



Brightwood's Ducks

Take a walk around Brightwood Pond, and you will likely see some ducks all year round. Have you ever stopped to look at how many different types of ducks visit Brightwood?

According to the eBird Field Checklist, 9 duck breeds have been reported in Brightwood Park:¹

How many of these have you seen? Have you found any beyond the nine breeds listed? Our photographers did.

eBird Field Checklist		Waterfowl
Brightwood Park		<input type="checkbox"/> Canada Goose
Union, New Jersey, US		<input type="checkbox"/> Wood Duck
ebird.org/hotspot/L4777296		<input type="checkbox"/> Blue-winged Teal
122 species (+1 other taxa) - Year-round, All years		<input type="checkbox"/> Gadwall
Date: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> American Wigeon
Start time: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Mallard
Duration: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Ring-necked Duck
Distance: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Common Merganser
Party size: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Ruddy Duck
Notes: _____		Pigeons and Doves
		<input type="checkbox"/> Rock Pigeon
		<input type="checkbox"/> Mourning Dove
		Swifts
		<input type="checkbox"/> Chimney Swift

Male and female ducks of the same breed look quite different. Male ducks look fancier than female ducks. Because the males have to court females, they want to look their best! They will put on a show and hope that a female will choose them to be their partner.

Ducks find a mate between December and March each year. To attract a female, males perform head pumping, head-up-tail-up maneuvers, and grunt-whistling.² They hope their performance will find them love. You can watch a video of some fancy courting here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmp8e9_Fa50

When you are in the park, be sure to listen for the ducks. Did you know that all ducks do not “quack?” Click on the links below to hear what sounds the different duck breeds make.

¹ https://ebird.org/printableList?regionCode=L4777296&yr=all&m&fbclid=IwAR10K2dxjdKkviAVJvAP7VTgXu8yzChqTEUzjc_ixfuIp1hVlwQ--U-IU5k

² <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/what-to-watch-for-duck-courtship-video/>

Mallards



You can find Mallard ducks in Brightwood Park year round.

Female mallards have brown feathers on their heads and bodies. Their wings have a bright blue “speculum” outlined by white stripes. Their brown bill shows some orange coloration, and their feet are orange.

Photo by Chuan-Chu Chou

Male mallards have iridescent green feathers on their head with a white ring around their neck. Their bill is yellowish, and their feet are orange. Like the female, the male’s wings also have a blue “speculum” with white stripes.

Mallards are “dabbling ducks”—they feed in the water from pond surface plants or tipping forward and grazing on underwater plants. They almost never dive.

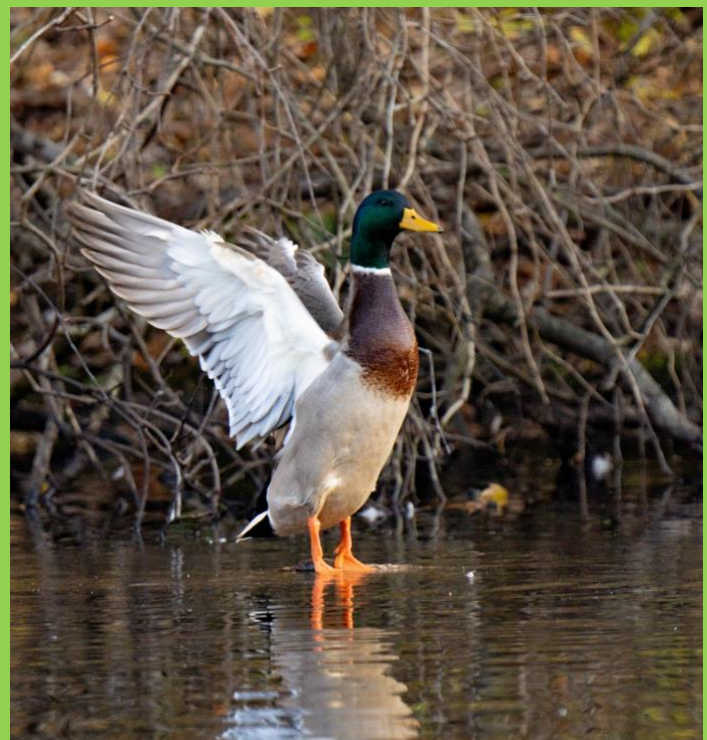


Photo by Kevin Redden

Mallards speak in “quacks”: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Mallard/sounds>

Wood Ducks

Can you guess which is male and which is female?



All Wood Duck photos by Chuan-Chu Chou

Wood ducks are particularly beautiful in coloring and patterning.



Males have iridescent green feathers with intricate bands of white and dark brown and a swept back crest on their heads. Their bodies have a dark back contrasted to a white belly. Their chestnut feathers accent their neck and tail. They have blue on the speculum of their wings.

Females have a soft greyish brown head and small swept back crest. Their eyes are ringed in a white teardrop shape giving them an elegant and distinctive profile. Their bellies are also white. They have blue speculum wing marking.

These birds live in wooded wetlands. They find holes in trees along ponds or lakes to nest within. Unlike most ducks, they have strong claws that can grip bark so that they can perch on branches.



Wood ducks mate in January and can lay up to two sets of eggs each year.

Ducklings jump down from their nests without any help from their parents and follow their mother down to the water.

Like Mallards, Wood Ducks are dabblers. Although they are omnivores, they eat mostly plants.

Wood ducks are one of the few birds with red eyes. This young male has not fully developed his fancy plumage yet.

Wood ducks have a much higher pitched call than Mallards:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Wood_Duck/sounds



American Wigeon

These two beautiful female American Wigeons show off their blue/grey bills and smoky brown eyes. They sport greyish brown feathers.



Like other duck species, the male Wigeon is more colorful than the female. Its head is white on top with an iridescent green stripe from its eye towards the back. Its neck is brown with black speckles three sides and black in the back. Male Wigeons have a brown body, white underbelly and black tail.

Photo by Chuan-Chu Chou

American Wigeons like to come together in groups in marshy wetlands. They are dabblers who mostly eat plants. Their shorter beaks help them tear off plants not only in the water but also on land.

American Wigeons have a very distinctive whistle-sneezy voice. You can hear their voice here: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Wigeon/sounds

Hooded Merganser



Hooded Mergansers are smaller ducks. This female is swimming with its cinnamon colored head crest fully open. She has a grey body, and is swimming with her longish tail in the water.

Males are quite showy white, black and cinnamon colored ducks. Their heads are black with a white wedge shaped feather section within their very distinctive crest. When their crest is folded down, the white appears to be a stripe.

Photo by Chuan-Chu Chou

Hooded Mergansers have short serrated bills. They dive and swim underwater to hunt for their meals. They eat fish, crayfish, and aquatic insects and swallow their catch whole. They also eat vegetation.

The Hooded Merganser also has a very distinctive voice that sounds more like a croak:
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hooded_Merganser/sounds

Common Merganser

This female Common Merganser was recently seen in Brightwood Park. She has a shaggy copper feathered head and grey body. Males have smooth iridescent green heads, black backs and white bodies. Common Mergansers have long serrated reddish beaks.



Photo by Chuan-Chu Chou

These ducks spend most of their time floating on the water in groups with other ducks including Buffleheads. They dive to hunt salmon, trout and other prey. They eat mostly fish, but also feed upon aquatic insects, crayfish, birds, small mammals and plants. These larger ducks are at the top of the aquatic food chain.

The Common Merganser has a call similar to a whirring sound:
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Merganser/sounds

Bufflehead

Buffleheads are smaller ducks with short beaks.

Male buffleheads have iridescent green and purple feathers on their head and neck and a large white patch on the back of their heads. Their bodies are white.



All Bufflehead photos by Chuan-Chu Chou

Female Buffleheads are brown and grey with distinctive white cheek patches.

Buffleheads stay mostly in the water and are rarely seen on land. They dive for their food and can stay underwater for up to 25 seconds. They eat invertebrates, crustaceans and mollusks while still underwater.

Buffleheads are one of the few duck species that stay with their same mate for years. Most other duck breeds choose a new mate each year.



Buffleheads have a more muffled “quack.”

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Bufflehead/sounds>

Odd couple?

This couple visited Brightwood this winter. This smaller male Bufflehead was accompanied by the much larger female Common Merganser. These two enjoyed themselves swimming in the unfrozen water in Brightwood pond. In the winter, these two duck species like to hang out together.



Ducks sometimes mate with other breeds.

Photo by Chuan-Chu Chou

Fun Duck facts:

Mother ducks do not feed their babies. They lead them around, but baby ducks forage for themselves.

Ducks have very good vision, and because their eyes are on either side of their head, they can see almost 340 degrees (that is, they can see in front, to the side and some of what is behind them at the same time!)

When ducks preen themselves, they are actually waterproofing themselves. While they are cleaning away dust and dirt, they are also spreading a waxy substance from a gland near their tails. So, when they dive down in the water, their underfeathers stay dry.

Ducks feet don't get cold. If you see them walking on ice or swimming in icy water, no worries. They don't have nerve endings in their feet!

For more information about ducks, check out The Cornell Lab website

www.allaboutbirds.org