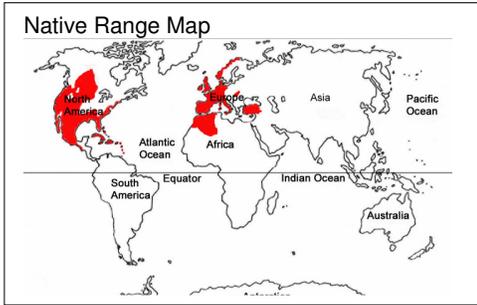


# N. American Ruddy Duck



Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Subphylum: Vertebrata  
Class: Aves  
Order: Anseriformes  
Family: Anatidae  
Genus: *Oxyura*  
Species: *jamaicensis*



Photo courtesy of Lynne Panebianco

## Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The North American ruddy duck originated in Canada, from British Columbia to Manitoba, south to California and Texas and scattered in the northeastern United States. It has been introduced into several European and North African countries. It lives near fresh water marshes, ponds and lakes with emergent vegetation and areas of open water.
- **Exhibit Location:** Waterfowl Pond in Courtyard

## Characteristics

- Length: 14-16 inches; Wingspan: 21-24 inches; Weight: 1-2 pounds
- Males are larger than females.
- The ruddy duck is described as a small, chubby duck that swims with its tail lifted straight up.
- The male plumage, in summer, consists of a red, cinnamon colored body with a white cheek patch, black cap on the head, blue bill, and grey-blue feet. In winter, the male resembles the female, but is gray with white cheeks.
- The female is a rusty-brown with a dark streak through her white cheek patch.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 2 years (13 years record); **In Captivity** 8 years

## Behaviors

- Ruddy ducks spend the majority of their lives in water and are hardly ever seen on land.
- They are great swimmers and divers. They can use their stiff tail as a rudder to maneuver when they swim and dive.
- Ruddy ducks feed mostly by sieving bottom debris while diving. They also dabble on the surface.
- When taking off from a lake or pond, ruddy ducks are very awkward. They must use their legs and wings to “run” across the surface of the water (like a runway). Once in flight, the ruddy duck must beat its wings very fast. Some people say it looks like a large hummingbird.
- To escape predators, it dives rather than flies.
- Ruddy ducks are partially migratory. They mostly depart their breeding grounds to winter in the south or near the coast. Other populations are mainly sedentary or make only small-scale movements.
- They are usually silent in their vocalizations, unless it is breeding season.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** Romaine lettuce & insects

## Reproduction

- On average, ruddy ducks do not reproduce until they are 2 years of age.
- Ruddy ducks pair up each year for the breeding season that begins in April. The male displays courtship by holding his tail straight up, beating his breast with his bill and blowing bubbles in the water. The call of the male is a “chuck-uck-uck-uck-ur-r-r”.

- Nest building occurs in May by the females in marshes, lakes or ponds. A dome is also built over the nest to protect it from being seen by predators. Nests can be made from old nests of other ducks, on muskrat houses, or on floating logs.
- Ruddy ducks normally only have 1 brood per year of 4-8 eggs. Incubation is 25-26 days.
- Female ruddy ducks incubate, feed, and protect the young. The male does not stick around to help. The young fledge in 50-55 days.

### Diet

- **In the Wild:** pondweeds, algae, seeds, sedges, grasses, small aquatic invertebrates
- **At the Zoo:** trout chow, flamingo chow and grain based waterfowl mix.

### Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** Least concern; **CITES:** not listed
- The North American ruddy duck is not globally threatened and is locally common. However, its numbers have decreased recently due to habitat destruction, periodic droughts or drainage in their breeding range, and exposure to oil spills in their winter quarters. They are also under pressure from hunters due to their tameness and relative ease of shooting.
- This species is of concern in the United Kingdom due to its invasiveness and for the fact that it is breeding with the globally endangered white-headed duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*). Hybridization is threatening the existence of the white-headed duck, so management of the ruddy duck is of concern overseas.
- Predators: raccoons, mink, American crows, red-tailed hawks, great horned owls, red foxes, black-crowned night herons, Swainson's hawks, ring-billed gulls, California gulls, humans

### Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- **Name(s),etc:** The ruddy ducks at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo were hatched at the zoo.
- For the most part, female ruddy ducks are silent. The talkers are the males.
- Females produce a very large egg for their size, almost 2 inches in length.
- Ruddy ducks are jerky fliers due to their rounded wings.

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