

Wood Duck

Aix sponsa

The Wood Duck is one of the most stunningly pretty of all waterfowl. Males are iridescent chestnut and green, with ornate patterns on nearly every feather; the elegant females have a distinctive profile and delicate white pattern around the eye. These birds live in wooded swamps, where they nest in holes in trees or in nest boxes put up around lake margins. They are one of the few duck species equipped with strong claws that can grip bark and perch on branches.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Wood Ducks have a unique shape among ducks—a boxy, crested head, a thin neck, and a long, broad tail. In flight, they hold their head up high, sometimes bobbing it. Overall, their silhouette shows a skinny neck, long body, thick tail, and short wings.

Color Pattern

In good light, males have a glossy green head cut with white stripes, a chestnut breast and buffy sides. In low or harsh light, they'll look dark overall with paler sides. Females are gray-brown with white-speckled breast. In eclipse plumage (late summer), males lose their pale sides and bold stripes, but retain their bright eye and bill. Juveniles are very similar to females.

Behavior

Unlike most waterfowl, Wood Ducks perch and nest in trees and are comfortable flying through woods. Their broad tail and short, broad wings help make them maneuverable. When swimming, the head jerks back and forth much as a walking pigeon's does. You often see Wood Ducks in small groups (fewer than 20), keeping apart from other waterfowl. Listen for the female's call when these wary birds flush.

Habitat

Look for Wood Ducks in wooded swamps, marshes, streams, beaver ponds, and small lakes. They stick to wet areas with trees or extensive cattails. As a cavity nester, Wood Ducks take readily to nest boxes.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 18.5 - 21.3 inches
- Wingspan - 26 - 28.7 inches
- Weight - 16.0 - 30.4 ounces

