

WILD NEWS

Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge

Nature Program Calendar

October - December 2005

Our Smallest Duck—The Bufflehead

By Jennifer Keyser



If you see a black and white diving duck this fall, it could be a bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*). It's possible to see them on the Refuge from mid-October through mid-April. Bufflehead numbers tend to be higher in November and March. Some Fish and Wildlife Service biologists think many move to open water from December through February when the Refuge's lakes are frozen.

Measuring just 13-15½ inches, the bufflehead is North America's smallest duck. Its summer (breeding) range is from Alaska to Ontario, and it winters in much of the United States. Nonbreeding (basic) plumage for males is a black head, black back and white sides, and a large white head patch. Buffleheads are often mistaken for common goldeneyes; but the latter, at 16-20 inches is larger. In addition, the white head patch of male common goldeneyes is in front of the eye, not on the side and top of the head as with the male bufflehead.

The bufflehead is mostly monogamous, often remaining with the same mate for several years. The female is duller than the male, with gray sides and a smaller white head patch. Females nest almost exclusively in tree cavities excavated by flickers (and occasionally, pileated woodpeckers.) Buffleheads lay eggs more slowly than most other ducks; there often are intervals of two or three days between eggs. Clutch size is usually 6-11 eggs, and chicks hatch after incubating 28-33 days.

Buffleheads usually feed by diving, and swallow their prey underwater. Their diet includes aquatic insects such as dragonflies and damselflies; they also will feed on shrimps, snails and crayfish. In addition to aquatic animals, buffleheads will also eat the seeds of pondweeds and bulrushes.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, excessive hunting reduced bufflehead numbers significantly. They have made a slow but steady comeback since then, and are among the few duck species whose numbers have grown since the mid-1950's. Because of its recovery, the Bufflehead is currently not listed as either threatened or endangered. The Refuge's lakes and ponds provide excellent habitat for this small but hardy "comeback story" as it re-stakes its claim on the Front Range.

Sources:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology. All About Birds. www.birds.cornell.edu/programs/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Bufflehead_dtl.html

University of Michigan Museum of Zoology. Animal Diversity Web. http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Bucephala_albeola.html

The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds (Western Region); 1993 ed.

Nature Programs

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2005

Reservations are required for these FREE popular programs. Space is limited. **Call 303-289-0930 to register.** Please dress for the weather and all children must be accompanied by an adult. Assistance dogs are welcome.

OCTOBER

Migration Magic

Sunday Oct 9 9:00 - 11:00 am

How do birds know the way? How far do they fly? Discover the answers and learn how national wildlife refuges help canopy dwellers and prairie foragers during migration.

Wildlife Watch

Sunday Oct 23 9:00 - 1:00pm

Join the Colorado Division of Wildlife for this interactive workshop designed to increase your wildlife viewing skills! Recommended for ages 10 and up.

Trick-R-Tweet

Saturday Oct 29 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Dare to take this slightly spooky hayride through the rolling prairie,

possibly meeting creatures along the way. Bone-chilling weather is predicted, so dress warmly. Fun for all ages.

NOVEMBER

Birding Basics

Saturday Nov 5 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Join a Refuge naturalist for this beginning birding program and get familiar with some of the Refuge's winged residents.

Waterfowl Identification

Sunday Nov 6 8:00 - 10:00 am

The Refuge is alive with quackers and honkers! Explore who these migrants are while we try to sneak up on these dabblers and divers.

Magnificent Mulies

Saturday Nov 12 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Saturday Nov 26 1:00 - 3:00 pm

It's the peak of the breeding season and the bucks are showing off their spectacular antlers! Learn the differences between mule deer and white-tailed deer.

Check Out Those Antlers!

Sunday Nov 13 9:00 - 11:00 am

Sunday Nov 20 9:00 - 11:00 am

Search for that perfect shot, with your camera that is, as some of Colorado's largest mule deer bound

across the short grass prairie.

Refuge Manager Tour

Saturday Nov 19 9:00 - 11:00 am

This is the opportunity to find out the latest information about the Refuge as the Manager guides your tour. Learn the inside scoop!

Fall KidFest

Sunday Nov 27 9:00 - 11:00 am

All "turkeyed" out? Stump your family and friends as we play a "wild" game of charades, look for clues around Lake Mary on a super scavenger hunt, and make an animal puppet to take home.

DECEMBER

Let's Hear it for Burrow Babes!

Saturday Dec 3 1:00 - 3:00 pm

What do prairie dogs do in winter? Tour a Refuge prairie dog colony and learn the importance of this keystone species.



The Refuge will be closed on Dec 25 and Jan 1.

Prairie Days and Prairie Nights Refuge Week Saturday Oct 15 12:30 - 8:00 pm
(See description on back)

Winter Raptors

Sunday Dec 4 9:00 - 11:00 am
Who hides behind the prairie dog mound? What bird has feathers covering its legs? Discover the extraordinary adaptations of these predators on this Refuge adventure.

Song Dogs

Saturday Dec 10 1:00 - 3:00 pm
Coyotes are the true "Song Dog of the West" and their cry travels far on a cold winter day. Explore this mischievous and cunning canine.



Where Eagles Soar

Sunday Dec 11 9:00 - 11:00 am
The Refuge is a great place to see the symbol of the United States—the magnificent

bald eagle. During this special tour look for these awe-inspiring birds.

Winter Wonderland

Sunday Dec 18 9:00 - 11:00 am
Kids! Explore the adaptations amazing prairie creatures use to survive Old Man Winter. Recommended for ages 6-11.

Holiday Tour

Saturday Dec 24 9:00 - 11:00 am
Escape the hustle and bustle of the season by taking this special tour. Wrap up your journey with cup of hot chocolate and holiday goodies.

Winter Wildlife Photo Tour

Saturday Dec 31 9:00 - 11:00 am
Bring your cameras, zoom lenses and lots of film to capture some amazing winter wildlife. Recommended for adults.

Celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week

Every October more than 540 national wildlife refuges celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week. This year the Refuge will celebrate ***Prairie Days and Prairie Nights***, Saturday, October 15, 12:30 - 8:00 pm. All activities are FREE. Some activities include:

- Hayrides through wooded and wetland areas
- An afternoon of catch and release fishing
- Guided bike rides
- Tours of the National Eagle and Wildlife Property Repository
- Guided walks

Unwind at the campfire with stories from Teddy Roosevelt and a local mountain man. Reservations are required for hayrides, bike ride, nature walks, and Repository tours. Call early to take advantage of this FREE celebration. Additional information is available on our web-site or by calling 303-289-0930.

Note: The Refuge will open on October 15, at 12:30 pm because of this special event.



► Save the Date ◀

On October 11, the RMA Wildlife Society will host its fifth **Blue Stem Banquet** to kick-off the celebration of National Wildlife Refuge Week. For reservations or information call 303-289-0820.

► Educators ◀

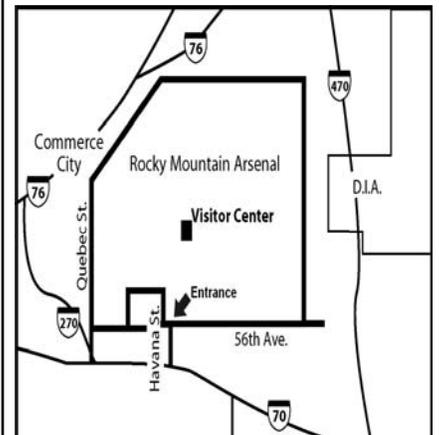
Look no further for FREE outdoor field trip opportunities that are aligned to the Colorado Model Content Standards. The Refuge invites you to schedule a no-cost field trip. Call 303-289-0931.

► Wild Rides ◀

Two hour trolley-tram wildlife viewing tour. Reservations required.
Saturdays from 9:00 - 11:00 am
Sundays from 1:00 - 3:00 pm

► Wild Treks Drop-In Program ◀

Reservations not required to hike the trails. Saturdays and Sundays 8:00 am - 4:30 pm.



DIRECTIONS

Enter the Refuge at 56th Avenue and Havana Street. Proceed 1.5 miles to the Visitor Center to check-in.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge
Commerce City, CO 80022-1748

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