

## Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*



**Folk Name:** Booby, Bristle-tail

**Status:** Winter Resident

**Abundance:** Uncommon

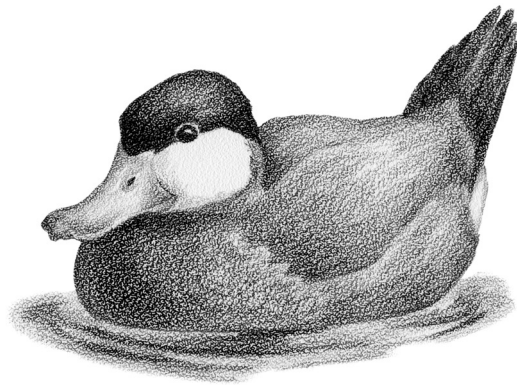
**Habitat:** Lakes, ponds

At 15 inches, the Ruddy Duck is our third smallest duck—averaging just an inch longer than the Green-winged Teal and 1 ½ inch longer than the Bufflehead. They have stiff, relatively long tails that are often cocked upward. They have a large head and somewhat chunky-looking body that is greyish brown in winter. Male Ruddy Ducks have a black cap and white cheek patch in winter, but by late spring, birders may find them in their breeding plumage of chestnut brown with their greyish bill now turned a bright blue. These divers generally stay together in small flocks and don't often intersperse with other ducks. They have the ability to immediately sink without diving, in order to escape danger. A study on the average diving time of ducks, conducted on ponds along the edge of the South Carolina Piedmont, calculated an average time submerged of 51.6 seconds per dive.

Ruddy Ducks begin to arrive in the Central Carolinas in early October, and most have departed by mid-April. We have a handful of records from summer months, but their presence at that time is quite rare. They can be expected to be encountered on any size lake or pond throughout the region.

Even the small Ruddy Duck fell subject to overhunting at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1909, T.G. Pearson shared this with newspaper readers in the Carolina Piedmont:

This is one of the smallest, as well as most trustful and unsuspecting of our ducks. It will decoy readily and appears to have little fear of the gunner. It is a strong diver, but when alarmed prefers, if given a fair chance, to escape by flight. This it accomplishes by taking wing slowly along the surface of the water with its head directly to the wind. It has not been many years since the market hunters began to hunt these plump little birds, which formerly swam or flew about him unnoticed. The high prices which they of late command have drawn to them the aim of the gunners throughout their range, and as a



natural result the boobies show a marked decrease in number. A popular method of hunting is to 'ring shoot' them from a number of boats which have surrounded a feeding flock.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the breeding population of Ruddy Duck in North America appears to be stable. The 2015 population survey in North Carolina indicated a no change (0%) from the 64-year average.



Male Ruddy Duck. (Jeff Lemons)