

## The Birder's Eye Ducking Out to Go birding!

When birding here in Western North Carolina, looking for ducks and geese is not one of the activities that immediately spring to mind. The mountains are rich in many bird species, such as warblers and other woodland birds, but ducks? Aside from the ubiquitous Canada Goose and abundant Mallard, the only wild duck we can regularly expect during the summer months is the beautifully-plumaged Wood Duck. However, during the winter, searching for ducks does seem a little more worthwhile. As the weather gets colder, as it has already started to do this year, the migrating waterfowl will appear on our local lakes and rivers. Although the number of waterfowl here in the mountains and foothills of the Carolinas cannot compare with the vast flocks along North Carolina's coast and Outer Banks, we still manage to attract a reasonable selection of birds on some of the larger rivers, lakes, and reservoirs. Here, if the water remains open throughout the colder months, we can expect small flocks of geese and ducks on many stretches of water.



Once you have found your duck-filled lake, the next job is to go through all of the assorted brown blobs and identify what is out there. Of course, this is much easier than it sounds! But there is some help out there with several good books that contain excellent illustrations of all our eastern waterfowl. One of my favorites is the National Geographic Guide to North American birds. With regular updated editions, this field guide gets better and better. What's even handier for most of us who live in the East, there is now a version that contains only our eastern birds. Another very handy

book is Waterfowl of Eastern North America by Chris Earley. Aside from books, nothing can beat getting out into the field. Should the weather stay very cold and the lakes begin to freeze over, many of the ducks and geese will move to areas of permanently open water, such as Lake Julian in south Asheville and Lake Osceola in Hendersonville. Some very impressive concentrations of regularly wintering waterfowl have occurred under these conditions.

The most regularly occurring species are Mallard, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Canada Goose, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked and Ruddy Ducks, but we shall also look for Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail and both Lesser and Greater Scaup. Local rarities in our area have included: Common Goldeneye, White-winged Scoter, and Snow and Greater White-fronted Geese.

Going out to see waterfowl in the winter can be very satisfying, but remember that the weather may be very cold. You will certainly need warm clothing, good boots, and a duckbill hat!

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