

American Black Duck

Description

American black ducks are similar to mallards in size, and resemble the female mallard in coloration, though the black duck's plumage is darker. The male and female black duck are similar in appearance, but the male's bill is yellow while the female's is a dull green. The head is slightly lighter brown than the dark brown body, and the speculum is iridescent violet-blue with predominantly black margins. In flight, the white underwings can be seen in contrast to the dark brown body.

Average length: M 22", F 21"

Average weight: M 2.7 lbs., F 2.4 lbs.

Food habits

American black ducks dabble in shallow water to feed on plant material and small aquatic animals (insects, amphibians, etc.) in freshwater habitats, and mollusks and crustaceans in maritime habitats.

American Coot

Description

While the American coot resembles a duck, it is not actually a duck species. Coots have chicken-like beaks, legs, and feet. Both drake and hen coots are grey in color but appear black from a distance. Their beaks are white with a faint red strip near the tip. The easiest way to tell the sex of a coot is its voice.

Average length: M 16.2", F 16.2"

Average weight: M 1.5 lbs., F 1.2 lbs.

Food Habits

While typically herbivores, coots are opportunistic and eat a highly varied diet depending on their current habitat. Foods range from pondweeds, duckweeds, algae, aquatic insects, invertebrates and mollusks.

American Wigeon (female)

Description

Both males and females have a bluish black-tipped bill.

Male American wigeons have a white patch from the forehead to the middle of the crown and an iridescent green band from the eye to the back of the head. They have a pinkish-brown breast and sides that are separated from the black undertail coverts by white flank feathers. In flight, the white shoulder patch is diagnostic. The legs and feet are blue-gray to dark gray.

Female American wigeons have a gray head with a brownish-black crown and brownish chest and sides. The legs and feet are blue-gray to dark gray.

Average length: M 20", F 19"

Average weight: M 1.8 lbs., F 1.6 lbs

Food habits

American wigeon are aquatic grazers and forage on grasses and sedges in wet meadows and pastures.

American Wigeon (male)

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Barnacle Goose

Description

Barnacle geese have a black chest, neck and crown, with a cream-white face. The sexes are similar in appearance, but males typically are larger. The extension of black from the neck over the head gives the face a hooded appearance. The upper back is black, shading posterior to silver-gray. The breast, sides and flanks are a pale gray and the belly, undertail coverts and rump are white, contrasting markedly with the large black tail. The bill, legs and feet are black.

Average length: M 27.0", F 23.5

Average weight: M 4.03 lbs., F 3.57 lbs.

Food habits

Barnacle geese feed on grasses and coastal plants found in salt marshes, grasslands near river estuaries or tidal mud flats.

Barrows Goldeneye (female)

Description

In flight, a Barrow's goldeneye is difficult to distinguish from a common goldeneye. A puffy, oval-shaped head; steep forehead and stubby triangular bill help distinguish it from a resting common goldeneye.

The male Barrow's goldeneye has a glossy purplish head with a crescent-shaped white patch between the eye and bill. The dark back contrasts with the white neck, breast and belly. The scapulars are black with a distinctive row of rectangular white spots. The white greater coverts are tipped with black, forming a black band between the white speculum and the white patch on the greater coverts. The bill is black and the legs and feet are yellowish.

The female Barrow's goldeneye has a dark chocolate-brown head with a narrow whitish collar. The back and sides are dapple-gray and the chest, breast and belly are white. The bill is fleshy-yellow with a blackish basal area and nail. The legs and feet are yellowish.

Average length: M 19.2", F 17"

Average weight: M 2.13 lbs., F 1.31 lbs.

Food habits

Barrow's goldeneyes dive to feed on aquatic insects, crustaceans, small fish, fish eggs and pondweeds found in freshwater habitats, and mollusks (especially blue mussels), seastars and marine worms found in marine habitats.

Barrows Goldeneye (male)

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Black Scoter

Description

Black scoters are among the most vocal of waterfowl species. Male black scoters are entirely black except for a yellow protuberance on the base of the bill and the gray lower surface of the flight feathers. The legs and feet are dusky and the iris is brown. Female black scoters are dark brown with light whitish cheeks, chin and throat, which contrast with a dark crown. The legs and feet are dusky and the iris is brown.

Average length: M 19.7", F 18.5"

Average weight: M 2.5 lbs., F 2.2 lbs.

Food habits

Black scoters dive to feed on mollusks, crustaceans and small fish found in marine and freshwater habitats. Their diet also includes small amounts of eelgrass, muskgrass, wigeon grass, pondweeds and algae found in inland habitats.

Black-bellied Whistling Duck

Description

Male and female black-bellied whistling ducks are similar in size and color. In general, black-bellied whistling ducks are long-legged, long-necked and the most erect of all ducks. They have a black belly with a chestnut nape, lower neck, chest, and back. A chestnut cap tops the head. They boast a bright orange bill, gray face, and upper neck and white eye ring. The long pink legs are easily observed while they are perched in trees.

Average length: M 19.4", F 19"

Average weight: M 1.80 lbs., F 1.85 lbs.

Food Habits

Black-bellied whistling ducks commonly feed at night on grain, seeds, some insects and mollusks and leaves and shoots found in fields and shallow water.

Blue-winged Teal (female)

Description

Male blue-winged teal have a slate gray head and neck, a black-edged white crescent in front of the eyes and a blackish crown. The breast and sides are tan with dark brown speckles and there is a white spot on the side of the rump. Most of the upper wing coverts are blue-gray, the secondaries form an iridescent green speculum and the underwing is whitish. The bill is black and the legs and feet are yellowish to orange.

Female blue-winged teal have a brownish-gray head with a darker crown and eye stripe. The breast and sides are brown, the upper parts are olive brown, and the upper wing coverts are bluish, but less vibrant than the drake. The bill is gray-black and the legs and feet are dull yellow-brown. The female has a high-pitched squeak.

Average length: M 16", F 14"

Average weight: M 1.0 lbs., F 0.8 lbs.

Food habits

Blue-winged teal dabble to feed on the vegetative parts of aquatic plants (algae, duckweeds, pondweeds, etc.), seeds (sedges, pondweeds, grasses, etc.) and large amounts of aquatic invertebrates found in shallowly flooded wetlands.

Blue-winged Teal (male)

Description

Male blue-winged teal have a slate gray head and neck, a black-edged white crescent in front of the eyes and a blackish crown. The breast and sides are tan with dark brown speckles and there is a white spot on the side of the rump. Most of the upper wing coverts are blue-gray, the secondaries form an iridescent green speculum and the underwing is whitish. The bill is black and the legs and feet are yellowish to orange.

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Brant

Breeding

Brant often nest in loose colonies in Arctic North America and Russia. They breed on the coastal tundra, on low and barren terrain; on islands, deltas, lakes, and sandy areas among puddles and shallows and in vegetated uplands. To avoid predation, brant often build nests on small offshore islands, on islands in small ponds or on gravel spits. Parents are bonded for life and both tend to nests and young. Female brant lay an average of 5 eggs.

Average length: M 25", F 23"

Average weight: M 3.4 lbs., F 3.1 lbs.

Description

In North America, two subspecies of brant are recognized, mostly due to differences in plumage characteristics. Atlantic or Pacific (black) brant are separated into subpopulations inhabiting distinct ranges and having genetic variation. Brant are small, dark geese that have large wings, which give them their characteristic strong flight.

Brant have short necks, small heads and bills. All subspecies have a black head, bill, breast, primaries, tail and legs. The otherwise black neck has a series of white striations, called a necklace, near the middle. The color of the belly varies according to subspecies and subpopulation. Both sexes are identical in plumage, except that the male's white necklace is larger than the female's.

Bufflehead (female)

Description

Male buffleheads have a large white patch across the back of the head that extends from cheek to cheek, forming a bushy crest. The remainder of the head is blackish with an iridescent green and purple sheen. The neck, scapulars, breast, belly and sides are white, and the back and rump are black. The upper wing surface is blackish except for the white speculum extending from the inner and middle secondaries across to the outer lesser and marginal coverts. The bill is light blue-gray and the legs and feet are fleshy pink.

Female buffleheads have a brownish head and neck, except for an oval white patch that extends from below the eye back towards the nape of the neck. The breast, sides and flanks are dark gray, the back is blackish, the belly is whitish and the tail is grayish-brown. The upper wing surface is blackish-brown, except for the inner and middle secondaries and inner greater coverts, which are white, tipped with black. The bill is dark gray and the legs and feet are grayish.

Average length: M 15", F 13"

Average weight: M 1.1 lbs., F 0.7 lbs.

Bufflehead (male)

Description

Male buffleheads have a large white patch across the back of the head that extends from cheek to cheek, forming a bushy crest. The remainder of the head is blackish with an iridescent green and purple sheen. The neck, scapulars, breast, belly and sides are white, and the back and rump are black. The upper wing surface is blackish except for the white speculum extending from the inner and middle secondaries across to the outer lesser and marginal coverts. The bill is light blue-gray and the legs and feet are fleshy pink.

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Average length: M 15", F 13"

Average weight: M 1.1 lbs., F 0.7 lbs.

Canada Goose

Description

Both sexes of Canada geese have a black head and neck except for broad white cheek patches extending from the throat to the rear of the eye. The female of a breeding pair is often smaller. The breast, abdomen and flanks range in coloring from a light gray to a dark chocolate brown, either blending into the black neck or being separated from it by a white collar. The back and scapulars are darker brown, the rump is blackish and the tail is blackish-brown with a U-shaped white band on the rump. The bill, legs and feet are black. Most subspecies are uniformly large and pale and exhibit the characteristic "honking" call.

There are 7 recognized subspecies of Canada geese: Atlantic, Hudson Bay or Interior, Giant, Moffitt's or Great Basin, Lesser, Dusky and Vancouver. In general, the subspecies nesting farther north are smaller in size and darker in color to the west. The Giant Canada goose is the largest goose in the world, with some individuals weighing more than 20 pounds. They can also be long-lived, with a banded giant Canada goose at 30 years and 4 months currently holding the longevity record for waterfowl.

Average length: M 25-45 inches

Average weight: M 3-13 lbs., F 3-11 lbs.

Canvasback (female)

Description

Male canvasbacks have a chestnut-red head and neck, a black breast, grayish back, black rump and blackish-brown tail. The sides, flank and belly are white, while the wing coverts are grayish and vermiculated with black. The bill is blackish and the legs and feet are bluish-gray. The iris is bright red in the spring, but duller in the winter.

Female canvasbacks have a light brown head and neck, grading into a darker brown chest and foreback. The sides, flanks and back are grayish-brown. The bill is blackish and the legs and feet are bluish-gray.

Average length: M 21", F 20"

Average weight: M 2.7 lbs., F 2.5 lbs.

Canvasback (male)

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Average length: M 21", F 20"

Average weight: M 2.7 lbs., F 2.5 lbs.

Cinnamon Teal (female)

Description

Male cinnamon teal have a cinnamon-red head, neck, breast and belly. They have an iridescent green speculum, which is separated from a bluish shoulder patch by a white stripe. The back, rump, uppertail coverts and tail are a dull brown and the undertail coverts are black. They have a distinctive red eye, a black bill and yellow legs and feet.

Female cinnamon teal are often confused with female blue-winged teal. They have a duller blue shoulder patch, an overall rustier color and are more heavily streaked.

Average length: M 16", F 15"

Average weight: M 0.7 lbs., F 0.8 lbs.

Food habits

Cinnamon teal dabble on aquatic plants in shallow water areas, especially rush seeds, pondweed seeds and leaves and salt grass seeds. They also feed on animal food, especially aquatic insects and mollusks.

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Common Eider (female)

Average length: M 24", F 22.5"

Average weight: M 4.3 lbs., F 3.3 lbs.

Description

Common eiders are the largest duck found in the northern hemisphere. They are stocky, thick-necked birds that hold their heads below body level during flight.

Male common eiders have a primarily white head, neck, chest and back. The breast, belly, sides, rump, tail coverts and tail are black. The crown and forehead have a black cap, while the cheeks are pale green and are used in breeding displays. A white round spot occurs on the black flank just forward of the tail. The head has a distinct sloping profile. The bill is olive-gray, turning yellowish near the facial area, and the legs and feet are grayish-green.

Female common eiders are russet-brown to gray. All are heavily barred with dark brown lines on their backs, chests, breasts, sides and flanks. The head has a distinct sloping profile. The bill is olive-gray to olive-yellow and the legs and feet are grayish.

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Common Goldeneye (female)

Description

The common goldeneye, like the Barrow's goldeneye, is named for its brilliant yellow iris. Common goldeneyes fly in small compact clusters, with their wings making a distinctive whistle at every wing beat.

Male common goldeneyes have blackish iridescent green heads with a white circular patch between the eye and the base of the bill. The breast, sides, belly and patch across the secondaries and secondary wing coverts are white. The back, rump and upper tail coverts are black and the tail is grayish-brown. The bill is black and the legs and feet are yellowish.

Female common goldeneyes have chocolate brown heads, a whitish neckband, and speckled gray back and sides. The upper wings are brownish-black with the middle five secondaries colored white. The bill is blackish, becoming yellow near the tip, and the legs and feet are yellowish.

Average length: M 19", F 17"

Average weight: M 2.3 lbs., F 1.7 lbs.

Food Habits

Common goldeneyes use brackish estuarine and saltwater bays and deep freshwater habitats in the winter and dive to feed on a wide variety of available animal life. In inland areas during the summer and fall, they feed on aquatic insects, crustaceans, and aquatic plants. Along coastal wintering grounds they feed largely on crustaceans, mollusks, small fishes and some plant material.

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Common Merganser (female)

Description

The long, narrow bill with serrated edges readily distinguishes mergansers from all other ducks. Common mergansers are among the largest ducks, but are less stocky than eiders and goldeneyes. In flight, they appear more elongated than other ducks, flying in trailing lines close to the water's surface.

Male common mergansers have a greenish-black crested head and upper neck. The lower neck, breast and underparts are creamy-white with a variable pink wash. They have black backs and upperwing coverts with white scapulars. The bill is red with a blackish culmen and nail. The legs and feet are a deep red.

Female common mergansers have a tufted red-brown head that is clearly defined from the lower neck by a clear whitish chin. The back and sides are silver-gray and the breast and belly are white. The bill is red with a blackish culmen and nail. The legs and feet are deep red.

Average length: M 25.5", F 22.9

Average weight: M 3.64 lbs., F 2.73 lbs.

Food Habits

Common mergansers eat mainly fish, amphibians, crustaceans, mollusks and other invertebrates obtained by diving underwater in marine and freshwater habitats.

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Food Habits

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Emperor Goose

Description

Male and female emperor geese have gray body plumage that is subtly barred with black and white. **The white head and hindneck, which are often stained orange-red from feeding in tidal ponds where iron oxide is concentrated**, contrast markedly with the dark foreneck. The emperor goose's short bill is pink and lacks the black "grinning patch" present in blue geese. The legs and feet of the emperor goose are yellow-orange.

Average length: M 27", F 27"

Average weight: M 6.20 lbs., F 6.10 lbs.

Food Habits

Emperor geese feed on seaweed; eelgrass; sea lettuce; algae; beach rye; beach pea; seabeach sandwort; grasses and sedges; crowberries and mollusks and crustaceans found in intertidal areas, salt marshes and tundra meadows.

Fulvous Whistling Duck

Description

Adult fulvous whistling ducks of both sexes have a rufous-brown crown and upper nape, which becomes blackish down the center of the hindneck. The sides of the head, neck, chest and belly are a rich rufous-buff, with the sides of the neck paler, almost whitish, with fine dark striations. The back is dark brown with chestnut feather fringes, and the rump is white. Ivory-edged side and flank feathers form a striking border between the sides and back. A distinctive white "V" separates the brownish-black tail from the dark-colored back. The bill, legs and feet are blue-gray and the iris is dark brown.

Average length: M 18", F 17.3"

Average weight: M 1.72 lbs., F 1.49 lbs.

Food Habits

Fulvous whistling ducks commonly feed at night on waste grain (especially rice), seeds and structural plant material found in fields and shallow water.

Gadwall

Description

Gadwalls are medium-sized ducks characterized by a general lack of bright coloration. Male gadwalls are gray-brown with a white belly and a black rump. In flight, a white speculum and chestnut and black portions on the wing coverts are displayed. The bill is slate-gray and the legs and feet are yellow. Female gadwalls are similar to males, but have a mottled brown appearance, a yellowish bill with dark spots and a smaller white speculum.

Average length: M 21", F 19"

Average weight: M 2.0 lbs., F 1.8 lbs.

Food habits

Aquatic vegetation makes up the majority of the gadwall's diet. As a result, they are often found feeding far from the shoreline, in deeper water than most other dabbling ducks. Gadwall up-end to feed on leafy portions of pondweed, naiad, wigeon grass, water milfoil and algae, as well as the seeds of pondweed, smartweed, bulrush and spike rush. They also feed on aquatic invertebrates, such as crustaceans and midges.

Green-winged Teal (female)

Description

Green-winged teal are the smallest of our North American dabbling ducks with a short neck and small bill.

Male green-winged teal have a chestnut head with an iridescent green to purple patch extending from the eyes to the nape of the neck. The chest is pinkish-brown with black speckles, and the back, sides and flanks are vermiculated gray, separated from the chest by a white bar. The wing coverts are brownish-gray with a green speculum. The bill is dark slate and the legs and feet are dark gray.

Female green-winged teal are mottled brown with a dark brown line that extends from the bill through the eye. The bill is dark gray and the legs and feet are olive-gray to brownish-gray.

Average length: M 14.7", F 14"

Average weight: M 0.7 lbs., F 0.6 lbs.

Food habits

Green-winged teal feed on seeds of sedges, smartweeds, pondweeds, grasses, aquatic insects, mollusks, crustaceans and tadpoles found while foraging in and adjacent to mudflats or while dabbling in shallow water.

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Harlequin Duck (female)

Description

The male Harlequin is very distinct and can be confused with no other waterfowl species. The basic body color is a deep slate blue, enlivened by white stripes, crescents and spots on the head, neck and scapulars. The sides and flanks are chestnut colored. The bill is blue-gray with a pale nail and the legs and feet are grayish.

Female Harlequin ducks resemble female buffleheads: Except for the three white spots on the head, the hen's basic color is black-brown. There also is an oblong white spot behind the eye instead of the circular one seen on buffleheads. Female Harlequins are also duskier and larger and, in flight, show no white patches on their wings, as buffleheads do.

Average length: M 17.3", F 15.8"

Average weight: M 1.44 lbs., F 1.22 lbs.

Food habits

Harlequin ducks dive to feed on crustaceans and mollusks, insects, small fish and roe found in riverine and marine habitats.

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Hawaiian Nene Goose

Hawaiian geese are found only in the Hawaiian Islands and are the only extant species of goose not occurring naturally in continental areas. The Hawaiian goose formerly bred on all or most of the Hawaiian Islands, but currently is restricted to Hawaii, Kauai, and Maui. Preferred nest sites include sparsely-to-densely-vegetated beach strands; shrublands; grasslands and woodlands on well-drained soil, volcanic ash, cinder and lava rock substrates. Females typically nest on the ground and lay an average of 3 eggs.

Description

Hawaiian geese have a black face and crown and cream-colored cheeks. The neck is pale grayish streaked with black and has a narrow dark ring at the base. The body plumage and folded wings are gray-brown with transverse barring. The bill, legs and feet are black and the iris is dark brown. Both sexes are similar in appearance, but males typically are larger.

Average length: 22-28"

Average weight: M 5.0 lbs., F 4.3 lbs.

Food habits

Hawaiian geese graze and browse on the leaves, seeds, berries, and flowers of grasses, herbs and shrubs.

Hooded Merganser (female)

Description

The hooded merganser is the smallest of the three merganser species occurring in North America.

Male hooded mergansers have a large white crest surrounded by black. The top of the head, neck and back are all black, and the chest, breast and belly are white. Wavy black lines can be seen on the tawny sides and flanks. The hindback, rump and tail are dark brown. The long, narrow, serrated bill is black. The iris is bright yellow and the legs and feet are dull yellow.

Female hooded mergansers have a gray-brown head and neck with a reddish-brown crest. Gray pervades their neck, chest, sides and flanks, and brownish-black dominates their back, rump and tail. The upper bill is black-edged with orange and the lower bill is yellow. The legs and feet are greenish in color and the iris is brown.

Average length: M 18.1 in, F 17

Average weight: M 1.6 lbs, F 1.5 lbs

Food habits

Hooded mergansers dive in fresh water to feed on small fish, crayfish and other crustaceans and aquatic insects.

Hooded Merganser (male)

Description

The hooded merganser is the smallest of the three merganser species occurring in North America.

Male hooded mergansers have a large white crest surrounded by black. The top of the head, neck and back are all black, and the chest, breast and belly are white. Wavy black lines can be seen on the tawny sides and flanks. The hindback, rump and tail are dark brown. The long, narrow, serrated bill is black. The iris is bright yellow and the legs and feet are dull yellow.

Female hooded mergansers have a gray-brown head and neck with a reddish-brown crest. Gray pervades their neck, chest, sides and flanks, and brownish-black dominates their back, rump and tail. The upper bill is black-edged with orange and the lower bill is yellow. The legs and feet are greenish in color and the iris is brown.

Average length: M 18.1 in, F 17

Average weight: M 1.6 lbs, F 1.5 lbs

Food habits

Hooded mergansers dive in fresh water to feed on small fish, crayfish and other crustaceans and aquatic insects.

King Eider

Description

Male king eiders have a black lower back, rump, scapulars, tail coverts, breast, belly and sides. The tail is brown-black and the bill is orange, sweeping upward into an orange frontal shield outlined in black with a pale blue crest. The neck, chest and foreback are creamy white. They have a white patch at the base of the tail and in the forepart of the upper wings. The legs and feet are dull yellow to orange.

Female king eiders are tawny-brown, barred with dusky brown chevrons ("V" marks) that can be similar in color to common eiders. The bill and facial skin are a dark olive-gray and the legs and feet are grayish.

Average length: M 23", F 21"

Average weight: M 3.7 lbs., F 3.5 lbs.

Food habits

King eiders dive great depths to feed on mollusks, crustaceans and aquatic insects. They also feed on eelgrass, wigeon grass and algae. There is a record of one king eider feeding on the bottom in 30 fathoms (180 feet) of water in the Bering Sea.

Long-Tailed Duck

Description

The Long-tailed duck is a slim, brightly plumaged sea duck. Smaller than the scoters or eiders. Flight is swift and low with constantly changing bunched-flock formations. Long-tailed ducks have a very complex cycle of plumages. In winter, long-tailed duck drakes have a white head, neck and upper breast with a gray cheek patch and a large black patch below the cheek.

The drake's body is white and black. During the breeding season, the drake's head is black with a white/grey cheek and eye patch.

The hen has a brown head and body with a white patch around the eye and white under the tail. In all plumages, long-tailed ducks have dark wings and the drakes have long central tail feathers. They are very vocal, with their yodeling voice carrying across tundra and coastal habitats.

Average wing length: M 8.9", F 8"

Average weight: M 2.1 lbs., F 1.6 lbs.

Food habits

Long-tailed ducks are excellent divers, with their favorite foods being crustaceans and mollusks.

Mallard (female)

Description

The mallard is one of the most recognized of all ducks and is the ancestor of several domestic breeds. Its wide range has given rise to several distinct populations.

The male mallard's white neck-ring separates the green head from the chestnut-brown chest, contrasts with the gray sides, brownish back, black rump and black upper- and under-tail coverts. The speculum is violet-blue bordered by black and white, and the outer tail feathers are white. The bill is yellow to yellowish-green and the legs and feet are coral-red.

The female mallard is a mottled brownish color and has a violet speculum bordered by black and white. The crown of the head is dark brown with a dark brown stripe running through the eye. The remainder of the head is lighter brown than the upper body. The bill is orange splotched with brown, and the legs and feet are orange.

Average length: M 24.7", F 23"

Average weight: M 2.7 lbs., F 2.4 lbs.

Food habits

Mallards dabble to feed on seeds, rootlets and tubers of aquatic plants off swamp and river bottoms.

Mallard (male)

Description

The mallard is one of the most recognized of all ducks and is the ancestor of several domestic breeds. Its wide range has given rise to several distinct populations.

The male mallard's white neck-ring separates the green head from the chestnut-brown chest, contrasts with the gray sides, brownish back, black rump and black upper- and under-tail coverts. The speculum is violet-blue bordered by black and white, and the outer tail feathers are white. The bill is yellow to yellowish-green and the legs and feet are coral-red.

The female mallard is a mottled brownish color and has a violet speculum bordered by black and white. The crown of the head is dark brown with a dark brown stripe running through the eye. The remainder of the head is lighter brown than the upper body. The bill is orange spotted with brown, and the legs and feet are orange.

Average length: M 24.7", F 23"

Average weight: M 2.7 lbs., F 2.4 lbs.

Food habits

Mallards dabble to feed on seeds, rootlets and tubers of aquatic plants off swamp and river bottoms.

Mottled Duck

Description

The Mottled duck can be confused with American Black ducks and hen mallards. While both drakes and hens have very similar plumages, the hen is a slightly lighter shade of brown. The mottled duck is a lighter color than the black duck and its blue to green iridescent wing patches (compared to a purple iridescence in black ducks) are rimmed with black (sometimes with a narrow band of white) rather than a distinct white edge as on the hen mallard. The mottled duck is a southern species found all along the entire Gulf Coast and the southern Atlantic Coast. The bill of the drake is solid yellow, while the hen has more of a yellow orangish tint with black spots. The legs and feet can be a dull to bright shade of orange for both sexes.

Average length: M 10.3", F 9.8"

Average weight: M 2.3 lbs., F 2.1 lbs.

Food habits

Mottled ducks are dabblers which feed mostly on aquatic vegetation and invertebrates in shallow waters.

Northern Pintail (female)

Description

Northern pintails are long, slender ducks with long, narrow wings, earning them the nickname "greyhound of the air." Pintails are named for their elongated central tail feathers, which constitute one-fourth of the drake's body length.

Male northern pintails have a chocolate-brown head with a white stripe on each side of the neck extending up from the white breast and belly. The back is blackish-gray and the rump has a white patch on each side. Two of the long central tail feathers are black while the others are gray margined by white. In flight, an iridescent greenish-black speculum is displayed. The bill is blue-gray with a black stripe along the center to the tip, and the legs and feet are slate-gray.

Female northern pintails have a dark-brown upper body with a buff or gray head and lower body. The speculum is a dull brown or bronze. The bill is blue-gray blotched with black, and the legs and feet are slate-gray.

Average length: M 25", F 21.4"

Average weight: M 2.26 lbs., F 1.91 lbs.

Food habits

Pintails dabble and up-end to feed on the seeds and nutlets of moist-soil and aquatic plants. They also make extensive use of waste grain.

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Food habits

Pintails dabble and up-end to feed on the seeds and nutlets of moist-soil and aquatic plants. They also make extensive use of waste grain.

Northern Shoveler (female)

Description

Perhaps the most visible diagnostic characteristic of the northern shoveler is its large spoon-shaped bill, which widens towards the tip and creates a shape unique among North American waterfowl.

Male northern shovelers have an iridescent green head and neck, white chest and breast and chestnut belly and sides. They have a white stripe extending from the breast along the margin of the gray-brown back, and white flank spots. The wings have a gray-blue shoulder patch, which is separated from a brilliant green speculum by a tapered white stripe. The bill is black in breeding plumage and the legs and feet are orange.

Female northern shovelers have a light brownish head with a blackish crown and a brownish speckled body. The upper wing coverts are grayish-blue, the greater secondary coverts are tipped with white and the secondaries are brown with a slight greenish sheen. The bill is olive green with fleshy orange in the gape area and speckled with black dots.

Average length: M 19.4", F 19"

Average weight: M 1.5 lbs., F 1.4 lbs.

Food habits

Northern shovelers feed by dabbling and sifting in shallow water. Seeds of sedges, bulrushes, saw grass, smartweeds, pondweeds, algae and duckweeds, as well as aquatic insects, mollusks and crustaceans, are consumed by filtering water which is taken in at the bill tip and jetted out at the base.

Northern Shoveler (male)

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Red-breasted Merganser (female)

Description

The red-breasted merganser's small head, slender neck and tapered body give it a streamlined appearance in the air.

The male shows a striking, wide band of white that extends almost the full length of the body and a dark band across its chest. The dark green head appears black at a distance and is tufted at the back, unlike the smooth head of the common merganser. Male red-breasted mergansers have deep red eyes and feet. The back is black, the rump gray-brown with fine black bars. Wavy lines of black bar the white sides and flanks, creating a distinct contrast with the white belly. Large white patches, similar to those of the common merganser and goldeneye, span the inner wing of the male, separated by two narrow black bars. The white patch formed by the white middle coverts on the shoulder is margined at the wing edge by the dusky feathers of the lesser coverts. One black bar is formed by the black base of the white greater coverts and the other by the black base of the white secondaries.

The female red-breasted merganser has a dusky gray back enlivened occasionally by a small white patch in front of the tail. Except for their smaller size, female red-breasted mergansers greatly resemble common mergansers. They have cinnamon-brown heads and lightly mottled gray backs and sides. The two species can be distinguished by noting that the white throat of the red-breasted merganser merge imperceptibly with the brown head, whereas the common merganser's throat is more sharply defined against its reddish-brown head. Female red-breasted mergansers also have a slight protrusion of feathers at the back of their head. The female also has lighter red eyes and feet than the male. They have ash-gray shoulders and a small white patch on the speculum formed by the inner white secondaries, with a black base. The primaries and their coverts are dusky brown.

Both males and females have long, narrow bills with serrated edges, which are bright red in the male and duller in the female.

Average length: M 17.1 in., F 16.3 in.

Average weight: M 1.56 lbs., F 1.52 lbs.

Red-breasted Merganser (male)

Description

The red-breasted merganser's small head, slender neck and tapered body give it a streamlined appearance in the air.

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Both males and females have long, narrow bills with serrated edges, which are bright red in the male and duller in the female.

Average length: M 17.1 in., F 16.3 in.

Average weight: M 1.56 lbs., F 1.52 lbs.

Redhead (female)

Description

Male redheads have a reddish head and upper neck with a black lower neck, foreback and breast. The remaining back is a dark grayish color. The hind back and tail are brownish-black. A broad band of light gray extends across the dusky gray wing and out onto the primaries, which helps distinguish it from scaup. The legs and feet are gray, and the bill is light blue-gray with a whitish band behind a relatively wide black tip.

Female redheads have a reddish-brown head, neck and breast, with a buff white chin and throat and an indistinct eye ring and stripe behind the eye. The flanks are warm brown, contrasting little with the breast, but with buffer fringes. The upper parts are darker and duller brown, with the upper-wing-coverts browner than on the male; otherwise the wing is similar to that of the male. The bill is duller than the male's, but similar in pattern.

Average length: M 20", F 19"

Average weight: M 2.4 lbs., F 2.1 lbs.

Food habits

Redheads dive to feed on seeds, rhizomes, tubers of pondweeds, wild celery, water lilies, grasses and wild rice. They also feed on mollusks, aquatic insects, and small fish.

Redhead (male)

Description

Male redheads have a reddish head and upper neck with a black lower neck, foreback and breast. The remaining back is a dark grayish color. The hind back and tail are brownish-black. A broad band of light gray extends across the dusky gray wing and out onto the primaries, which helps distinguish it from scaup. The legs and feet are gray, and the bill is light blue-gray with a whitish band behind a relatively wide black tip.

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Average length: M 20", F 19"

Average weight: M 2.4 lbs., F 2.1 lbs.

Food habits

Redheads dive to feed on seeds, rhizomes, tubers of pondweeds, wild celery, water lilies, grasses and wild rice. They also feed on mollusks, aquatic insects, and small fish.

Ring-necked Duck (female)

Description

The "ringneck" name is derived from a faint brownish ring around the base of the neck, which is visible only upon close inspection. The legs and feet are gray-blue and the iris is yellow. Ring-necked ducks are silent except in display, when a low whistling note is uttered.

Female ring-necked ducks have a brown head with a black crown, light brown cheeks and chin and a white eye ring. A narrow white line extends from the eye to the back of the head. The bill is slate with a faint white band near the tip. The neck, back, sides and flanks are brown and the belly is white. The legs and feet are gray-blue and the iris is brown. Female vocalizes a soft, rolling "trrr." Female ring-necked ducks most closely resemble female redheads, but are distinguished by their smaller size; peaked, angular head profile; and pale region around the face.

Average length: M 17", F 16.6"

Average weight: M 1.6 lbs., F 1.5 lbs.

Food Habits

Ring-necked ducks dive in shallow water to feed on the tubers, seeds and leaves of moist-soil and aquatic plants (pondweeds, coontail, water milfoil, hydrilla, sedges, grasses, wild rice, etc.). They also eat aquatic insects, snails and clams.

Ring-necked Duck (male)

Description

The "ringneck" name is derived from a faint brownish ring around the base of the neck, which is visible only upon close inspection. The legs and feet are gray-blue and the iris is yellow. Ring-necked ducks are silent except in display, when a low whistling note is uttered.

Male ring-necked ducks have an iridescent black head, neck, breast and upperparts. The belly and flanks are whitish to grayish, with a distinctive triangular white wedge extending upward in the area in front of the folded wing. The bill is slate with a white border around the base and nares, and a pale white band behind the black tip. Although male ring-necked ducks superficially resemble their counterparts in greater and lesser scaup, their peaked, angular head profile, distinctive white bill markings and uniformly dark upper wings distinguish them.

Average length: M 17", F 16.6"

Average weight: M 1.6 lbs., F 1.5 lbs.

Food Habits

Ring-necked ducks dive in shallow water to feed on the tubers, seeds and leaves of moist-soil and aquatic plants (pondweeds, coontail, water milfoil, hydrilla, sedges, grasses, wild rice, etc.). They also eat aquatic insects, snails and clams.

Ruddy Duck (female)

Description

The conformation of the small ruddy duck is distinctive: a short, thick neck; chunky body; stubby wings and a fan-shaped tail composed of stiff feathers.

The male ruddy duck has a brilliant rusty-brown back, rump, neck, scapulars, chest, sides and flanks. The crown, rear ear coverts and hindneck are black, and the throat and sides of the head below the eyes are white. The bill is bright sky blue and the legs and feet are grayish.

Female ruddy ducks have grayish-brown neck and body plumage. The sides of the head and neck are dull buff-brown with a single dusky horizontal stripe crossing a pale-gray cheek patch. The bill is dark gray and the legs and feet are grayish.

Average length: M 15.4", F 15"

Average weight: M 1.20 lbs., F 1.19 lbs.

Food Habits

Ruddy ducks dive to feed on pondweeds, algae and wild celery, as well as the seeds of sedges, smartweeds and grasses. They also eat aquatic insects and their larvae, shellfish and crustaceans. During the breeding season they feed mainly on invertebrates, primarily chironomid larvae and pupae.

Ruddy Duck (male)

Description

The conformation of the small ruddy duck is distinctive: a short, thick neck; chunky body; stubby wings and a fan-shaped tail composed of stiff feathers.

The male ruddy duck has a brilliant rusty-brown back, rump, neck, scapulars, chest, sides and flanks. The crown, rear ear coverts and hindneck are black, and the throat and sides of the head below the eyes are white. The bill is bright sky blue and the legs and feet are grayish.

Female ruddy ducks have grayish-brown neck and body plumage. The sides of the head and neck are dull buff-brown with a single dusky horizontal stripe crossing a pale-gray cheek patch. The bill is dark gray and the legs and feet are grayish.

Average length: M 15.4", F 15"

Average weight: M 1.20 lbs., F 1.19 lbs.

Food Habits

Ruddy ducks dive to feed on pondweeds, algae and wild celery, as well as the seeds of sedges, smartweeds and grasses. They also eat aquatic insects and their larvae, shellfish and crustaceans. During the breeding season they feed mainly on invertebrates, primarily chironomid larvae and pupae.

Sandhill Crane

Description

Sandhill cranes are long and tall with thick heavy bodies. Both males and females have gray plumage and can not easily be sexed. Adults have reddish skinned foreheads, with juveniles having brown feathered foreheads.

Average height: M & F 3.9"

Average weight: M & F 12 lbs.

Average wingspan: M & F 6.6"

Food Habits

Sandhill cranes are opportunistic and eat a highly varied diet depending on their current habitat. While their main diet consists of grains, the cranes eat both invertebrates and vertebrates for protein and fat reserves.

Scaup (female)

Description

Greater and lesser scaup are often found together, but the larger size of the greater scaup is very obvious.

Female greater scaup are brown with white oval patches around their bills. The female's bill is similar to that of the male, but slightly duller, and the legs and feet are gray.

Female lesser scaup have a brownish head, neck and chest, and white oval patches around their bills. The back, rump and scapulars are dark brown and the speculum is white. The bill is similar to that of the male but slightly duller, the legs and feet are gray and the iris is yellow.

Greater Scaup

Average length: M 18.6", F 17"

Average weight: M 2.32 lbs., F 2.15 lbs.

Lesser Scaup

Average length: M 17", F 16.5"

Average weight: M 1.8 lbs., F 1.6 lbs.

Food Habits

Greater scaup dive to feed on aquatic plants and animals. In coastal areas, mollusks constitute the principle diet items. In freshwater habitats, seeds, leaves, stems, roots and tubers of aquatic plants (sedges, pondweeds, muskgrass, wild celery, etc.) are important items.

Lesser scaup dive to feed on seeds of pondweeds, wigeon grass, wild rice, sedges, and bulrushes. They also feed on crustaceans, mollusks, aquatic insects, and small fish.

Scaup (male)

Description

Greater and lesser scaup are often found together, but the larger size of the greater scaup is very obvious.

Male greater scaup also have a larger, more round, green-tinted head than male lesser scaup. Male greater scaup have a glossy black head tinted green. The neck, breast and upper mantle are glossy black, and the flanks and belly are white, sometimes with gray wavy lines on the lower flanks. The back is whitish with fine black wavy lines, and the tail and upper- and under-tail coverts are black. The wing has a broad white speculum spanning nearly the entire length of the primaries and secondaries. The bill is a light blue-gray with a black nail, the legs and feet are gray and the iris is yellow.

Male lesser scaup have a glossy black head with a purple cast. The neck, breast and upper mantle are glossy black. Wavy lines on the sides and flanks are olive brown and contrast with the white chest and belly. The back is light gray with broad heavy wavy lines of sooty black. The tail, upper and under-tail coverts are black. The wing has a white speculum and the inner primaries are light brown, becoming darker towards the tips and outer primaries. The bill is a light blue-gray with a black nail, the legs and feet are gray and the iris is yellow.

Greater Scaup

Average length: M 18.6", F 17"

Average weight: M 2.32 lbs., F 2.15 lbs.

Lesser Scaup

Average length: M 17", F 16.5"

Average weight: M 1.8 lbs., F 1.6 lbs.

Snow Goose

Description

Lesser snow geese have two color phases: a dark (blue) plumage and a white (snow) plumage. The two color phases are variations within the same race and do not indicate separate races. The sexes are similar in appearance in both phases, but the female is often smaller. Lesser snow geese can hybridize with Ross' geese, which are similar in appearance. They have pinkish bills with black grinning patches, and the feet and legs are reddish-pink. In the dark phase they have white heads and upper necks, with bluish-gray bodies. In the white phase they are completely white except for black wing tips. The head can be stained rusty brown from minerals in the soil where they feed. They are very vocal and can often be heard from more than a mile away.

The greater snow goose is a slightly larger version of the white-phase lesser snow goose. No color dimorphism has been discovered in this race. In the field it is virtually impossible to tell these two apart. In the hand, the larger size and longer bill of the greater snow goose distinguish it from its smaller counterpart. The sexes are similar in appearance, but the female is often smaller.

Lesser Snow Goose

Average length: M 29", F 28"

Average weight: M 6.1 lbs., F 5.5 lbs.

Greater Snow Goose

Average length: M 31", F 30"

Average weight: M 7.4 lbs., F 6.1 lbs.

Feeding Habits

Greater snow geese are grubbers, feeding on roots, rhizomes and shoots of bulrushes and salt-marsh cordgrass. They also make extensive use of agricultural fields found adjacent to wintering areas.

Spectacled Eider

Description

In both sexes, the feathers extend down to the nostrils, a characteristic not found in the other eiders.

Male spectacled eiders are striking, with a pale green head, bright orange bill and the characteristic white spectacle-like patches around the eyes. The chest, rump, tail and belly are black, and the throat, neck and back are white. The legs and feet are yellow-brown and the iris of the eye is pale blue.

Female spectacled eiders are a tawny color, similar to the female king and common eiders, with a gray-blue bill and light brown spectacles around their blue eyes. The legs and feet are yellow-brown.

Average length: M 20", F 19"

Average weight: M 3 lbs., F 3 lbs.

Food Habits

Spectacled eiders often feed like dabbling ducks, immersing their heads in the water and tipping up to forage. They feed primarily on mollusks and crustaceans in shallow waters and may forage on pelagic or free-floating amphipods that are concentrated along the sea-water/pack-ice interface. On coastal breeding grounds, they feed on freshwater mollusks, small crustaceans, insect larvae, grasses, berries and seeds. They utilize inland ponds and coastal shallows during brood rearing to feed on crane flies and caddis fly larvae.

Stellers Eider

Description

The Steller's eider is the smallest and fastest flying of the eiders. Its appearance is puddle-duck-like, with a head and bill reminiscent of a mallard.

Male Steller's eiders have a white head with a black eye spot and a pale green patch on the crown. The wing resembles that of a wigeon, but the white shoulder patch is larger and is bordered by a blue rather than a green speculum. The chest is chestnut, and the side of the breast is marked with a circular black spot. The throat and back are black, and the bill, legs and feet are a blue-gray.

Female Steller's eiders have dark brown mottled plumage and a pale buff eye ring. The speculum is blue with a white border on each side, similar to the mallard. The bill, legs and feet are blue-gray.

Average length: M 18.1", F 17.5

Average weight: M 1.9 lbs., F 1.9 lbs.

Food Habits

Steller's eiders feed primarily on crustaceans, mollusks, polychaete worms and aquatic insect larvae obtained in deep water, seldom near shore. They also occasionally feed on pondweeds and eelgrass.

Surf Scoter (female)

Description

Male surf scoters are entirely black with a white patch on the forehead and a larger white triangle on the nape. They have large bills, which are swollen on the top and truncated on the sides, with black feathers extending to near the nostrils. The bill is multicolored white, red, yellow and black, appearing mostly orange from a distance. The legs and feet are reddish-orange with dusky webs, and the iris is white.

The female surf scoter is fairly uniformly colored dark to black-brown with occasional whitish feathers. There are two whitish patches on the cheeks below the eyes. The bill is greenish-black or bluish-black. The legs and feet are dull orange and the iris is pale or brown. Female plumages of all scoter species are similar. The surf scoter hen can be differentiated from the black scoter by the more sloping forehead and white face patches.

Average length: M 19.7", F 18.5"

Average weight: M 2.2 lbs., F 2.0 lbs.

Food Habits

The surf scoter feeds mainly on mollusks; crustaceans; aquatic insects; small fish and on green plant matter such as pondweeds, wild celery, muskgrass and the seeds of sedges and bulrushes. Rarely diving in water that exceeds 30 feet deep, they forage in the zone of breaking waves, easily diving through wave crests.

Surf Scoter (male)

Description

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Trumpeter Swan

Description

The plumage of adult trumpeter swans is completely white, though their heads and necks are often stained a rusty color from contact with ferrous minerals in the soils of wetland bottoms during feeding. The bill, legs and feet are black and the iris is brown. Both sexes are identical in appearance, but males typically are larger. The trumpeter swan is larger than the similar tundra swan, but it is difficult to separate them in the field. The trumpeter swan's call is more vociferous than that of the tundra swan and has been likened to the sound of a French horn. The tundra swan's call is high-pitched and reminiscent of snow geese.

Average length: M 59.0", F 57.0

Average weight: M 27.9 lbs., F 22.6 lbs.

Food Habits

The limited information available on the diet of trumpeter swans indicates that a variety of marsh and aquatic plants compose the bulk of foods consumed. Where available, tubers of duck potato and sago pondweed are important items. The stems and leaves of sago and other pondweeds, white water buttercups, water milfoil, muskgrass, waterweed and duckweed, as well as the seeds of yellow pond lily, water shield and sedges, are also important parts of the trumpeters' diet.

Tundra Swan

Description

The plumage of adult tundra swans is completely white, though their heads and necks are often stained a rusty color from ferrous minerals encountered in marsh soils during feeding. The bill is black and often has a yellow spot at the base. The legs and feet are black and the iris is dark brown. Both sexes are identical in appearance, but males typically are larger. The tundra swan is smaller than the trumpeter swan, but it is difficult to separate them in the field. The tundra swan's call is high-pitched and reminiscent of snow geese, while the trumpeter swan's call is more vociferous and has been likened to the sound of a French horn.

Average length: M 52.0", F 51.5

Average weight: M 16.0 lbs., F 13.9 lbs.

Food Habits

Tundra swans feed on aquatic plants found in shallow water by immersing their head and neck. They primarily feed on wigeon grass, sago and clasping leaf pondweeds and wild celery, but also utilize waste grain (corn and soybeans) and winter wheat shoots.

White-fronted Goose

Description

The white-fronted goose is named for the distinctive white band found at the base of bill. The sexes are similar in appearance, but males typically are larger. The head, neck and upper back of white-fronted geese are grayish-brown. The lower back and rump are dark brown, and the tail is dark brown and edged with white. The chest and breast are grayish with dark brown to black blotches and bars on the breast, giving it the nickname "specklebelly." The belly and upper and lower coverts are white. The bill is pinkish and the legs and feet are orange.

Average length: M 29", F 27"

Average weight: M 6.2 lbs., F 5.5 lbs.

Food Habits

The white-fronted goose is primarily a grazer and feeds on marsh grasses, grain crops, tundra plants, aquatic plants and fresh plant growth in fields. They also eat berries, aquatic insects and their larvae.

White-winged Scoter

Description

The white-winged scoter is the largest of the three North American scoter species. The large white speculum on the black wing make this species the easiest to identify while in flight.

Male white-winged scoters are entirely black with white eye patches. The bill is orange, becoming red at the tip with a large black knob at the base. The legs and feet are reddish-orange with dusky webs and the iris is pale gray.

Female white-winged scoters are a dark brownish-black color with two whitish patches on the sides of their heads, in front of and behind the eye. The bill is blackish-gray with a less prominent black knob at the base. The legs and feet are dull orange and the iris is brown.

Average length: M 21.6", F 20"

Average weight: M 3.5 lbs, F 2.6 lbs

Food Habits

White-winged scoters dive to feed on mollusks, crustaceans, aquatic insects, and small fish found in marine and freshwater habitats. The summer diet also includes pondweeds and bur reeds in inland areas.

Wood Duck (female)

Wood ducks prefer riparian habitats, wooded swamps and freshwater marshes.

Description

Male wood ducks have a crested head that is iridescent green and purple with a white stripe leading from the eye to the end of the crest, and another narrower white stripe from the base of the bill to the tip of the crest. The throat is white and the chest is burgundy with white flecks, gradually grading into a white belly. The bill is brightly patterned black, white and red. The legs and feet are a dull straw yellow and the iris is red.

Female wood ducks have a gray-brown head and neck with a brownish, green, glossed crest. A white teardrop shaped patch surrounds the brownish-black eye. The throat is white and the breast is gray-brown stippled with white, fading into the white belly. The back is olive brown with a shimmer of iridescent green. The bill is blue-gray and the legs and feet are dull grayish-yellow.

Average length: M 20", F 19"

Average weight: M 1.5 lbs., F 1.4 lbs.

Females nest in tree cavities or nest boxes and lay an average of 12 bone-white eggs.

Wood Duck (male)

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Description

Male wood ducks have a crested head that is iridescent green and purple with a white stripe leading from the eye to the end of the crest, and another narrower white stripe from the base of the bill to the tip of the crest. The throat is white and the chest is burgundy with white flecks, gradually grading into a white belly. The bill is brightly patterned black, white and red. The legs and feet are a dull straw yellow and the iris is red.

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