

## Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*



**Folk Name:** Dipper, Spirit Duck, Butter-ball

**Status:** Winter Visitor

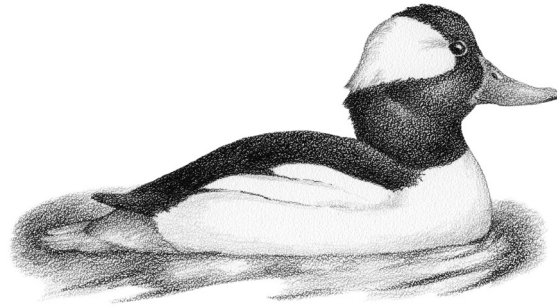
**Abundance:** Uncommon

**Habitat:** Lakes, ponds

The tiny Bufflehead has a very large black-and-white head with a short, stubby bill. The male's body is black above and white below. The Bufflehead is our smallest duck, just over one foot long. In 1869, Ornithologist Thomas Nuttall shared this description of the Bufflehead and how it was given a few of its common names:

This very elegant little Duck, so remarkable for its expertness in diving and disappearing from the sight, is another of those species, like the Golden-eye, to which the aborigines have given the name of Spirit, or Conjuror, from the impunity with which it usually escapes at the flash of the gun or the twang of the bow. ...They are often exceedingly fat... and...commonly known by the ridiculous name of Butter-box, or Butter-ball. Their flesh, however, like that of the [Ring-necked Duck], is not in very high request for the table; but the females and young... are very tender and well flavored. ...In February, the males are already engaged in jealous contests for the selection of their mates, and the birds are then assembled in small flocks of both sexes. The drake is now heard to quak, and seen repeatedly to move his head backward and forward in frolicksome humor of our Domestic Ducks; and by the middle of April or early in May every single individual will have disappeared on its way to the natal regions of the species in the North.

From their great propensity to diving, these birds are commonly known in the Carolinas by the name of Dippers; when wounded or hit with a shot, they will often dive or conceal themselves with such art that they seem to have buried themselves in water, and probably often remain wholly submerged to the bill, or disappear in the jaws of a pike.



“Frequently taken during winter.” —Leverett Loomis, Chester, 1885

Today, the Bufflehead is generally an uncommon duck here in the Central Carolinas, found in small numbers between October and March. Our earliest recorded arrival is 29 October in 2007, and a lingering female was seen on 28 April in 2010. Both of these Bufflehead were found at the McAlpine WWTP in the Town of Pineville. A total count of 130 were counted on the Pee Dee Christmas Bird Count on January 2, 2010. Most sightings are of 25 or fewer birds.



*Male and female Buffleheads. (Jeff Lemons)*