

IDENTIFYING DUCKS AND GEESE IN COASTAL BC IN WINTER

Generally, waterfowl provide an excellent group to identify for beginner birders. Ducks and geese are relatively large, common, and usually distinctive. Although both sexes of geese look the same (other than size), most ducks are distinctly “sexually dimorphic”—meaning that males look different than females. Typically the males are showy, so are relatively easy to identify. The females, on the other hand, are quite brown and non-descript, which can pose problems for even some experienced birders. Do not assume that just because a female duck is with an obvious male of a particular species that she is the same species. Unless the bird is obscured or quite far away, you should be able to make the correct identification using tips from this guide.

It is also important to realize that not all brown dabbling ducks are females. Sometimes they are young males that have not yet reached the maturity of alternate (breeding) plumage. Also, in late summer/early fall, you may be seeing a few adult males in what many refer to as “eclipse” plumage—when males moult into a female-like plumage, prior to their new pre-alternate molt in the fall/winter.

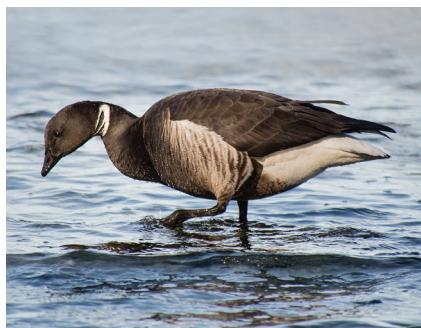
IDENTIFICATION FEATURES

- 1) Bill colour and shape
- 2) Head colour and shape
- 3) Markings on flanks/wing (e.g. colour of the “speculum”)
- 4) Tail shape/markings
- 5) Leg colour and
- 6) Overall size/structure

Brant (BRAN)

- Dark body
- Black head; white collar
- White V pattern on tail shows when flying

Brant (Photo: Terry Thormin)



Canada Goose (CANG)

- Brown body
- Black head & neck; white cheek patches

Canada Goose (Photo: Terry Thormin)

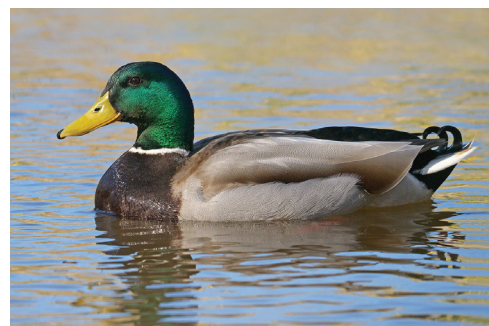
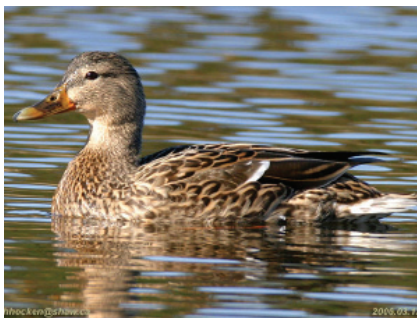


Mallard (MALL)

- Male has green head, white collar, rusty breast, orange feet, yellow bill
- Female has mottled brown body, blue wing patch, orange feet, orange/black bill

Female (Photo: Ralph Hocken)

Male (Photo: Terry Thormin)



Northern Pintail (NOPI)

- Longer, more slender bodied than MALL, with pointed tail
- Male has brown head, white breast & neck stripe, long tail feathers
- Female has plain, un-patterned face, dark grey bill

Female (Photo: Paul Kusmin)

Male (Photo: Terry Thormin)



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American Wigeon (AMWI)

- Head shape has steep forehead
- Male has white crown, green on sides of head
- Female has pinkish-beige flanks, contrasts with greyish face, small gray bill with black tip

Female (Photo: Mike Yip)

Male (Photo: Terry Thormin)



Eurasian Wigeon (EUWI)

- Male has rusty coloured head
- Female is similar to AMWI but with uniform warm-brown colouring, edge of bill usually lacks black border of AMWI, greyish underwing visible in flight (AMWI has white)

Female (Photo: Mike Yip)

Male (Photo: Terry Thormin)

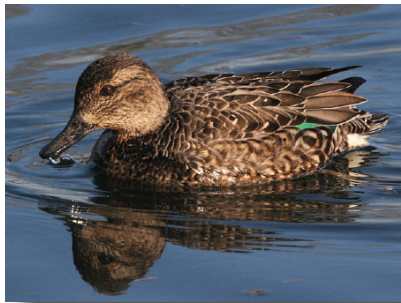


Green-winged Teal (GWTE)

- Obviously smaller than other dabblers
- Male has rusty head with green face patch, browish-grey body with vertical white strip on side
- Female is all grey-brown with green wing-patch like male, cream-coloured streak on outer tail feathers usually prominent

Female (Photo: Mike Yip)

Male (Photo: Terry Thormin)

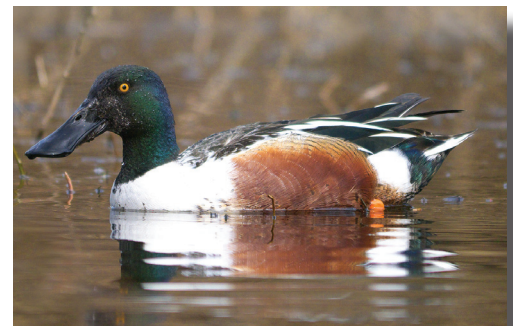


Northern Shoveler (NSHO)

- Large shovel-like bill is very distinctive
- Male has green head, white breast, rusty flanks
- Female is similar to female Mallard but with green wing patch

Female (Photo: Paul Kusmin)

Male (Photo: Terry Thormin)



Greater Scaup (GRSC)

- Male has greyish-white body, black at ends, green hue on head
- Female is dark brown with broad white patch between eye & bill
- Both have pale blue bill

Female and Male (Photos: Terry Thormin)

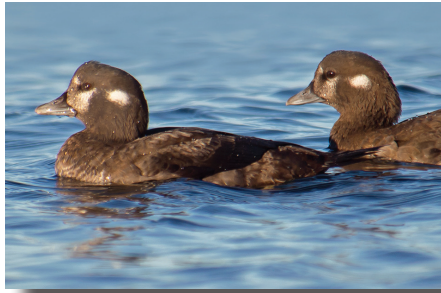


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Harlequin Duck (HARD)

- Male is colourful grey, blue & chestnut, with white markings
- Female has dusky brown body with white patches on side of head; circular white patch behind eye

Females and Male (Photos: Terry Thormin)



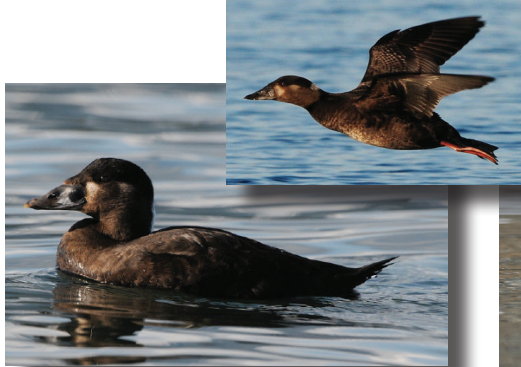
Surf Scoter (SUSC)

- Male has white patches on back & front of head; bulbous red, yellow & white bill; no wing patches
- Female has white spots on sides of head & at base of bill; no wing patches

Female swimming and in flight (Photos:

Mike Yip)

Male (Photo: Terry Thormin)

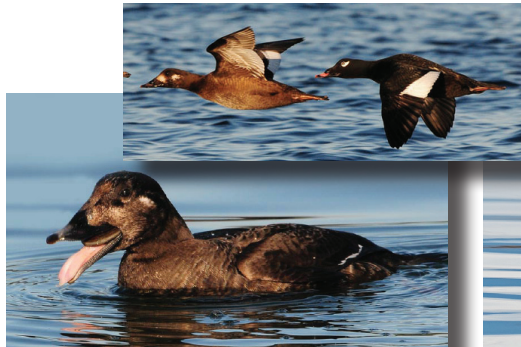


White-winged Scoter (WWSC)

- Male has small white crescent below eye; reddish bill with black knob; white wing patches
- Female is dark; white wing patches
- Larger than other two scoter species

Female swimming and female & male in flight (Photos: Mike Yip)

Male (Photo: Terry Thormin)



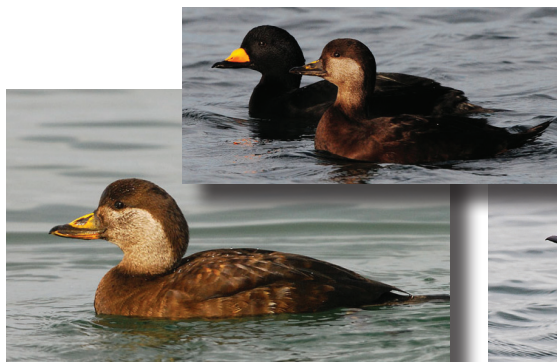
Black Scoter (BLSC)

- Male has solid black head; orange knob on top of bill; no wing patches
- Female has dark cap and pale cheeks; no wing patches

Female swimming alone and with male

(Photos: Mike Yip)

Male (Photo: Terry Thormin)



Long-tailed Duck (LTDU)

- Rounded body, small bill, very vocal
- Both male & female have several different plumages, with extensive white in winter
- Male has long tail feathers

Female and Male (Photos: Terry Thormin)



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Bufflehead (BUFF)

- Small duck with large head
- Male has greenish-purple head with large white patch, dark back, white sides
- Female is dark above, grey-brown flanks, dark head with oval white patch behind eye

Female and Male (Photos: Terry Thormin)



Common Goldeneye (COGO)

- Head profile shows sloping forehead
- Male has greenish head, dark back, sides mostly white; circular white spot between eye & bill
- Female has greyish-brown body, yellow tip of dark bill

Female and Male (Photos: Terry Thormin)



Barrow's Goldeneye (BAGO)

- Head profile shows steep forehead
- Male has purplish head, dark back, sides half white; crescent-shaped white spot between eye & bill
- Female has brownish-grey body, mostly yellow bill

Male and Female (Photo: Terry Thormin)



Common Merganser (COME)

- Male has no visible crest, long bright-red bill, dark green head, mostly white body
- Female has rusty-coloured crest, long bright-red bill, clean white neck & throat, mostly grey body

Male and Females (Photo: Terry Thormin)



Red-breasted Merganser (RBME)

- Male has scruffy crest, thin red bill, dark green head, rusty breast with white collar
- Female has cinnamon-coloured crest, thin red bill, dusky throat & neck, mostly grey body

Female and Male (Photos: Terry Thormin)

