

Wood Duck: A stunning beauty that nests in trees

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

You'll be hard pressed to find any waterfowl that are more stunning than Wood Ducks.

The non-native Mandarin Duck will always stand out due to its beauty but the male Wood Duck will always impress anyone with an eye for bright colors and fascinating feather patterns.

Male Wood Ducks are iridescent chestnut and green with a boldly patterned breast.

The male's crested head is worth close inspection. The shape makes the duck look like it might be wearing a helmet with white stripe accents. The bright red eye is sure to draw attention. The bold white neck and cheek pattern stand out making the bird easy to identify at a distance.

The 2020-2021 federal duck stamp features a male Wood Duck.

The female, while not as bright and bold as the male, is distinctive with its teardrop shaped eye ring and bright blue patch on the wings.

Wood Ducks are found in wooded swamps and rivers or ponds with thick vegetation. They tend to prefer shallow ponds or slow-moving water with nearby, overhanging vegetation.

They are 18 to 24 inches in length and weigh between one and two pounds. They eat seeds,



Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.



A male Wood Duck: Distinctive enough for a U.S. postage stamp.

fruits, insects and, occasionally, nuts and grains.

Wood Ducks nest in tree cavities or nest boxes. They are one of duck species that has feet that are capable of gripping bark or branches using strong claws. They are also the only North

American duck that produces two broods in one year.

In the late 19th century, Wood Duck populations were declining rapidly due to nesting and foraging habitat loss. Conservation efforts introduced artificial nest boxes to replace the natural

tree cavities used for nesting but loss of wetland habitat, including ponds and riparian areas along streams, is still a cause of concern.

Today, Wood Duck populations have increased and are stable. Ecologically, Wood Ducks are listed as "low concern."

However, climate modeling by the National Audubon Society shows that a two-degree Centigrade increase in summer temperatures would result in a 20 percent loss in the area suitable for hosting these ducks. In all of the climate modeling scenarios, the Wood Duck range is pushed far north into Canada.

Most of the time, Wood Ducks will avoid people and swim for cover or move away when approached.

City park ponds, however, often provide an opportunity to get closer to them, allowing good viewing with the naked eye or binoculars.

A wide variety of cameras allow good photos of these beautiful birds. Slow movements and paying attention to the bird's behavior as you approach will frequently allow you to get remarkably close.

Feel free to take as many photos as you like when you get the opportunity. Good luck!