



wood duck

Aix sponsa

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

Features

The wood duck is 17 to 20 inches long. Its tail is dark, long, and rectangular. The short, broad wings are black with white on the back edges. The neck is short. The male becomes brilliantly colored in the winter and spring. His head is an iridescent purplish-green. Two white parallel lines may be seen from the base of the bill over the head to the back of the neck. The white throat extends upward to the red eyes and the base of the bill. The male's maroon chest has white markings and his sides are gold with a black and white design. The male is brown with white patches on the face during the summer. The bill is red and white. The female (all year) has a dark gray-brown body and head with tan sides. Her belly is white, as are her throat and the circle around each eye.

Natural History

The wood duck is Iowa's most widespread nesting duck. It is a common migrant and summer resident

statewide. It lives in swamps, around rivers, or around ponds (with wooded areas). This duck eats acorns, insects, corn, and seeds of buttonbush, hickories, and wild millet. The call of the female is a loud "whee-e-e-e-k, whee-e-e-e-k," and the male's call is "twee, twee." It may be seen sitting on a tree limb. When flying, it bobs its head up and down. While swimming, it floats high on the surface of the water. The wood duck will nest in a tree cavity, barn, chimney, or a constructed wood duck box. Spring migrants begin appearing in Iowa in March. Nesting occurs from April through July. Six to 14 white eggs are laid per clutch. Sometimes, several females lay eggs in the same nest. This process, called "dumping," may result in as many as 40 eggs in one nest. Soon after hatching, the female (hen) coaxes the young ducks to water. Fall migration begins in September.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; natural lakes and prairie marshes

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

summer: statewide; migrant: statewide

Bibliography

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