

# What to look and listen for to know your ducks...

Habitat, action, color, shape and voice — all help distinguish one species from another.

Shallow marshes and creeks normally attract few divers; large, deep bodies of water are not usual feeding grounds of puddle ducks.

The maneuvers of a flock in the air can help indicate the species. Mallards, pintails, and widgeons form loose groups; teals and shovellers flash by in small bunches; mergansers often appear in single file; canvasbacks shift from waving lines to temporary V's; red-heads "boil up" in short flights from one end of a lake to the other.

Closer up, individual silhouettes can show large heads or

small, broad bills or narrow, fat bodies or slender, long tails or short. Trained observers also identify ducks from the wing beats; they may be fast or slow, short rapid flutters or long strokes.

At close range, color areas can be positive. Depending on light conditions they may or may not appear in their true color, but their size and location are a key to the identity.

The sound of wings can be as important as that of voice. The pinions of goldeneyes whistle in flight; the swish of wood ducks is different from the steady rush of canvasbacks. Not all ducks quack; many whistle, squeal or grunt. Experience can teach you the dif-

ference.

## PINTAIL

Found in every flyway, most plentiful in the west.

Extremely graceful, fast flier, fond of zig-zagging from great heights before leveling off for a landing. Equally agile on land; visits croplands to glean food.

Drakes whistle; hens have a hoarse quack.

## MALLARDS

Most common duck. Extremely hardy, wintering as far north as it can find open water.

Flocks often leave the water in early morning and late afternoon to feed in nearby harvest fields,

returning to marshes and creeks to spend the night.

The flight is not particularly rapid; voice of the hen is a loud quack; of the drake, a lower-pitched kwek-kwek.

## BLACK DUCK

A bird of the eastern States, using the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways.

Shy and wary, regarded as the wariest of all ducks.

Often seen in company of mallards, but along the Atlantic coast frequents the salt marshes and the ocean much more than mallards.

Flight is swift; usually small flocks, in V's or angular lines.

Voice is duplicate of mallards.

## GADWALL

Not plentiful anywhere; greatest numbers in the Central flyway, fewest in the Atlantic flyway.

The only puddle duck with white in the speculum.

Small, compact flocks fly swiftly, usually in a direct line. Wing beats are rapid.

Drakes whistle and kack-kack; hens quack like a mallard hen, but softer.

## WIDGEON

Nervous birds, quick to take alarm. Agile fliers, usually in compact flocks. Flight is fast, irregular, with many twists and turns. White belly and forewing very conspicuous in the air.

When feeding, often accompanies diving ducks and robs them of

food brought up from depths beyond the widgeon's capability.

Drakes whistle; hens utter a loud kaow and a lower qua-awk.

## SHOVELER

Early fall migrant; usual flight is steady and direct. When startled, the small flocks fly erratically, twisting and turning like teal.

Greatest numbers occur in the Central and Pacific flyways.

Aquatic animal life forms a third of its diet.

Drakes call woh-woh and took-took; hens have a feeble quack.

## WOOD DUCK

Found in all flyways; most numerous in the Mississippi flyway.

Frequents wooded streams and ponds; perches in trees.

Flies through thick timber with speed and ease, and feeds readily on acorns, berries, and grapes on the forest floor.

Flight is swift and direct; flocks are usually small.

Drakes have a hoo-w-ett, often in flight; hens have a cr-r-ek when frightened.

## GREAT SCAUP

Flock movement is rapid, in fairly compact formation; over feeding areas they normally fly under hundred-foot altitude. The wings produce a loud rustling sound.

Longer light strip showing through the wing is the best way to (See Know Ducks, Page 13)

## Hungry

With approximately 44% of the central flyway snow goose harvest occurring in Texas, Texas Parks and Wildlife, waterfowl processors and the Texas Association of Community Action Agencies Inc. created a pilot project within the Hunters for the Hungry (HFTH) program to utilize snow geese. HFTH provides hunters an opportunity to help feed hungry Texans and at the same time prevent the disruption of the Arctic ecosystem by reducing the snow goose population to a level that can be sustained by the land.

Hunters may take their legally harvested light geese (snow, blue

and Ross' geese) to a participating waterfowl processor listed here, and pay a tax-deductible Processing fee of \$1 to \$3 per goose. Processors then prepare the bird and donate the meat to food banks, food pantries and other food assistance providers in the area.

**Participating waterfowl processors include:**

Blue Goose Hunting Club: 9800 Hwy. 90A, Altair; 979-234-3597.

Oyster Bayou Hunting Club, Hwy. 1985 (6.25 miles west of 124), Baytown; 409-296-4848.

Total Outdoor Adventures: south end of County Road 251,

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Egypt; 979-760-6331.

Waterfowl Specialties Inc.: northeast corner of Hwy. 59 & Divide St., El Campo; 979-543-1109.

Rosie's Pickers: 101 Arthur, Garwood; 979-758-3296.

Paradise Hunting Club: No. 2, Rt. 333, Garwood; 800-368-4769.

Blazes Bird Processing: 5733 North St., Katy; 281-391-3490.

Bay Prairie Outfitters & Lodge: Corner of FM 111 & Hwy. 71, Midfield; 512-588-1122.

Central Flyway Outfitters: 4 miles west of Stowell on Hwy. 65, Winnie; 409-296-4999.

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