

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*

In the early 1900s, this beautiful bird was threatened with extinction from over hunting, drainage of wetlands, and over cutting of forested swamps (Terres 1980). Between 1918 and 1941, the United States and Canada closed the hunting season on this species. The species breeds in North America, wherever there are wooded swamps.

Habitat. Wood Ducks feed on a variety of vegetable and animal matter. Approximately 90% of their diet is composed of plant materials, such as duckweed, cypress cones, seeds of grasses and sedges, wild grapes, and acorns. Invertebrates consumed include dragonflies, beetles, and a few crustaceans (Howell 1932). Invertebrates are especially important in the diets of breeding females and broods.

Nests are located in bare cavities in the trunks or larger limbs of trees. Nest boxes provided by humans are used extensively throughout the breeding range of the species. No nesting material is brought into the cavity, but a lining of down is provided. Eight to 10 eggs comprise a typical clutch, but nests with up to 50 eggs have been reported.

This is the result of many hens "dumping" eggs in the same nest (Ehrlich et al. 1988). The eggs are unmarred white to creamy-white. Incubation is performed solely by the hen and takes 28 to 37 days. Soon after hatching the brood leaves the nest in response to the calls of the hen. Using sharp toenails, ducklings climb to the nest entrance and drop unaided to the ground or water below. The young first fly 56 to 70 days after hatching. The nest is usually located near or over water, but sometimes it is placed up to a mile away (Terres 1980).

Seasonal Occurrence. Although Wood Ducks reside in Florida, many individuals migrate into the state from farther north in the fall months and leave to breed in the spring. Most nesting occurs March to June (Stevens and Anderson 1994), but eggs have been recorded as early as 21 January (Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission [editor: now Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission], unpublished data).

Status. Today, the Wood Duck is the most widespread breeding waterfowl in Florida and, by far, the most common. A careful look at the Atlas map reveals that the Wood Duck is entirely absent, as a breeder, from the Keys and parts of the Everglades. Sawgrass marshes are not suitable breeding habitat for this duck, even with interspersed hammocks. It also avoids mangrove swamps and the agricultural areas southeast of Lake Okeechobee. Wood Ducks no longer occur in some heavily developed areas, but most gaps in the Panhandle or north Florida were probably a result of insufficient coverage.

Robert W. Loftin

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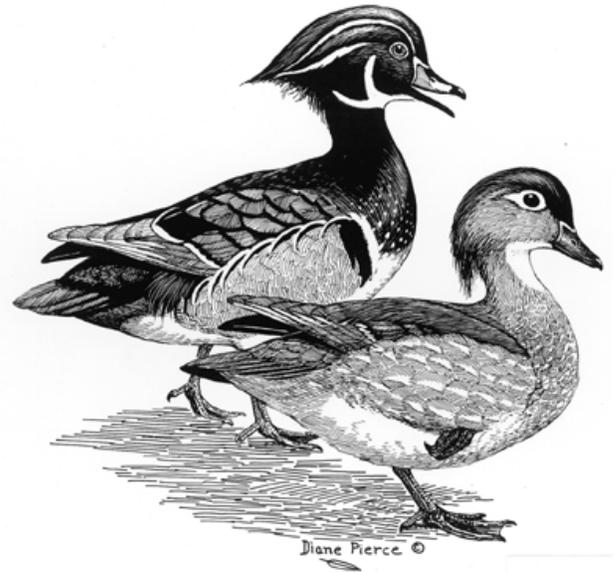


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Wood Duck

