
Redhead

Aythya americana

Class: *Aves*

Order: *Anseriformes*

Family: *Anatidae*

Characteristics:

A medium-sized diving duck in which the male has a cinnamon-colored head, grey bill with a black tip, grey body and blackish breast and tail. Female and young redheads are drab brown but have the characteristic grey bill with black tip ([Cornell](#)).

Behavior:

Redheads are very social birds that will congregate in large flocks. While many ducks lay their eggs in other ducks' nests, redhead females take this to the extreme by parasitizing not only duck nests but other birds' nests as well. In fact, some female may actually never have their own nests and leave other birds to incubate the eggs ([Audubon](#)).

Reproduction:

If the female nests, they nest in dense marshes, particularly in bulrushes, building a bulky above-water nest of dead vegetation which is anchored to standing growth and lined with down. The female lays around 9-15 eggs, although due to brood parasitism it is hard to determine average clutch size. Sometimes females will lay eggs in other nests and raise a brood of her own.

Diet:

Wild: Mainly aquatic plants but will occasionally eat insects
Zoo: Scratch grains, greens, waterfowl pellets

Conservation:

Redheads have seen one of the greatest decline of the North American duck species, probably due to habitat loss.

FYI:

In addition to laying eggs in others' nests, female redhead will also have "dump" nests where several in a group will go to lay eggs, but never incubate them. One such nest was found to contain 87 eggs ([Audubon](#))!



Range & Habitat:

Winter in lakes, saltwater bays and estuaries, and summer in freshwater marshes



Lifespan: up to 20 years in captivity, 5-10 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations: Males have an elaborate courtship dance where they throw back their heads, almost touching their tail!

IUCN Conservation Status:

Least Concern

