

## American Wigeon *Anas americana*



**Folk Name:** Baldpate, Bald-crown

**Status:** Winter Visitor

**Abundance:** Uncommon

**Habitat:** Lakes, ponds

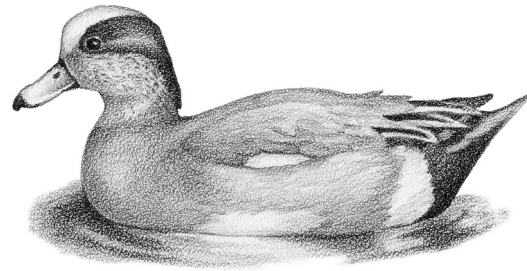
In the Carolinas, the American Wigeon was widely known as the Baldpate, because of the male's obvious white forehead and crown. The male has white on the forewing that is evident in flight. The female is drabber in color than the male and both sexes have a rounded head and small gray bill. The American Wigeon (often spelled widgeon) is a dabbling duck that frequents the edges of ponds and slow-moving river banks.

Leverett Loomis was the earliest observer to report American Wigeon in this region. During the late 1800s in Chester County, he described it as common in winter but most numerous during migration. Twenty years later, T.G. Pearson provided this description:

Numbers of them frequently come on shore to rest and preen their feathers in the sunshine, but these wary birds are continually on the lookout, and rare is it that the hunter can surprise them when thus engaged. Often when feeding among the rushes they may be located by their oft-repeated notes uttered to their companions in an agreeable conversational tone. The baldpate is fond of wild celery and other plant food. This they are said to be quite dexterous in securing by robbing canvasback and other diving ducks of their gleanings.

The number of American Wigeon in this part of the Carolina Piedmont appears to have declined over the past century, but the decline has not been dramatic. A 1947 study of Piedmont ducks conducted by UNC Chapel Hill ranked the American Wigeon as 13th in order of relative abundance for the region. Data from the recent 10-year Greater Mecklenburg Waterfowl Survey ranked it as 14th.

A study of the Catawba River titled "The Investigation of Cowan's Ford Reservoir for Waterfowl Development" published in April 25, 1960, noted that "spring-migrating baldpates numbered 1,000 during some years and a few teals also have been present." A flock of 1,022 was a recent high count recorded by staff at Pee Dee NWR on January 4, 2001. An analysis of Charlotte Christmas Bird Count



data comparing an early 20-year period and a recent 20-year period show the American Wigeon has dropped from 61st to 78th most common species reported—per party-hour.

American Wigeon generally begin to arrive in the region by late October, and most have departed by the second week of April. The average flock size in the region is generally smaller than 25, but larger flocks are occasionally seen. Many older local birders have remarked that the appearance of this species seems to have become more intermittent in the region in recent years.

The *State of the Birds 2014 Report* indicates that the long-term North American population of the American Wigeon has declined; however, the most recent counts have estimated them at 20% above the long-term average. The most recent North Carolina estimate is +70% change from the recent 10-year average. South Carolina duck harvest data from the Broad River indicate the American Wigeon is the seventh most harvested duck over the past 12 years.



Male American Wigeon. (Jeff Lemons)