

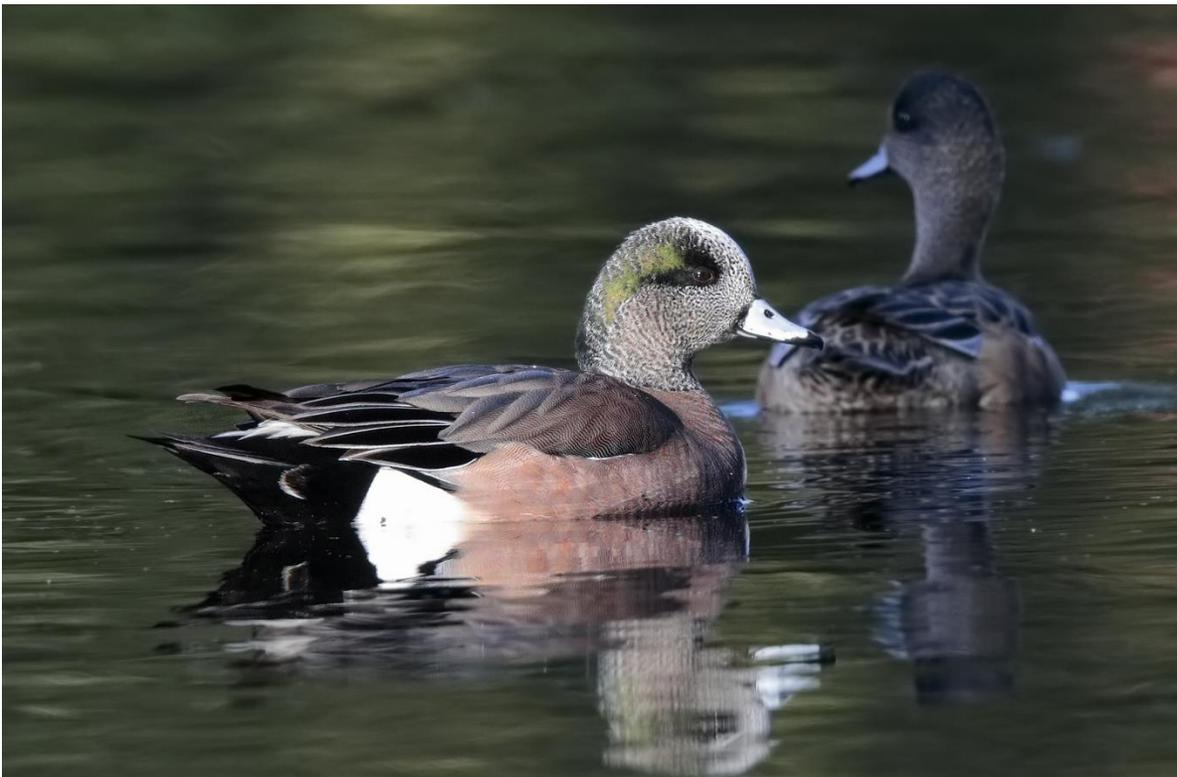
BirdWalk Newsletter

2.12.17

Magnolia Plantation and Gardens

Conducted by: Perry Nugent

Written by: Jayne J Matney



American Wigeon pair

Photo by Chuck Fuhrman

The American Wigeon: *Anas Americana* or “American Duck” does have a counterpart in Eurasia. Another common name for this duck is the “Baldpate” for the drake’s white head which resembles a bald head. They also have a white belly and large, white shoulder patches on each of the wings that flash into view as the birds are in flight. Both drake and hen have pale beaks of bluish grey with black tips. The feet and legs, however, are on the dark side. During the non-breeding season, the drakes look very much like the hens with grayish brown bodies. During the mating season, the drake has an iridescent green mask across the eye which continues to the back of the head. They have white flank feathers that highlight the black under tails. You may even notice a pinkish brown hue on the breast area.



American Wigeon

Photo by Ray Swagerty

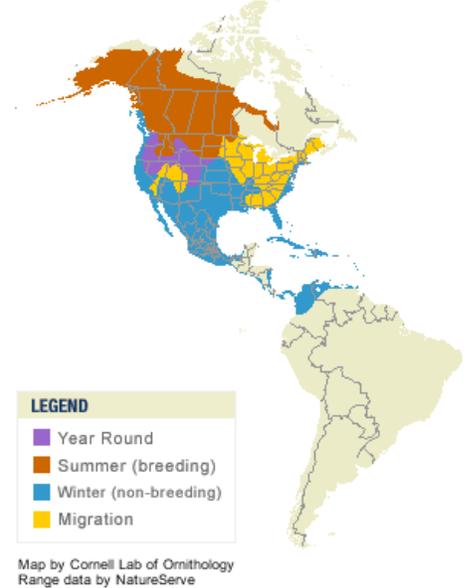
- **Notice the pale beaks and the start of the bald cap on the males**

The American Wigeon is a medium-sized dabbling duck with a small rounded head, short neck, and small bill. The American Wigeon's diet has a higher proportion of plant material than any other dabbling duck. They eat by grazing along ponds or other wetlands for aquatic vegetation as most dabbling ducks do, but these ducks will also graze on the banks of grasslands for seeds and clover in addition to waste seeds from processed farmlands- unlike most dabbling ducks. Those that know a bit about their behavior can attest to the fact that they will watch diving birds and steal their vegetation for food which gives them another nickname of "robber" or "poacher." Outside of the breeding season, they will congregate in large flocks among American Coots. This is what is seen here on this plantation. Wigeon are considered noisy ducks unlike the quieter Gadwall. Their vocalizations are usually described as a "three note whistle... which makes a wheezy whoee-whoee-whoee" by the drake and "hoarse grunts and quacks" which sound like "a low growl" by the females. The courtship entails various "tail-wagging, head-turning, wing-flapping, and sudden jumps out of the water." Other sources describe the drake extending his neck, keeping his head down low, and opening his bill.

This pairing up process can happen during the wintering or just before spring migration occurs. There is a tendency for the southern migration to be gradual and early. Their summer nesting begins later in the season. Migrating flocks usually fly in the daytime with the males leaving the breeding grounds earlier than the females. Once they reach their destinations, they then begin their molting. The females build the nests as shallow hollows in tall grasses near water. The American Wigeon lay anywhere from 5-12 eggs, but the number is usually around 9, which are white in coloration. The young feed themselves immediately on vegetation and insects. The female waits to migrate until the ducklings have grown into "flight ready" ducks. American Wigeon's northern migration is consistently further north than any of the other dabbling ducks. In the summer, the American Wigeon range all the way up into deep Canada and Alaska. All flyways are utilized for wintering migration, but the most

used flyway is certainly the Pacific Flyway and into Mexico. During the process of a year, these ducks cover the entire range of North America. American Wigeon are of the Least Concern status, but conservation reports are conflicting when looking at population fluctuations. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, this conflict is between the North American Breeding Bird (NABB) Survey and the federal waterfowl surveys done over 60 years. The NABB survey shows a decline by 2.5% each year since 1966 and therefore has a decline of 71% overall in those years giving it a “steep decline” status in the 2014 State of the Birds report. The federal surveys state that the population has remained stable and are now increasing by close to 20% each year of 2013 and 2014. Presently, hunting is widespread throughout North America and the hunting season is regulated by federal limits. Droughts tend to be a major factor for population fluctuations. The oldest American Wigeon on record was at least 21 years and 4 months old.

American Wigeon
Anas americana



**** Information used for this article came from All About Birds, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Ducks Unlimited Publications from www.ducks.org; Audubon Society’s Audubon Field Guide On-Line at www.audubon.org; and Wikipedia.**

This Sunday was a cool, cloudy, and windy day. Unfortunately, Perry had no participants this time, but he worked hard for the rest of us and enjoyed his morning doing what he enjoys best. The count was still a good one with 46 species of birds here at the plantation. Large numbers of Common Moorhen and American Coot were at the cross dike, while large numbers of Gadwall showed up at Ravenswood Pond. Between 30 to 40 individuals of Blue-winged Teal and Green-winged Teal each and American Wigeon completed the duck list for the day. Pied-billed Grebe, Double Crested Cormorant, and Anhinga were included in the count. The wading birds included the Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, and White Ibis. Our 2 adult Bald Eagles were located on the nest! Let’s hope this is a good sign. 2 Red-shouldered Hawk were seen this Sunday. 2 Black Vulture and



Great Blue Heron on early nest Photo by Cathy Padgett

8 Turkey Vultures circled above and congregated on the dike. 2 Ring-billed Gull were counted as flyovers.

The winning species for numbers was actually the Yellow-rumped Warbler with 100!

Also on the property in large numbers were the Tree Swallow, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Common Grackle. The sparrows included the Song, Swamp, and White-throated Sparrows. The woodpecker family included the Red-bellied and Downy along with Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Northern Flicker. Rounding out the count were: Mourning Dove, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, American and Fish Crow, Carolina Wren, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Pine Warbler, Northern Cardinal, and Boat-tailed Grackle.



Plenty of Yellow-bellied Turtles to go around! Photo by Jo Frkovich



Hermit Thrush spot on an old fallen tree

Photo by Ray Swagerty