



## N. American Wood Duck

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



Photo courtesy of Lynne Panebianco

### Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The wood duck is most commonly found in quiet undisturbed creeks, rivers, floodplains, lakes, and wooded swamps. It is also associated with beaver ponds. Wood ducks are migratory birds mostly occurring on the west coast and eastern half of the United States, and southern portions of Canada. It has also been introduced to some Western European countries.
- **Exhibit Location:** Waterfowl Pond in Courtyard and Swan Pond

### Characteristics

- Length: 17-20 inches; Wingspan: 28-30 inches; Weight: 1.4-1.5 pounds
- In breeding plumage the male has a darkly iridescent head with a “slicked-back” crest, orange-red eyes, a head striped with white, a white throat, and a rich burgundy breast and neck. Its bill has a variegated pattern of red, yellow, black, and white. Non breeding males are duller, with head and body grey, bill dull red, and head bushy but lacking the crest.
- The female has a grayish head with a crest, a prominent white ring around dark brown eyes, a white throat, brown back, and brownish breast and flanks. Its bill is black.
- The juvenile resembles the female, except it has a streaked and mottled brown belly.
- The wings of wood ducks are proportionately broader than many other ducks, giving them more maneuverability while flying in their wooded habitats.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 3-4 years (record is 15 years); **In Captivity** up to 20 years

### Behaviors

- Wood ducks get around by swimming, walking, or flying. Males will often sleep in the water. Their flight is swift and direct, reaching an average of 31 mph.
- They are social animals and are often found in pairs or small flocks, especially during migration. They do not associate closely with other waterfowl.
- Partially migratory, the northernmost portion of breeding birds fly south to winter at lower latitudes, reaching central Mexico.
- They forage for food on water by plucking, dabbling, head dipping, and upending. They also forage on land.
- Adult wood ducks have 12 distinct calls; ducklings have 5. The males’ call is a distinct, thin whistling. The females’ is a high-pitched OO-EEK! OO-EEK! Most adult calls are used to warn others of predators, but they are also used to attract mates. Ducklings have alarms and contact calls to find their mothers.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** romaine lettuce and insects

### Reproduction

- Sexual maturity is attained in the first year of a wood duck’s life.
- Male wood ducks are monogamous, but will find different mates each year. The male’s colorful plumage, along with calls and displays, are used to attract females. Breeding begins in February in the southern United States and happens as late as mid-April in the northern part of their range.

- The nest is made inside a tree cavity or a man-made nest box near water. Like other waterfowl, wood ducks become aggressive during pair bonding and egg laying. Males will defend their mate by chasing and pecking their opponent. Older males usually defeat younger ones in such “battles.”
- The female lays 6-15 eggs per season and incubates them for 28 days. After hatching, the ducklings remain in the nest for only one day before the mother leads them to water where they learn to forage. Ducklings are independent within 56-70 days.

### Diet

- **In the Wild:** acorns, nuts, seeds, green parts of aquatic plants, aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates, berries, grains
- **At the Zoo:** waterfowl grain based mix, trout chow & flamingo chow

### Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** Least Concern; **CITES Appendix:** not listed
- Wood ducks are not globally threatened. They have recovered from near extinction in the early 1900s caused by over-hunting and loss of habitat. Restrictions on hunting and use of man-made nest boxes have helped aid the recovery of the wood duck over the past 100 years to its now stable condition.
- Predators: great horned owl, American mink, raccoons, red foxes, gray foxes, alligators, black rat snakes

### Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Many consider the male, in brightly colored breeding plumage, the most beautiful North American duck.
- When on the water, the wood duck sits high with its tail angled upward. On land, it walks or runs with greater ease than most ducks, and frequently perches in trees. Their feet are specially adapted with sharp claws for perching.
- Other common names for wood ducks are woody, acorn duck, swamp duck, or squealer.
- The colorful feathers of wood ducks are much sought after by fishermen for making lures and flies.
- In the southern United States where the breeding season is longer, females will often raise 2 broods.

### Sources:

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