American wigeon

Anus americana

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Aves
Order:	Anseriformes
Family:	Anatidae

Characteristics

The American wigeon is 18 to 22 inches long. The top of the head is white. Both the male and female have white bellies, gray heads with black flecks, and grayish-blue legs and feet. The wings are narrow and the tail is long and wedge-like. The small light blue bill has a black tip. The male has a distinctive white patch on his shoulder. A green line may be seen from the eye to the back of the head. The male has a pinkish-brown chest with black highlights and the female has a reddish-brown body with a gray wing patch.

Natural History

The American wigeon winters in Middle America and the West Indies north to the southern United States and coastally to southern Alaska and the Maritime Provinces. This bird is a rare summer resident. It lives in and around marshes, lakes, ponds, flooded fields, or open fields. It eats aquatic insects, mollusks, grass, grain, and the leaves and stems of aquatic vegetation. Its call is “whee whee whew.” This common migrant is seen mainly from mid-March to late May and from early September to late November. Nests are concealed, filled with dry grass and plant stems, lined with finer materials, and often far from water. Seven to ten white eggs are laid. Most birds leave Iowa by the end of December.

Habitats

constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; temporary water supplies; natural lakes and prairie marshes

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

summer: western half of Iowa and scattered in eastern Iowa in suitable habitats; migrant: statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.