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# North American Wood Duck

*Aix sponsa*

**Class:** *Aves*

**Order:** *Anseriformes*

**Family:** *Anatidae*

## Characteristics:

A beautiful perching duck identified by the striking coloration of the male and unique boxy crested head found in both sexes. Males have an iridescent green head broad tail, and ornate patterns on nearly every feather. Although drab in color, the female has a similar distinct profile as the male and a white pattern around the eye.

## Behavior:

Unique among waterfowl, wood ducks perch and nest in trees (similar to the merganser), and often fly through wooded areas; hence they are known as perching ducks but they are also classified as a dabbling duck due to their feeding method. They prefer to stay in small groups of fewer than 20 birds. When swimming, they display a characteristic jerking back and forth of the head, similar in motion to what is seen in a pigeon when walking ([Cornell](#)).

## Reproduction:

Wood ducks readily nest in tree cavities or, if present they will gladly use nest boxes. Once they pair, the male will stand outside the nest while the female inspects it. She prefers a nice, open cavity. The clutch can be up to 16 eggs, not all of which may be the nest owners as they regularly practice brood parasitism. Ducklings hatch following a 28-37 day incubation period ([National Wildlife Federation](#)).

## Diet:

Wild: Juveniles eat mainly aquatic invertebrates whereas adults eat those as well as seeds and plant material  
Zoo: Wood ducks you see in the Idaho Falls Zoo are wild animals that have flown in, not part of the collection. They come mainly for food but also safety and nesting, so they'll eat the zoo animals' food of scratch grains, greens, and waterfowl pellets.

## Conservation:

Wood duck populations appear to be increasing.

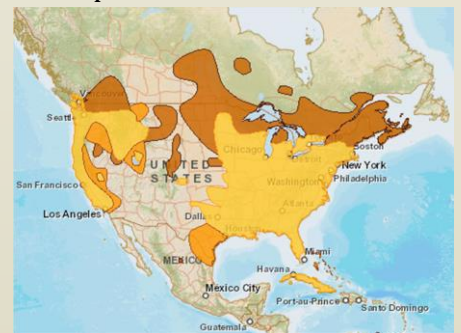
## FYI:

Unlike mergansers which consistently nest in cavities above water, wood ducks prefer to nest above water or their nests but it isn't a necessity and the nests may be located up to a mile away from a water source.



## **Range & Habitat:**

Wooded waterways such as swamps, marshes, streams, beaver ponds and small lakes.



**Lifespan:** up to 15 years in captivity, up to 4 years in the wild.

**Special Adaptations:** Wood duck ducklings are born fully feathered and alert. Within a day of hatch, they jump out of nests well over 50 feet in the air without injury and make their way to water sources, sometimes up to a mile away from their nest site.

**IUCN Conservation Status:**  
Least Concern

