

COMMON GOLDENEYE

Bucephala clangula



The Common Goldeneye received its name because of its distinctive, bright yellow eyes. This duck is also referred to as the “whistler” because of the sound made by the male’s wings in flight. The Goldeneye is a regular winter resident of the Jersey shore, although seldom seen before December because it is one of the last ducks to migrate south in the fall. Flocks of 25 or more usually favor a few certain areas of Barnegat Bay but singles can be found on almost any body of water.

The male has a black back with white sides, chest and belly but the most distinctive feature is the green head with the white, oval cheek

spot behind the bill. Their eyes are a golden yellow. The female has a gray body with a brown head, pale yellow or white eyes and a puffed-out nape area.

The Common Goldeneye breeds on deep lakes and rivers across the taiga of northern North America in nearby tree holes or nest boxes. Fish free ponds are the preferred nest sites because they ensure less competition for their invertebrate prey. They are surface divers and the flock will often dive together to catch their prey.

Goldeneye females lay one egg every other day until a clutch is complete with an average of 8-10 eggs. Once the clutch is complete, incuba-

tion begins and lasts about 30 days. The young can swim and feed themselves immediately after hatching but still require protection from the female. Some females will abandon their brood, leading to young joining another female’s brood until fledging at about 60 days. Males abandon the females early in incubation.

The Common Goldeneye population appears to be stable and represent about 2% of the total ducks in North America. In New Jersey they are only incidental in the hunters’ bag unless one sets up in an area frequented by Goldeneye.