Waterfowl Identification
WFS 536

Order
Anseriformes

Family
Anatidae

Anas acuta

Matthew J. Gray
University of Tennessee
Subfamily *Anserinae*

**Tribe Dendrocygnini**  
Whistling or Treeducks

**Tribe Cygnini**  
Swans

**Tribe Anserini**  
True Geese
Fulvous Whistling Duck
(Dendrocygna bicolor)

- Large, long-legged, long-necked duck
  - Dark bill and dark Legs
  - Chestnut Belly

“Mostly Tropical and Nocturnal”
Black-bellied Whistling Duck
(Dendrocygna autumnalis)

- Large, long-legged, long-necked duck
- Bright Orange Bill and Pink Legs
- Black Belly

“Mostly Tropical and Nocturnal”
Mute Swan
*(Cygnus olor)*

- Large, long-necked waterbird with entirely white plumage and black legs and feet
  - Neck held in distinctive "S" curve
  - Orange bill with black base; knob above bill

“The Most Aggressive Swan in NA”

40 in. BL
90 in. WS
Trumpeter Swan

(Cygnus buccinator)

- Large, long-necked waterbird with entirely white plumage and black legs and feet
  - Long neck usually held straight up
  - Long, **solid** black bill that extends to eye but does not encircle it
Tundra Swan
(Cygnus columbianus)

- Large, long-necked waterbird with entirely white plumage and black legs and feet
  - Long neck usually held straight up
  - Long, slightly concave black bill that extends to eye ending in a yellow “tear drop”

36 in. BL
85 in. WS

Waterfowl w/ the most feathers (ca. 25,000)
White-fronted Goose

*(Anser albifrons)*

- Medium-sized long-necked goose
- Mostly brown plumage
- White patch at base of pink or orange bill
- Irregular black flecking on belly
- Orange legs and feet

20 in. BL
60 in. WS
Snow Goose
(*Chen caerulescens*)

- Medium-sized Goose
- Pink bill w/ black patch along mandibles

**Blue Morph**
- Throat white
- White-edged scapulars

**White Morph**
- Entirely white plumage
- Black primaries

19 in. BL 58 in. WS
Canada Goose
(\textit{Branta canadensis})

- 11 Races
  - B. c. maxima
  - B. c. minima

16-25 in. BL
50-68 in. WS
4-13 lbs

- Small to large long-necked goose
- Black bill, head, and neck
- White \textit{throat patch} extends up to cheek
- \textbf{Brown} back, upper wing, and flanks
Subfamily Anatinae

- Tribe Cairinini: Perching Ducks
- Tribe Anatini: Dabbling Ducks
- Tribe Aythyini: Diving Ducks
- Tribe Mergini: Sea Ducks
- Tribe Oxyurini: Stiff-tailed Ducks
Wood Duck
*(Aix sponsa)*

13 in. BL  
28 in. WS

**Drake**
- Red bill and eye
- Green head
- White throat and cheek stripe
- Chestnut breast
- Golden flanks

**Hen**
- Gray bill
- White teardrop around eye and edge of secondaries
- White throat
- Gray-brown head and body

*Photo by Pat Lynch*
Mallard

*(Anas platyrhynchos)*

**Drake**
- Green head
- Yellow or olive bill
- White ring around neck
- Chestnut breast
- Gray belly and flanks

**Hen**
- Orange bill with black central patch
- Dark cap and eye line
- Mottled brown/tan plumage

16 in. BL
36 in. WS
American Black Duck

(Anas rubripes)

16 in. BL

36 in. WS

**Drake**
- Dark brown head & body
- Dark blue speculum not bordered by white
  - Greenish-yellow bill
  - Bright red legs

**Hen**
- Dark brown head & body
- Dark blue speculum not bordered by white
  - Green bill with black saddle
  - Orange legs

“A Forest Duck”
American Green-winged Teal
(*Anas crecca carolinensis*)

**“The fastest duck in NA”**

- Very small-bodied duck

**Drake**
- Rust colored head with green post-ocular patch
- Black bill

**Hen**
- Light brown head and body
- Dark gray bill
Blue-winged Teal
(*Anas discors*)

- Very small-bodied duck
- 11 in. BL
- Drake: Green speculum BUT blue in lesser and middle coverts
- Hen: Light brown head

- 24 in. WS
- Blue-iridescent head
- White crescent patch
- Dark brown crown
- Buff breast & flanks w/ spots
- Mottled gray-brown body
Gadwall
(Anas strepera)

14.5 in. BL     35 in. WS

• Average-sized bodied duck with steep forehead
• **White** speculum (*only dabbler*) and black rump

**Drake**
• Black bill

**Hen**
• Gray **bill with orange edges**
American Wigeon
\( (Anas\ americana) \)

14 in. BL

34 in. WS

- Blue bill with black nail
- White secondary coverts (grayer in females)

**Drake**
- White crown
- Green post-ocular stripe
- Rusty breast and flanks

**Hen**
- Mottled body w/rusty flanks contrasting w/ head & neck
- Dusky eye patch
Northern Pintail
(*Anas acuta*)

18.5 in. BL

35 in. WS

- Dull **blue** bill with black culmen stripe
- Very long neck, small head and attenuated retrices

**Drake**

- Dark brown head
- White chest & neck extending into latitudinal stripe

**Hen**

- Tan head lightly colored mottled body
- Bronze speculum
Northern Shoveler
\((Anas clypeata)\)

14 in. BL

31 in. WS

“A very territorially breeder”

- Spatulate bill

**Drake**
- Black bill
- Green head and yellow eyes
- White chest & chestnut sides

**Hen**
- Orange bill with mottling
- Tan head and brown eyes
- Mottled brown body
Canvasback  
(*Aythya valisineria*)

- **15 in. BL**  
- **34 in. WS**

One of the fastest ducks (>100 km/h)

- **Drake**
  - Long sloping forehead and peaked crown
  - Black bill
  - Red eye, head, and neck
  - Black chest and breast
  - Pale gray back & flanks

- **Hen**
  - Brown eye, head, and neck
  - Brown chest and breast
  - Pale gray back and flanks
Redhead
(Aythya americana)

14.5 in. BL
33 in. WS

• Smoothly rounded head
• Dark wing with grayish secondaries

Drake
• Red head & neck; yellow eye!
• Blue bill w/ white ring before black tip

Hen
• Brown eye, head, and neck
• Blue-gray bill w/ faint white ring before black tip
Ring-necked Duck

(Aythya collaris)

12 in. BL

28 in. WS

- Bill with white semi-terminal ring
- White/cream-colored ring at base of bill

**Drake**
- Purple head & neck; yellow eye
- Gray flanks with vertical white finger near black chest

**Hen**
- Brown eye, head, and neck
- Faint white eye ring and **solid** white ring before tip
Lesser Scaup  
(*Aythya affinis*)

- Purplish head
- White on wing restricted to speculum
- Body size

Greater Scaup  
(*Aythya marila*)

- Greenish head
- White on speculum extends to primaries
- Body size

12 in. BL  29 in. WS  
13 in. BL  31 in. WS
Common Goldeneye

(Bucephala clangula)

13 in. BL  
31 in. WS

- Short, stubby bill
- Body rides low in water

Drake
- Green head & neck; yellow eye
- White circular cheek patch
- All white chest, breast, flanks

Hen
- Redish-brown head
- Terminus of bill light colored
- Gray body
Barrow’s Goldeneye
*(Bucephala islandica)*

“The most territorial of NA ducks”

- Steeply sloped forehead
- **Purplish** head and large crest
- White **tear-drop** shaped cheek patch
- White **neck, breast and belly**
  - Dark back

13 in. BL
31 in. WS
Bufflehead
(*Bucephala albeola*)

10 in. BL

24 in. WS

- “Smallest duck in North America”
- Very small dark gray bill

**Drake**
- Dark iridescent head
- Large white patch extending from back of head to eye
- White body

**Hen**
- Dull brown head
- White longitudinal stripe on cheek
- Brown body
Hooded Merganser

(Lophodytes cucullatus)

13 in. BL

26 in. WS

“Smallest merganser”

- Long, pointed serrated bill
- Fan-like crest, small body, yellow eye

Drake

- Black forehead, cheek, & crest
- White cheek/crest patch not extending to eye

Hen

- Brown head, neck, flanks, back, and wings w/ paler breast
- Faint reddish tinge to crest
Common Merganser

(Mergus merganser)

18 in. BL  
37 in. WS

“Largest merganser”

- Long, pointed serrated bill that is thick at base
  - Brown eye
  
Drake
- Dark green head with no crest
- White body and black back

Hen
- Copper-colored head with crisp chest separation
- Distinct white chin patch
Ruddy Duck

(Oxyura jamaicensis)

11 in. BL

23 in. WS

Can move through water waveless

- Small, chunky diving duck with flat, wide bill
- Long stiff retrices that are often held vertically

**Drake**
- Bright blue bill
- Rust colored body
- White cheek & under tail coverts

**Hen**
- Dull brown bill
- Dusky longitudinal cheek stripe
- Gray-brown body
North American Waterfowl NOT Required for WFS 536
Emperor Goose
(Chen canagicus)

- Small Coastal Goose
- Mostly gray plumage with black and white feather edging
- White head and neck
- Black throat and foreneck
- Pink bill

18 in. BL
43 in. WS
Common Eider
(Somateria mollissima)

- Bill feathered along side almost to nostril
- Long sloping forehead
- Black crown; light green back of head
- All white chest & breast; black belly & sides

17 in. BL

“Largest Duck in NA”

41 in. WS
Spectacled Eider (Somateria fischeri)

- Bill feathered along side almost to nostril
- Long sloping forehead
- Pale green head w/ large white patch around eye
- Yellow bill; black under- & white upper-parts

15 in. BL 36 in. WS

Endangered
King Eider  
\textit{(Somateria spectabilis)}

16 in. BL  
37 in. WS

“The most northern of the eiders”

- Bill feathered partly along side
- Steep forehead
- Pale blue crown & back of head; green cheek
- Yellow forehead outlined in black; orange bill
White-winged Scoter  
(*Melanitta fusca*)

- Base of bill feathered; white speculum
- Sloping forehead
- **Entirely black plumage; small white eye patch**
- Black bill with a **red tip**

"The largest of the scoters"

16 in. BL  
38 in. WS
Black Scoter
(*Melanitta nigra*)

- 14 in. BL
- 33 in. WS

“The most northern of the scoters”

- Round head
  - Entirely black plumage
- Black bill with *orange* knob at base
Harlequin Duck
(*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

- **Threatened**

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<th>12 in. BL</th>
<th>Threatened</th>
<th>26 in. WS</th>
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“Only duck in NA to nest near fast, running water”

- Small diving duck with short gray bill
- Two circular white patches on side of head
- **Blue-gray** head & body; **white** ocular crescent
  - White stripes on neck and breast
**Oldsquaw**  
(*Clangula hyemalis*)

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<th>15 in. BL</th>
<th>30 in. WS</th>
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<td><strong>“The tenor of the Anatidae”</strong></td>
<td>![Image of Oldsquaw]</td>
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- Very long, black central retrices
- Black bill with pink/orange ring
- White *crown and back of neck*
- Black cheek patch; light brown around eye