
Bufflehead duck

(*Bucephala albeola*)

Class: *Aves*

Order: *Anseriformes*

Family: *Anatidae*

Characteristics: Bufflehead are very small, compact ducks with large, rounded heads and short, wide bills. Adult males have a white body, black back, and a dark head with a large white patch that wraps around the back of the head. Females and first-year males are gray-brown overall with an oval, white cheek patch. In flight adult males have a large white patch on the upper wing; females and first-year males have a smaller white wing patch. L: 12.6-15 in (32-40 cm) Wt: 9.6-22.4 oz (272-635 g).

Behavior: The tiny Bufflehead spends winters bobbing in bays, estuaries, reservoirs, and lakes. A buoyant, large-headed duck that abruptly vanishes and resurfaces as it feeds, it is diving for aquatic vertebrates and usually swallows its food while still underwater. Dives last on average about 12 seconds and rarely more than 25 seconds, typically staying on the surface another 12 seconds or so before diving again. Bufflehead nest in old woodpecker holes, particularly those made by Northern Flickers. In flight, you can identify them by noting their small size, fast wingbeats, and pattern of rocking side-to-side as they fly.

Reproduction: When courting females, male Buffleheads swim in front of them, rapidly bobbing their heads up and down. Almost exclusively monogamous, they keep the same mate for several years. Females often reuse the same nest site year after year laying a clutch of 5-10 eggs after an incubation period of 29-31 days. Young leave the nest 1-2 days after hatching. She abandons the nest after 5-6 weeks and the young fledge at 45-50 days.

Diet: Wild: aquatic invertebrates, crustaceans, mollusks, insects, and seeds.

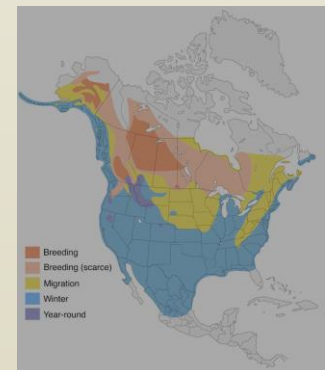
Zoo: Waterfowl and seaduck pellets, crickets, mealworms

Conservation: Least Concern. Although Buffleheads are not prized among sport hunters, shooting is a significant factor in their mortality. They are nevertheless among the few species of ducks whose numbers have increased markedly since the mid-1950s.

FYI: The name Bufflehead is a combination of buffalo and head, referring to the oddly bulbous head shape of the species. The oldest Bufflehead on record was at least 18 years and 8 months old. It was caught and re-released by a bird bander in New York in 1975.



Range & Habitat: Ponds, small lakes, shallow bays and inlets, boreal forest and aspen parkland of Canada and Alaska with isolated populations in the western United States.



Lifespan: up to 13 years in captivity, 3 years in the wild

Special Adaptations: Feet are webbed and, unlike other diving ducks have a lobe hind toe which aids in their great swimming abilities.

IUCN Conservation Status:

Least concern

