

# Look, listen 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; redheads "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 difference.

## 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. Ex-

tremely 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 distinguish from the lesser scaup in the air.

Frequents the largest bodies of water, where it rafts up during the day.

Drakes utter a discordant scap, scaup; hens are usually silent.

## COMMON GOLDENEYE

Distinctive wing-whistling sound in flight has earned the name of Whistlers.

Active, strong-winged fliers, moving in small flocks, often high in the air. Exceedingly wary. Large numbers winter in Great Lakes and both seacoasts.

Barrow's Goldeneye, predomi-

nantly a westerner, differs mainly in the white crescent in front of the eye.

Drakes have a piercing speer-speer; hens a low quack. Both are usually quiet.

## REDHEAD

Ranges coast to coast, often found with canvasback. On migration, large flocks travel in V's; in feeding areas, flocks fly in irregular formations. Movements in the air always seem to be hurried.

Usually spends the day in the large rafts in deep water; feeds morning and evening in more shallow sections.

Drakes purr and meow; hens have a loud squawk, higher than mallard hen's.

## CANVASBACK

Extremely powerful fliers, migrating in lines and irregular V's; in feeding areas, compact flocks fly in indefinite formation. Wing beat is rapid and noisy. Normally late migrants.

On the water, body size and head shape distinguish them from scaups and redheads.

Drakes croak, peep, and growl; hens quack, similar to a mallard.

## HOODED MERGANSER

Often seen in pairs, or very small flocks.

The birds are graceful fliers, give an impression of great speed.

Flushes straight up or patters along water.

Wing strokes are short, rapid; the wings appear to blur.

Seldom goes to salt water; wintering grounds are the inland waters in all coastal states.

Only call is a series of coarse grunts.

## RED-BREASTED MERGANSER

Flight is very similar to common mergansers, but drakes show far less conspicuous white.

Juveniles and many adult drakes resemble hens during migration, for adult males grow out of eclipse plumage late.

Winter principally along both coasts, as well as Gulf of Mexico.

Voice; croaks, seldom heard.

## COMMON MERGANSER

Strong fliers; the flight is swift and direct, low over the water, often in "follow the leader" line.

A very large duck; drakes show more white than any other species.

Winters from ice-free water in the north to the coastal waters of the Southern States.

The only call seems to be a startled croak.

## SPECIES WITH LIMITED RANGES

These birds: Harlequin, Oldsquaw, Fulvous Tree Duck, Surf Scoter, Common Scoter, White-Winged Scoter, Black-bellied Tree Duck and Common Eider; except the tree ducks, are primarily of the sea.

Harlequins go a little further south than Long Island and Puget Sound and north to Alaska. Oldsquaws have essentially the same range, plus the Great Lakes.

Fulvous tree ducks are beginning to spread into the east from Louisiana west to California, while the black-bellied is still restricted to Texas.

Scoter hunting is heaviest in New England, where all three species are locally known as "coots." Some flocks migrate along the coast as far as the Carolinas on the Atlantic and lower California on the Pacific.

Common elders are only in the North Atlantic, but related forms occur in the northwest and Alaska.

## DIVING DUCKS

Diving ducks frequent the larger, deeper lakes and rivers, and

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