

# Local Bird Identification for the Alberta Oil Sands



Presentation by Neil Foley and Sarina Loots



**Birds are cool...**

Radical  
wave,  
brah



**...but they can also be tricky**



**So pay attention to the prominent features and try repeating everything back to yourself.**

[YouTube Video: The life of a birder](#)

## At Risk Species

- Whooping Crane
- Trumpeter Swan
- Peregrine Falcon



## Sensitive Species

- Northern Pintail
- Green-winged Teal
- Lesser Scaup
- White-winged Scoter
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Horned Grebe
- Western Grebe
- American White Pelican
- Sandhill Crane
- Great Blue Heron
- Sora
- Black Tern
- Bald Eagle
- Golden Eagle
- Osprey
- Northern Harrier
- American Kestrel
- Upland Sandpiper
- Rusty Blackbird
- Purple Martin
- Barn Swallow
- Common Yellowthroat
- Baird's Sparrow
- Short-tailed Grouse

## May be at Risk

- Short-eared Owl
- Olive-sided Flycatcher



6'6"  
6'0"  
5'6"  
5'0"  
4'6"  
4'0"  
3'6"  
3'0"

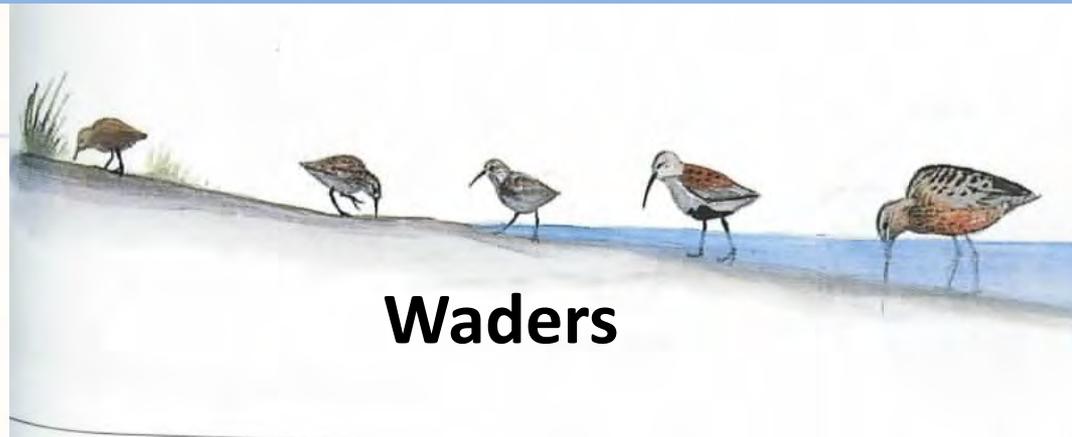
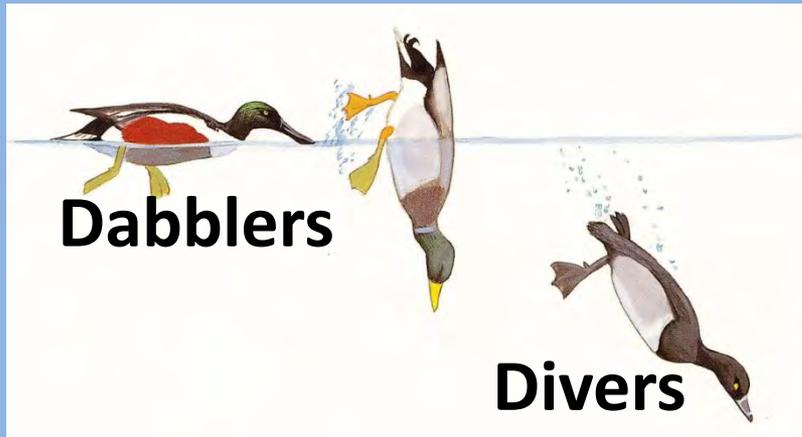
five criminals . one line up . no coincidences



# The Usual Suspects

©Neil Foley

# If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck... what does it eat like???



**Birds that forage for food on the shore and in the pond itself are at the highest risk of contacting process affected water, so we will cover these foraging guilds in depth**

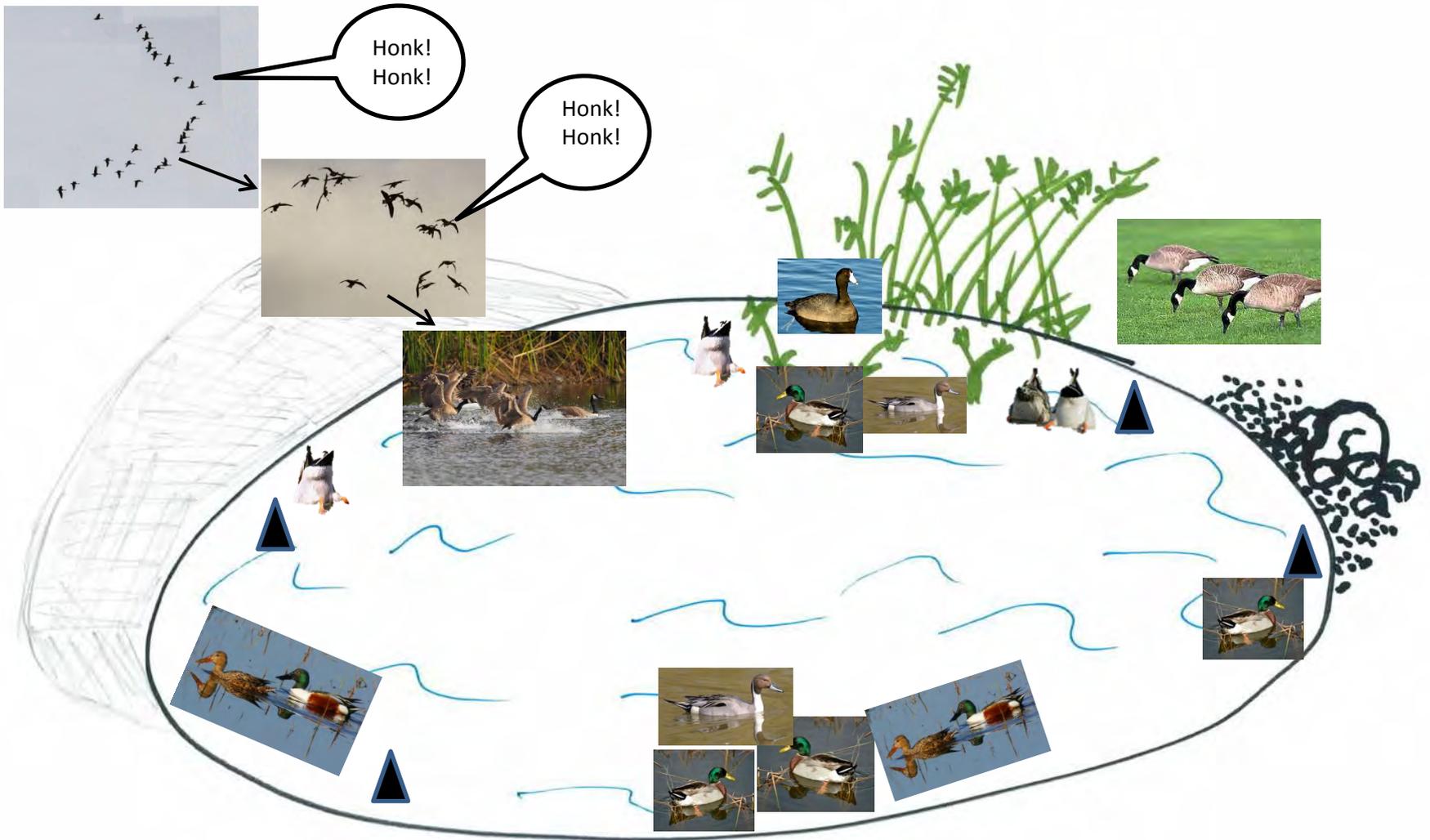
# Dabblers

# Dabblers

- Feed at or near the surface of the water, particularly near the shallows.
- Often seen in “bottom up” position
- Eat vegetation or insects that live in the shallows.



# Dabblers



# Dabblers

## Mallard

Female ♀ (hen)



Brown body



Orange bill with black spot



Blue patch with 2 white bars



Male ♂ (drake)



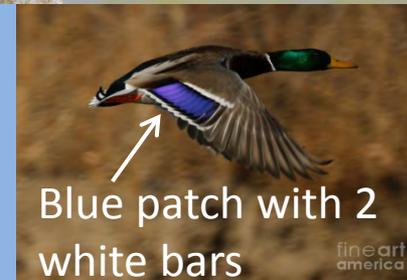
Bright green head

Brown breast

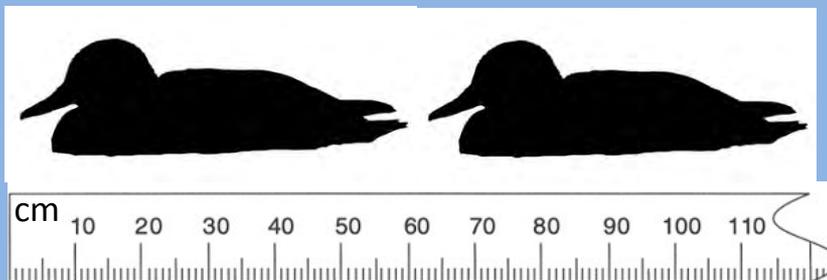
Oct-May



Olive bill



Blue patch with 2 white bars



cm

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110

# Dabblers

## American Wigeon

Female ♀ (hen)

Mottled, brown body with gray head



Gray bill with black tip



Black patch on wing



Male ♂ (drake)

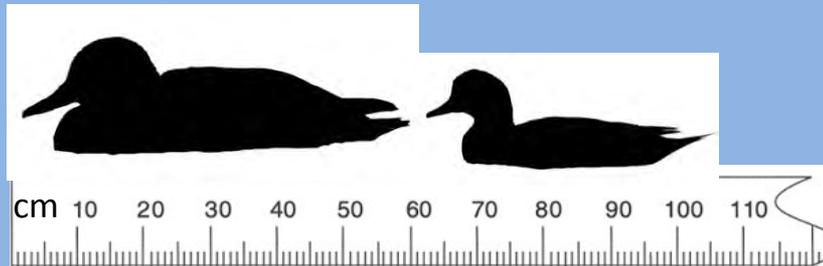
Oct-Jun White forehead with green eye patch



Black tail and white patch on rump



Black and white patch on wing



# Dabblers

Female ♀ (hen)

Mottled, brown body



Large, flat, orange bill



Male ♂ (drake)

Nov-Jun

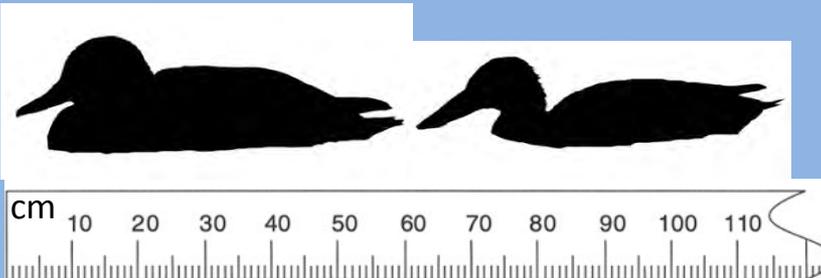
Green head with yellow eye



Large, flat, black bill



## Northern Shoveler



White and brown body



Dabbling or Shoveling



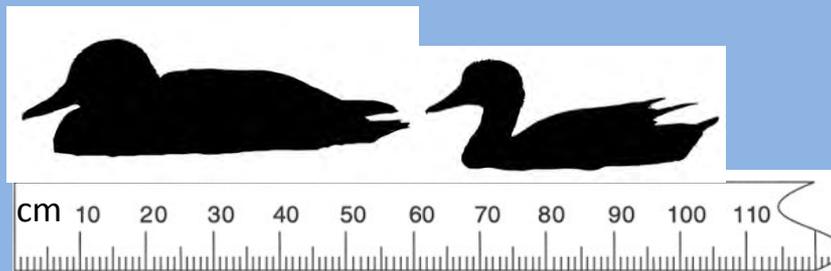
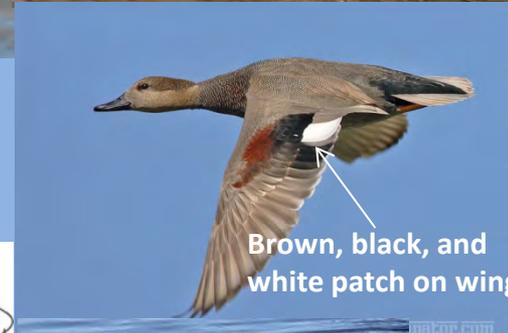
# Dabblers

## Gadwall

Female ♀ (hen)



Male ♂ (drake)



# Sensitive Species

Female ♀ (hen)

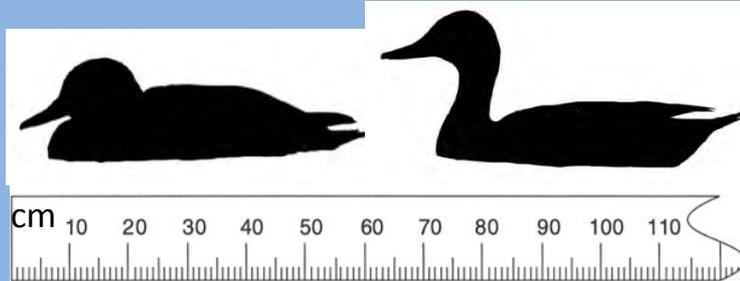
# Dabblers

Male ♂ (drake)

## Northern Pintail



Long Tail and Neck



# Sensitive Species

# Dabblers

Female ♀ (hen)

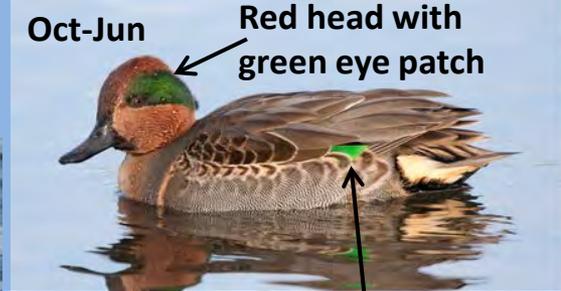
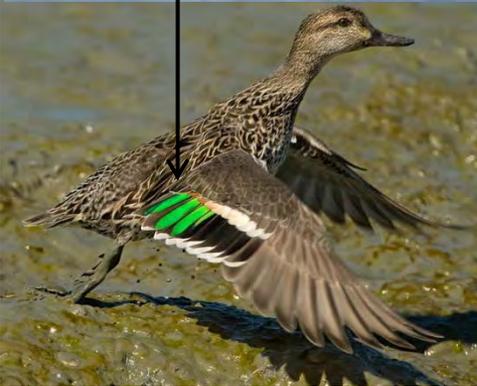
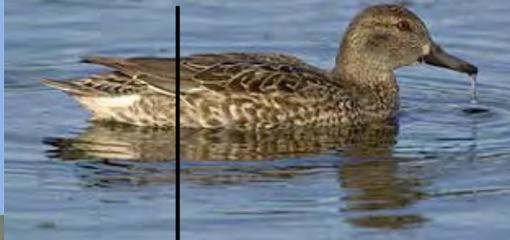
Male ♂ (drake)

## Green-winged Teal

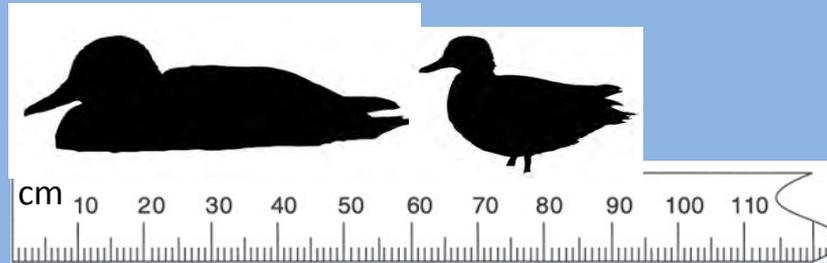
Mottled, gray body with black eye stripe



Green and black patch on wing



Green and black patch on wing



Teals are a lot smaller than Mallards

# Dabblers

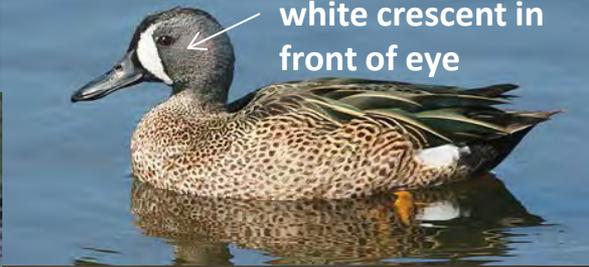
Female ♀ (hen)

Male ♂ (drake)

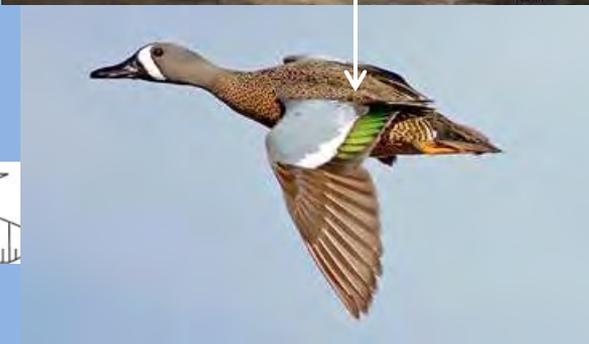
## Blue-winged Teal

Nov-Jun

Gray head with white crescent in front of eye



Blue and green patch on wing



Blue and green patch on wing



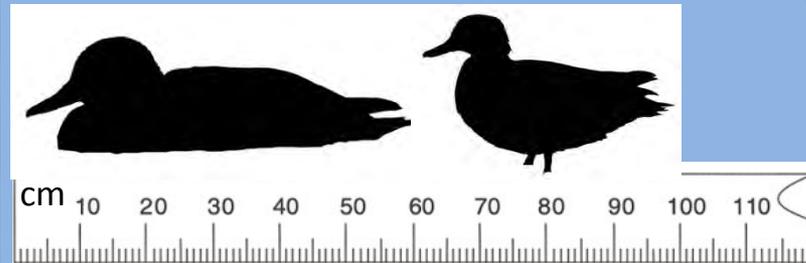
Mottled, brown body with black eye stripe

Blue and green patch on wing

Black bill



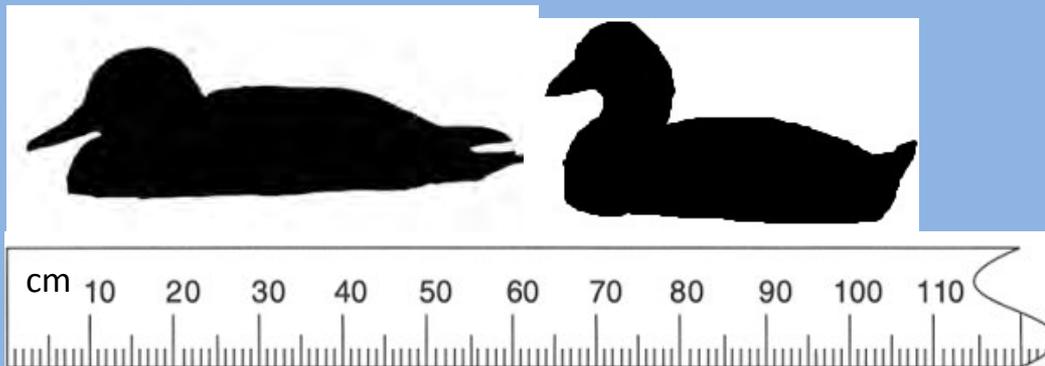
"Blue Moon"



Slightly larger than Green-winged Teal

# Dabblers

## American Coot



# Dabblers

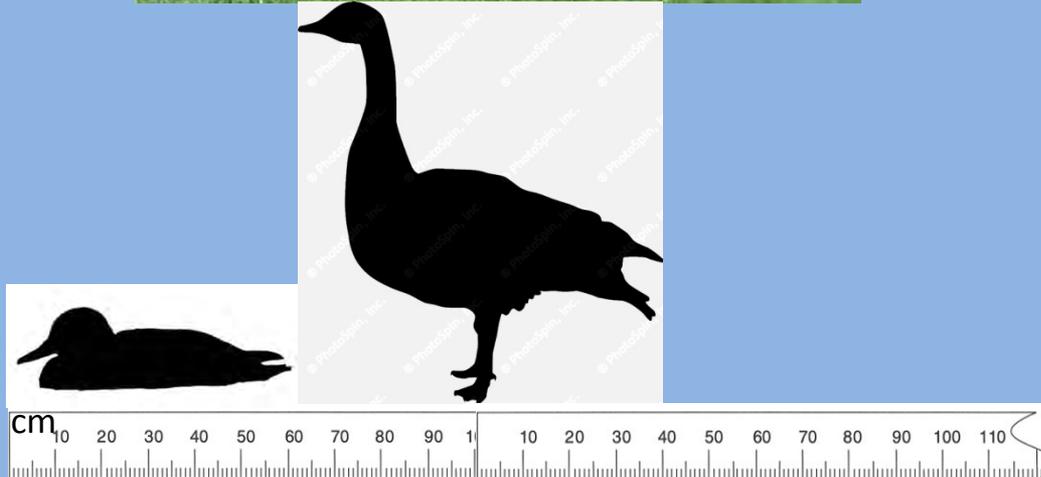
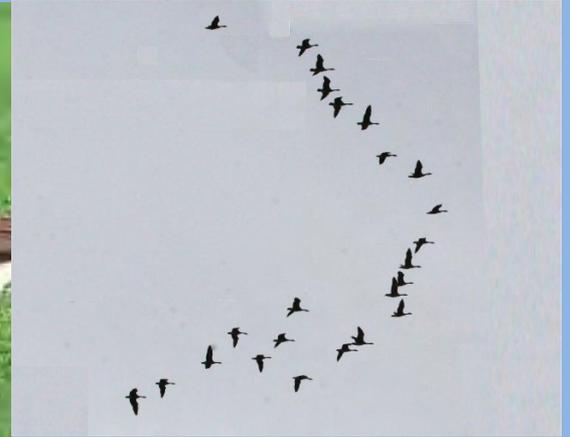
## Canada Goose



Long, slender black neck and head



with white cheek patch

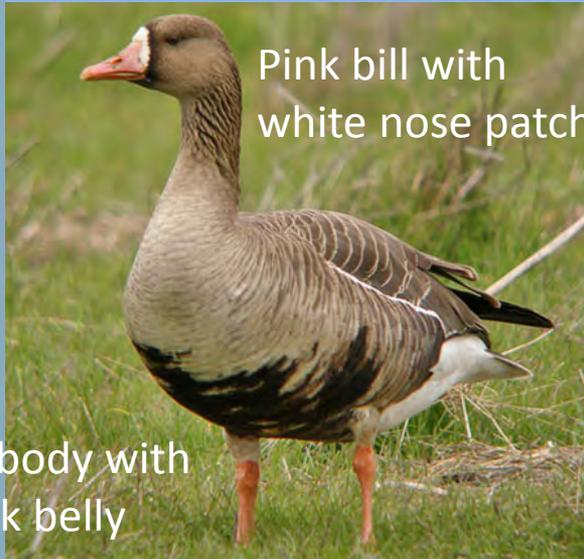


# Dabblers

## Greater White-fronted Goose



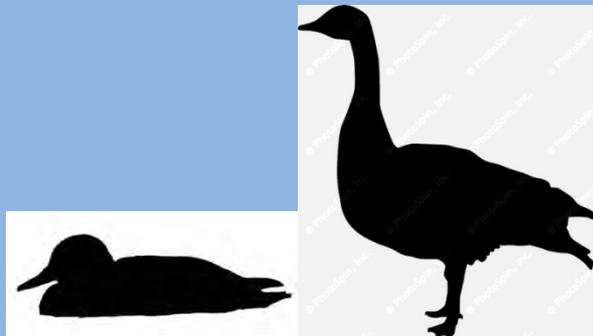
Gray-brown body with mottled black belly



Pink bill with white nose patch



Patrick J. Endres/AlaskaPhotoGraphics.com



Slightly smaller than Canada Goose



# Dabblers

## Snow Goose



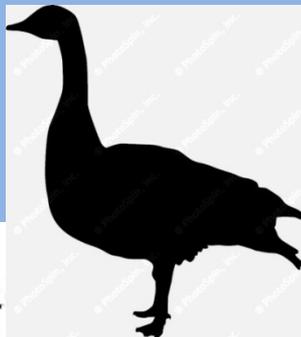
“Blue” morph White head, brown and white body



Most have White body with black wing tips



Pink bill on both morphs

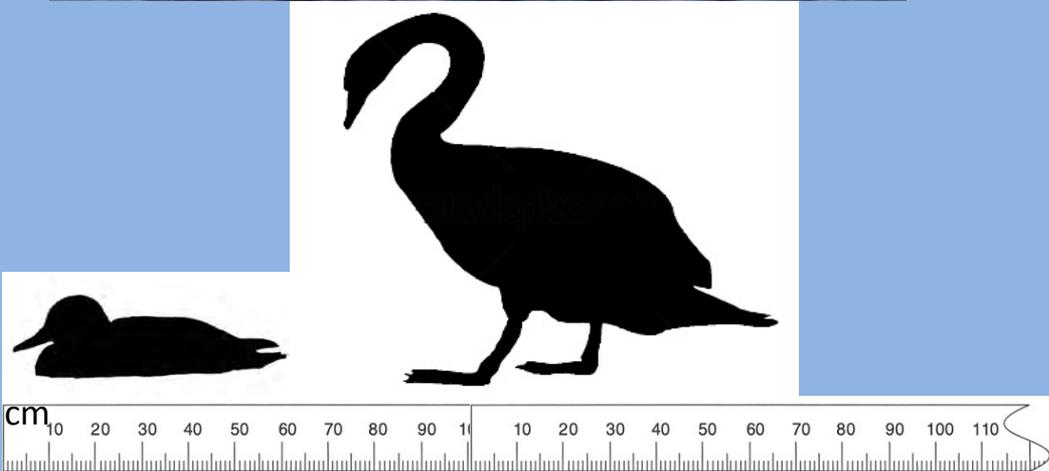
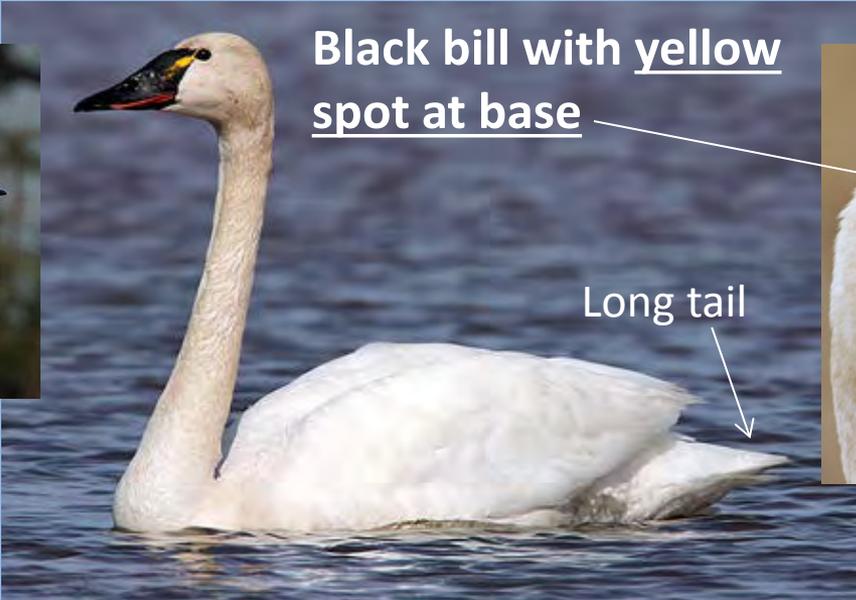


Slightly smaller than Canada Goose



# Dabblers

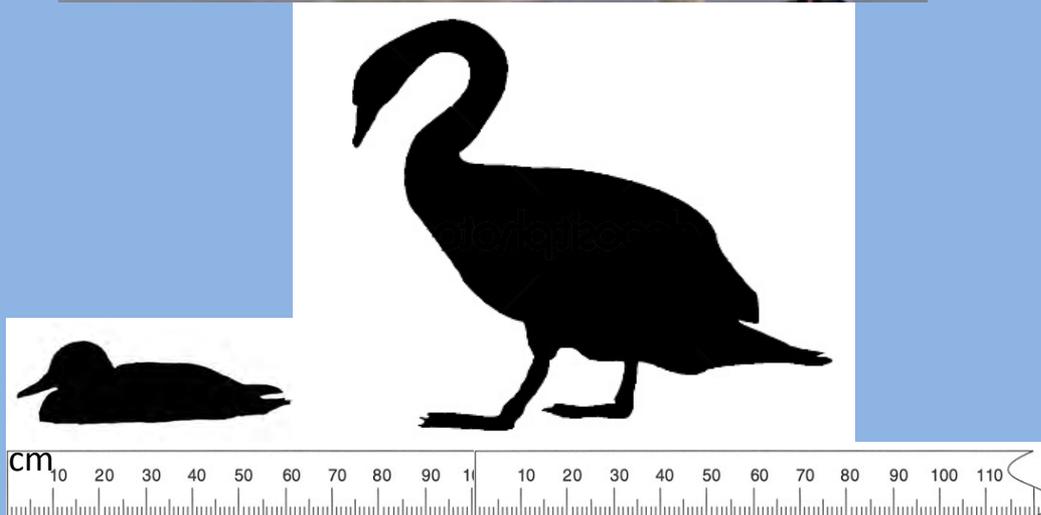
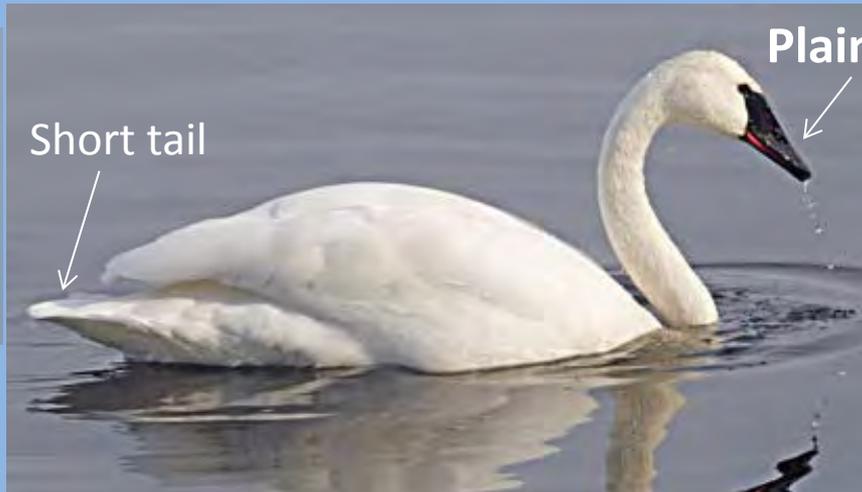
## Tundra Swan



**AT RISK SPECIES**

# Dabblers

## Trumpeter Swan



..in the Yellow  
corner...

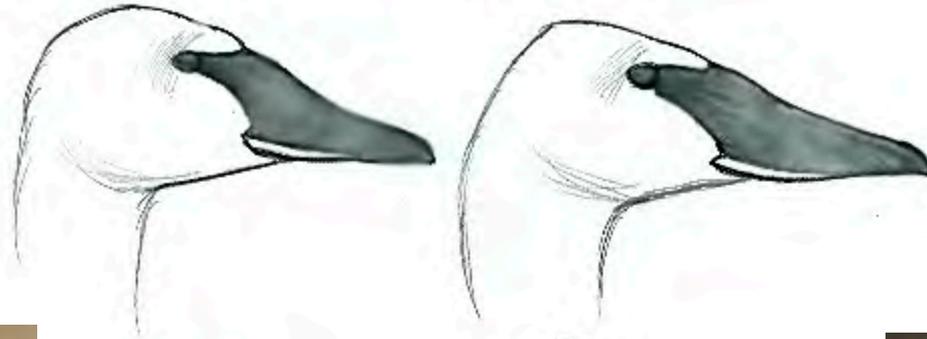
## Tundra



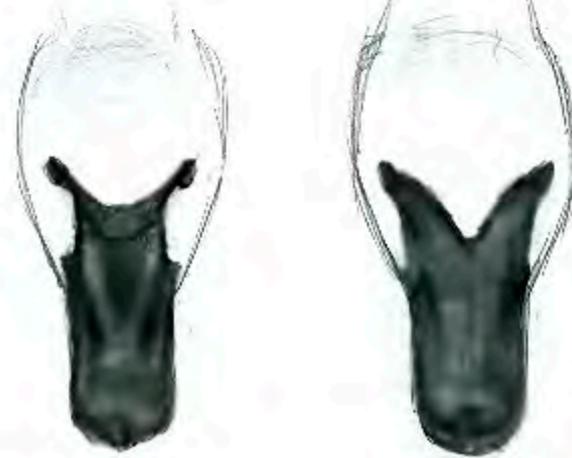
- Smaller
- Yellow Spot on bill
- Longer tail

Tundra Swan

Trumpeter Swan



**SWAN vs. SWAN!**



...in the Black  
corner...

## Trumpeter



- Larger
- Plain black bill
- Shorter tail

# Spot Quiz

# Which species can you see?



# What is this bird?



# What is this bird?



Remember to look for:

- Large, flat bill used to shovel through mud.
- Yellow eye in males.
- White and brown body with green head in males.

# What is this bird?



# Name that species



A



B



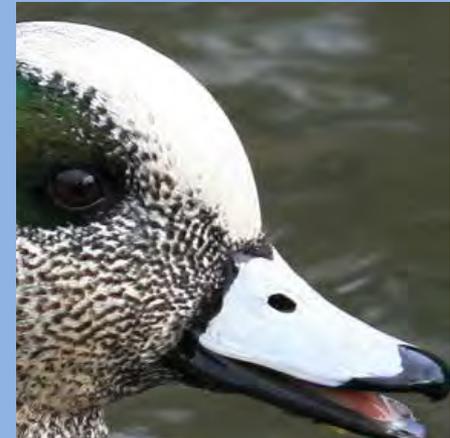
C



D



E



F

# Which swan is this?



# Divers

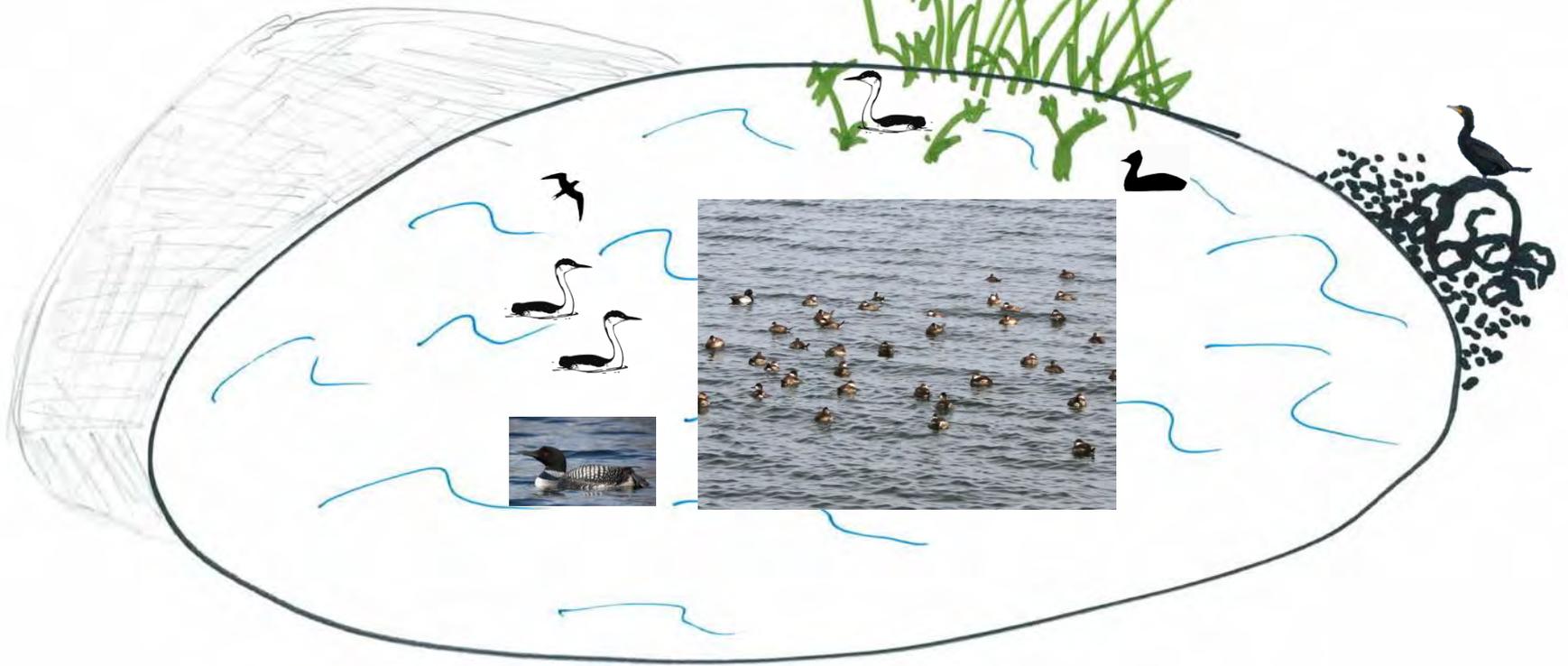
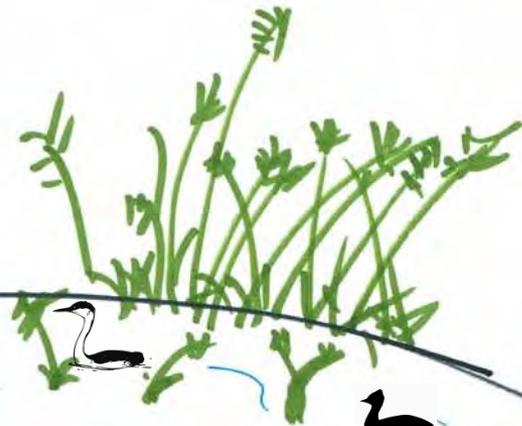
# Divers

- Feed below the surface of the water. Sometimes in the middle of the pond.
- Disappear below the surface, but resurface soon after.
- Eat fish, mollusks, or insects that live below the surface, often near the bottom.
- Highest percentage of sensitive species in this guild.



# Divers

Keeyurr!



# Abundant Divers

- Ducks



- Grebes



- Mergansers



- Loons

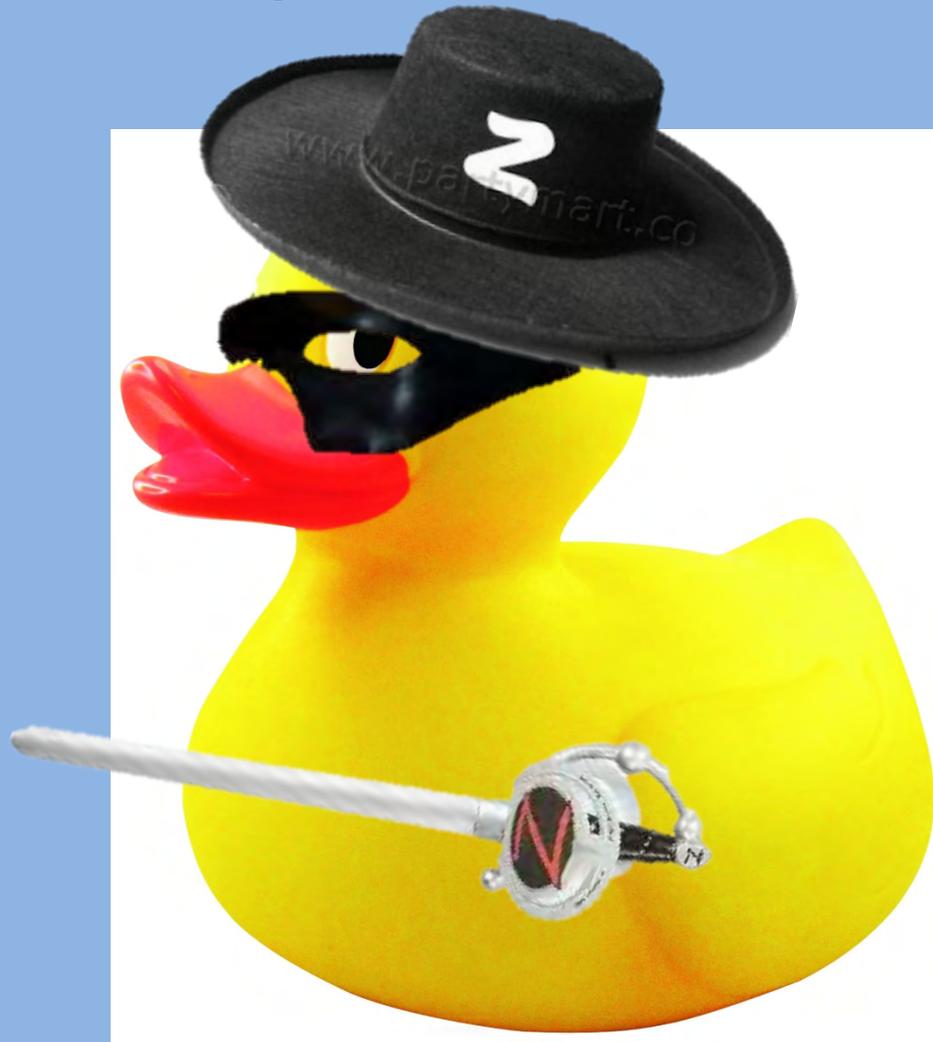


- Other



**...But the  
winner is...**

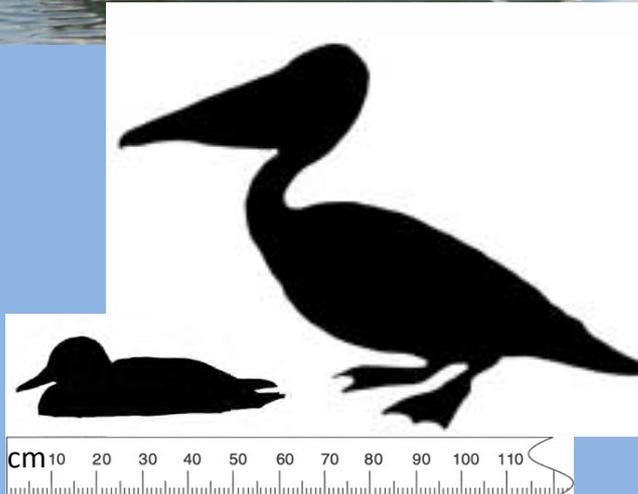
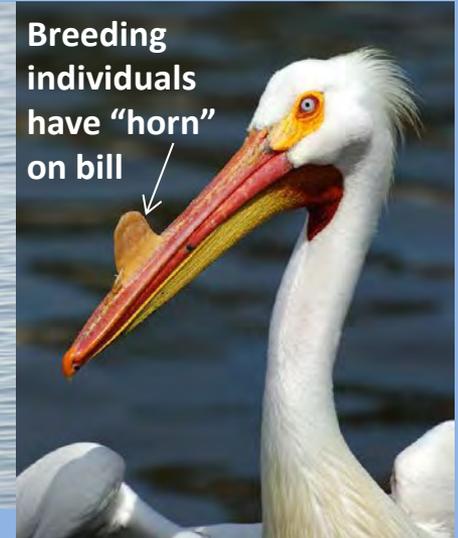
# The Unknown Duck/Waterfowl!!



# Divers

## American White Pelican

AMERICA!!!...was where it was first described,  
but it is international!



**Large-bodied, white bird with black wing tips and long bill**

# Divers

## Red-necked Grebe

Non-Breeding Adult  
(Sep-Mar)



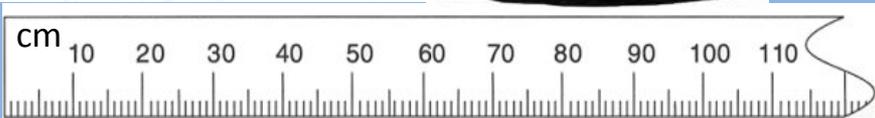
Yellow bill

Black top of the head with  
white cheek

Breeding Adult  
(Feb-Aug)



Reddish neck



# Sensitive Species

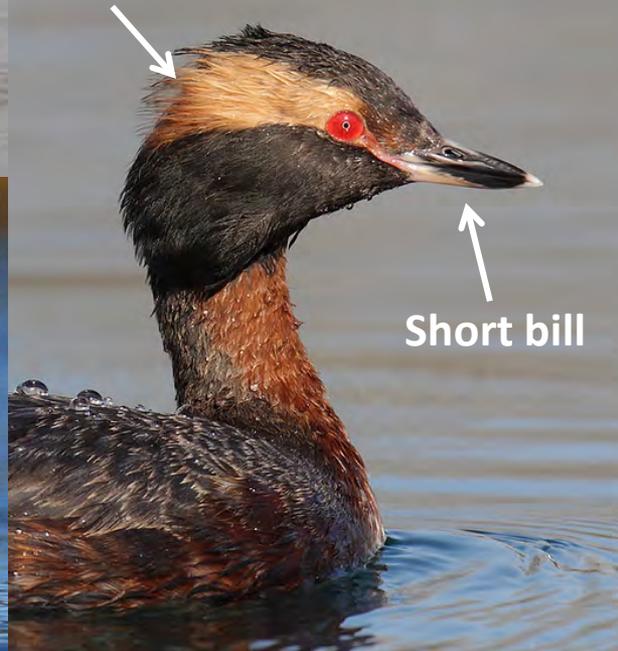
Non-Breeding Adult  
(Sep-Mar)



# Divers

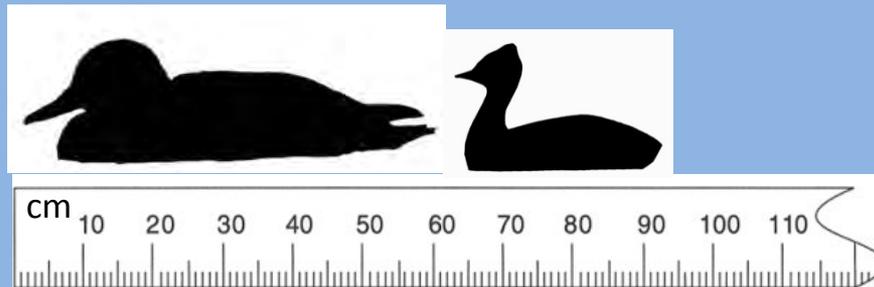
## Horned Grebe

© Brian L. Zwickel  
Golden patch behind red eye



Short bill

Breeding Adult  
(Apr-Aug)



# Divers

Non-Breeding Adult  
(Oct-Mar)

Much darker than  
Horned Grebe



## Eared Grebe

Thin, Golden feathers behind  
red eye

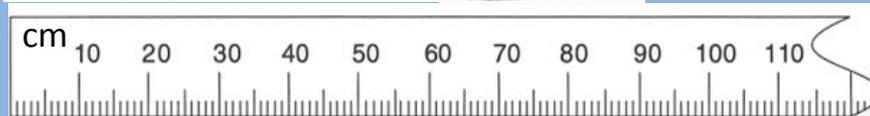


Short bill

Breeding Adult  
(Apr-Sep)



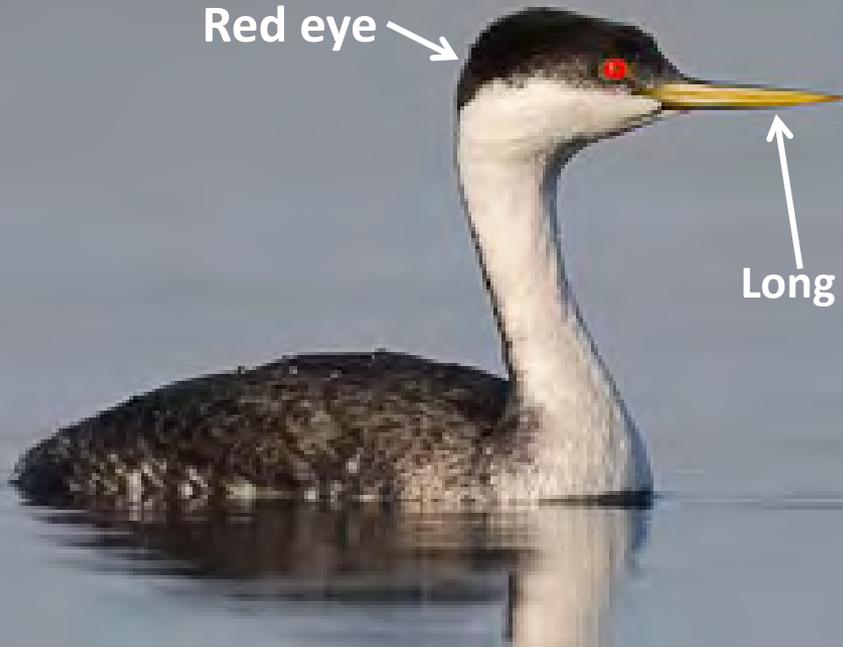
Smaller than  
Horned Grebe



# Divers

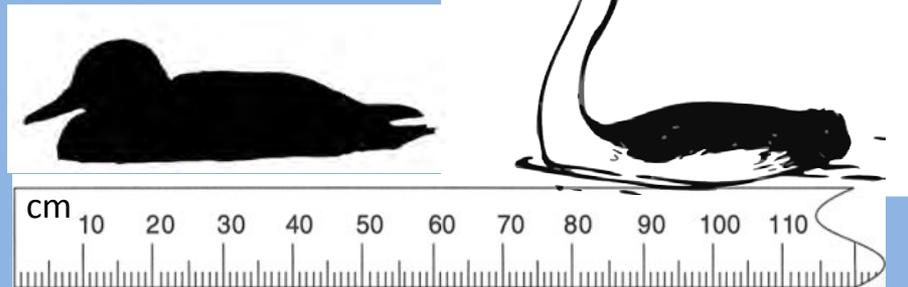
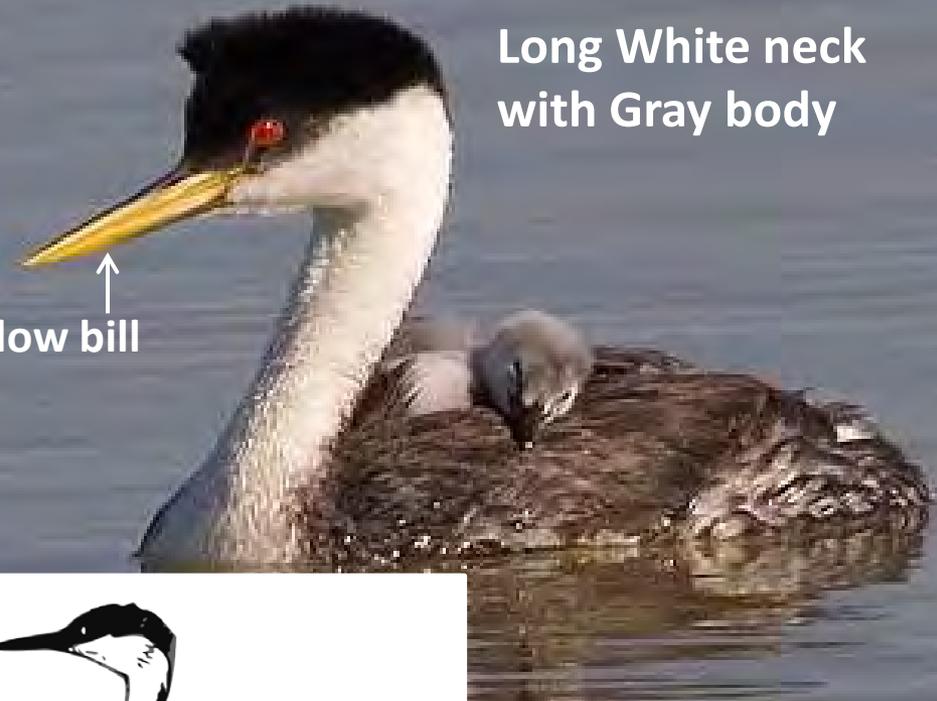
## Western Grebe

Black top of head with  
Red eye



Long yellow bill

Long White neck  
with Gray body



# Sensitive Species

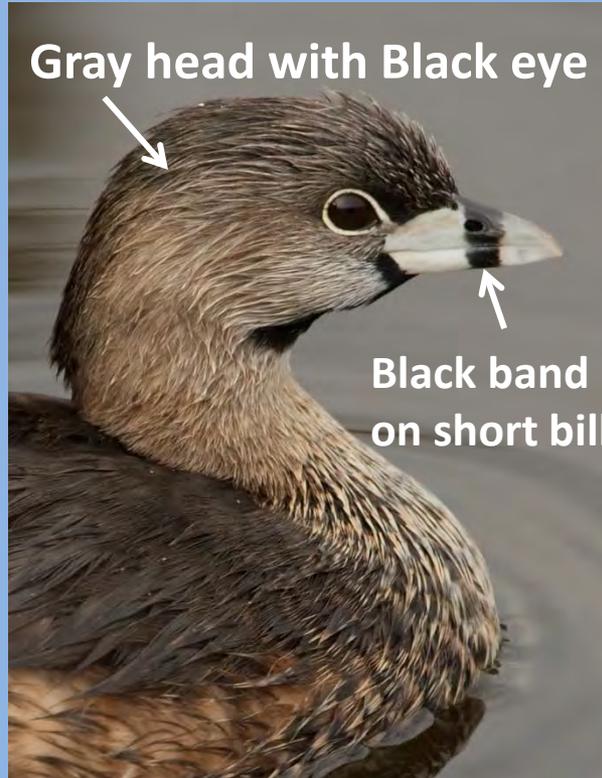
Non-Breeding Adult  
(Sep-Mar)



Juvenile

# Divers

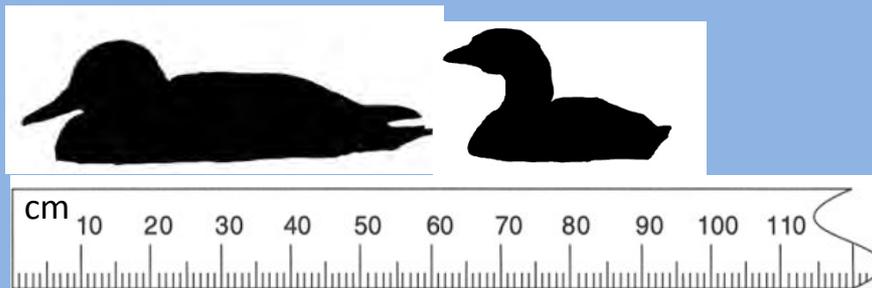
## Pied-billed Grebe



Gray head with Black eye

Black band on short bill

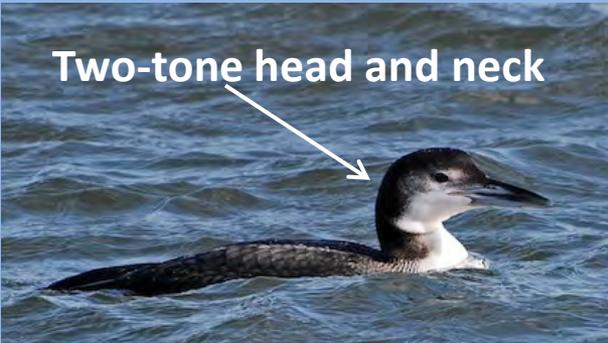
Breeding Adult  
(Feb-Sep)



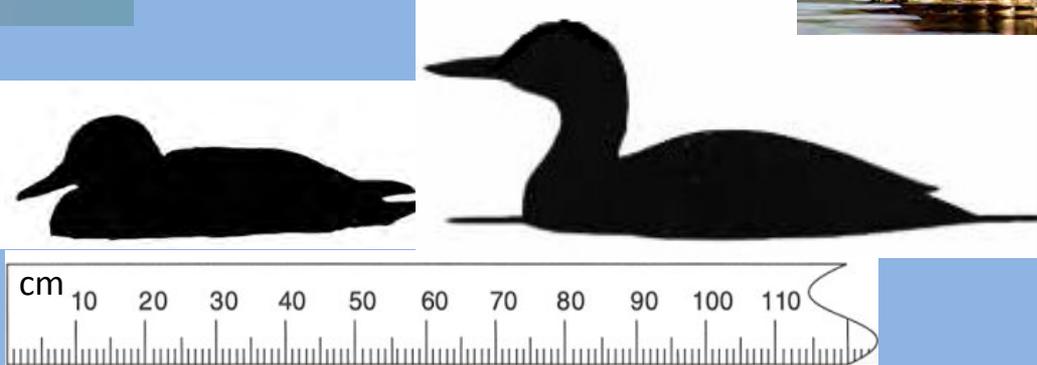
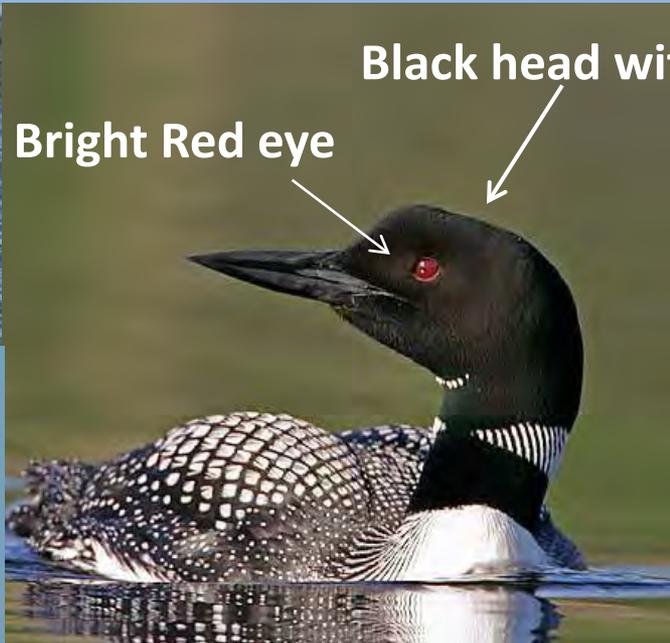
# Divers

## Common Loon

Non-Breeding Adult  
(Sep-Mar)



Breeding Adult  
(Mar-Oct)



# Divers

## Pacific Loon

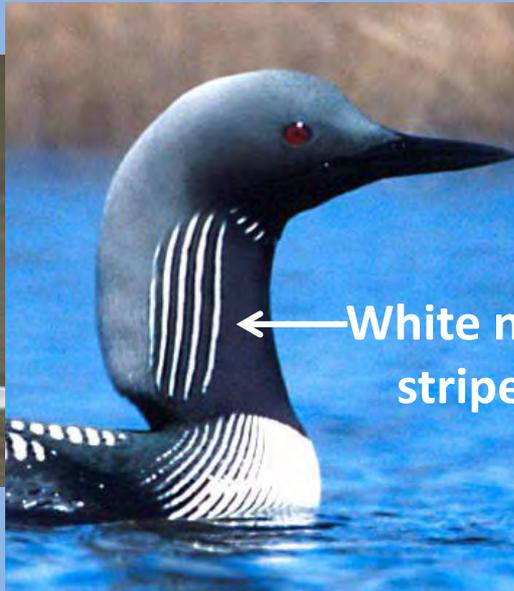
**Non-Breeding Adult  
(Sep-Mar)**

Gray two-tone  
head and neck



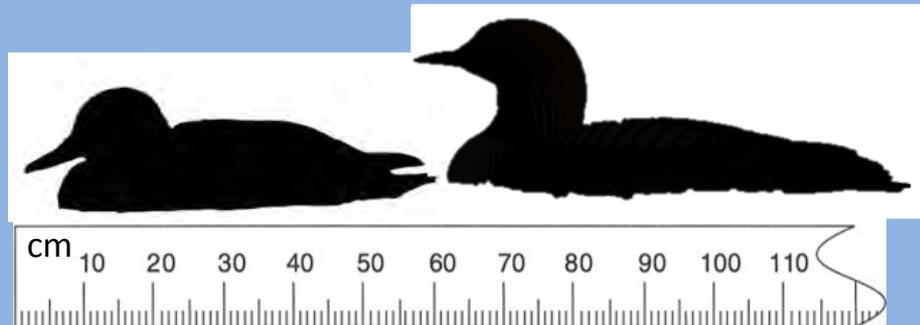
**Breeding Adult  
(Feb-Oct)**

Gray head with  
Black front



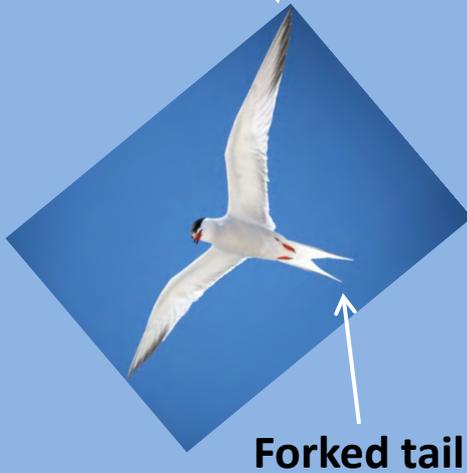
White neck  
stripes

Smaller than Common Loon, with  
more rounded head

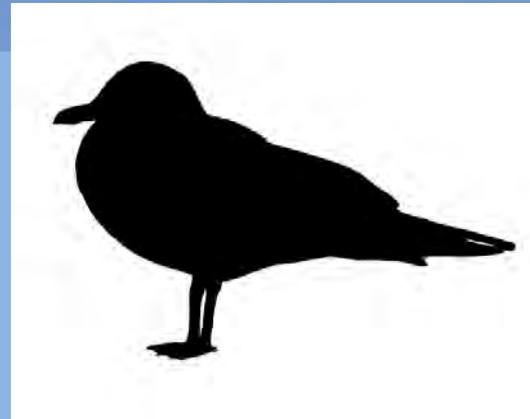


# Terns vs Gulls

More pointed wings

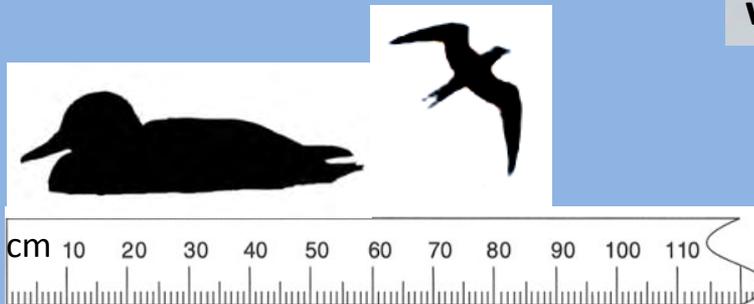


Much larger



# Divers

## Common Tern



A shrill "kit" or "keeyurr"

# Sensitive Species

Non-Breeding Adult  
(Aug-Feb)



Black cap and "sideburns"



White body



A whiny "kick" or "kek"

# Divers

## Black Tern

Black head, body, and bill  
with Dark Gray wings



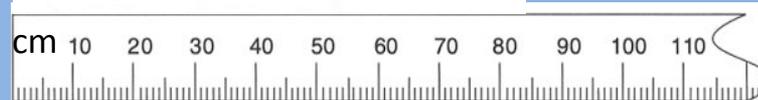
Breeding Adult  
(Mar-Aug)



White under tail



Smaller than  
Common Tern



# Divers

## Common Merganser

Female ♀ (hen)



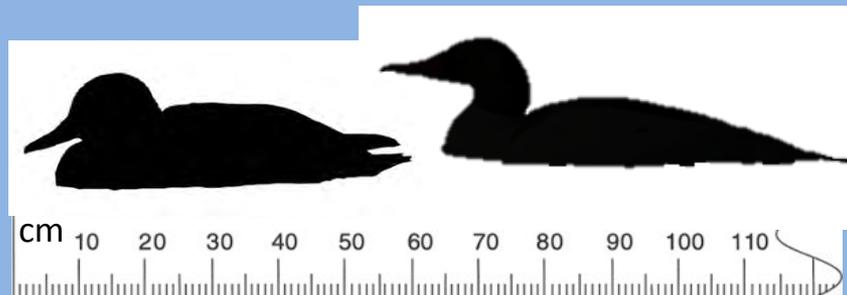
Bright Orange bill  
And Black eye



Male ♂ (drake)



Long, flat bird with thin bill



# Divers

## Red-breasted Merganser

Female ♀ (hen)

Brown head

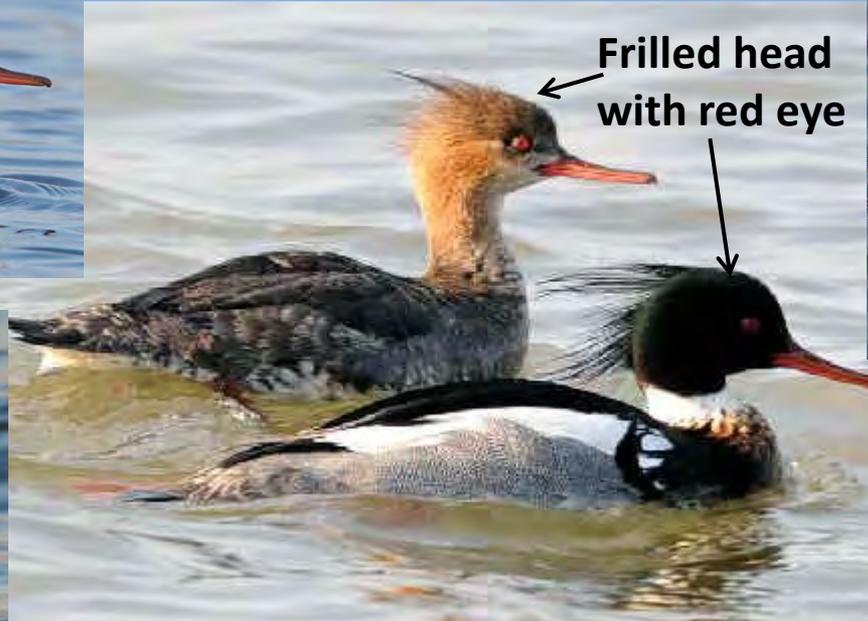


Male ♂ (drake)

Green head



Frilled head with red eye



Red breast

Smaller than  
Common Merganser

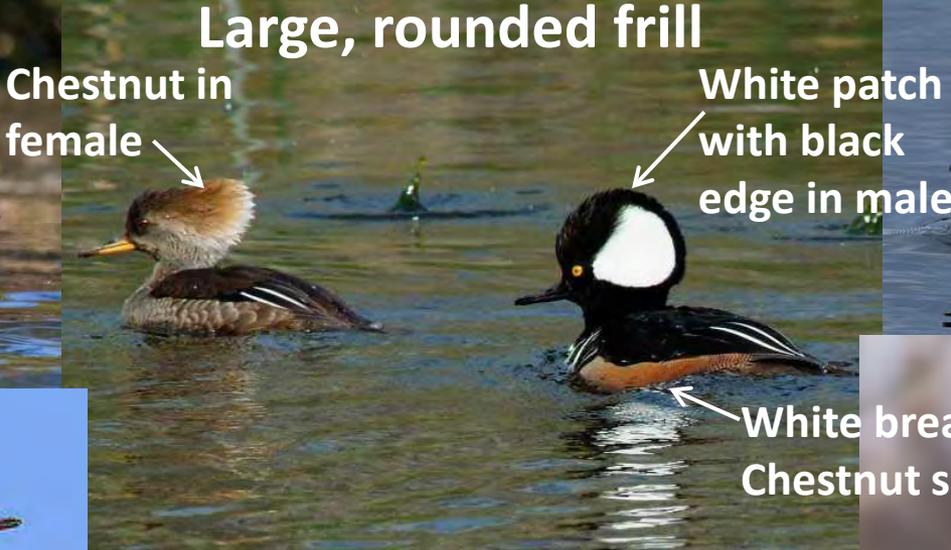


# Divers

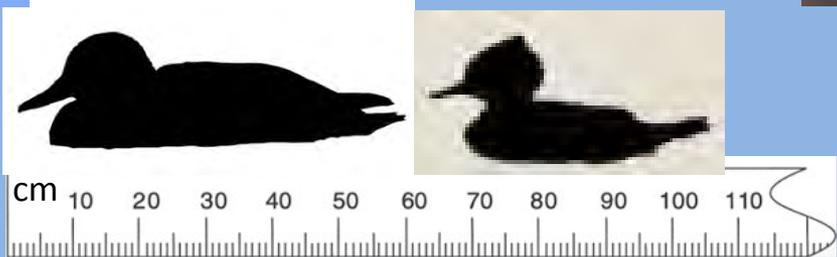
## Hooded Merganser

Female ♀ (hen)

Male ♂ (drake)



Smallest Merganser with pronounced frill

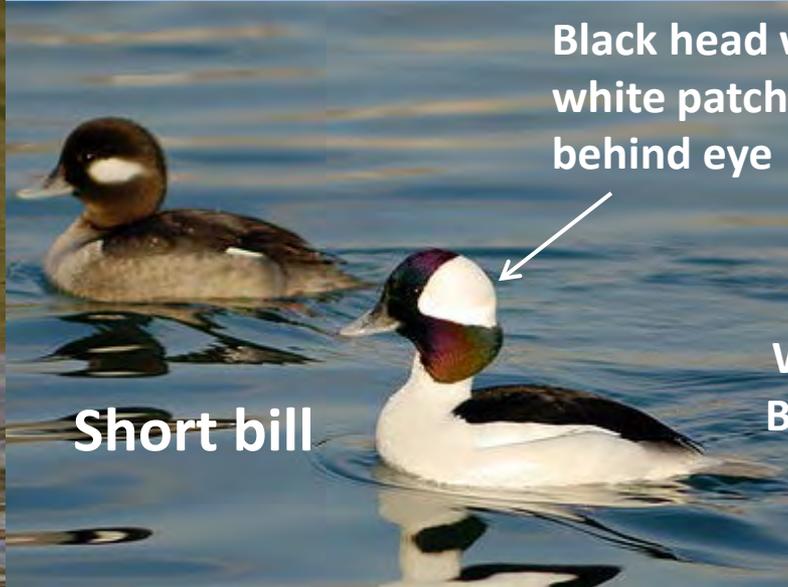


# Divers

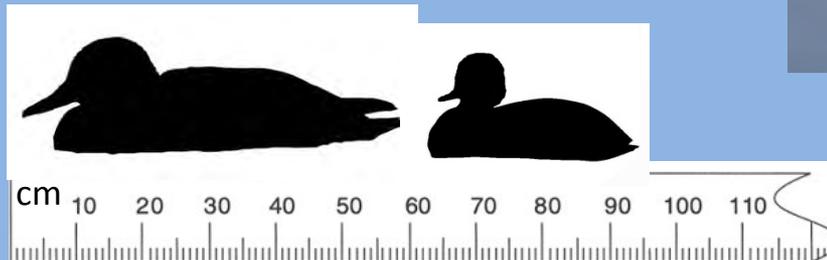
## Bufflehead

Female ♀ (hen)

Male ♂ (drake)



Round head with short bill



...Wait...those diving ducks  
looked so alike!

**Hooded  
Merganser**

**Bufflehead**



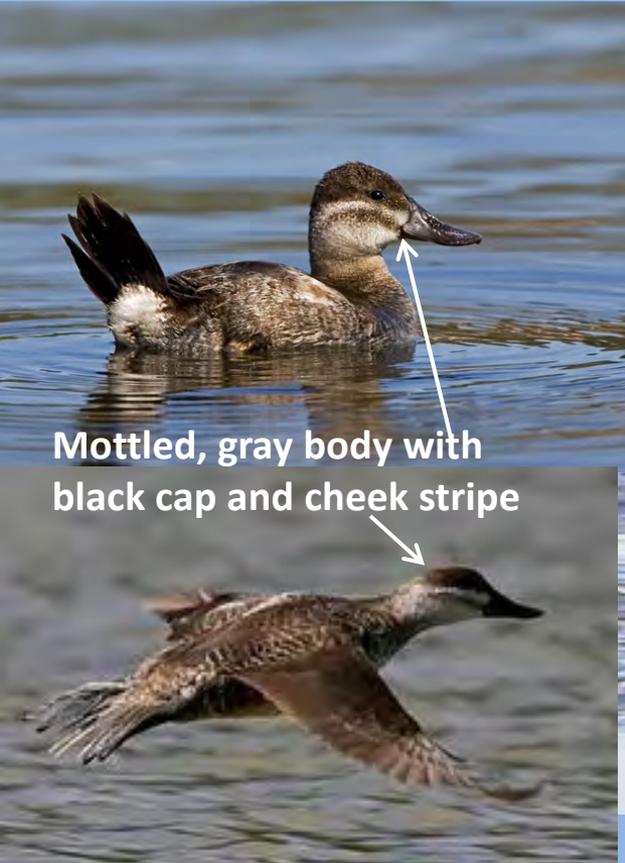
**Black edge on frill.  
Covers it like a  
hood!**

**Plain white  
patch**

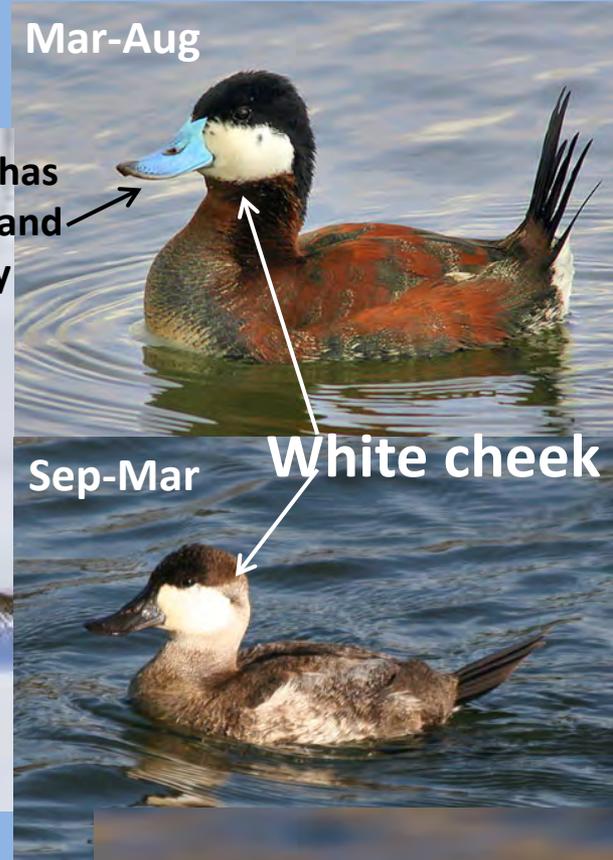
# Divers

## Ruddy Duck

Female ♀ (hen)



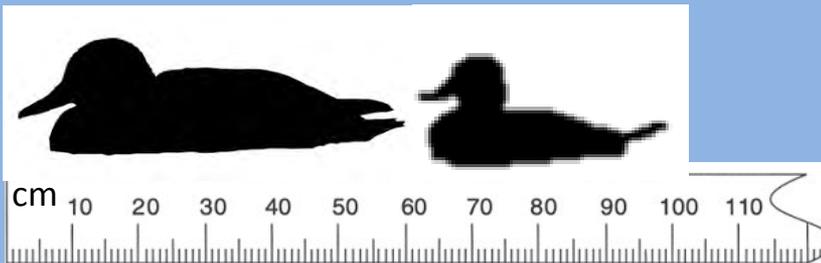
Male ♂ (drake)



Stiff, often upright tail



Small duck with stiff tail



# Sensitive Species

# Divers

## Lesser Scaup

Female ♀ (hen)

Not distinct  
from Greater  
Scaup female



White patch in  
front of eye



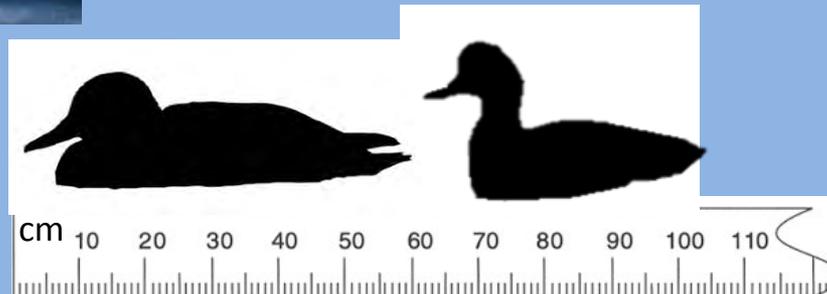
Male ♂ (drake)

Black head and rump,  
White sides,  
& Gray wings.



Steep forehead and  
Purple sheen

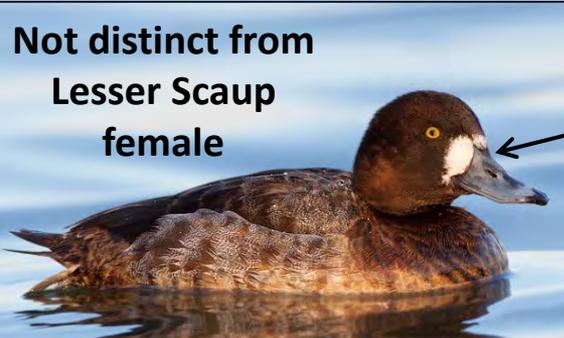
Purple sheen  
on head



# Divers

## Greater Scaup

Female ♀ (hen)



Not distinct from  
Lesser Scaup  
female

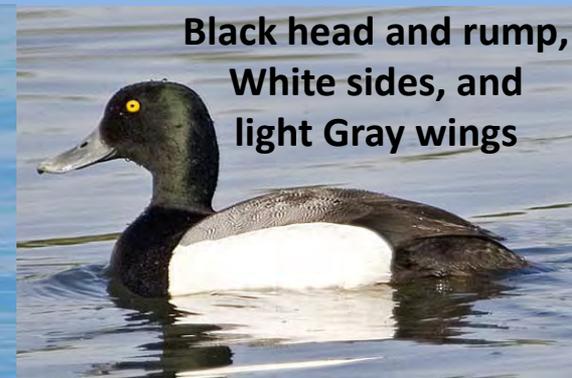


White patch in  
front of eye

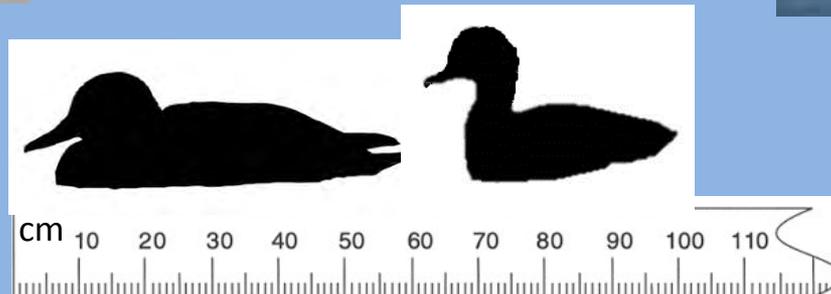
Green sheen

Shallow forehead and  
Green sheen

Male ♂ (drake)



Black head and rump,  
White sides, and  
light Gray wings

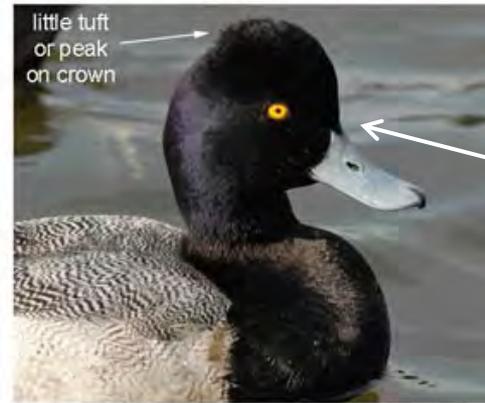


# Divers

Greater Scaup  
*Aythya marila*



Lesser Scaup  
*Aythya affinis*



large black nail on tip of bill



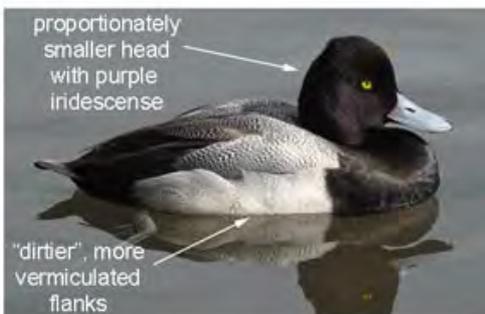
small black nail on tip of bill



proportionately larger head with green iridescence

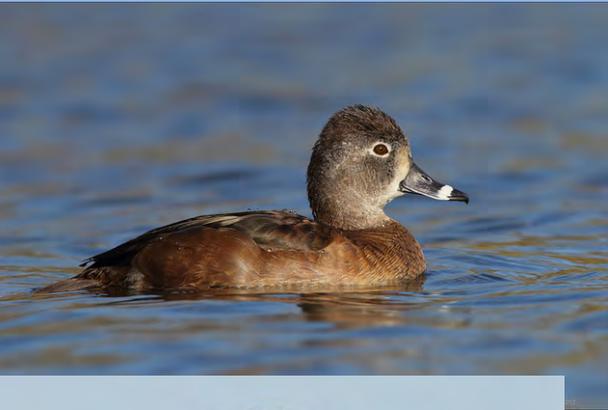


proportionately smaller head with purple iridescence



# Divers

Female ♀ (hen)



## Ring-necked Duck

White line  
across bill



Male ♂ (drake)

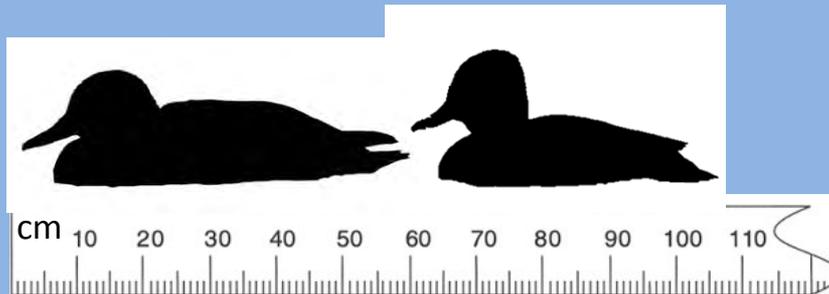


White edge  
around base of  
bill

Black body  
with Gray  
sides



Egg-shaped head



# Divers

## Canvasback

Female ♀ (hen)

Male ♂ (drake)

Oct-Apr



Brown head  
and Black bill

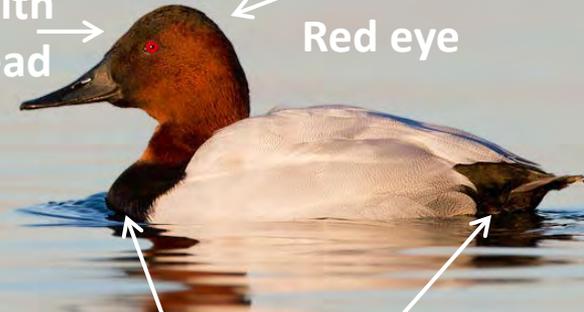
Summer



Red head with  
dark forehead

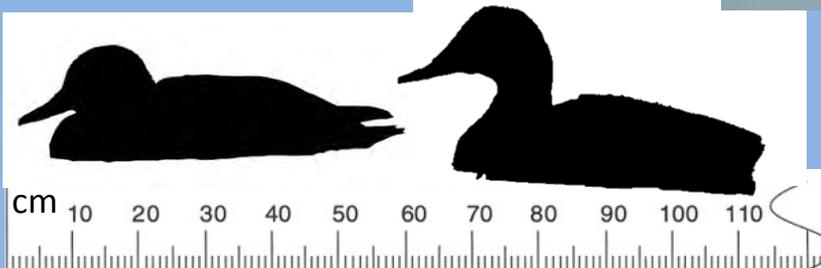


Black bill  
and  
Red eye



Black breast and rump with  
Canvas colored middle

Long, sloped head



# Divers

## Redhead

Female ♀ (hen)

Male ♂ (drake)

Oct-Apr



Brown head  
and Blue bill

Light Red head

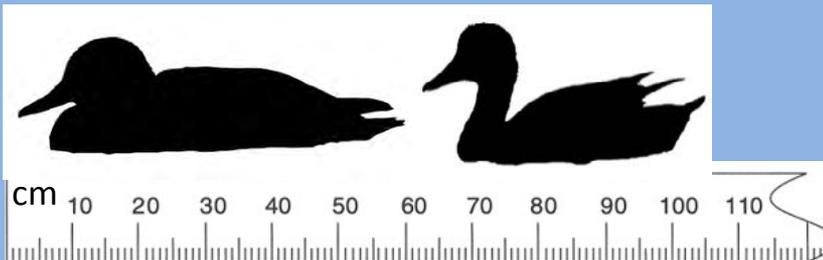
Blue bill and  
Yellow-Orange  
eye

Black breast and rump with

Gray middle



Rounded head



ALBERT R. BROCCOLI Presents  
PIRCE BROSNAN as  
**Common**  
**GOLDENEYE™**



# Divers

Female ♀ (hen)



Brown head, Gray body, and White wing patch



Male ♂ (drake)

## Common Goldeneye



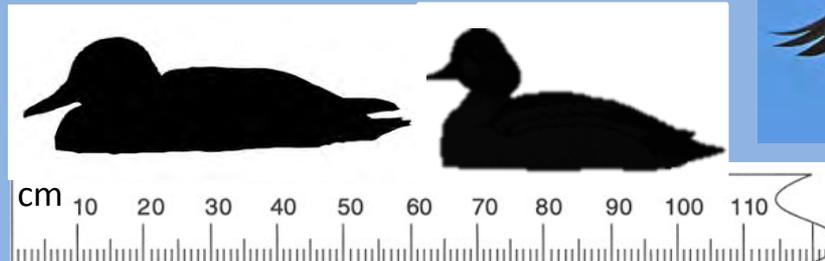
Rounded White patch in front of Golden eye



White breast, neck, and patch on the wing

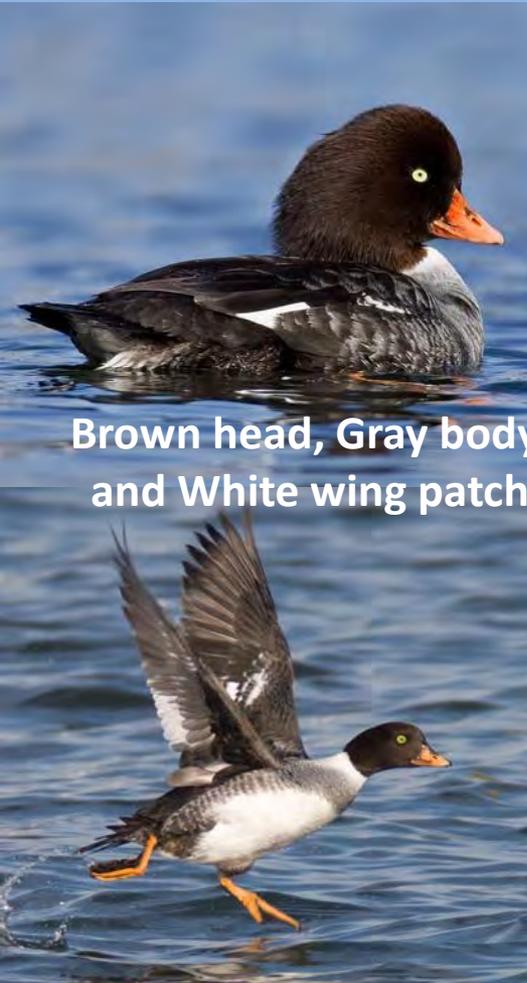


Tall, rounded crest on head



# Divers

Female ♀ (hen)



Brown head, Gray body, and White wing patch

Male ♂ (drake)

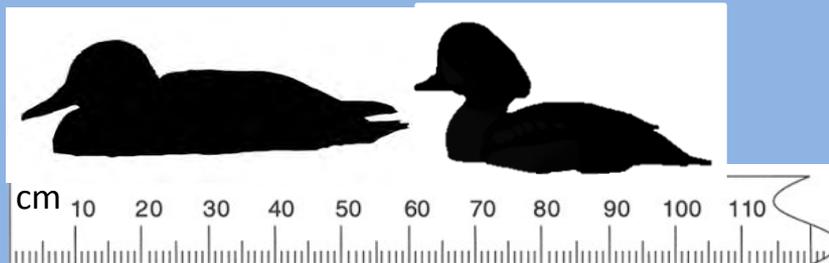


Shorter bill, steeper forehead, and more frilled neck

White Crescent in front of Golden eye



White breast, neck, and patch on the wing



# Divers

## Surf Scoter

Female ♀ (hen)



White patches in front of and behind eye

Male ♂ (drake)



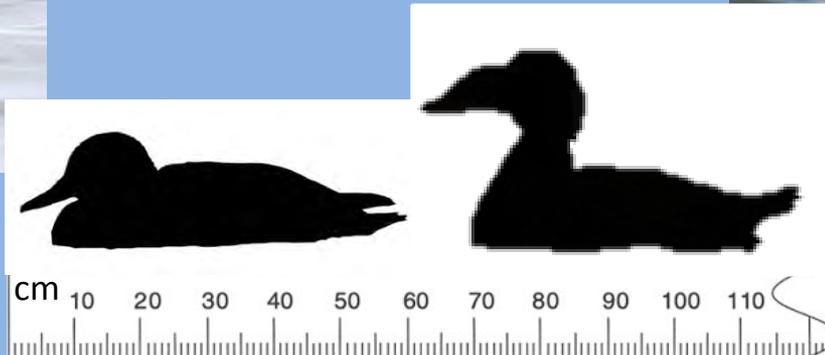
White patch on bill, forehead, and back of the neck



Black body  
Males are darker



Large, bulbous bill for cracking shells



# Divers

## Double-crested Cormorant

Juvenile is more Gray

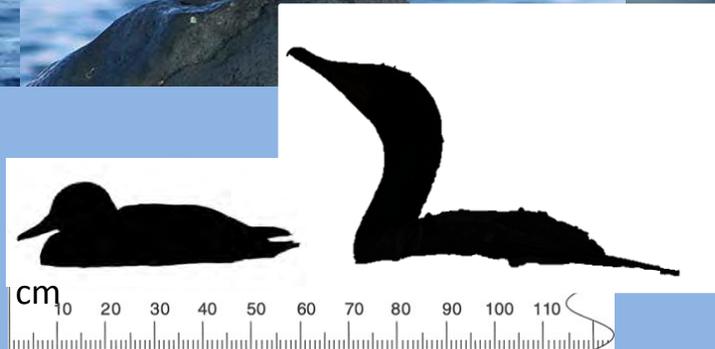
Long, thin bill with hooked end



Long, sleek, Black body with Orange face



Upright head



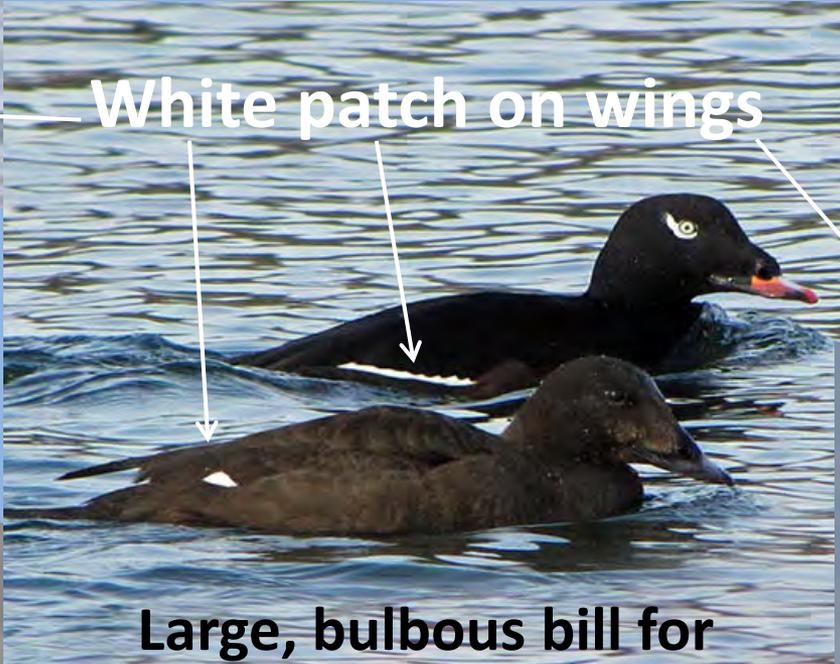
# Sensitive Species

# Divers

Female ♀ (hen)

Male ♂ (drake)

## White-winged Scoter

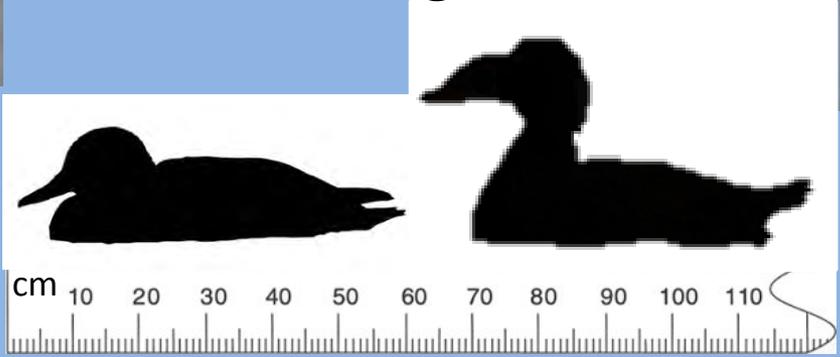


White patch on wings

Large, bulbous bill for cracking shells



White crescent on eye



# Divers

## Long-tailed Duck

Female ♀ (hen)

Male ♂ (drake)

May-Jun

May-Jun



White eye patch

Pink spot on bill and Gray face

Long tail Nov-Apr

Nov-Apr

