

Duck Identification Guidelines Given

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. 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; 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 Mis-

issippi flyway.

Frequents wooded streams and ponds; perches in trees.

Flies through thick timber with speed and ease, and feeds readily

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