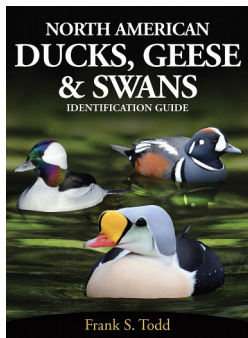


North American Ducks, Geese & Swans Identification Guide

By Frank S. Todd. 2018. Hubbs Seaworld Research Institute. Distributed in Canada by Hancock House Publishers. 203 pages, 29.95 USD, Paper.

This is a visually stunning book, with superb photographs of each species in a variety of behavioural postures and flight angles, plumages, and age classes; for example, I counted 40 images for Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) alone (pp. 167–170). There is very little text: a short preface,



an introductory page to each section (whistling ducks, geese, swans, perching ducks, dabbling ducks, pochards, eiders, sea ducks, stiff-tailed ducks, and “urban” waterfowl, which includes escaped or released exotics), the length, wingspan, and weight of each species, along with a bulleted list of key plumage characteristics and a statement about population size. Each species account also includes a small range map at varying scales. An appendix gives the body mass, number and colour of eggs, incubation time, and number of days from hatching to fledging for each species. The author stretches the definition of North America (usually Canada, the USA, and Mexico) to include the Caribbean, Greenland, the Hawaiian Islands, and United States territories in the Pacific (the Marianas and Aguigan islands). When you include subspecies, Eurasian vagrants, and accidentals, this book covers some 125 “forms”.

While the photographs are excellent, they are not consistently labelled with sex and/or age, and there is no definition of the terms that are used, such as fledgling, juvenile, immature, young, subadult, and first year juvenile, which overlap and can be confusing. And I assume that a summer male is the same as an eclipse male? The Hawaiian Duck (*Anas wyvilliana*) account (pp. 80–81) nicely shows three different age classes of ducklings (at 10, 22, and 72 days), but most other accounts only have one photo with no age indicated. More age-specific labels for other ducklings would have been useful.

There are no source references for population size estimates nor for conservation status (given as stable, increasing, or decreasing) so it is difficult to assess how accurate these numbers are. For example, the population size for “Northern” Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*) is given as ca. 20 000 (p. 69), which must be missing a few zeros. Some statements are confusing, such as when the population size for “Greenland” Mallard (*A. p. conboschas*) is given as ca. 15 000–30 000, followed by “but recent estimates of ca. 100 000” in parentheses (p. 71)—does this mean the author believes the lower range to be more accurate? Some species accounts include both a North American and a global population estimate, while others have only one, even though those birds also breed or winter outside of North America (also the case for the range maps). Other accounts just refer to “population size” without specifying geographic extent.

There are some major errors in the range maps. Having studied Harlequin Ducks (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) for over 20 years, I naturally checked that account first, and discovered that the entire inland breeding range for western North America is missing on the range map (p. 133). And while Greenland is shown on the map, it does not indicate any presence of Harlequin Ducks there, which there are, including birds which migrate from Labrador, Quebec, and Nunavut after breeding (COSEWIC 2013). Conversely, the Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) range map (p. 46) only shows breeding range but no wintering range. Considering that waterfowl undertake such spectacular migrations, with abundant numbers seen at stopover sites, some indication of migration routes on the range maps would have been helpful, especially for beginning birders.

There is no indication what audience the author was aiming for; perhaps he simply wanted to showcase a lifetime of waterfowl photography in a book. Todd died before the book was published, and it was completed by three friends, which may have contributed to some of the inconsistencies. While it works as an identification guide, do not buy this as a field guide, but rather as more of a coffee table book that you browse through for the truly excellent photos unlike those in any other book.

Literature Cited

COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada). 2013. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* eastern population in Canada. COSEWIC, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Accessed 12 November 2018. http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/cosewic/sr_Harlequin%20Duck_2013_e.pdf.

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