
Hooded Merganser

Lophodytes cucullatus

Class: *Aves*

Order: *Anseriformes*

Family: *Anatidae*

Characteristics:

Also known as saw-bills or fish ducks, hooded mergansers are the smallest of the three species of mergansers. Hooded mergansers have a crested "hood." The sexes are highly sexually dimorphic. In the males, the hood is white with a black border while the body is brown with a black and white striped back and chest. In females, the hood is brown to match the body's coloration. They also have a long, narrow, serrated bill with a hook on the tip. In males the bill is usually black whereas in females it is brown or orange ([National Zoo](#)).

Behavior:

Mergansers are the only ducks that specialize in eating fish ([Audubon](#)). Hooded mergansers locate their food by swimming with their heads just under the water. They then dive under the water to capture their prey.

Reproduction:

Pairs form in the late fall or winter. The male has an elaborate courtship display which includes raising the hood, throwing back their head, pumping their wings and making distinct vocalizations. They are cavity nesters and lay up to 15 eggs in a nest located above water. Like many ducks, the females will often lay her eggs in another bird's nest (aka [brood or nest parasitism](#)). After about a 33-day incubation period, the eggs will hatch.

Diet:

Wild: fish, crayfish, frogs, crabs, clams, aquatic invertebrates

Zoo: Seabird, flock raiser pellets, scratch grains

Conservation:

While their habitat (mature trees near water) has been declining, they are considered Least Concern due to their wide range distribution.

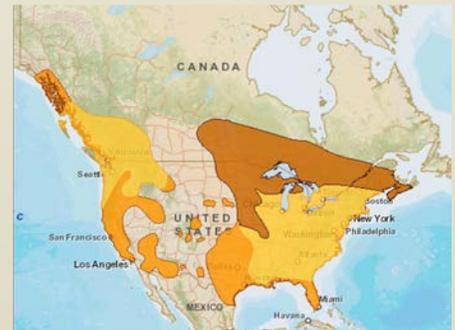
FYI:

Within 24-hours after hatching, mom will leave the nest, enter the water and calls to the young at which time they use sharp claws to climb out of the cavity and jump into the water below.



Range & Habitat:

Only merganser whose range is restricted to North America, they are found in forested wetlands



Lifespan: up to 15 years in captivity, 11 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations: They have an extremely muscular gizzard which allows them to digest shellfish.

IUCN Conservation Status:

Least Concern

