

ruddy duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Anseriformes

Family: Anatidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The ruddy duck averages 15 to 16 inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). It has a large, white, cheek patch and a dark “cap” on the head. In the summer, the male has rust-red side feathers, a black “cap” of feathers on the head and a blue bill. In winter, the male is dull gray where it was red or black in the summer and has a gray bill. The female’s appearance year round is much like that of the winter male except that she has a dark line through the white cheek patch which the male does not have. The tail of this duck is often held erect. Three of the toes are webbed to help with swimming. The bill is flattened and has a toothlike fringe on its edge to help strain food from the water.

BEHAVIORS

The ruddy duck is a common migrant statewide, an occasional summer resident in northern Illinois and an occasional winter resident statewide. It lives in ponds, marshes, sewage lagoons and lakes. This diving duck cannot walk well on land. Spring migration starts in February. A few ruddy ducks breed in northern Illinois in ponds or marshes with much floating vegetation. A floating nest of plant materials is attached to live plants at the water’s edge. Six to 10, white eggs are deposited by the female, and she incubates them for the 25- to 26-day incubation period. The male remains near the nest during incubation and with the female during the raising of the young. Fall migration starts in late September. The ruddy duck winters as far south as Honduras. It eats aquatic insects, especially midge larvae, and aquatic plants. The call of this duck is “chick-ik-ik-ik-k-k-kwrrrr.”

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; Lake Michigan; marshes

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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