

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*



Folk Name: Old Squaw, Knock Molly

Status: Migrant, Winter Visitor

Abundance: Very Rare to Rare

Habitat: Lakes, ponds

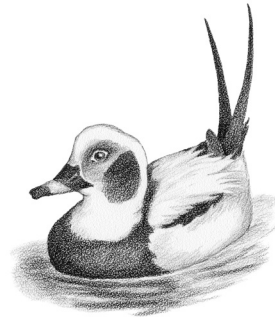
The Long-tailed Duck winters primarily in the sounds and bays along the coast of the Carolinas. It has been considered a “very rare” to “rare” find inland on freshwater lakes since it was first reported inland in Buncombe County, NC, in 1897. This duck is almost exclusively a carnivore, eating only small amounts of plant material, and, therefore, it is often mentioned as being one of the less desirable ducks for human consumption. The males have the longest tail feathers of any duck in the Carolinas. This duck has historically been known to associate with flocks of Surf Scoters when visiting the Carolina coast. In our region, Long-tailed Ducks are generally seen individually or in pairs, and they aren’t necessarily found in association with scoters or other ducks.

Long-tailed Ducks breed in the far north all the way to the Arctic tundra. T.G. Pearson shared this account of their courtship flight with North Carolina readers in 1909:

Seldom does a gunner trouble to shoot an old squaw. Dwight W. Huntington in “Our Feathered Game,” says “It is a swift flyer, expert diver, a fish eater and tough and undesirable bird for the table. Its evolutions in the air are said to be beautiful in the springtime, when the males chase the females about and all dive from the air into the water.”

Rhett Chamberlain provided the first, albeit brief, report of Long-tailed Duck in this region in a summary he wrote for the national magazine *Audubon Field Notes*: “several Oldsquaw were noted near Charlotte” in January 1947. The second report comes from Rowan County: Thom W. Blair found a drake that had landed on City Lake on January 12, 1954. Thirty years later, Billy Totten reported up to a dozen Long-tailed Ducks foraging on Lake Norman along the Iredell–Lincoln county line during the winter of 1983–1984. He saw the first one arrive around 15 December. This is by far the largest flock ever found in this region. David Wright found what was later described as an “amazing” inland flock, totaling seven Long-tailed Ducks, on Lake Norman on November 17, 1995. Wright reported two lingering on University Lake the following year from December 1996 into January 1997.

Reports of Long-tailed Duck in the Central Carolinas have become more regular since the turn of the twenty-first century. Dwayne Martin photographed a female in



Catawba County for a first county record on October 28, 2001. Steve Tracy spotted a pair on Robinwood Lake in Gaston County on February 17, 2003, providing a first county record as well. One of these birds remained on the lake until 3 March. One was counted on the Greater Mecklenburg Winter Waterfowl Survey on November 13, 2003. On December 20, 2004, Dwayne Martin located four on Lake Hickory.

Long-tailed Ducks have been reported annually in the region since 2012. Jeff Lemons photographed a female Long-tailed Duck on Lake Norman “just inside the Mecklenburg County line” on November 3, 2012. One was photographed in Lincoln County on November 24, 2013, and 4 days later a surprising group of six were photographed swimming on Lake Don T. Howell in Cabarrus County. Five were found on Lake Hickory, lingering the entire month of February 2014, and a drake was seen in Mecklenburg County during the same period. Hens were discovered on Lake Hickory on January 13, 2015, and on Lookout Shoals Lake on January 28, 2015. Our earliest recorded arrival date is 28 October, and our latest departure date in 3 March.

The North American Bird Conservation Initiative warns that the population of the Long-tailed Ducks is rapidly declining throughout its range.



Long-tailed Duck on Lake Norman. (Phil Fowler)