

Species Fact Sheets

Order: Anseriformes
Scientific Name: *Aix sponsa*

Family: Anatidae
Common Name: Wood Duck

AZA Management: Green Yellow Red None

Photo (Male):



Photo (Female):



NATURAL HISTORY:

Geographic Range: Europe Asia North America Neotropical
 Africa Australia Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Habitat: Forest Desert Grassland Coastal
 Riverine Montane Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Circadian Cycle: Diurnal Crepuscular Nocturnal Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Cold Tolerance: To 70° F To 60° F To 50° F To 40° F
 To 30° F To 20° F Other Cold tolerant, can be maintained outdoors as long as they have access to moving water

Heat Tolerance: To 30° F To 50° F To 70° F To 90° F
 To 110° F Other Can be kept outdoors as long as water and shade are available

Diet: Frugivore Carnivore Piscivore Insectivore
 Nectivore Omnivore Folivore Other (Add Below)

Captive Dietary Needs:

Captives can be fed commercial waterfowl diet, supplemented with greens, insects/worms, and vitamins and minerals.

Life Expectancy in the Wild: Males: unknown Females: unknown

Life Expectancy in Captivity: Males: 20-25 years Females: 20-25 years

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BREEDING INFORMATION:

Age at Sexual Maturity: Males: 1 Year Females: 1 Year

Courtship Displays: Male swims in front of female with the wings and tail elevated. The sexes will also mutually preen.

Nest Site Description: Tree cavity lined with down, will readily use nestboxes.

Clutch Size, Egg Description: 6-16 cream or tan colored eggs (more eggs may be present in a nest due to females clutch-dumping one another)

Incubation Period: 25-37 (Usually 30) Days

Fledgling Period: 8-10 Weeks

Parental Care: Male leaves female shortly after mating to molt. Female incubates the eggs alone. After the chicks hatch, she leads them from their cavity nest (coaxing them to jump down) to the water, where they follow her until fledging.

Chick Development: Ducklings leave the nest cavity shortly after hatching and follow their mother to the water. They are able to fly at 8-10 weeks and are sexually mature at the end of their first year. Ducklings are able to climb very well, which must be managed if they are being reared in a brooder.

CAPTIVE HABITAT INFORMATION:

Social Structure in the Wild: Pair, Small Flock

Social Structure in Captivity: Pair, Small Flock

Minimum Group Size: Pair

Maximum Group Size: Small Flock

Compatible in Mixed Species Exhibits: Yes **Comments:** Successful combinations have included other waterfowl, herons, ibises, passerines, turtles, and beavers.

Optimal Habitat Size: 100 Square Feet for a Pair

Management Challenges: Wood ducks are widely kept in captivity; their simple husbandry requirements and beautiful coloration make them very popular in waterfowl collections. This popularity has come at the expense of other, higher-priority species, which could benefit from some of the space and resources devoted to wood ducks. Wood ducks hybridize readily, and feral populations have become established in the United Kingdom.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

The American wood duck (sometimes also known as the Carolina duck) has an adult body length of 47-54 centimeters and a wingspan of 66-73 centimeters. Its weight varies from 454-862 grams. Males have a glossy green head (caped with a flowing crest and marked with white stripes), a chestnut breast, and buff-colored

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sides. The Latin name translates to “Water bird in a bridal dress” in reference to the male’s plumage. Females are gray or brown with white speckling on the breast. The feet of the male are orange-yellow, compared to the grey feet of the female. The call is a thin, high whistle, rising and falling, while the wings make a whistling sound in flight. It has been suggested that their loud vocalizations are a response to the poor visibility of dense woodlands.

As implied by their common name, wood ducks are often found in wooded areas; their broad tail and short, broad wings make them more maneuverable in flight than many other ducks, while their clawed feet allow them to perch in trees. The species is very arboreal and captives benefit from perching to place themselves out of reach of other birds in their exhibit. Nesting also takes place in the trees, using either natural cavities or man-made nest boxes. Unlike many other North American duck species, wood ducks will regularly brood twice in one year. Brood parasitism is not uncommon, with females frequently leaving their eggs in the nests of other woods, along with other cavity nesters, such as hooded mergansers (which will also lay their eggs in the nests of wood ducks).

Wood ducks are not especially aggressive or assertive, and may be bullied or chased by larger waterfowl in a mixed enclosure. They are not territorial with one another, but neither are they especially social, and seldom gather in large flocks. The species is partially migratory, with those at the northern limits of its range migrating south in the winter and southern populations being resident year round.

Natural predators include snakes, minks, raccoons, snapping turtles, foxes, and alligators. The wild population of wood ducks declined sharply during the 1900s, largely due to overhunting; it was also threatened by loss of habitat and nesting sites. Fortunately, the species utilizes man-made nest boxes readily and breeds very freely in captivity. Wood ducks have since made a dramatic comeback. They are now one of the most common waterfowl species in North America.

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