

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*



Folk Name: Hairy-crowned Fish Duck

Status: Migrant, Winter Visitor

Abundance: Rare to Uncommon

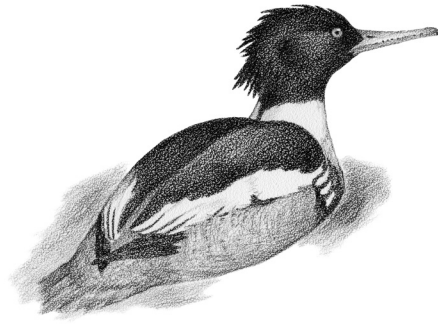
Habitat: Lakes, large ponds

The Red-breasted Merganser averages almost 2 feet (23 inches) long—which is about 2 inches smaller than the Common Merganser and 5 inches larger than the Hooded. It has an obvious, shaggy or wispy crest. The breast of the male is reddish, while the breast of the male Common Merganser is white. These ducks are common in brackish water in winter along the coast of the Carolinas, but they are less common inland.

Red-breasted Mergansers have been reported on lakes in the Central Carolinas every year for the past quarter-century. Most arrive in November or December, and most have left by the end of March. Flocks usually number less than five birds, but groups of up to 65 have been counted. Our earliest arrival date is 8 November, and our latest departure date is 29 May.

Red-breasted Merganser was first recorded in the region on a Charlotte Christmas Bird Count held on December 29, 1956. Two birds were found at Creech's Pond on the York–Mecklenburg county line. Since this count, this merganser has been a much-anticipated find on Christmas Bird Counts throughout the region.

Females occasionally linger here into May. The arrival of a flock of five Red-breasted Mergansers found on the Charlotte Spring Bird Count on May 3, 1975, was a highlight of the day. Paul Hart found one Red-breasted Merganser lingering on Catawba River during the Spring Bird Count held on May 3, 1986. Rob Gilson had a pair



Red-breasted Merganser on Lake Norman.
(Chris Talkington)

on May 18, 2014. There are a couple summer records of this sawbill from this part of the Piedmont as well. These may represent injured birds or non-breeding birds that have lingered here.