

## Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*



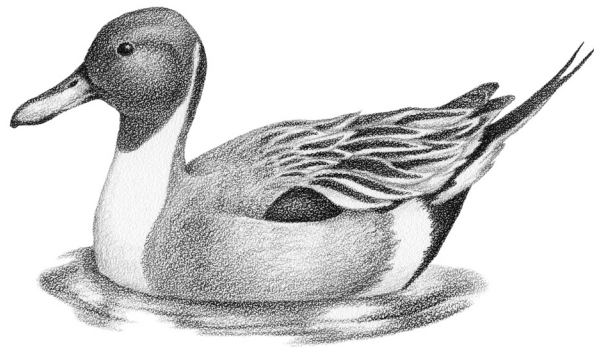
**Folk Name:** Neck Twister, Sprigtail  
**Status:** Migrant, Winter Resident/Visitor  
**Abundance:** Rare to Uncommon  
**Habitat:** Lakes, ponds

The Northern Pintail gets its name from long thin tail extensions found on the male, which can best be seen when the bird is resting on the water. For decades, people have lauded the pintail as a distinctive beauty of the duck world—employing adjectives like “elegant,” “refined,” “graceful,” “long-necked,” “stream-lined,” “thin-winged,” “neat,” “most attractive,” “striking,” “dazzling,” and even “glorious” to describe this dabbling duck. The pintail wasn’t just enjoyed for its good looks—it was also one of the most prized game birds for sport and for the table.

At one time, this beauty was the most widespread and numerous of all ducks in North America. A duck census conducted on the North Carolina coast at Lake Mattamuskeet in the winter of 1936–1937, estimated 42,000 pintails present with the next closest species being American Black Duck at 2,350 and American Wigeon at 2,200. Unfortunately, the Northern Pintail population has been in serious decline across the continent for the last half a century. Continental population estimates dropped to the lowest in 2002. Conservation efforts have had some impact and numbers are rising, but the population is still 20% below its long-term average. There is some hope for more pintail sightings both on the coast and inland, as one recent survey near Lake Mattamuskeet estimated 32,000 pintails present.

“Only a single instance, March 12, 1883, have I met with this species.” —Leverett Loomis, Chester County

The Northern Pintail has been a rare to uncommon duck here in the Central Carolinas. The bulk of our records are from December, January, and February, but



*Pintails at a wastewater treatment plant. (Jeff Lemons)*

many have been reported from here during migration as well. Our earliest arrival is 3 October in 1987, when a drake Northern Pintail showed up on the pond at Crowders Mountain State Park. Our latest departure is a lingering drake reported by John Scavetto on 6 May in 2014 on a pond near the Town of Pineville. A count of 587 estimated on the Pee Dee Christmas Bird Count on January 2, 2010, appears to be the highest in the region. Most sightings are of 20 or fewer birds.