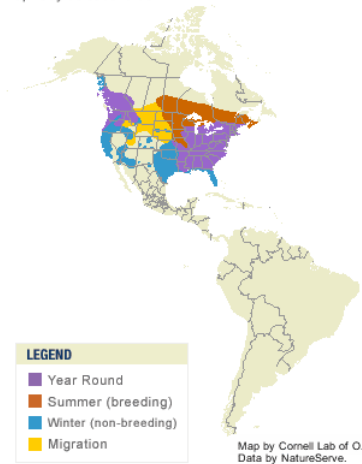


Hooded Merganser  
*Lophodytes cucullatus*



# HOODED MERGANSER

ANSERIFORMES  
Family: Anatidae  
Genus: *Lophodytes*  
Species: *cucullatus*



Male



Female

**Range:** North America

**Habitat:** mainly small freshwater bodies of water such as ponds and small estuaries where there is emergent aquatic vegetation but may inhabit larger wetlands, impoundments, flooded timber, and rivers. May also occur in brackish water as well

**Niche:** Aquatic, diurnal, carnivorous

**Wild diet:** dominated by fish, some aquatic insects and crab and crayfish and other crustaceans

**Zoo diet:**

**Life Span:** (Wild) (Captivity)

**Sexual dimorphism:** (see breeding season photos above) male eyes are yellow, female's brown

**Location in SF Zoo:** Bird string between Lemur Café and Koala exhibit

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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The hooded merganser is a species of small duck; it is the second smallest of the mergansers and the only merganser whose native habitat is restricted to North America. Females are greyish-brown in coloring with a narrow white patch over the lower breast and belly and also a reddish-brown crest extending from the back of their head. Males are similar in coloring during the non-breeding season but have yellow eyes whereas the females are brown. During the breeding season, the male's plumage is mainly black with white markings and chestnut flanks. They also have a large white patch on either side of their crest.

As a diving bird, mergansers hunt largely by sight, using their thin serrated bills for catching fish. They propel themselves with their webbed feet. They also feed by swimming with just their heads underwater. Their legs are set far back on their bodies to help with diving but they are awkward on land.

<b>Weight:</b> 16 – 31 oz
<b>Length:</b> 15.7 – 19.3 in
<b>Wingspan:</b> 23.6 – 26 in

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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Hooded Mergansers are fairly common and their populations are stable. They are listed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List. Population declines in the past have been linked with large scale deforestation as they are cavity nesters and require mature trees for nesting sites

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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Hooded Mergansers are short-distance migrants. They winter in the United States, mainly on the Mississippi flyway. They fly distinctively, with shallow, very rapid wingbeats. They take flight by running across the water, flying with fast wingbeats; when landing they skid to a stop on the water.

Hooded Mergansers are usually in pairs or small groups of up to 40 birds. They court in groups of one or more females and several males. Hooded Mergansers are usually silent, but they call during courtship and around nest sites; the males raise their crests, while giving a froglike croak. Once a female begins incubating eggs her mate abandons her. Incubating females may use a broken-wing display to protect eggs or nestlings from raccoons, mink, black rat snakes, black bears, pine martens, European Starlings, Northern Flickers, Red-headed Woodpeckers, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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Females nest in cavities of dead trees; they prefer cavities 4–15 feet off the ground near water. Breeding occurs anytime between the end of February and the end of June, depending on the region. The female will lay a clutch but only begin incubation when the last egg has been laid, thereby permitting synchronous hatching. All hatchlings are consequently of the same size, which facilitates efficient parental care.

Hooded Mergansers often lay their eggs in other female merganser's nests. ("brood parasitism") Female Hooded Mergansers can lay up to about 13 eggs in a clutch, but nests have been found with up to 44 eggs in them.

Hatchlings are precocial and usually leave the nest within 24 hours after they hatch. Once they leave the nest, the young are capable of diving and foraging, but the dives are short and shallow during their first week. Ducklings remain with the female for warmth and protection.

<b>Incubation:</b> 26 – 41 days <b># of eggs:</b> 10 - 13 eggs	<b>Sexual Maturity:</b> <b>Fledging:</b>
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## MISCELLANEOUS

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Hooded Mergansers can change the refractive properties of their eyes to improve their underwater vision. In addition, they have an extra eyelid, called a "nictitating membrane," which is transparent and helps protect the eye during swimming, like a pair of goggles.

### **Sources:**

Handbook of the Birds of the World Vol I © 1992, Lynx Edicions  
[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hooded\\_Merganser/id](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hooded_Merganser/id)  
<http://www.ducks.org/hunting/waterfowl-id/hooded-merganser>

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