
Canvasback

Aythya valisineria

Class: *Aves*

Order: *Anseriformes*

Family: *Anatidae*

Characteristics:

A large diving duck, in fact the largest in its genus, the canvasback weighs about 2.5-3 pounds. The male has a chestnut-red head, red eyes, light white-grey body and blackish breast and tail. The female has a lighter brown head and neck that gets progressively darker brown toward the back of the body. Both sexes have a blackish bill and bluish-grey legs and feet.

Behavior:

A wary bird that is very swift in flight. They prefer to dive in shallow water to feed and will also feed on the water surface ([Audubon](#)).

Reproduction:

Several males will court and display to one female. Once a female chooses the male, they will form a monogamous bond through breeding season. They build a floating nest in stands of dense vegetation above shallow water and lay 7-12 olive-grey eggs. Often redheads will lay their eggs in canvasback nests which will result in canvasbacks laying fewer eggs. The female incubates the eggs which hatch after 23-28 days. The young feed themselves and mom leads them to water within hours of hatching.

Diet:

Wild: Seeds, plant material, snails and insect larvae, they dive to eat the roots and bases of plants

Zoo: Scratch grains, greens, waterfowl pellets

Conservation:

Some say the populations are decreasing while others say they are increasing due to habitat restoration and the ban on lead shot. Either way, canvasbacks are listed in IUCN as Least Concern.

FYI:

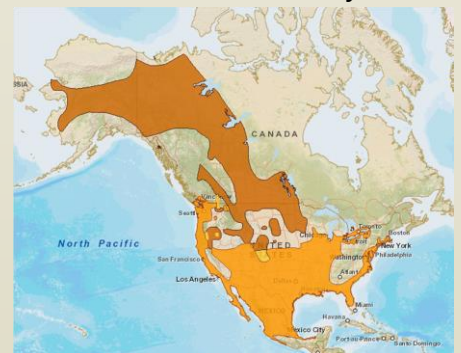
The canvasback's species name, *valisineria*, comes from the scientific name of wild celery (*Vallisneria spiralis*) which is the duck's preferred food during nonbreeding season ([Cornell](#)).

Canvasbacks have been called "the aristocrat of ducks" because of their sleek, regal appearance ([BioKids](#)).



Range & Habitat:

Breeds in prairie potholes and winters on ocean bays



Lifespan: up to 20 years in captivity, 10 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations: They go from freshwater marshes in summer to saltwater ocean bays in winter.

IUCN Conservation Status:

Least Concern

