

BAYOU CITY BIRDING
ZINE #11
WILD DUCKS AND COOTS

No intro needed here - we've all loved ducks since the little rubber ones first showed up in our tubs! Look for more at ponds like the one at Hermann Park, and where water slows at bends in bayous. And please, bring any ducklings who have lost their way to The Wildlife Center of Texas!

© 2017 Wendy Wright



REDHEAD

MALE

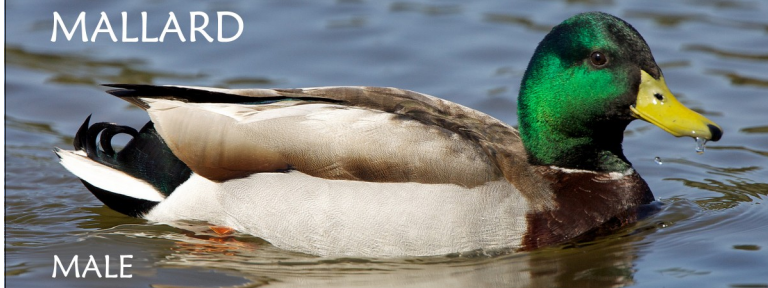
FEMALE



MALLARD

MALE

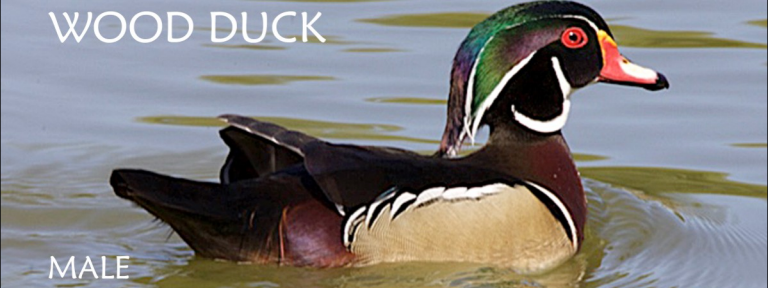
FEMALE



WOOD DUCK

MALE

FEMALE



GADWALL

MALE

FEMALE



RING-NECKED DUCK

MALE

FEMALE



BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK

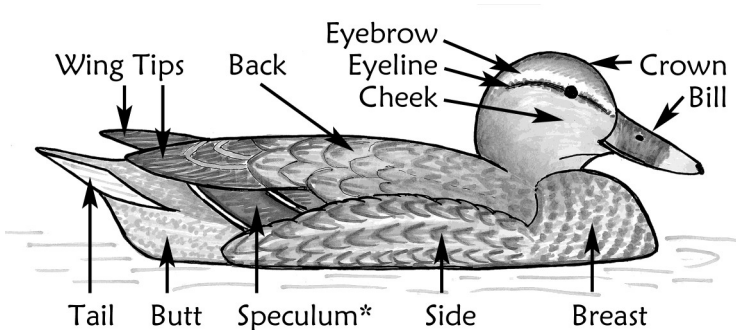
ALTHOUGH MOST DUCKS PICK A NEW MATE EACH YEAR, BLACK-BELLIES MATE FOR LIFE.



AMERICAN COOT

COOTS CAN LOOK LIKE LONG, SKINNY DUCKS, OR LIKE A MASH-UP OF A CHICKEN AND A... BOWLING BALL. DON'T MISS THE COOL TOES!





* Many of the dabbling ducks have bright, shiny feathers on the inner part of their wings. Although the folded wings stay mostly hidden on swimming birds, the shiny “speculum” can sometimes peek through.

Download more of the Bayou City Birding Zines at WhiteOakBayou.org

MALLARD (DABBLING DUCK)

WHEN: October to April, with the similar-looking domesticated Mallards (Zine #12) present year round

LOOK FOR: The male has a shiny green head, yellow bill, and curly tail feathers. The female (see sketch) is mostly brown, with a dark eyeline, light eyebrow, black splotches across the center of her orange bill, a shiny blue and white-edged speculum, and white tail.

FIELD NOTES: IDing female ducks is tricky, since they are designed to blend into the background while caring for their ducklings. Look to see how the females of each species differ, starting with the head and bill.

1st SEEN ON AT

GADWALL (DABBLING DUCK)

WHEN: October to March

LOOK FOR: The male is grayish-brown with a black bill and butt, with white edges on his breast and side feathers. The female is brown with a gray head and a faint eyeline—look for the orange sides of her black bill. Both genders have square-ish heads and white speculums that show when their wings are raised.

FIELD NOTES: Gadwalls are dabblers, with their butts rotating up into the air as they reach down to eat aquatic plants and invertebrates. Like most other ducks, they build nests on the ground close to water.

1st SEEN ON AT

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK

WHEN: Year round

LOOK FOR: Both genders look the same. The pink “lipstick” on the bill, gray head, white eyering, and extra-long neck and legs make IDs super simple.

FIELD NOTES: Black-bellies whistle loudly as they fly. They feed mostly at night, grazing on grain/seeds and a few assorted invertebrates. Like the Wood Ducks, females lay their eggs in holes in trees, with ducklings jumping down to the ground the day after they hatch. Fathers help take care of their ducklings, unlike the males of most other duck species.

1st SEEN ON AT

REDHEAD (DIVING DUCK)

WHEN: Year round, but very uncommon in summer

LOOK FOR: Both genders have a gray bill with a black tip. The male has a dark red head, black breast and butt, and gray back and sides. The female has a thin white eyering, and her crown, breast and back are only a little bit darker than her cheeks and sides.

FIELD NOTES: Redheads are diving ducks, swimming down to the bottom of ponds to eat vegetation, aquatic insects, mollusks, and fish. The legs of diving ducks are close to the back of their bodies, making it easy for them to swim, but hard for them to walk.

1st SEEN ON AT

WOOD DUCK (DABBLING DUCK)

WHEN: Year round, but less common in summer

LOOK FOR: The male is boldly patterned—serving as nature’s best-dressed duck! The female has a very wide white eyering, white throat, and blue-green speculum.

FIELD NOTES: Wood ducks don’t hang out with other ducks—look for them off by themselves at ponds bordered by oak trees (they like acorns). Like the other dabblers, they have legs close to the center of their bodies, making it easy for them to waddle on land. The dabbling ducks also have long wings and can leap directly into flight from the water’s surface.

1st SEEN ON AT

RING-NECKED DUCK (DIVING DUCK)

WHEN: October to April

LOOK FOR: Both genders have a triangular head that is taller at the back, and a blue-gray bill that ends with a white ring and black tip. The male has a black head, breast, back, and butt, and gray sides. The female’s crown is much darker than her cheeks, and her back is darker than her breast and sides. Look for the eyering and the white on her cheeks at the base of her bill.

FIELD NOTES: The Ring-necks, like the other diving ducks, are relatively heavy and must “run” along the water’s surface before they can launch into flight.

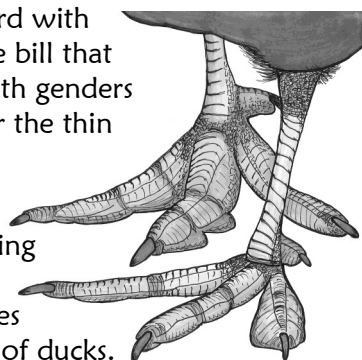
1st SEEN ON AT

AMERICAN COOT (not a duck)

WHEN: Year round, but very uncommon in summer

LOOK FOR: A duck-like bird with red eyes and a mostly white bill that stretches to its forehead. Both genders are grayish-black, except for the thin white edge on their tails.

FIELD NOTES: Coots graze on land, tip over like dabbling ducks, and make shallow dives. They have lobbed toes instead of the webbed toes of ducks.



1st SEEN ON AT