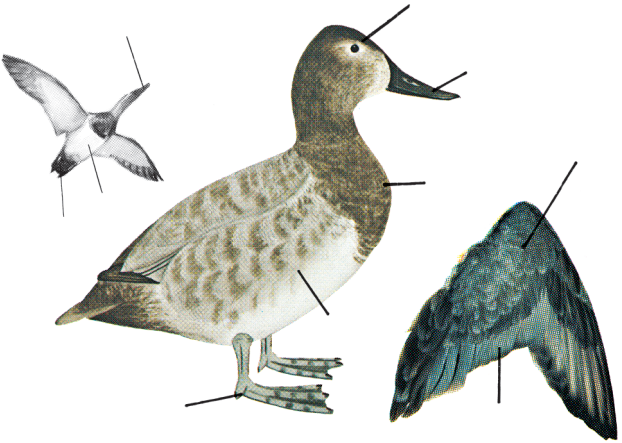
DIVING DUCKS



Body: Grayish white with heavy vermiculation. Black chest and rump. Head and neck burnished red. Forehead slopes into elongated black bill. Eyes red. Feet gray. **Wings:** Grayish white coverts and tertials. Pearl gray speculum; remainder dark gray. **Voice:** *Croak, peep and growl.* **In Flight:** Feet outstretched beyond tail. Elongated neck and body. White belly contrasts with black chest and rump.



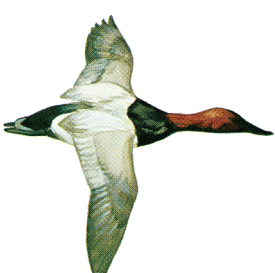
Ranging from mottled grayish brown to near-winter coloration. Head brown. Eyes, bill, feet and wings same as in winter.



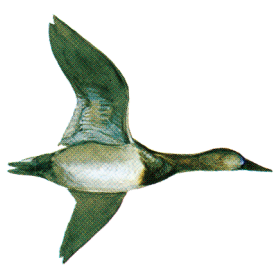
FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Mottled gray-brown. Head, neck and rump brown. Belly white. Whitish area around eyes and at base of bill. Eyes black. Bill black. Feet gray. **Wings:** Similar to male. **Voice:** *Quack.*

MALE

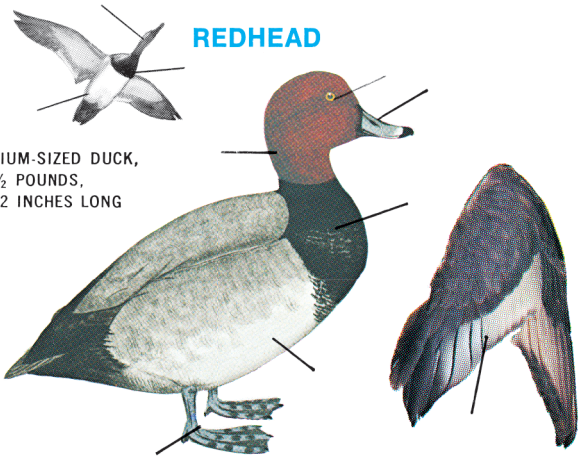


FEMALE



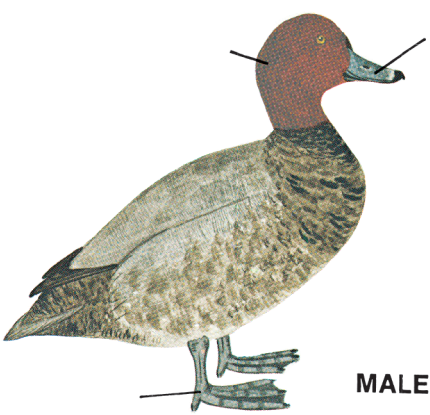
REDHEAD

MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK,
2-2½ POUNDS,
20-22 INCHES LONG



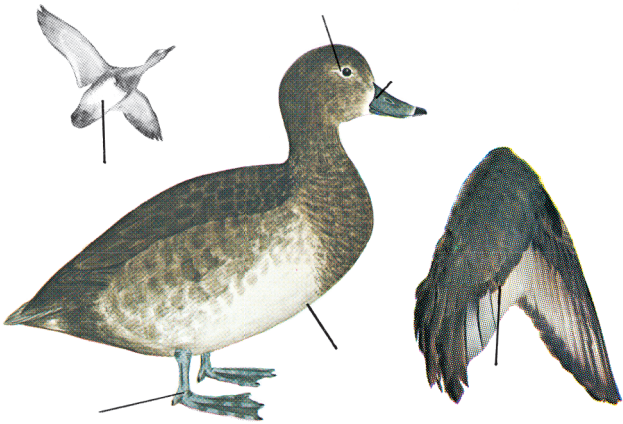
MALE — WINTER

Body: Back and sides grayish. Chest and rump black. Belly white. Head rounded and rusty red. Bill gray with white band toward tip. Feet gray. Eyes lemon yellow. **Wings:** Grayish brown with faint white flecking. Speculum dull pearl gray with faint white trailing edge. **Voice:** Deep *meow* or *purr*. **In Flight:** Rapid wingbeat. Flock usually flies low in well-formed V. White belly contrasts with black chest and red head.



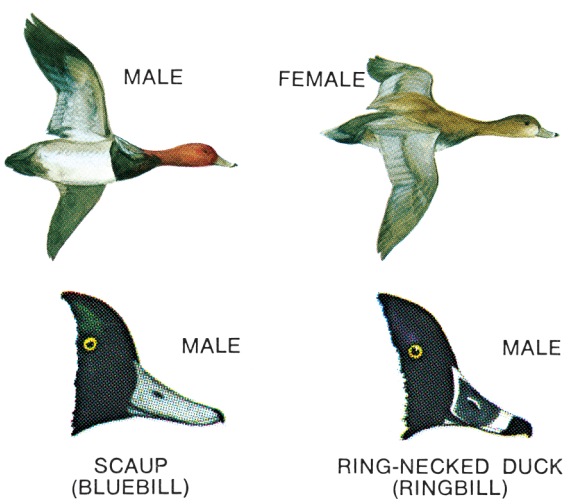
MALE — FALL

Ranging from brownish gray with faint reddish head and neck to blotchy near-winter appearance. Eyes, bill, feet and wing same as in winter.



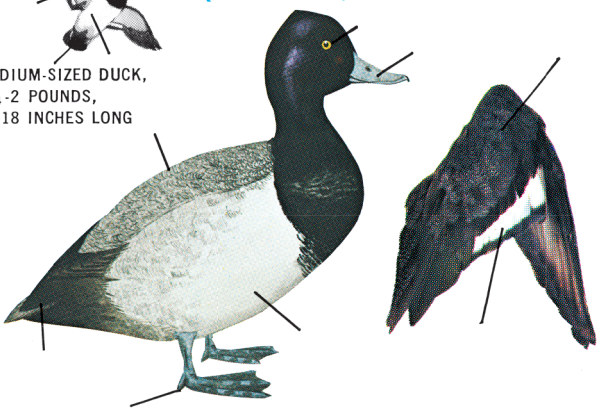
FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Mottled gray-brown with dusky white belly. Pale area at base of bill and around dark brown eyes. Bill and feet similar to male but lighter. **Wings:** Similar to male but less flecking. **Voice:** Loud *squawk* or *quack*.



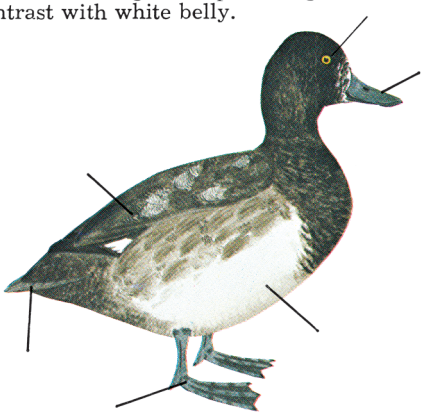
LESSER SCAUP (BLUEBILL, BROADBILL)

MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK,
1¾-2 POUNDS,
15-18 INCHES LONG



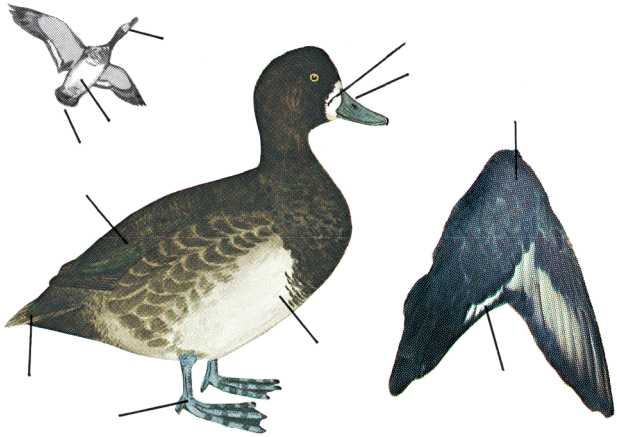
MALE — WINTER

Body: Gray vermiculated back with white sides and belly. Head purple-black. Chest and rump black. Eyes yellow. Bill light blue, short and broad. Feet gray. **Wings:** Dark brown with white flecking on coverts and tertials. Speculum white. **Voice:** *Purr.* **In Flight:** Rapid wingbeat. Dark head and chest contrast with white belly.



MALE — FALL

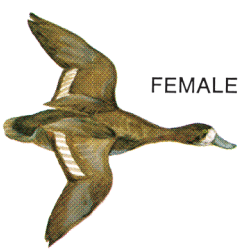
Ranging from bluish brown to blotchy near-winter coloration. Belly whitish. Head dark with scattering of white at base of bill. Bill, eyes, feet and wings same as in winter.



FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Dull brown with distinct white belly. Prominent white patch at base of bill. Eyes yellow. Bill and feet similar to male. **Wings:** Dark brown with minute white flecking on coverts. Speculum white. **Voice:** *Purr* or silent.

MALE



FEMALE

MALE

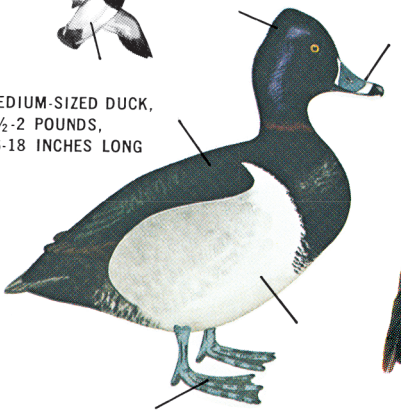
REDHEAD

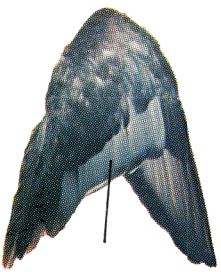
MALE

RING-NECKED DUCK
(RINGBILL)

RING-NECKED DUCK (RINGBILL, BLACKJACK)

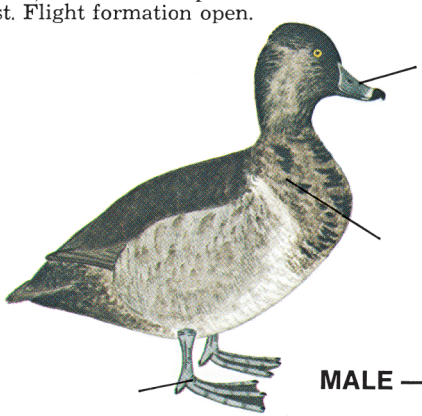
MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK,
1½-2 POUNDS,
16-18 INCHES LONG





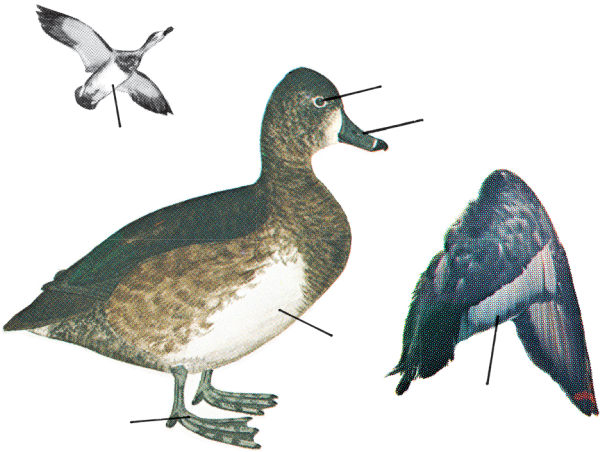
MALE — WINTER

Body: Black back, chest and rump with white crescent on side. Belly white. Head blackish purple with distinct crest. Faint chestnut ring around neck. Eyes yellow-orange. Bill gray with white band at base and toward tip. Feet grayish blue. **Wings:** Greenish-glossed coverts. Speculum pearl gray with faint white trailing edge. **Voice:** *Purr.* **In Flight:** Dark head, neck, back and rump contrast with white belly. Wingbeat fast. Flight formation open.



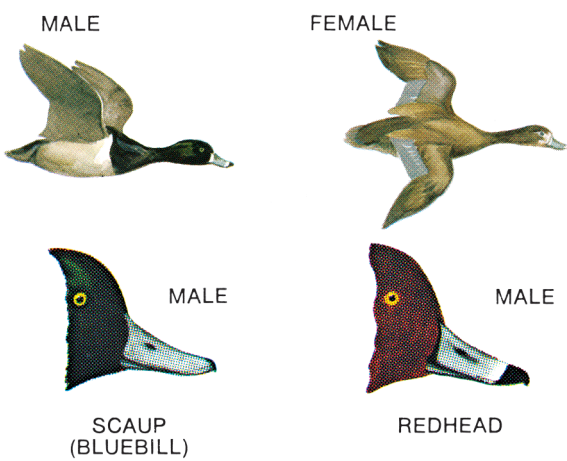
MALE — FALL

Ranging from mottled brownish black with dusky white belly to near-winter coloration. Faint white crescent on sides. Eyes, bill, feet and wings same as in winter.



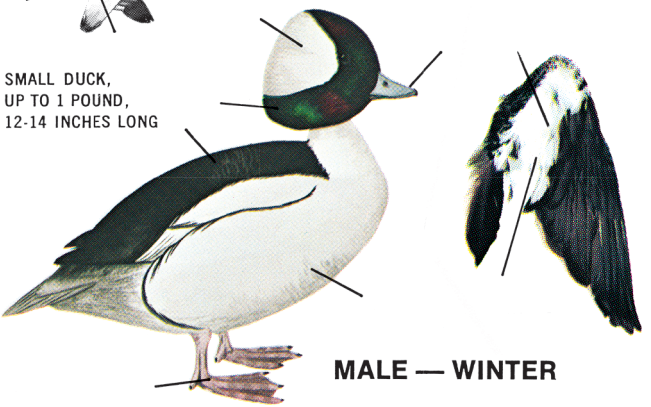
FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Blackish brown back. Brown head, neck and sides. Belly white. Whitish eye-ring and face-patch. Eyes brown. Bill, feet and wings similar to male. **Voice:** Occasional *purr*.



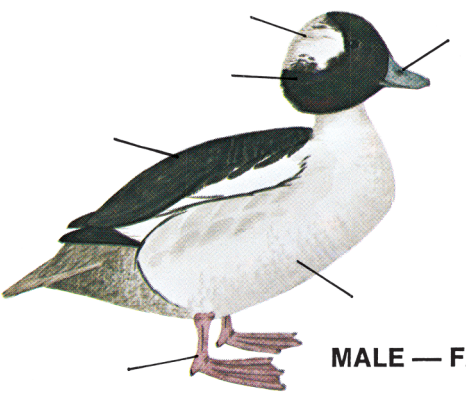
BUFFLEHEAD (BUTTERBALL)

SMALL DUCK,
UP TO 1 POUND,
12-14 INCHES LONG



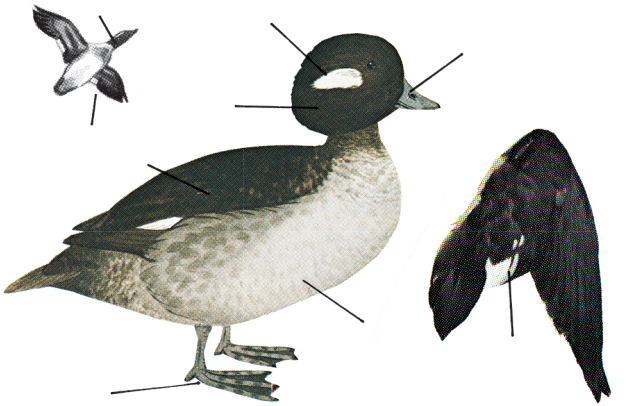
MALE — WINTER

Body: White belly and sides with black back and dusky rump. Puffy-appearing head with multicolored iridescence and fan-shaped white patch. Bill short and bluish gray. Feet pinkish. **Wings:** Mostly black. Coverts and secondaries form large white patch. **Voice:** Squeaky *whistle*. **In Flight:** Small flighty bird. White belly. Puffy head. White head-patch and trailing edge of underwings evident.



MALE — FALL

Ranging from a mottled grayish white to near-winter coloration. Head puffy and brownish. White head-patch streaked with dusky black. Bill, feet and wings same as in winter.



FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

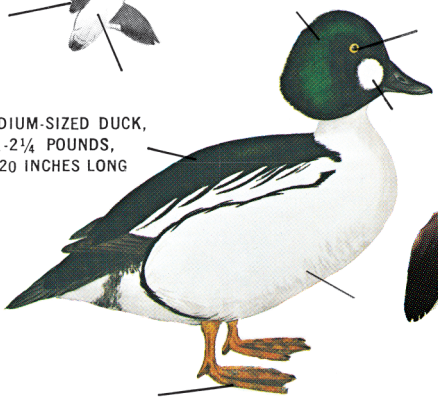
Body: Grayish white with brown back, tail and rump. Head puffy-appearing and brown with small white patch behind eye. Bill and feet brownish gray. **Wings:** Brown with inner secondaries forming small white portion of speculum. **Voice:** Hoarse *quack*.

MALE

FEMALE

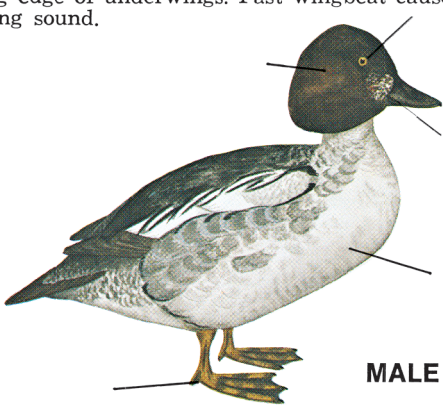
COMMON GOLDENEYE (WHISTLER)

MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK,
1¾-2¼ POUNDS,
17-20 INCHES LONG



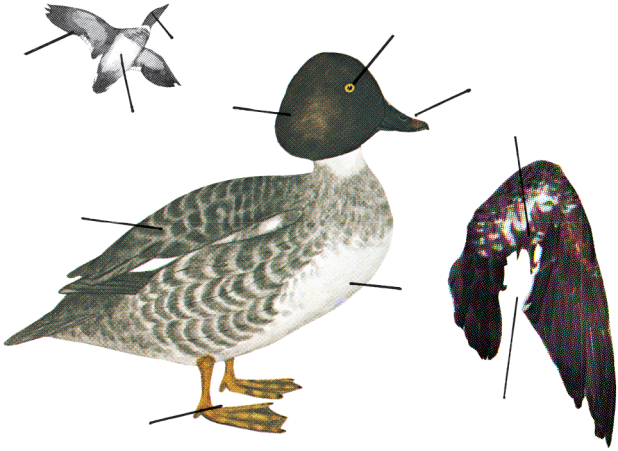
MALE — WINTER

Body: Black back contrasts with white belly. Iridescent green head. Eyes gold. Round white spot on cheek. Bill short and black. Feet yellow-orange. **Wings:** Coverts and seculum form white patch; remainder of wing black. **Voice:** Piercing *speer*. **In Flight:** White on body. Dark head. White on trailing edge of underwings. Fast wingbeat causes distinct whistling sound.



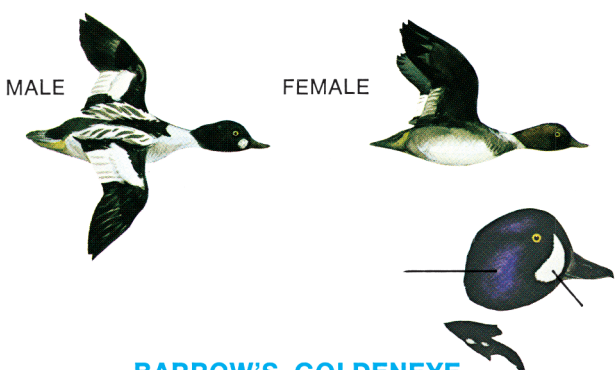
MALE — FALL

Ranging from dull gray appearance to blotchy near-winter coloration. Head brownish green. White spot in front of eyes blotched with brown. Eyes, bill, wings and feet same as in winter.



FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Mottled gray over back, chest and sides. Throat and belly white. Brown head lacks white cheek-spot. Bill short and black, occasionally with orangish tip. Feet yellow-orange. **Wings:** Dark with lesser and middle coverts gray; inner greater coverts and secondaries white. **Voice:** Low *quack*.

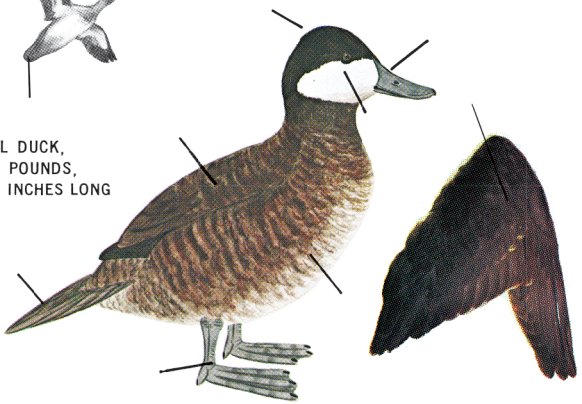


BARROW'S GOLDENEYE

Purple head with crescent-shaped white cheek-spot. Remainder of bird similar to Common Goldeneye. Rare east of Rocky Mountains.

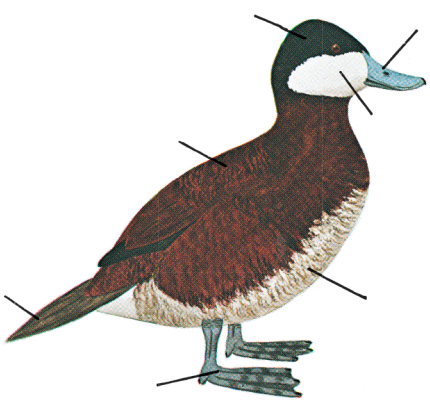
RUDDY DUCK
(RUDDY, SPIKETAIL)

SMALL DUCK,
1-1½ POUNDS,
13-15 INCHES LONG



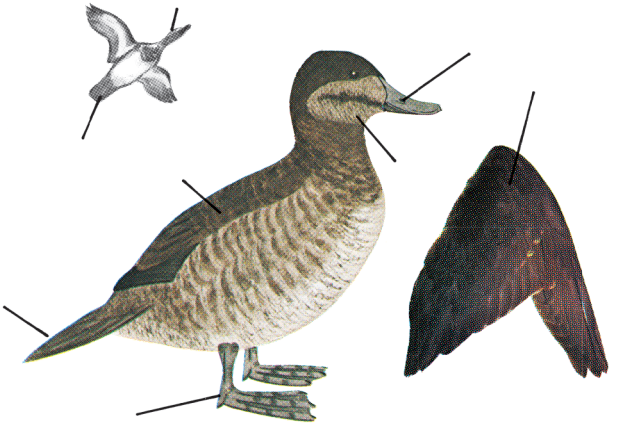
MALE — FALL AND WINTER

Body: Barred brown with lighter belly. Brown spike-like tail. Dark crowned head. Grayish white to white face-patch. Bill and feet gray. **Wings:** Brownish with slight white flecking. **Voice:** *Cluck.* **In Flight:** Small, drab, stubby-necked bird. Rapid wingbeat. Reluctant flyer; flies low.



MALE — SPRING AND SUMMER

Rusty brown with barred brown, black and white belly. Tail brown. Crown of head black. White face-patch. Bill bright blue. Wings and feet same as in winter.



FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

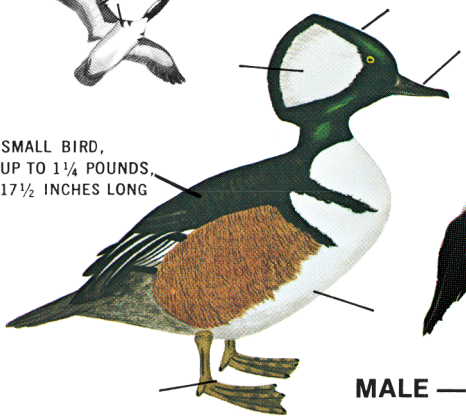
Body: Similar to male in winter but lighter sides. Face-patch, often indistinct, with dark stripe. Bill, feet and wings similar to male in winter. **Voice:** Occasional weak *cluck*.

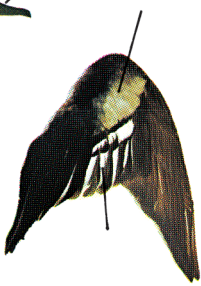
MALE

FEMALE

HOODED MERGANSER
(FISH DUCK, SAWBILL)

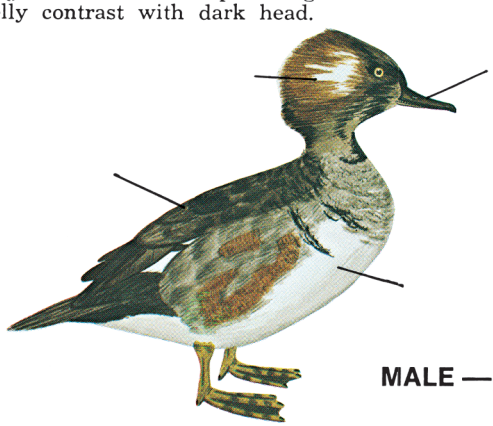
SMALL BIRD,
UP TO 1¼ POUNDS,
17½ INCHES LONG





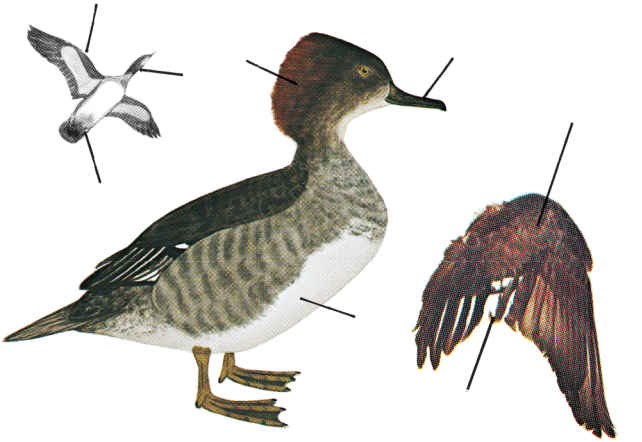
MALE — WINTER

Body: Black back with two prominent black bars between chest and sides. White belly. Vermiculated tan sides. Dark greenish black head with distinct hood and fan-shaped white area. Eyes yellow. Bill blackish, narrow and serrated. Feet dull yellowish olive. **Wings:** Lesser and middle coverts gray, greater coverts, secondaries and tertials black and white; remainder dark. **Voice:** Series of coarse *grunts*. **In Flight:** Small size. Rapid wingbeat. White head-patch and belly contrast with dark head.



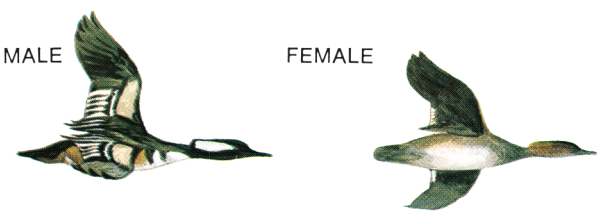
MALE — FALL

Ranging from blotchy brown, black and white to near-winter coloration. Belly white. Hood present but lacking distinct white pattern. Eyes, feet, bill and wings same as in winter.

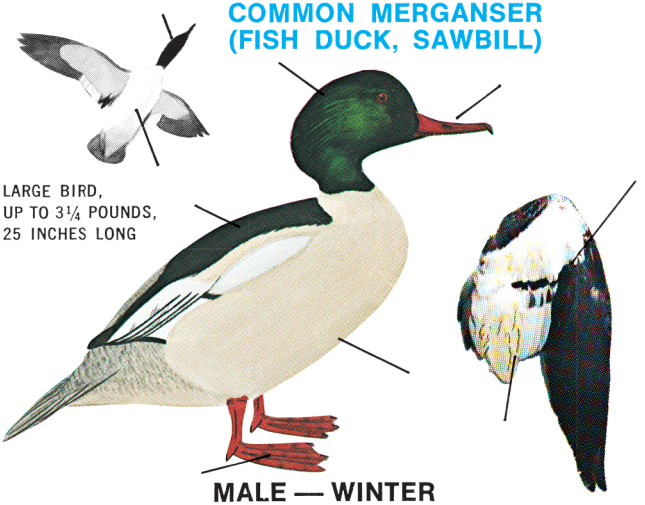


FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

Body: Dark back with chest and sides mottled gray. Belly white. Hood rusty. Eyes yellow-brown. Narrow, serrated blackish bill with yellow or orange tinge. Feet greenish brown. **Wings:** Similar to male but with less white. Coverts brown instead of gray. **Voice:** Rough *grunt.*



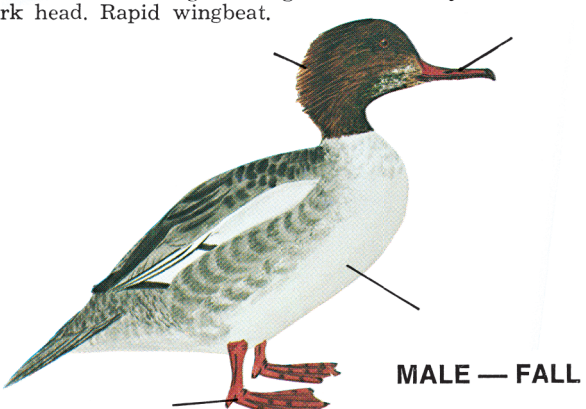
COMMON MERGANSER (FISH DUCK, SAWBILL)



LARGE BIRD,
UP TO 3¼ POUNDS,
25 INCHES LONG

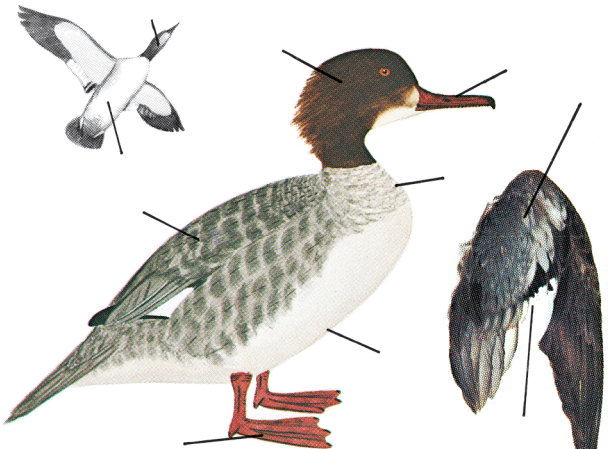
MALE — WINTER

Body: Black back. Belly, chest and sides white, tinted with pink. Greenish black head with narrow, serrated dusky red bill. Eyes reddish brown. Feet reddish. **Wings:** Middle coverts creamy white. Speculum white with black leading edge. Tertials pale creamy yellow; remainder blackish. **Voice:** Hoarse *croak*. **In Flight:** Elongated white body contrasts with dark head. Rapid wingbeat.



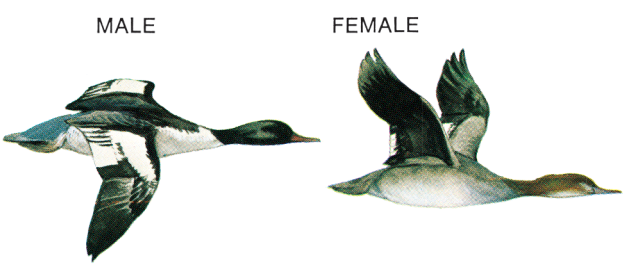
MALE — FALL

Ranging from mottled gray, black and white body with black-streaked cinnamon brown head to near-winter coloration. Belly white. Feet, eyes, bill and wings same as in winter.



FEMALE — ALL SEASONS

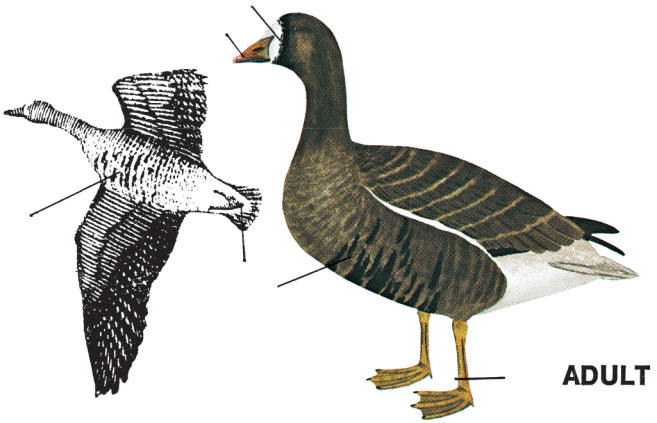
Body: Mottled gray with white chest and belly. Head reddish brown with crest. Whitish chin. Bill and feet similar to male but dull red. **Wings:** Coverts and tertials grayish. White speculum with black leading edge; remainder black. **Voice:** Hoarse *croak*.



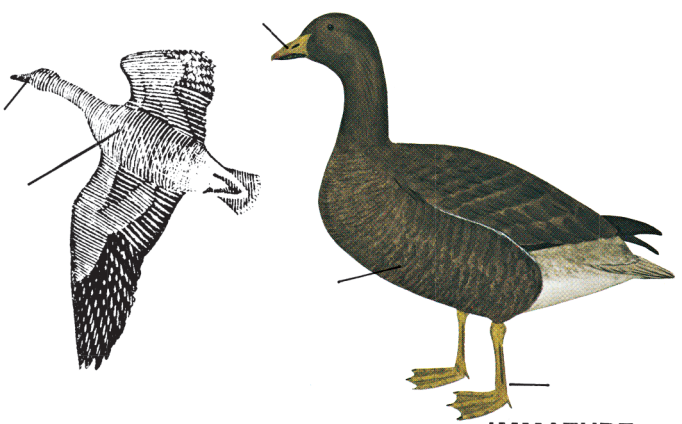
WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (SPECKLEBELLY, TIGER BREAST)

(Sexes Similar)

MEDIUM-SIZED GOOSE, 4½-7 POUNDS, 27-30 INCHES LONG



ADULT

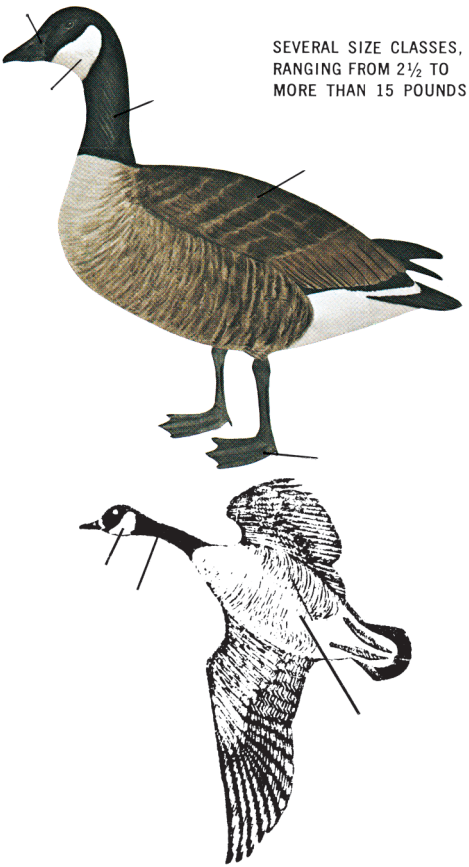


IMMATURE

Body: Grayish brown. Adult characterized from immature by black barring on breast and white on face. Bill yellow-gold with adult showing some pink at base and tip. Feet yellow-orange. **Voice:** High-pitched *ke-lee-lee-lee*. **In Flight:** Yellow-orange feet and black-barred breast in adult evident.

CANADA GOOSE (HONKER)

(Sexes Similar)

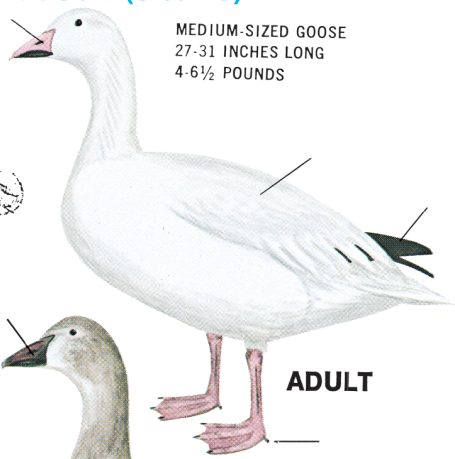


Body: Blackish brown back and sides. Chest and belly vary from brownish to pearl gray with larger subspecies usually lighter. Head and neck jet black with white cheek- and throat-patch. Bill and feet black. **Voice:** Deep-throated *honk*. **In Flight:** Black head and neck with white cheek and throat evident. Immature and adult similar.

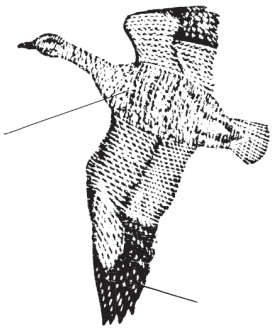
SNOW GOOSE (SNOWS)

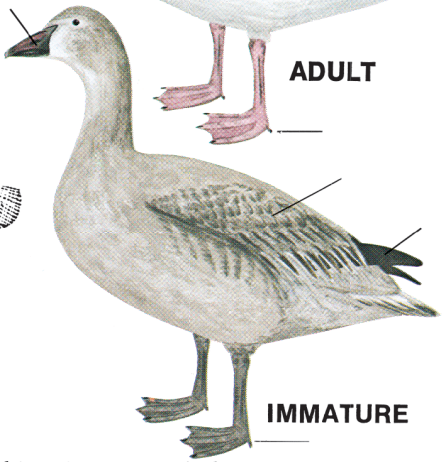
(Sexes Similar)

MEDIUM-SIZED GOOSE
27-31 INCHES LONG
4-6½ POUNDS



ADULT





IMMATURE

Body: Adult snow white; immature dusky white. Bill of adult pink with whitish tip immature bill, dusky. Bill forms "grin-patch" where upper and lower portions meet. Feet of adult pink; immature feet, dusky. **Wings:** Adult, snow white with black primaries; immature, dusky with black primaries. **Voice:** Harsh, high-pitched *yelp*. **In Flight:** Adult, snow white body and black wing tips; immature, dusky white body and black wing tips.

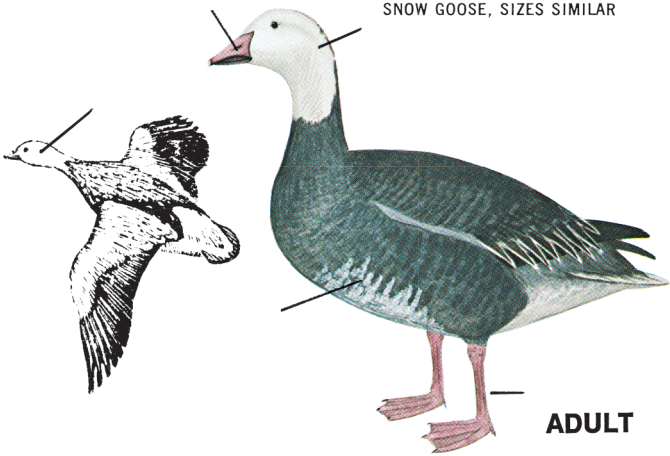
ROSS' GOOSE

Small mallard-sized goose. Identical to Snow Goose in coloration but has small short bill. Lacks "grin-patch." Adult with wart-like tissue at base of bill.

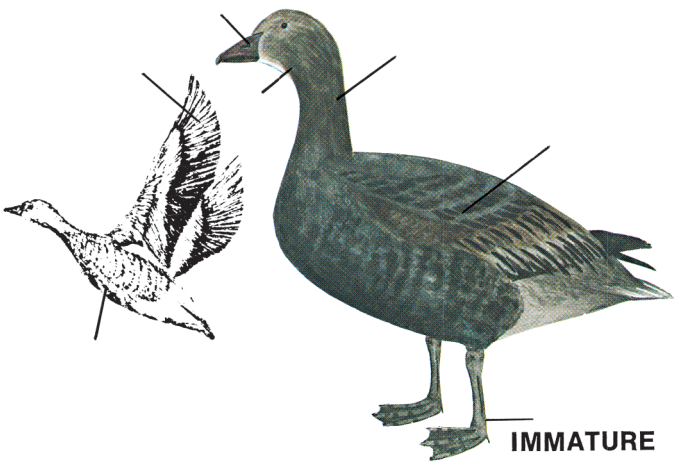
BLUE GOOSE (BLUES)

(Sexes Similar)

A COLOR-PHASE OF THE SNOW GOOSE, SIZES SIMILAR



ADULT

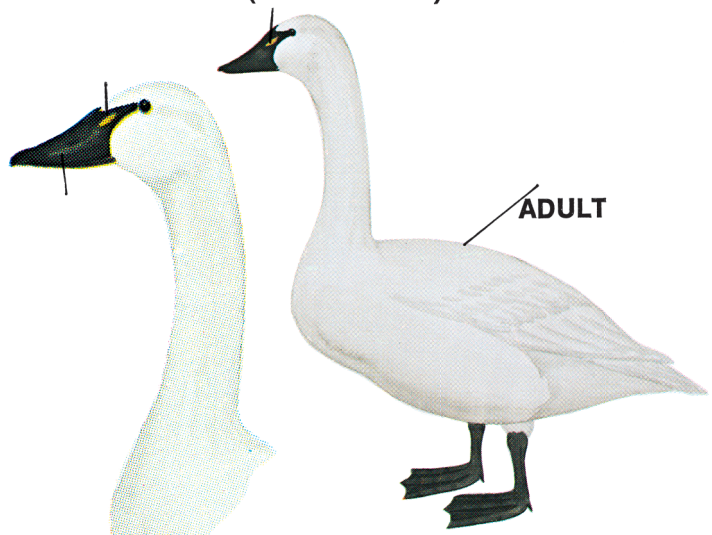


IMMATURE

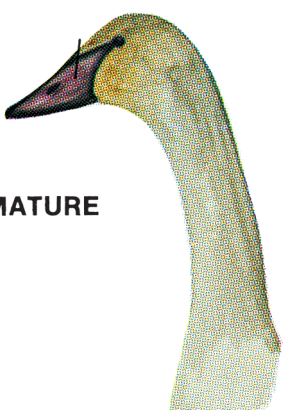
Body: Slate gray. Head of adult white; immature, gray with small white patch on chin. Feet, bill and "grin-patch" same as Snows. **Wings:** Slate gray with darker primaries in both adult and immature. **Voice:** Same as Snow. **In Flight:** Adult, white head and white or light belly; immature, slate gray with darker wing tips.

TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLER)

(Sexes Similar)

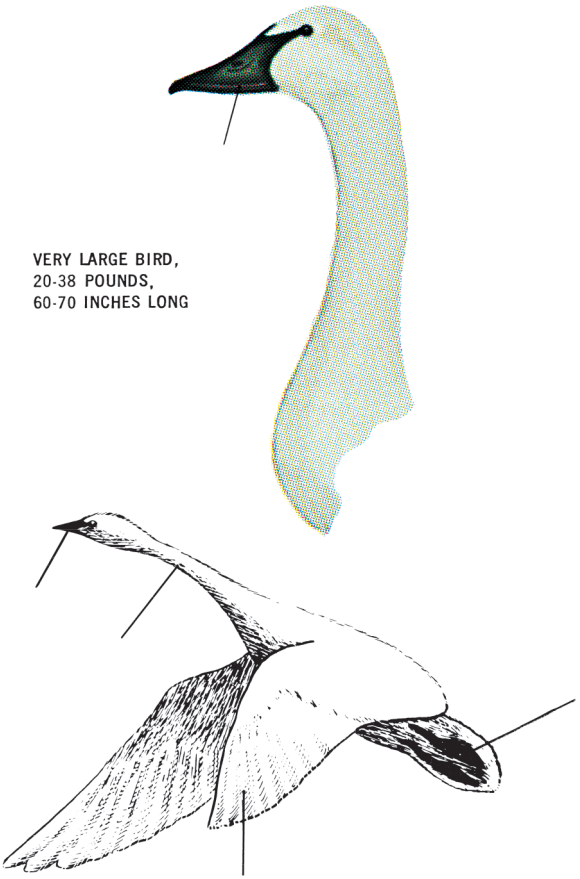


VERY LARGE BIRD, 11-20 POUNDS, 48-57 INCHES LONG



Body: Adult entirely snow white; immature grayish white. Primaries whitish as opposed to black primaries on Snow Goose. Adult feet and bill black with yellow spot on bill in front of eye; immature, dull pinkish feet and bill, and bill lacks yellow spot. **Voice:** Loud, musical and varied *wow-wow-ou* and *who-who*. **In Flight:** Very long white neck and body. Black bill and feet evident.

TRUMPETER SWAN (BUGLER)
(Sexes Similar)

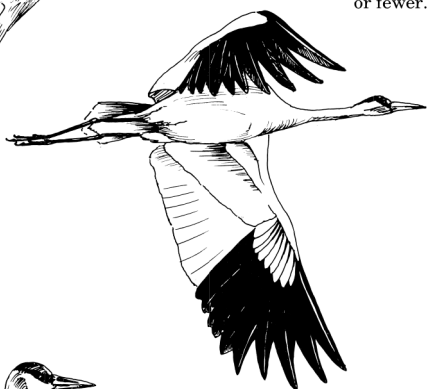


Body: Adult white; immature grayish white. Primaries similar to Whistler. Adult feet and bill black with salmon red streak along edge of bill; immature, dull yellowish brown feet and black bill with pinkish markings on ridge and edge. **Voice:** Resonant *trumpeting* call. **In Flight:** Similar to Whistler. Generally local, nonmigrating populations.

THERE ARE MORE THAN JUST

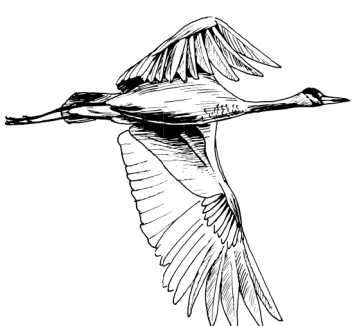
WHOOPING CRANE

Snowy white and stands more than four feet tall. In flight, its black wingtips are visible, its neck is extended and its long dark legs extend beyond the tail. It has a wingspan of 7½ feet. Whoopers usually are found in small groups of six or seven or fewer.



SANDHILL CRANE

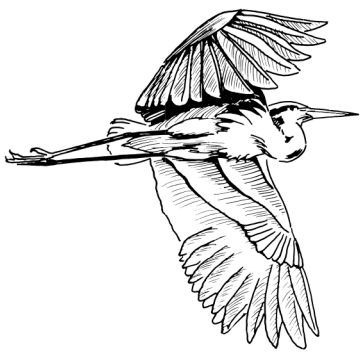
Grey, not white, although may look almost white in certain light. Stands four feet tall or less, has a six-foot wingspan and lacks black wing tips. Adults, like whooping cranes, have red crowns visible in good light. Legs extend beyond tail in flight.



DUCKS ON OUR MARSHES!

GREAT BLUE HERON

Stands four feet tall, is dark grayish-blue and has a wing span of nearly six feet. These common herons fly with their necks folded and long legs trailing behind. Often seen as singles or in small groups.



GREAT EGRET

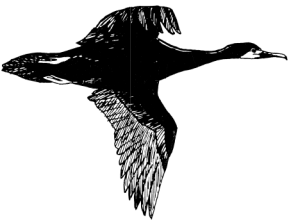
An all white heron with 4½-foot wingspan and bright yellow beak. In flight, the neck is not extended but their black legs extend beyond the tail. Slightly smaller than sandhill cranes when standing.

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN

May be confused with the whooping crane, especially in flight, but neck is not extended. Black markings on its eight-foot wingspan extend almost to its body and its yellow legs are not visible beyond the tail. The bill is long and yellow. Commonly seen in large flocks of 20 or more.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT

Goose-sized with a slender body, long neck and slender, hooked bill that is usually tilted up while swimming. Orange throat patch. Dark, nearly totally black body. More rapid wing beat and longer tail than geese.



COMPARATIVE SIZES OF SOME WATER BIRDS

Outstretched Neck in Flight

Trumpeter Swan p. 55

Whooping Crane p. 56

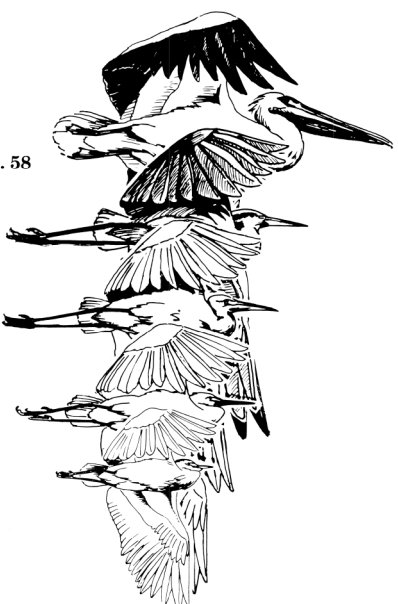
Wood Stork

Sandhill Crane p. 56

Double-crested Cormorant p. 58

White Ibis

Snow Goose p. 52



Tucked Neck in Flight

American White Pelican p. 58

Great Blue Heron p. 57

Great Egret p. 57

Snowy Egret

Cattle Egret

WILDLIFE
RESTORATION