

BE A WILDLIFE WATCHER!

You can discover what is really going on out on the refuge by watching and making notes. Watch, listen and remember what is happening on the fields for 5 minutes. After the 5 minutes are over write down what you saw and heard. Take a little rest and try another five minute watch. Anything new this time?

— Snow Buntings - first migratory birds to visit the fields. —



Spring Guide to Birds of Creamer's Field

Migratory
Waterfowl
Refuge



This guide belongs to:

Guide for Coloring the Birds

Consult a published Field Guide or for most accurate color patterns.

Each bird illustrated is coded with a small letter to guide you in a realistic coloring scheme. Have fun!!

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| w. White | b. Black |
| g. Grey | d. Dark Brown |
| l. Light brown | r. Red |
| s. Rust or Burnt Sienna | o. Orange |
| y. Yellow | n. Green |
| u. Blue | dg. Dark Grey |

Coloring Facts

Throughout most of the spring and summer, male ducks are brightly colored whereas female ducks are mostly brown. In the fall, they are all similarly colored. Male and female geese and cranes appear similar in color all year round, and are not brightly colored at all. WHY?

There are two main answers...

1. Protective Coloration

The mostly brown colors of female ducks year round and all ducks in fall and winter help them to be less visible. For females it is especially important to camouflage while they are incubating eggs and raising young. Female ducks incubate and raise young without help from the male duck.

The drab colors of both male and female geese and cranes make them less visible as well. As you might guess, both male and female birds take part in incubating the eggs and caring for the young.

2. Finding a Mate

The colorful patterns of male ducks probably give them an advantage in attracting a mate. Unlike the geese and cranes, they find a new mate every year.

Geese and cranes mate for life, and so it is beneficial for them to keep their protective coloration all year round. The male ducks pictured in this guide are shown in their bright mating plumage.

How many of these treasures can you find on Creamer's Field?

Find and name a bird:

with blue on it _____

with green on it _____

with red on it _____

with a spoon shaped bill _____

with a ring around its neck _____

with a plastic band around its neck _____

Animal other than a bird _____

Bird in a tree _____

Bird standing on the snow _____

Bird standing in the water _____

Birds flying in a 'V' _____

Birds rolling in the air _____

Bird eating _____

Bird taking off from the water _____

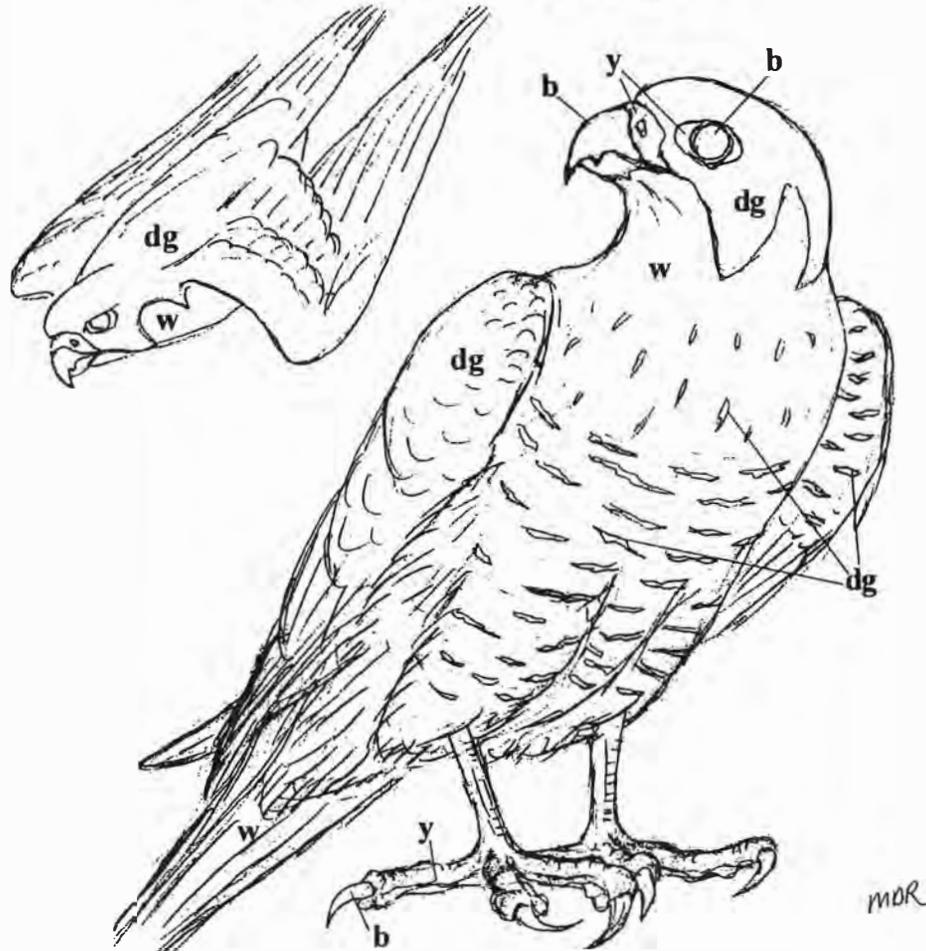
Bird landing on the water _____

Bird with head under water _____

Sleeping bird _____

MORE (your list) _____

Peregrine Falcon



Field Marks: A medium-sized falcon with pointed wings and a narrow tail. It has a slate colored back, light barred breast, and a dark (almost black) head where the darker color extends down each cheek (known as a malar stripe). Younger birds are darker and browner underneath. Its quick wingbeats help to identify it as a falcon.

Migration: Winters as far south as coastal regions of Central and South America.

Food: Preys almost exclusively on birds, especially songbirds, shorebirds, ducks, and pigeons. It will occasionally eat a mammal, amphibian, or insect. Peregrines dive or “stoop” and strike in mid-air killing their prey with a sharp blow.

Habits: One of the swiftest birds in the world, peregrines have been clocked at over 180 mph when diving after prey. They live in open country, especially areas frequented by waterfowl. Peregrines mate for life and nest on ledges. In the 1970's there were less than 330 nesting pairs in North America due to a chemical pesticide called DDT. DDT was banned in the U.S. in 1972; after intensive recovery efforts the bird was taken off the endangered species list in 1999.



CANADA GOOSE

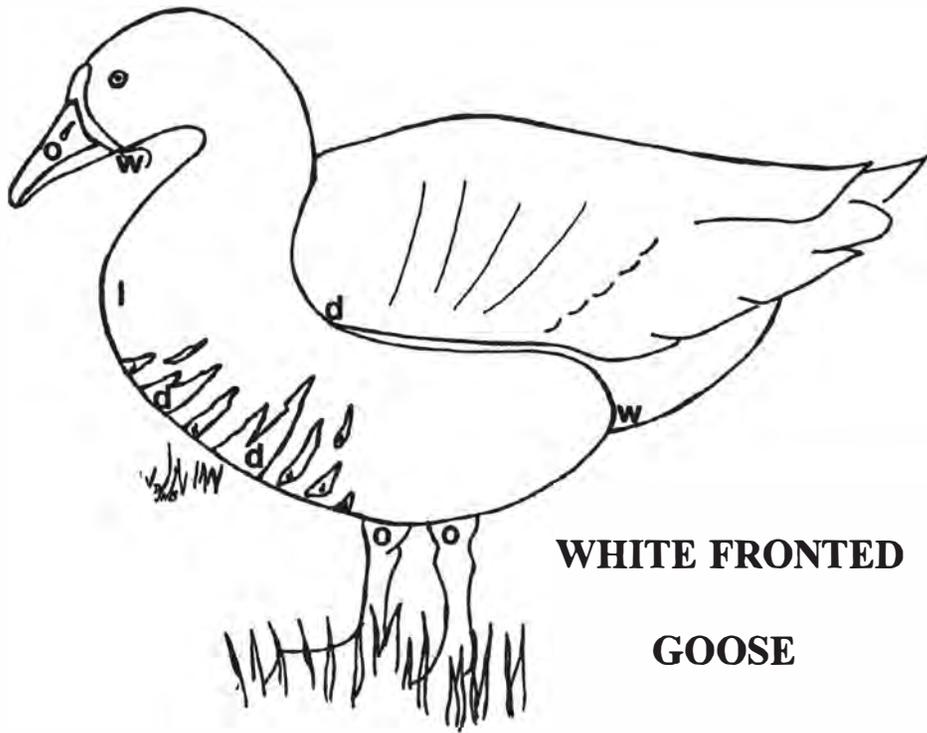
Field Marks: Large! Black legs, neck and head with white chin strap, brown body.

Call: Noisy! The loud honking call is often given while flying.

Migration: The official early migrant of the waterfowl group. The Canada Geese seen at Creamers winter in the Pacific States of California, Oregon and Washington where they gather in large flocks.

Food: Grazers! These geese like young grasses and shoots, grains, berries and water insects and plants. You can see them grazing on Creamer's Refuge in late summer and fall.

Habits: The Canada Goose is widely distributed in North America. It is not native to other continents although they have been introduced in many places. There are many variations, especially in size. Canada Geese mate for life and their family group stays together through the winter and during migration. The grassy nest built on the ground near water is lined with goose down and feathers. Occasionally Canada geese nest in higher places, on ledges or even in trees. About 6 eggs are laid and incubated for about 28 days. The downy young, protected by both parents, grow to full size and strength by the time of the fall migration.



**WHITE FRONTED
GOOSE**

Field Marks: Large! Older birds are marked with large irregular dark stripes on the belly, giving the name "Speckle Belly". The legs and feet are orange, the bill is pink. "White Fronted" refers to white above the bill.

Call: A high pitched honking, but quieter in general than the noisy Canada Goose.

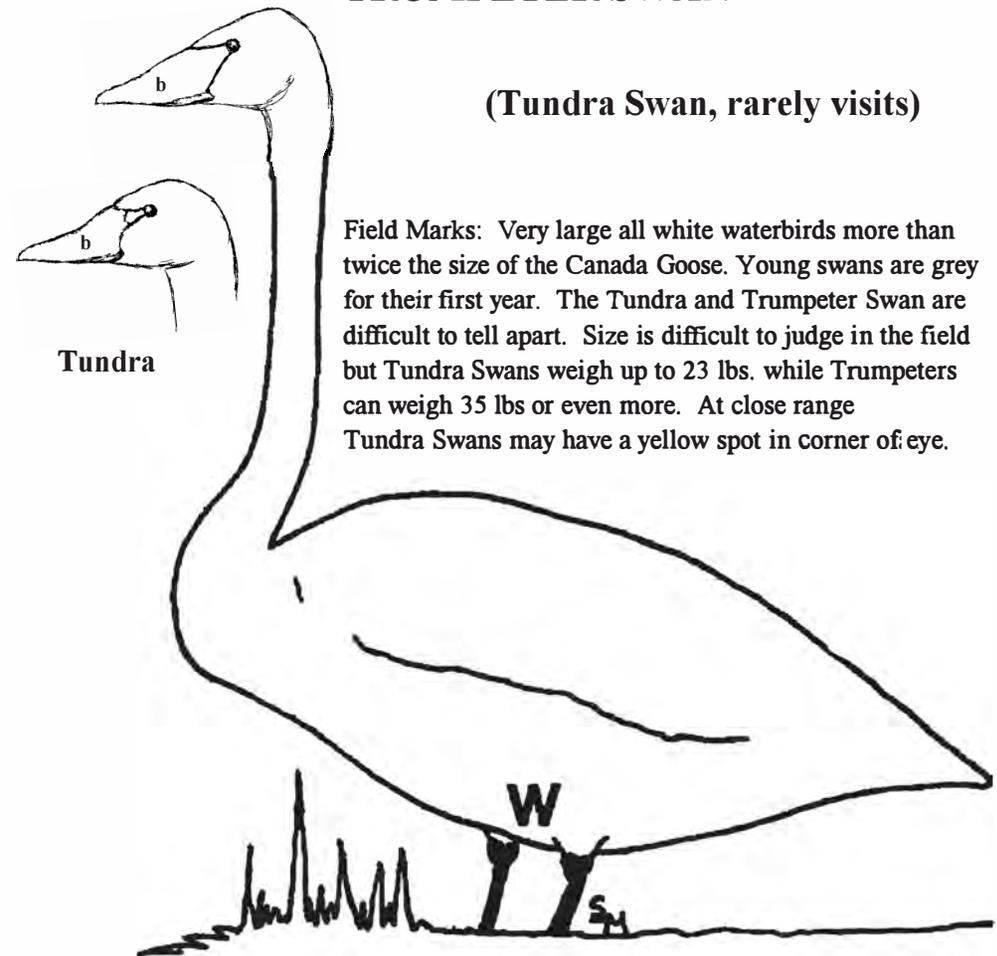
Migration: Most of the White Fronted Geese seen at Creamer's Refuge winter in Central California in large flocks.

Food: Grazers! Grasses, grains and berries, also water insects and plants.

Habits: This is a goose of western North America, Eurasia and Greenland. The geese mate for life and the family group stays together throughout the winter and spring migration. The nest is on the ground near water and lined with grasses, sticks and goose down. Six eggs are laid and incubated for about 26 days. The downy young, protected by both parents, grow large enough to fly in about 45 days. During migration these geese, like other geese, fly in flocks composed of several family groups and V-shaped. They may fly quite high during the day or night.

TRUMPETER SWAN

(Tundra Swan, rarely visits)



Tundra

Field Marks: Very large all white waterbirds more than twice the size of the Canada Goose. Young swans are grey for their first year. The Tundra and Trumpeter Swan are difficult to tell apart. Size is difficult to judge in the field but Tundra Swans weigh up to 23 lbs. while Trumpeters can weigh 35 lbs or even more. At close range Tundra Swans may have a yellow spot in corner of eye.

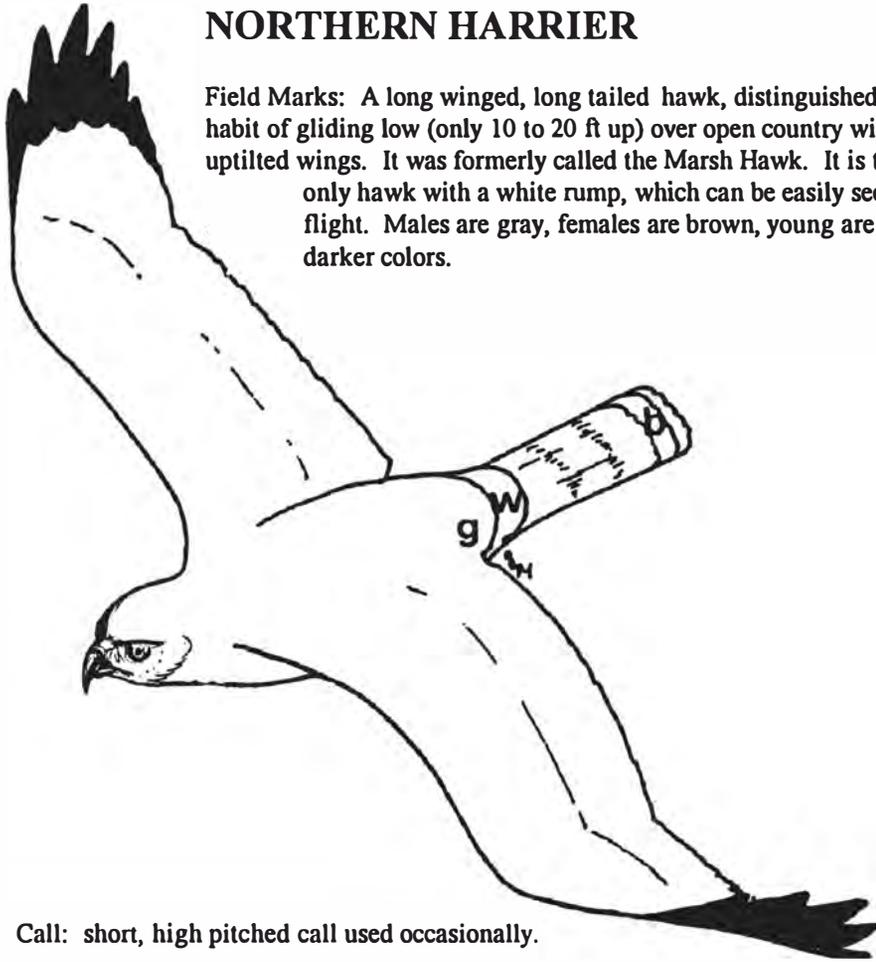
Call: Tundra Swan has a high pitched whistling call. The Trumpeter Swan's call is short, deep, "ko-ho", frequently given in flight. These two swans are more easily distinguished by their calls.

Food: Aquatic plants, grasses and sedges.

Habits: The Trumpeter Swan, once almost extinct, now nests near the lakes and ponds of northwestern North America. The Minto Flats are an important nesting area. Tundra Swans nest further north or west near tundra lakes. Swan eggs require 35 or more days of incubation. Young Tundras may be ready to fly in about 60 days, but Trumpeter chicks require more time(100 to 120 days). This is one reason why Swans leave late in the fall, waiting until oncoming winter forces them out in late September or early October.

NORTHERN HARRIER

Field Marks: A long winged, long tailed hawk, distinguished by its habit of gliding low (only 10 to 20 ft up) over open country with uptilted wings. It was formerly called the Marsh Hawk. It is the only hawk with a white rump, which can be easily seen in flight. Males are gray, females are brown, young are darker colors.



Call: short, high pitched call used occasionally.

Migration: Winters from Southeastern Alaska and Canadian Provinces south.

Food: Consumes a variety of small birds and animals but especially likes meadow voles. Occasionally hunts small ducks successfully.

Habits: The supply of meadow voles available during the summer affects the breeding success of this hawk. They hunt by flying slowly close to the ground. When they locate their prey they hover and then plunge on it. In the spring harriers perform aerial displays of steep dives and climbs to impress a mate. They nest on the ground laying about 5 eggs which they incubate for about 31 days. The male bird hunts for the female and for the young, but the female does all the feeding. Young harriers are ready to fly in about 30 days.

SANDHILL CRANE

Field Marks: large, tall gray bird with long legs, neck and bill.

Call: Loud, prehistoric sounding trumpeting, rattling, more scratchy sounding than the voices of geese or swans. Very distinctive.

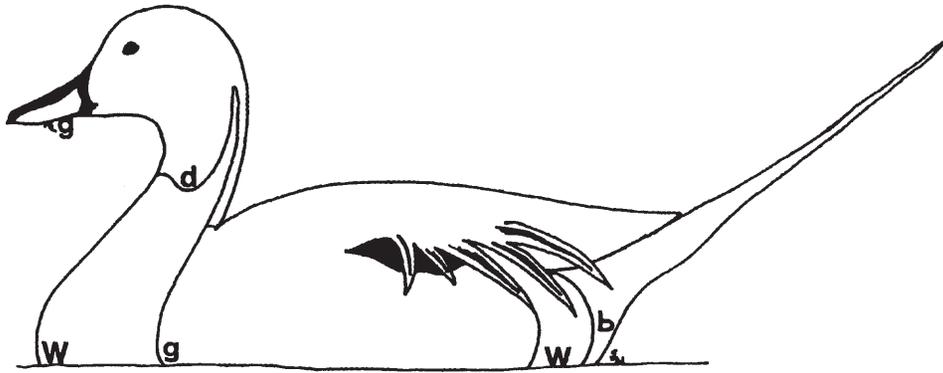
Migration: The Sandhill Cranes we see passing through Creamer's Refuge winter in Texas, New Mexico and Mexico. At the Refuge and to the south of Fairbanks Cranes can be seen flying high overhead in flocks of 100 or more. During their spring migration they spend several weeks at the Platte River in Nebraska where they find the food necessary



to give them energy for their coming migration and nesting season.

Food: Grain, seeds, roots, tubers, berries, also insects, like grasshoppers, also voles and frogs.

Habits: Many interesting habits from painting themselves with muddy water to dancing displays. Cranes nest in wetlands and usually lay 2 eggs which hatch a few days apart after about 30 days. Both parents raise the young and the family group stays together through the following spring migration. Young birds mature to breeding age in 4 to 5 years.



NORTHERN PINTAIL

Field Marks: Large, slender duck with shiny white breast and vertical white stripe reaching up the neck. The male duck has a long needle-like tail. Females are brown.

Call: The male gives a flute-like whistle. The female quacks; quieter and deeper than the female Mallard's quack.

Migration: The Pintail is widespread in North America, especially in the West. Pintails seen at Creamer's probably winter along the Pacific Coast. Pintails are very adaptive and we may sometimes see large numbers here that have not been able to find suitable nesting areas elsewhere due to drought.

Food: The Pintail dabbles in the water for aquatic vegetation. It is fond of feeding on seeds and vegetation on the bottom of shallow ponds.

Habits: Pintails are fast graceful fliers. They have been clocked at 50 to 60 MPH. They are abundant at Creamer's Field during spring migration. They nest on grassy ground, sometimes far from water. The 6 to 9 eggs are incubated about 24 days and the young are ready to fly in about 45 more days.



Bald Eagle

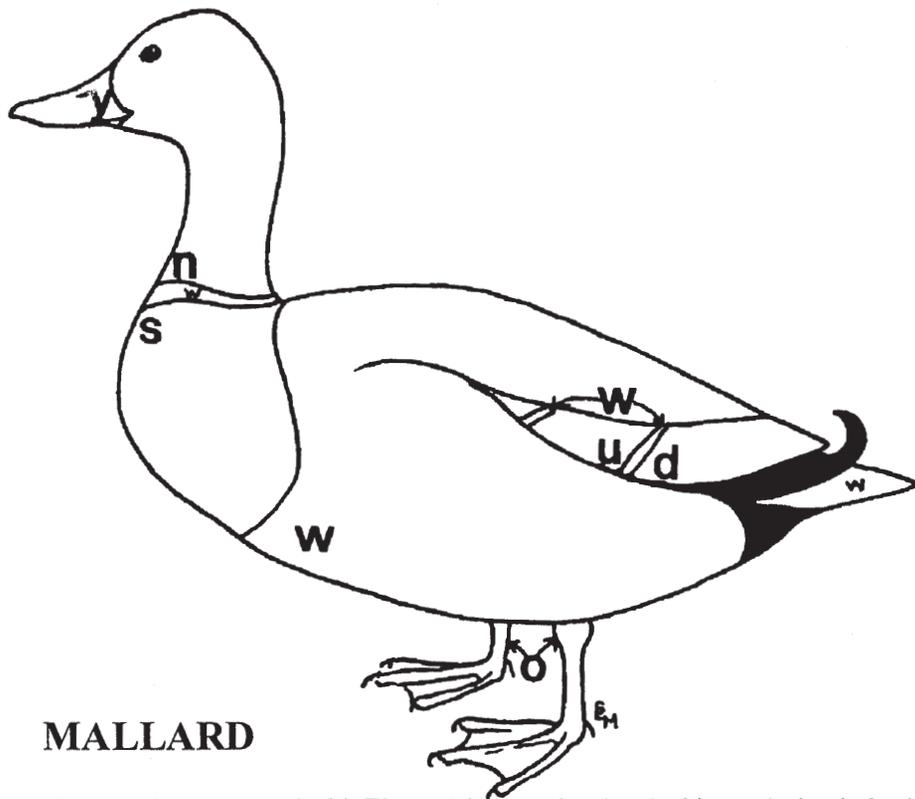
Field Marks: White head, neck, and tail contrast with otherwise black-brown plumage; large yellow bill. In flight head and tail of adults project about equally, and it soars with its wings held flat. Look for its large size, long wings, and deliberate wing beats. Wingspan 6.5-8 feet. Young birds (under 4-5 years) are dark colored with variable white marbling.

Call: A series of squeaky chitters and screams.

Migration: The bald eagle is found all over North America with more birds in Alaska than in all other states combined. Most northern birds winter in southeastern Alaska, Canada, and the continental U.S.

Food: Bald eagles eat a variety of fish, birds, mammals, and often scavenge for carrion.

Habits: Bald eagles live in many different habitats, although they prefer watery locations. They nest in old growth timber or on cliffs. Mated pairs return to the same nesting site, adding to it annually, resulting in enormous nests. Bald eagles were once on the endangered species list, but populations are recovering and stable.



MALLARD

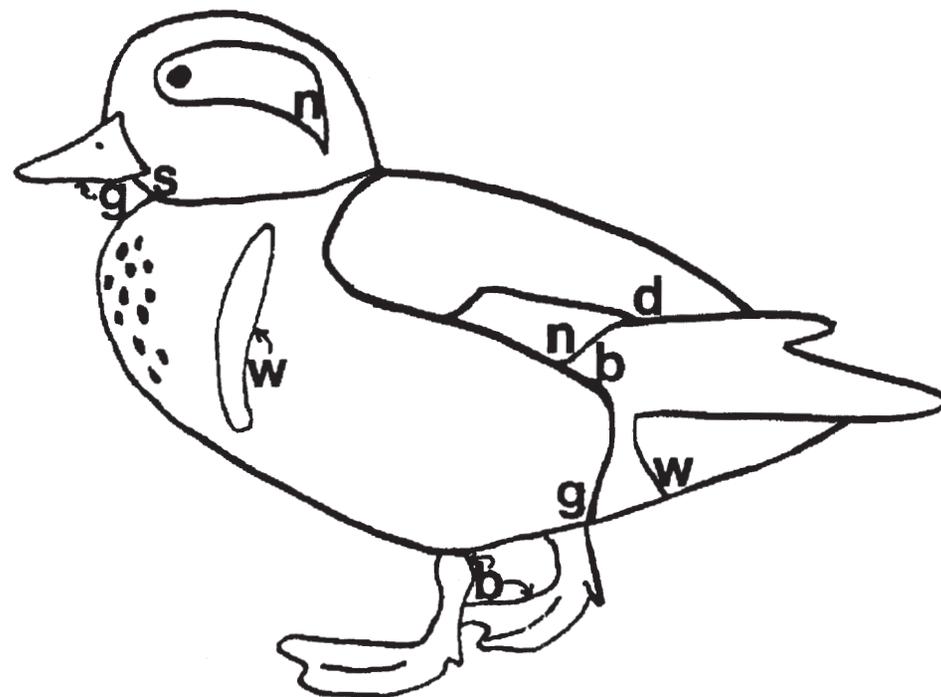
Field Marks: A large duck! The male's green head and white neck ring is familiar to many. The female is brown. Both male and female have a blue wing patch called a speculum.

Call: The male gives a low "kwek". The female utters a loud "quack, quack, quack" Some say the Mallard's quack is the only true quack.

Migration: The ducks we see at Creamer's Fields winter along the Pacific Coast. Occasionally they winter in Fairbanks in sheltered locations that have open water.

Food: Feeds on water plants by dabbling, but will dive to the bottom for feed in shallow lakes. Also likes grains and other farming wastes.

Habits: The Mallard is the best known of all the ducks because it occurs almost everywhere in the Northern Hemisphere. It is the duck most frequently bagged by hunters. In addition it is the common ancestor of most breeds of domestic ducks. Some domestic ducks so not look like Mallards, but if you see the curled feathers on the top of the tail you know it really is a Mallard. Flight speed is from 40 to 60 MPH. Mallards nest on the ground near water. Their 8 to 10 eggs are incubated for 26 to 30 days and the young are ready to fly about 55 days later.



GREEN-WINGED TEAL

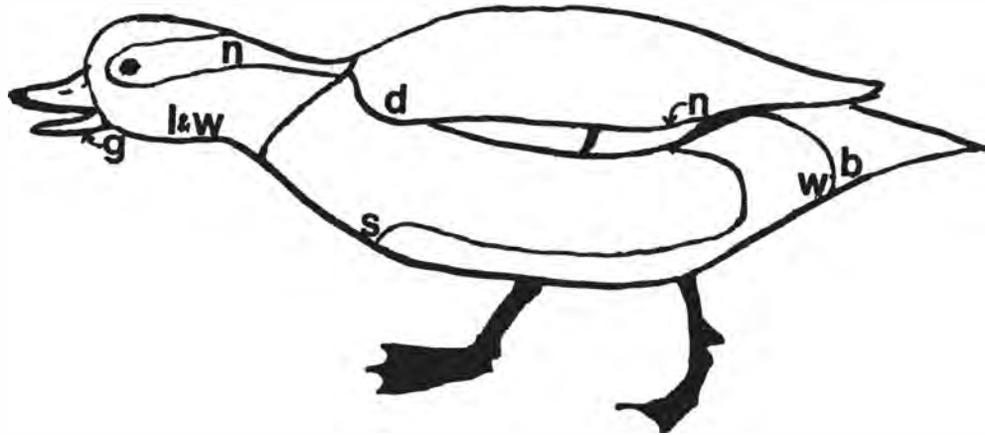
Field Marks: Small! The colorful male has a white crescent on its side. The female is brown. Both male and female have a green wing patch (speculum)

Call: Soft and high "preep-preep" frequently given by the male. The female quacks quietly when surprised.

Migration: Winters along the Pacific and Gulf coasts and in southwestern U.S.

Food: Dabbles for aquatic insects and plants. Feeds on land on berries and grain and other available foods.

Habits: Teal are the smallest ducks, but they are very active. It takes some practice to follow and identify the teal as it busily swims about. Teal also move quickly on land. In the air Green-winged Teal fly in close swift moving flocks of a few individuals. The speed of flight has been timed at 30 to 40 MPH. The female nests on grassy ground where she lays 8 or 9 eggs which she incubates for about 34 days. The young fly about 44 days later.



AMERICAN WIGEON

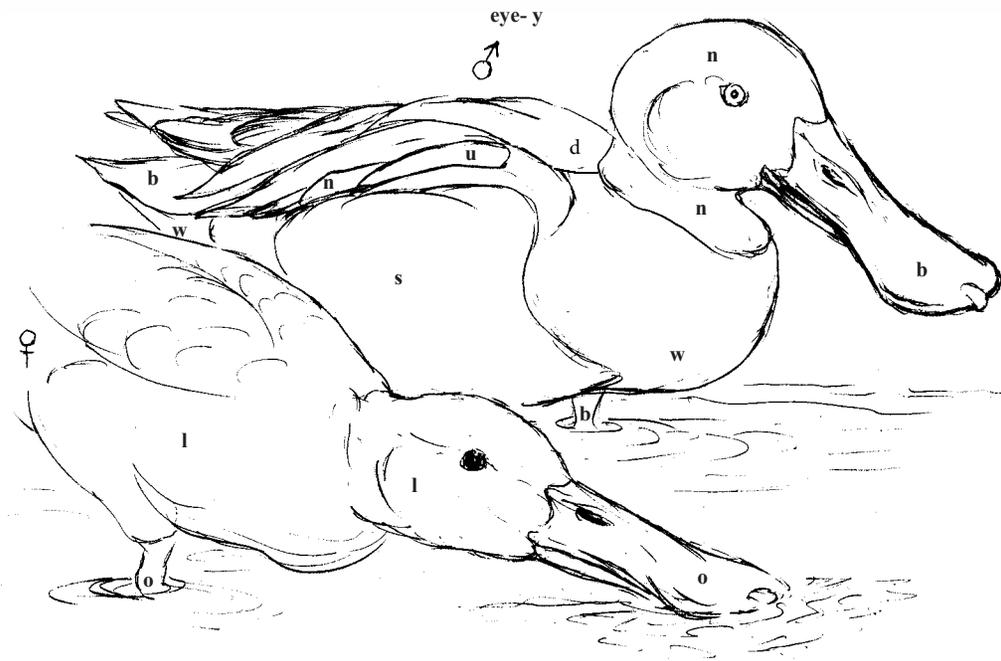
Field Marks: The colorful male looks bald because of its light colored head. It used to be called "Baldpate". The female is brown. In flight a large white patch on the wing of both male and female is clearly seen and helps with identification.

Call: The male makes a throaty whistle, the female a weak quack.

Migration: In the fall widgeon can be seen feeding on the Refuge fields. They winter along the Pacific coast from SE Alaska south.

Food: Mostly vegetarian, feeding on aquatic plants and young sprouts of grasses and grains in fields.

Habits Flight speed is about 22 MPH. The 9 to 11 eggs are incubated 22 to 24 days and the young are ready to fly about 45 days later.



NORTHERN SHOVELER

Field Marks: A small duck. The flashy color pattern of the male Shoveler plus the oversized bill help with identification. The female is brown and also has the oversized bill. The male has a green head, like a Mallard, leading some to call it the "Smiling Mallard".

Call: Male gives a low call, "took". Female quacks weakly.

Migration: The Shovelers seen at Creamer's Refuge winter along the Pacific Coast.

Food: The specially adapted bill of the Shoveler allows it to strain small bits of food from the surface or from mud stirred up from shallow bottoms. Shoveler ducks can be seen following each other around, feeding on the mud stirred up by the duck just ahead.

Habits: Flight speed is 25 to 50 MPH. As with other ducks, the female incubates the eggs and raises the young. The males spend the summer in flocks by themselves. The nest is built in tall grasses often far from water. The 10 to 12 eggs are incubated for 22 to 24 days. After hatching the youngsters are led to water and cared for by the female until ready to fly in about 45 days.