

The Long-Tailed Duck

Clangula hyemalis

By Joshua Gant



Long-tailed Ducks, historically called Oldsquaw, are a species of sea duck that visits New Jersey in the winter. They can be found locally in and around inlets and in the surf. This species is one of the deepest diving ducks in the world, with regularly recorded dives over 200 feet in search of food. Due to their diet of crustaceans and shellfish they are not generally regarded as good table fare. During the spring, flocks of this species will fly north to polar regions where they breed. Long-tails are quite vocal gathering in noisy rafts in the hundreds before departing from New Jersey around March. They have a distinctive appearance that is not likely to be confused with any other local species.

The population of Long-tailed Ducks had been stable for many years. In recent years, they have been threatened by food source contamination and chemicals such as lead. Gill nets have been another documented threat. Organizations have been established to keep track of waterfowl populations. The Sea Duck Joint Venture started in 1999 as part of North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Partners include but are not limited to: the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, and National Audubon Society. Organizations such as this help establish and monitor bag limits and annual take for different sections of the country.

