

614 Maass Wildfowl

Jan

Lake Christina Twilight – Canvasbacks

A large diving duck and powerful flier, the canvasback is found only in North America. Canvasbacks, or “Cans,” as they are called, spend much of the day asleep or resting out on open water and fly to shallow water feeding grounds in morning and evening. They typically dive into bodies of water to reach their favorite foods of wild celery and pond weeds. The graceful canvasbacks shown here are flying across Lake Christina in west central Minnesota. Lake Christina is known as one of the top canvasback areas of North America.

Feb

The New Arrivals – Lesser Scaups

A favorite diving duck among waterfowl hunters, the lesser scaup (also called bluebill) is built for swimming underwater for long distances in search of food. They are most often found on larger bodies of water where they congregate in huge groups called “rafts,” especially during migration. Their population has experienced a dramatic decline in recent years but no one environmental reason has been identified as a cause for this change.

Mar

Woodland Descent – Mallards and Black Ducks

Mallards are the most common and easily recognized duck in the United States. Of all the ducks in North America, it is the mallard whose breeding range is the most far-reaching. During breeding, the highest concentration of black ducks are found in Maine and Nova Scotia, while the greatest numbers of mallards are found in North Dakota, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba.

Apr

Marsh Landing – White-fronted Geese

The white-fronted goose got its formal name from the extraordinary white band at the base of its bill. White-fronted geese are popular among birders and sportsmen alike. Those who enjoy its chuckling call and grinning expression call it the “laughing goose;” those who identify with the dark blotches and bars on the breast call it “specklebelly.”

May

Stormy Approach – King Eiders

Looking for a place to land, a flock of king eider ducks fly over a rocky ledge on Newfoundland’s Gulf of St. Lawrence. Although somewhat smaller than their cousin, the common eider, king eiders are nevertheless among the largest ducks to grace the sky. These waterfowl forage for their food underwater, sometimes as much as 180 feet below the surface. Many scientists believe the king eider earned its name through its regal appearance. Others believe the name was bestowed by the Eskimos living in or near the bird’s nesting territory, proposing that king eider is from the Eskimo word “kingalik,” which means he has pride.

Jun

Southern Sojourn – Pintails

Pintails are beautiful and elegant birds. These ducks with their muted, yet distinctive coloring have slim necks, comparatively long bills and long, pointed tails. The pintails migrate early in the winter and are the most plentiful duck of the West Coast. These pintails are coming into a southern Arkansas rice paddy.

Jul

Rapid Advance – Wild Turkeys

According to most accounts, wild turkeys were quite abundant at the time of the European colonization of North America. Their numbers dwindled, however, as settlers moved westward through the birds’ habitat, as here in a ponderosa pine forest in the Black Hills of South Dakota. The restoration of the wild turkey is a wildlife management success story. The birds have made a strong comeback through the combined efforts of national and state wildlife management agencies, the National Wild Turkey Federation and other conservation organizations.

Aug

Wetland Retreat – Canada Geese

Whether it’s a busy metropolitan area or a peaceful country meadow, Canada geese readily adjust to a wide range of environments. They adapt well to their surroundings for a variety of reasons. The foods they favor, including winter wheat and corn, are plentiful in the country. In the city, they are quick to consume the grass on golf courses, parks, even lawns. Canada geese prefer to migrate only as far as they have to, often wintering in waters kept warm by power plants and in other ice-free locations. The geese pictured above are in the Butte Sink National Wildlife Refuge area of California’s Sacramento Valley. The Sutter Buttes Mountain Range is shown in the background.

Sep

Autumn Pond – Blue-winged Teals

Blue-winged teals are as fast as they are beautiful. They are capable of speeds up to forty miles per hour. These dabbling ducks are some of the smallest with drakes weighing about a pound and hens even less. When temperatures cool, they are one of the first ducks to head south.

This colorful group is taking off from a pond in northern Vermont.

Oct

Feeding Time – Ring-necked Ducks

A strong flyer, the ring-necked duck can quickly reach speeds of up to 45 miles per hour once airborne. It prefers an open, loose formation when flying and usually lands without the preliminary circling common to many other ducks. The ring-necked duck is not a gregarious bird. It is usually found with its own kind in small numbers.

Unlike other species of diving ducks, ring-necked ducks will often inhabit smaller marshes and ponds in wooded areas. This small group, however, is taking exception and landing near a pond with rushes just off the shoreline of a fairly large lake.

Nov

Graceful Approach – Wood Ducks

One of the most colorful and recognizable of North American waterfowl, the wood duck is a medium sized duck found mainly in eastern North America, the west coast of the United States and in western Mexico. Wood Ducks get their name because their breeding area is in wooded marshes and ponds where they nest in cavities of trees. The wood ducks in this painting are entering a typical small, wooded pond in northern Indiana.

Dec

Brisk Takeoff – Ring-necked Pheasants

A shimmering display of colors erupts from a northern Illinois farm field as a trio of ring-necked pheasants take flight, their graceful, glittering, multicolor wings in motion. When it's time to make an aerial exit, these birds launch with a rattle of wings and a clamorous staccato cackle. Native to China, the ring-necked pheasant is now an all-American bird as well, having adapted well to life in the United States and Canada. Tolerant of humans, these birds often nest on the outskirts of large cities, but they thrive in open country with a minimum of cover from grassy fields, creek beds and cornfields. Wild populations of this spectacular bird are now found in thirty-six states and in Canada.