

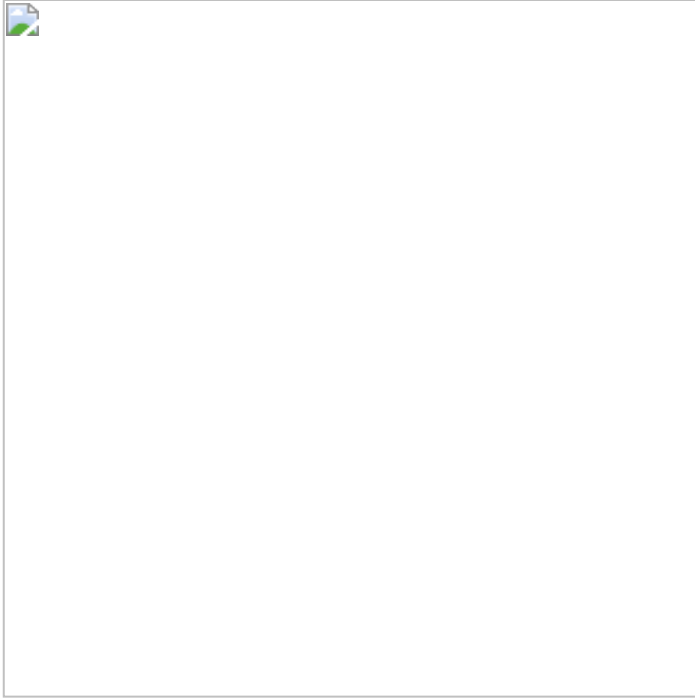
Highlights from Oct 17 Bird Walk at Harriman Lake

Chuck Aid. 10/19/2020 :



Blue-winged Teal (c) Mick Thompson

Harriman Lake, as with many of the metro reservoirs, is as low as it has been in decades. The water has gotten so low in some reservoirs that the birds have moved elsewhere. At Harriman, however, there is still enough water to attract both dabbling and diving ducks, and we saw a pretty nice mix on Saturday. This is that time of year when many species have moved on south or are in the process of doing so. With the ducks, specifically, we will lose two species, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal who are heading at least as far as the southern US and possibly as far as northern South America. The good news is that because of the number of duck species that breed far to the north and winter here in Colorado, coupled with a few species that are here year-round, we can see over twenty species in the winter around Denver. These Nearctic migrant ducks really help keep birding interesting between now at the advent of breeding season (which for some owls can start as early as December). Most of these wintering ducks have started arriving and have already been reported in the area.



Ring-necked Duck (c) Mick Thompson

Among these wintering ducks that are currently increasing in numbers we saw Gadwall, American Wigeon, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, and Hooded Merganser. We also saw some of the ever-present Mallards and one late-leaving male Blue-winged Teal. This latter was interesting because we are at the tail end of the “eclipse-plumage” time of year, when male ducks become cryptically colored (looking largely like their female counterparts) for a period of several weeks. Our Blue-wing on Saturday was still in the process of reacquiring his distinctive white facial crescent. Also, related to this, it appears now that the male Mallards have pretty much got all of their beautiful colors back.

Buffleheads

(c)

Mick

Thompson

This walk on Saturday was primarily to help beginning birders start to gain some familiarity with these ducks because they are so distinctive in their plumage and they don't tend to hide among a million leaves fifty feet overhead. So, while we had some other cool sightings, e.g. a beautiful adult Bald Eagle and a gazillion American Coots (a waterbird with lobed toes, and NOT a duck), we focused on our eight duck species, and even started working on some of the easier females, most notably the female Buffleheads with their oval white cheek-patch. These little females are our smallest North American duck – about 13” long and weighing 11 ozs. In contrast a Mallard is about 23 in long and weighs 36 ozs.

We'll be doing one more bird walk next month on November 14, and then won't have another walk until mid-January. Make sure to stock up on your bird seed.

Chuck

Harriman Lake, Oct 17, 2020

29 species

Canada Goose 6
Blue-winged Teal 1
Gadwall 12
American Wigeon 22
Mallard 18
Redhead 16
Ring-necked Duck 5
Bufflehead 18
Hooded Merganser 4
Pied-billed Grebe 4
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) 1
Mourning Dove 4
American Coot 150
Ring-billed Gull 25
Bald Eagle 1
Red-tailed Hawk 2
Downy Woodpecker 1
Northern Flicker 6
Blue Jay 5
Black-billed Magpie 4
American Crow 15
Common Raven 1
European Starling 12
American Robin 2
House Finch 18
Vesper Sparrow 1
Song Sparrow 5
Red-winged Blackbird 38
Yellow-rumped Warbler 2