

WATERFOWL AT WELLSGATE LAKE

1. Bufflehead Drake - a small diver but in the sun you can see his bright white topnotch well out into the lake. If he disappears keep watching, he'll come up again a few feet away. We have many around the lake during the winter months.



2. Ruddy Duck Drake - Ruddies are very small divers much like the buffleheads. The drake has a white band around his chin and neck and many times you can see his needle like tail feathers pointing up at an angle while he swims. Ruddys are common in Wellsgate.



3. Ringnecks are a tad larger than Ruddys and Buffleheads but also are divers. It is very easy to mistake a ringneck for a Lesser or Greater Scaup. Markings are almost the same and both have blue bills but the ring neck has a visible ring around his neck. And yes he does have a dull but almost unnoticeable ring around his neck to suit his name. You don't see many ring necks in Wellsgate but a few show up during the winter months.



4. Scaup are also divers but come in two sizes, Lesser and Greater. Identical other than size. Can be mistaken for a ring neck. We have a few of these but not many. Last year we had over a thousand for a day or so. Scaup are also known as "blue bills".



WATERFOWL AT WELLSGATE LAKE

5. Mallards are common but uncommon at Wellsgate. We do have a dozen or so resident mallards (year around) but they have interbred with a few domestic ducks someone put on the lake a few years ago so some are not as shiny as the drake in this photo. Easily recognized by their lucent shiney green heads. Mallards are dabblers not divers.



6. Gadwalls are Mallard-size ducks and also dabblers not divers. We had two to three dozen or so in the past week on Wellsgate Lake. When in the water the duck looks brown but has an identifiable black patch beneath his tail and back.



7. Pintails are dabblers and very rare for the past 6 years. I did see a dozen a week ago but they did not stick around long. Overall populations are not doing too well. A beautiful duck with a long needle like tail. Not quite as big as a Mallard but almost.



8. Redheads are divers and I have not seen them for at least 7 years but the past few days we have 3-4 dozen at least. They are divers and you can see how the drake's red head is as red as the Mallard's is green. Great duck and they are still here on the north end of the lake if anyone wants to take a look. Redheads can easily be mistaken for Canvasbacks.



WATERFOWL AT WELLSGATE LAKE

9. Canvasbacks are fast flyers and also dabblers like the Redheads and Buffleheads. A premium duck and sought after by hunters as they are a tasty table bird. Limits are restricted now to protect the species. I have seen very few Canvasbacks on our lake but did see a dozen or so a few days ago swimming around with the Rednecks.



10. Wood Ducks are year-around birds and nest this time of year. The drake is hands-down the most spectacularly colored duck around. I have 5 wood duck houses on the lakeshore behind my house. For a month now, and will stretch into May, you'll see them around the shoreline in the evening and early morning. Drakes will stand guard while the hens fly into the boxes and lay their eggs. It's rare to see a hen shoo out her chicks and take them across the dam into the woods for protection until they can fly. I've only seen that once or twice. If you get too close to the box and she is on her nest, she will shriek and fly out like she's crippled. Flop in the water and swim away to pull you away from her nest. Wood ducks were almost gone many years ago but thanks to wood duck nesting boxes people put up and limits on their harvest, they have made a great comeback.



11. The White Fronted Goose is also known as a "Specklebelly". Neither a diver or a dabler geese eat grass but also grain and legumes that grown around the shoreline. We have specks in the Delta that pal around with the Snow Geese but you seldom see them here. We did have a flock of about two dozen over near the dam a couple of weeks ago. The speck is smaller than our resident Canadian geese but a migratory goose for sure.



12. Coots are fish eaters and similar to Comorants and Mergansers. Not particularly colorful we have a flock of two dozen or so that show up this time of year to raise their young. You'll likely not see them again after April-May until this time next year. Most hand around my shoreline and the inlet at the north end. Easily identifiable they are coal black with white bills. Never try to cook and eat one. Being fish eaters they will stink your whole kitchen up!



WATERFOWL AT WELLSGATE LAKE

13. Hooded Mergansers are frequent at Wellsgate and like the coot are fish eaters. They have small teeth in their beaks for that purpose. They come in three variants, Common, Hooded, and Red-Breasted. Ours are the Hooded ones and well named. In the morning sun you can't miss the drakes with their black heads and pure white lucent hoods. Much like the Bufflehead they stand out in the sunlight. Divers of course as they feed on minnows.



14. Osprey are not ducks but we do have two nesting pair that return each year. I saw one today over the south end heading north. The Osprey can be recognized from the Eagle as the Osprey has a "W" shaped wing structure. About 2/3 the size of an Eagle if you are lucky, you'll see one come zooming down from his overhead watch and crash into the water and fly back up with a fish in his claws. I think they nest north of us and perhaps in the shallows of Sardis backwaters near Coontown where I've seen a nest or two. Typically high up in a dead tree. After raising young they will head further south to the Gulf area. Osprey are also called "fish eagles".



15. Of course Bald Eagles are not ducks either but a magnificent bird and most of our residents have seen the two we have around Wellsgate. At high distances you can tell the Eagle from the Osprey by the architecture of his wings. The Eagle has a broad wing that spans from tip to tip in an almost straight line (like the edge of a board) while the Osprey has a "W" wing with leading edges swept back at different angles. Bald Eagles are also fish eaters but will also dive on ducks and geese. We are privileged to have a pair here from time to time. If you see them one will normally be very high and the other quite a bit lower while scanning the water for fish.



16. Shoveller Ducks - Last but not least. we have common sightings of the Northern Shoveller duck. They frequent the Delta but drop into Wellgate often and hang out with the Buffleheads and Ruddys. About the size of the Pintail the Drake has a green/brown head but an unmistakable rufus patch on his side that is visible at long distances. Also if you look hard, like Canvasback that has a long sloping beak, the Shoveller has a shovel like bill that is long but curved like a shovel - hence his name. Shovellers are divers and use their bills to scoop up food beneath the water.

