

Bufflehead

Bucephala albeola

General Information:

-The name of this large-headed duck, which means buffalo-headed or ox-headed, belies the Bufflehead's agility in flying, swimming, and diving. It is the smallest diving duck, but it is one of the best divers. In flight the male's pink legs and feet are bright against white under-parts, and a white patch crosses the entire inner wing; female show white in the secondary feathers only. These birds only nest in North America, and they are one of only 4 Wisconsin ducks that nest in trees.

Song:

-Squeaky whistle and low squealing or growling call. In courtship makes loud grating or chattering noise. Female has a harsh quack, *ec-ec-ec* and buzzy *cuc-cuc-cuc*.

Behavior:

-Can take off directly from water unlike other diving ducks. Uses feet to swim underwater. Dives in groups for safety, leaving "lookouts" on surface. Eats aquatic insects, larvae, snails, small fish, and aquatic plant seeds. On saltwater eats shrimp and other crustaceans, shellfish, and snails. Male performs head-bobbing display in courtship.



Breeding:

-Monogamous. Solitary nester.

Nesting:

-Incubation of 28-33 days by female. The 1 brood per year of precocial young leave the nest by jumping out of the tree cavity with 1 day of hatching, are tended by the female, and have their first flight at 50-55 days.

Population:

-Common but has declined.

Birdhouses:

-Will use nest boxes located near water.

Conservation:

-Much less numerous now due to unrestricted shooting in the 20th century and loss of habitat.

Shoreline Restoration Issues:

-The Bufflehead is one of Wisconsin's four native ducks that nest in tree cavities, the others being the Wood Duck, Common Merganser, and Goldeneye. To create an environment friendly to the Bufflehead you need plenty of emergent aquatic vegetation, submersed aquatic vegetation, and shoreline vegetation. Leave trees near the water that have cavities and put up "Wood Duck houses".