

wood duck *Aix sponsa*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Anseriformes

Family: Anatidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The wood duck is 17 to 20 inches long. Its tail is dark, long and rectangular. The short, broad wings have black feathers with white on the back edges. The neck is short. In the winter and spring, the male's feathers become brilliantly colored. His head feathers are an iridescent purple-green. Two white parallel lines may be seen from the base of the bill over the head to the back of the neck. The white throat extends upward to the red eyes and the base of the bill. The male's maroon chest feathers have white markings, and his side feathers are gold with a black and white design. In the summer, the male has brown feathers with white patches on the face. The bill is red and white. The female (all year) has dark gray-brown feathers on the body and head with tan feathers on the sides. Her belly feathers are white, as are her throat feathers and the circle around each eye.

BEHAVIORS

The wood duck is a common migrant through Illinois and summer resident statewide. It is an uncommon winter resident but will stay in southern Illinois during mild winters. This bird lives in swamps and near rivers and ponds (with wooded areas). It eats acorns, insects, corn and seeds of bald cypress, buttonbush, hickories and wild millet. The call of the female is a loud "whee-e-e-k, whee-e-e-k," and the male's call is "twee, twee." This bird will nest in a tree cavity, barn, chimney or a humanmade wood duck box. Spring migrants begin appearing in Illinois in February. Nesting occurs from March through July. Six to 14 white eggs are laid per clutch. Sometimes several females lay eggs in the same nest. This process, called "dumping," may result in as many as 40 young in one nest. Soon after hatching the female (hen) coaxes the young ducks to jump down from the nest that may be fairly high in a tree. She then leads the young ducks to water. The wood duck may be seen sitting on a tree limb. When flying, it bobs its head up and down. Fall migration begins in September.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; rivers and streams

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; southern Illinois lowlands

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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