

# WATERBIRDS





“Everyone likes birds. What wild creature is more accessible to our eyes and ears, as close to us and everyone in the world, as universal as a bird?”

- Sir David Attenborough

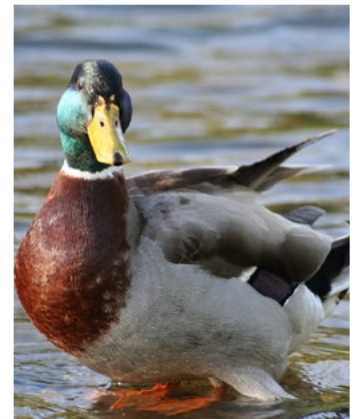
### Do we need birds? Do birds matter?

Birds fascinate the human mind in ways that other animals cannot – their flight inspires us; their songs enliven us; their beauty and diversity transfix us; their presence often soothes us.

Birds matter and likely you also believe that we **do** need birds. Birds are very important environmental indicators, helping us see the environmental impacts, negative or positive, of human activities that are either visible or undetectable to the human eye. The expression “canary in a coal mine” speaks directly to birds’ value as indicators of environmental quality. Changes in the health of individual birds, or in the health or size of entire populations of birds, provide us with important signals of environmental change.

What’s more, because bird watching and collection of detailed bird observations have been common hobbies for many decades, we have the ability to see trends in environmental change by looking at changes in bird populations over time.

**Birds matter** also because they are all around us – as Sir Attenborough suggests, they are perhaps our best, universal connection to nature for this reason. *Can you imagine describing a spring morning to anyone without mentioning singing birds?* We thought not. There are of course many other reasons why birds matter. But what really, truly matters is this: Why do birds matter to you? If you don’t yet know the answer, let us help you explore the question within our series of e-Books.



*Mallard*

### What you will learn in this e-Book

This e-Book will introduce you to fun audio vignettes of several bird species found in eastern Ontario, and in some case many other parts of Canada, that have been grouped together according to a certain theme. You’ll learn each species’ English and French common name, as well as a few fun facts, anecdotes or historical points about

them. In addition, you'll get a photo and verbal description of what each bird looks like, with some added tips to help you differentiate some lookalike species that are easily confused "in the field". Perhaps most importantly, an example of the song or call of each species and a description of its basic life history are provided in each audio vignette.

### **What types of birds you will learn about in this small e-Book**

This e-Book highlight waterbirds found in Canada: [\(Click on a bird's name to learn more\)](#)

- *American Black Duck*
- *Canada Goose*
- *Double-crested Cormorant*
- *Mallard*
- *Brant*
- *Common Goldeneye*
- *Great Egret*
- *Pied-billed Grebe*
- *Bufflehead*
- *Common Merganser*
- *Horned Grebe*
- *Wood Duck*

### **Birds and nearby nature**

What is nearby nature? It's nature right where you live – examples of nature can be found all around you, from the bee pollinating a flower in a planter box on your windowsill, to your backyard, to your community's park, to a small creek or patch of forest you pass on your daily commute.



*Great Egret*

Nearby nature isn't a substitute for the wild spaces we love, such as national parks or wild seascapes, but it is a place where we can connect with nature easily. For many of us, the best expression of nearby nature is probably birds. Birds flit and fly from place to place through our human landscapes reminding us that, if we do things right, they can find sustenance and habitat in our built-up world. And to the amazement of many, the birds we encounter seasonally in the towns and cities of our country are winged ambassadors, travelling throughout the hemisphere from the far north to the far south, and all places in between.

Birds represent some of the most accessible wildlife with which we can interact with nearby nature. In this way, birds are a kind of "gateway" creature to get people interested in the wildlife – and its habitat – that's found all around them. Birds remind us that we are not alone on this planet and that how we live can either help, or hinder, our wild neighbours.

**It's wonderful that you are interested in learning more about bird species.  
Please enjoy!**



The **American Black Duck** is a large duck that is actually dark brown in colour. The head and throat are a lighter brown than the body and accented with a distinct dark eye stripe.



*American Black Duck*



*Brant by BJ Stacey*

Although the **Brant** could be considered the doppelgänger of the Canada Goose, brant fly in a straight-line formation.





The “All **Buffleheads** Day” is held annually on October 15th and these birds are very punctual in attending it. They arrive in the waters just off the Vancouver Island almost precisely on this day every year as part of their winter migration. Find out why this occurs in this week’s segment!



*Bufflehead by Don Hackett*



*Canada Goose*

It’s no secret that the people of Canada have a love-hate relationship with **Canada Geese**. On the one hand, they provide wonderful opportunities to interact with nature and see wildlife up close, but on the other hand they can be the loudest, most obnoxious and...messy lawnmowers any town or city could ask for.



**C**ommon Goldeneyes are silent during the fall until their courtship displays begin from December through April. Male and female goldeneyes differ significantly in colour although both sexes have a noticeable bright eye.



*Common Goldeneye by Don Hackett*



*Common Merganser by Don Hackett*

**K**nown in French as Grand Harle, the **Common Merganser** is nicknamed “sawbills” for the serrated edges along the inside of its bills. These saw-like edges help this diving duck species to catch and hold slippery fish and other food they gather during underwater dives.



The **Double-crested Cormorant** is notable for its matte black appearance. This bird can often be seen perched on a rock with its wings outstretched as if looking to give a bear hug. This is a means for drying off after diving for food.



*Double-crested Cormorant*



*Great Egret*

The call of this stark white bird brings to mind a dinosaur. You won't likely hear it unless the **Great Egret** is in courtship, on the nest or startled.





In addition to having folk names such as “devil diver” and “water witch” the **Horned Grebe** has the strange habit of snacking on its own feathers. It does this to create a mass in its stomach that’s thought to entangle fish bones as the bird eats, allowing them to stay in the stomach longer to more fully digest. Yum!



*Horned Grebe*



*Mallard photographed by Richard Bartz*

The **Mallard** is the most common and widespread duck in the Northern Hemisphere and they are also the most frequently hunted duck species. They have small curled feathers that resemble John Travolta’s hair in *Grease*.





The **Pied-billed Grebe** is a bit of an odd duck. Despite not being a duck at all, grebes are in fact a separate group of diving waterbirds.



*Pied-billed Grebe photo by Alan Vernon*



*Wood Duck*

The colourful **Wood Duck** gets its name in part because it nests in tree cavities – up to 20 metres high – in wooded areas near water. At as young as 1-day-old the nestlings jump from the nest to join their mother in heading to the water. But that doesn't make them “quacks” – this duck actually whistles!

# Thank You!



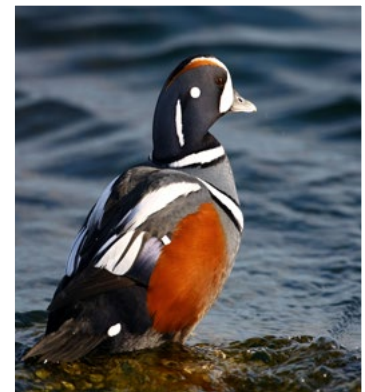
**It's wonderful that you care about nature and are keen to learn about the many bird species nearby you.**

**Our NatureHood program** inspires Canadians like you to seek out and learn about nearby nature. Likely you've already discovered that spending time in nature is good for your heart, mind and soul.

Perhaps you would like to use one of our handy [NatureHood Tour](#) brochures to visit green spaces close by and discover more backyard birds and other critters. And we hope you might add your bird or wildlife sightings to our [NatureHood app](#) which helps us monitor wildlife populations.

## **About Nature Canada:**

For over 75 years, Nature Canada has been your voice for nature. Together we defend wildlife and protect wilderness in your province and across the country – places so you can spot wildlife and experience the joys of nature. And we inspire more Canadians to connect and value nature in our lives.



*Harlequin Duck*

With the support of caring people like you, we've helped preserve 63 million acres of parks and wildlife areas and protect countless, cherished species that depend on this habitat -- from butterflies to birds to bears.

**You can help protect animals, plants and many special areas that all make up our beautiful country with a donation to Nature Canada today.**



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*Thank you to our volunteer Matthew Martin for contributing to this e-Book.*