

Upland Game Birds Introduction

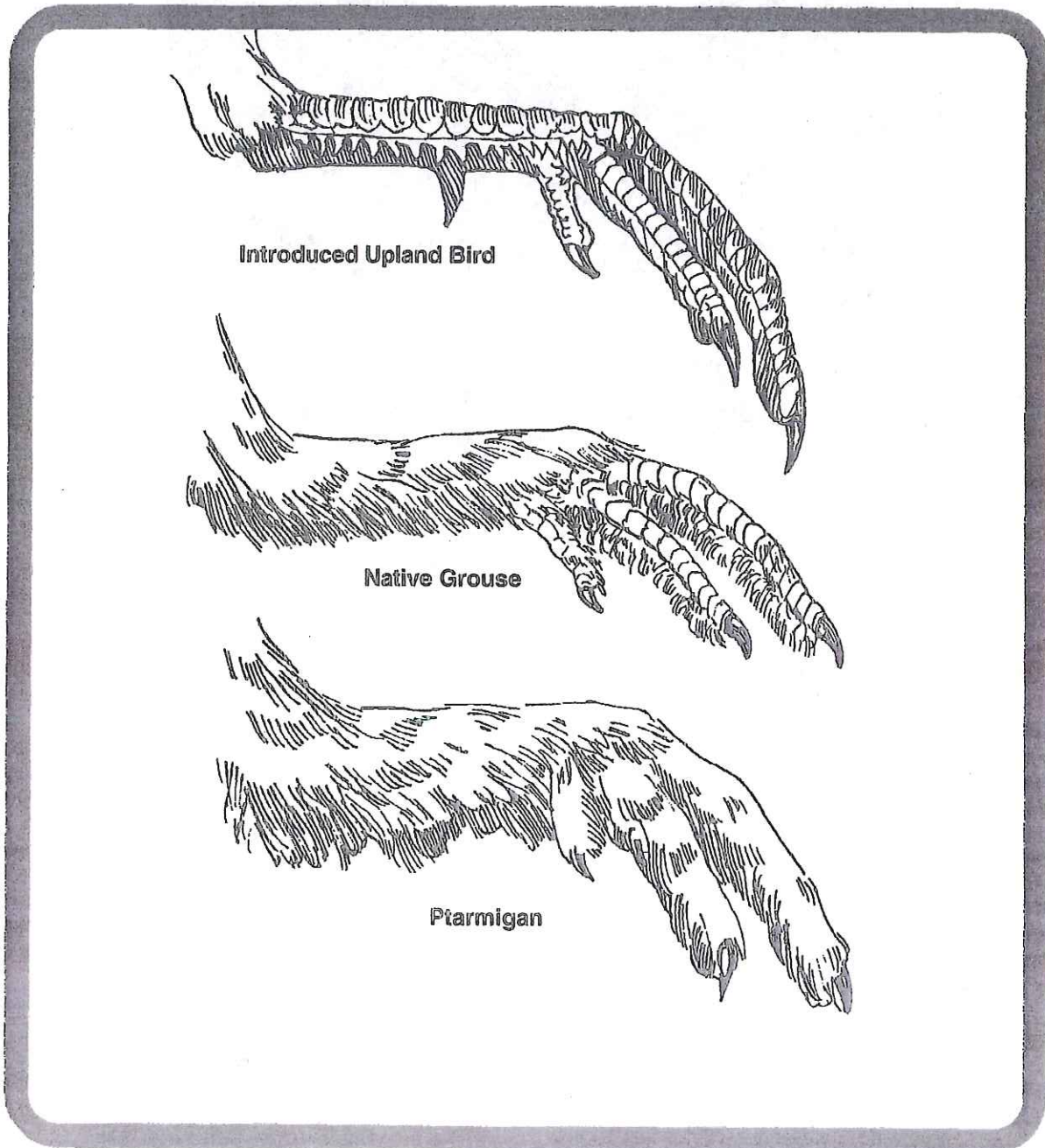
The upland game birds of North America include the wild turkey, several varieties of grouse and grouse-like birds, quail, partridges and pheasant. All are gallinaceous or chicken-like ground birds with heavy bodies, short, heavy bills and short rounded wings. And all but three-the ring necked pheasant, chukar partridge and Hungarian partridge-are native species.

In no one area of the country are all of these game birds to be found. The ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant and bobwhite quail are the upland birds of the East and Midwest. The other groups and grouse-like species are found in the Northwest and over much of Canada. The

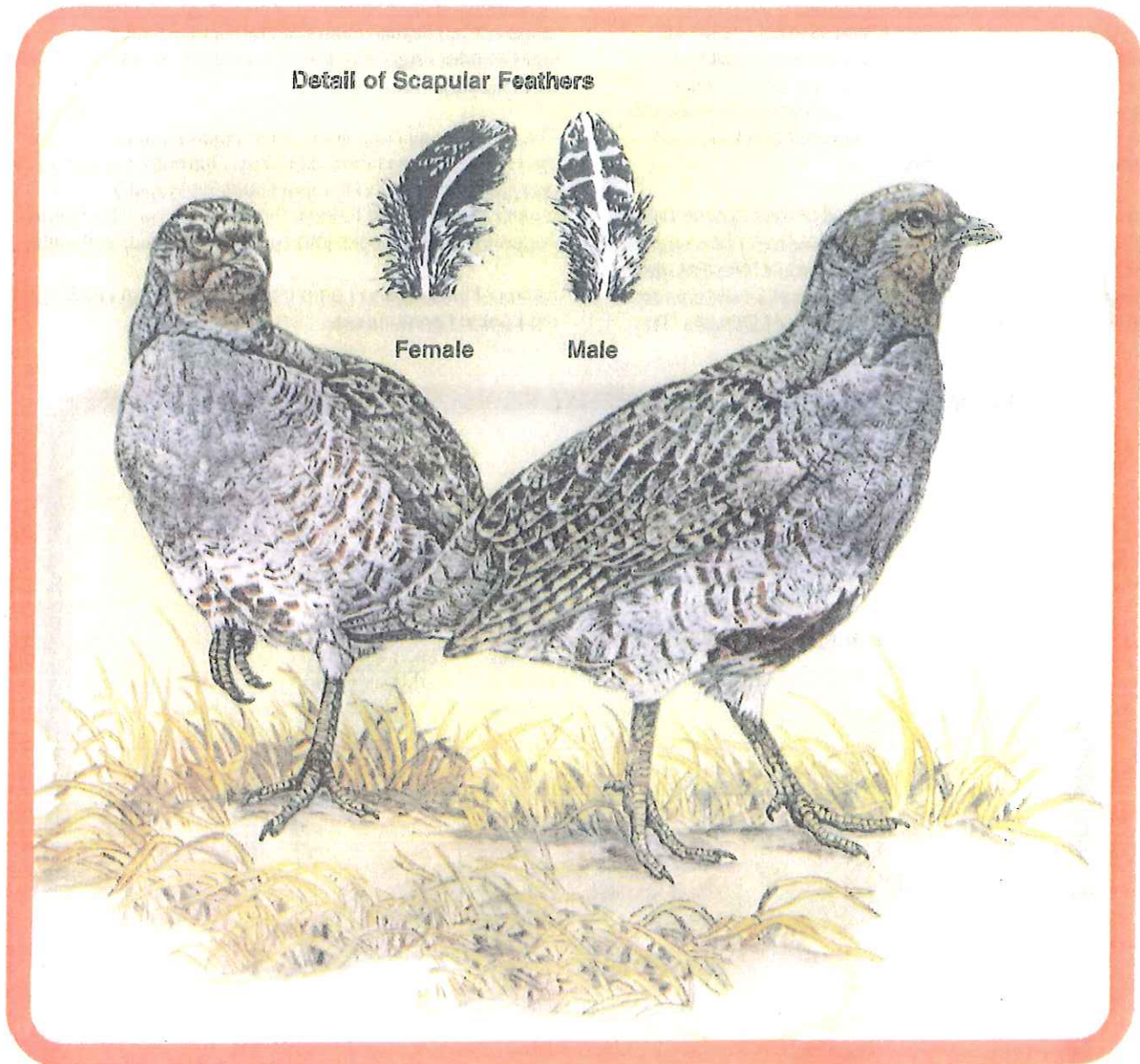
several species of western quail occupy the mixed woodlands of the Pacific Coast (California and mountain quail) and the drier regions of the Southwest (scaled, Gambel's and Harlequin quail).

The most nearly ubiquitous of the upland game birds in the United States is the wild turkey. Currently, huntable populations are found in most states due mainly to the reintroduction of wild turkeys through the release of birds trapped from wild flocks into suitable, unoccupied habitat.

Each of these upland game birds offers its own challenge to the upland game hunter.



Hungarian Partridge



Identification

The Hungarian partridge, sometimes called the gray partridge, is not native to the United States. Like other introduced upland birds, its legs and feet are bare and unfeathered. It is a brownish-gray colored bird with short brown tail feathers that are obvious and distinctive when viewed in flight. Male birds or cocks have a solid brown horseshoe marking on their lower breast. Hens and juveniles have a similar mark but it is broken and less distinct. Both hens and cocks weigh about 14 oz. (400 g).

Habits

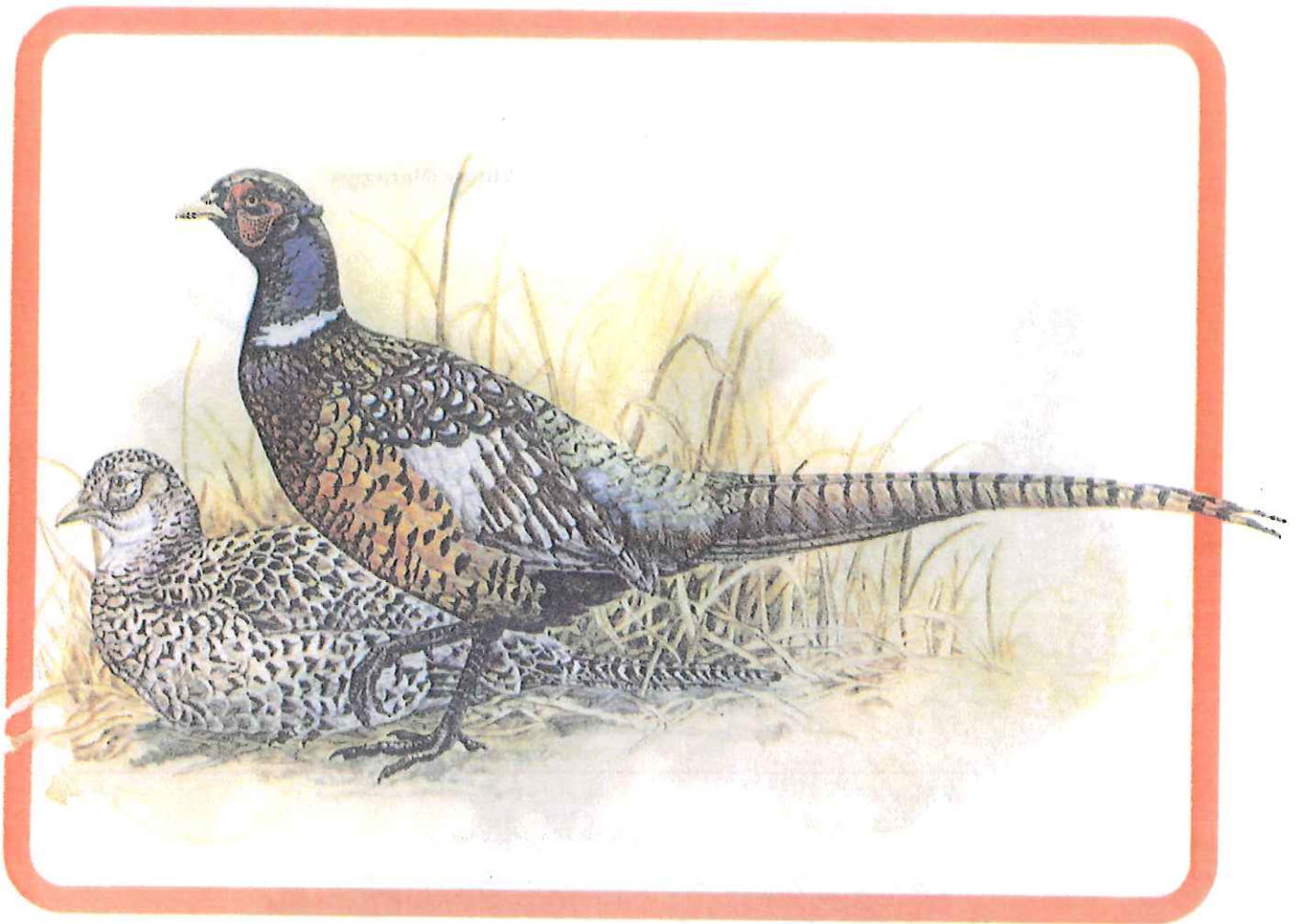
Hungarian partridges were released in many locations in the United States between 1899 and 1912. The birds became well established however only in those agricultural

areas where small grains provide suitable food and cover. They are now found throughout the cultivated portions of the prairie and parkland regions of the northern U.S. and southern Canada where they feed on grain, grass seeds and other vegetation.

Birds generally occur in coveys of from six to 15 birds and are commonly found around abandoned farmsteads and shelterbelts.

Hungarian partridge may burrow into snowdrifts for protection and survival. When hunting partridge, be prepared for the shock of a covey exploding from cover in all directions. Occasionally the birds may escape by running through the stubble rather than taking flight.

Ring-Necked Pheasant



Identification

The male or cock, ring-necked pheasant is unlikely to be confused with other game birds because of its brilliant markings. The cock is brightly colored and has a distinctive red eye patch on an iridescent purple head. The long, tapered tail may reach 15 to 18 inches (38 to 45 cm). Cocks are also distinguished by the presence of pointed spurs on the back of each scaly, unfeathered leg. The spurs on the adult cock are longer and more pointed than those of the young cock.

The hen pheasant is a more subdued, pale-brown color and resembles the sharp-tailed grouse. The tail of the hen pheasant is longer than that of the sharp-tailed grouse.

A mature cock weighs about three pounds (1300 g); a hen weighs about two pounds (900 g).

Habits

The ring-necked pheasant is not native to North America. It was introduced to the U.S. in 1818 and released in other

areas later. Pheasants spread rapidly and quickly occupied much of the corn and grain-producing areas of the U.S. and southern Canada. A number of color variations of ring-necked pheasants have also been released. Occasionally, hunters may take birds of this species that vary in color from dark black to almost white.

Pheasants can usually be seen feeding in open cultivated fields during early morning and late afternoons. Young birds feed exclusively on insects while older birds feed on grass seeds and grain.

One of the wariest birds, pheasants normally take advantage of ground cover to run from the approaching hunter. Hunters using a well-trained dog will have a decided advantage over those who do not. When forced to flush, cocks take to the air with a noisy, cackling sound.

Unlike the Hungarian partridge, pheasants will not burrow into snow drifts for protection during severe blizzards. Unless they can find dense cover, they may perish.

Willow Ptarmigan



Winter Plumage

Identification

In winter, the willow ptarmigan is white except for a black tail, beak and eyes. In this winter plumage both sexes look alike and cannot readily be distinguished.

A cock in summer plumage has a brown head, neck and breast. The female is a mottled, yellowish brown. White wings are good field marks for summer identification.

Mature adults of both sexes weigh slightly over one pound (450 g). Ptarmigan have a completely feathered foot.

Habits

Willow ptarmigan are found in the northwest and northern provinces of Canada and in Alaska. Although willow ptarmigan gather in large flocks in fall and winter, they are difficult to find. Against the snow, their white plumage makes them almost invisible. They are easiest to locate while perched in bushes. Ptarmigan are extremely curious and can often be closely approached. The willow ptarmigan feeds extensively on buds of the willow although its diet also includes alder, birch buds and twigs, and the flowers of many plants. Much of their range is not easily accessible, and therefore the species is not heavily hunted.

White-Tailed Ptarmigan



Identification

In both summer and winter plumages, both sexes are similar in appearance. In summer, they are a mottled brown with patches of black and white. Unlike the willow ptarmigan, they are completely white in winter except for the black beak and eyes. The white tail of this species is thus a distinctive feature of both summer and winter plumages.

Both sexes weigh the same at about 10 to 12 ounces (280-340 g).

Habits

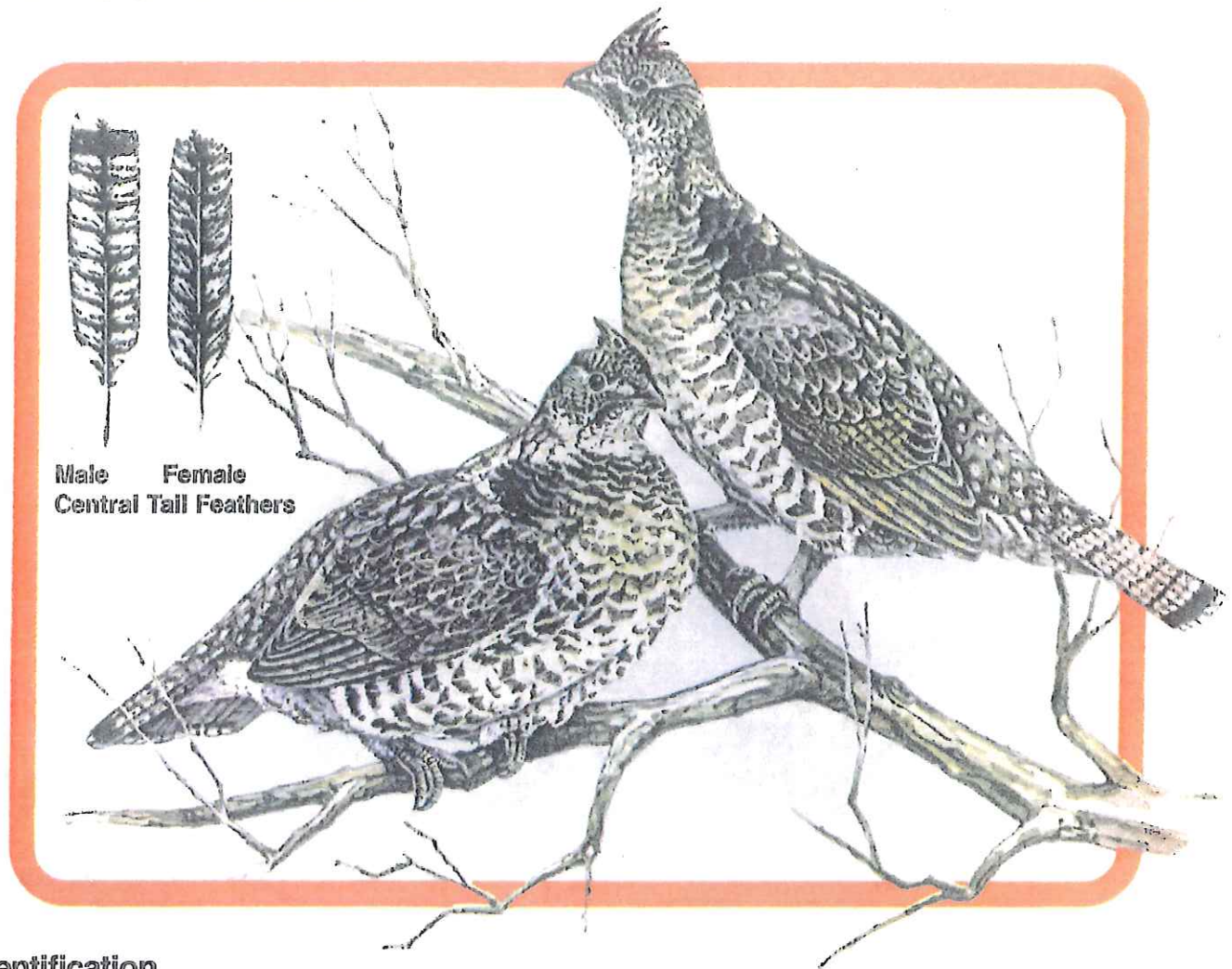
White-tailed ptarmigan are found in the higher mountain

regions of several western and northwestern states, the northwestern provinces of Canada and in Alaska. Their diet consists of flowers, berries, buds and twigs.

Throughout the summer they occur in small family groups. By fall, the family groups have merged into larger flocks. Protective coloration and seasonal changes in plumage add to the difficulty of hunting ptarmigan. Perhaps because of their reliance on this excellent camouflage, they may be easily approached before flushing.

Because of the relative inaccessibility of its habitat, it is not often seen and is rarely taken by hunters.

Ruffed Grouse



Identification

The ruffed grouse gets its name from the "ruff" of dark feathers on each side of its neck. The ruff is more prominent on the cock than the hen. The bird's color may be either gray or reddish brown; both color phases are common. The head is crested. The long, slightly rounded, fan shaped tail is barred and has a broad, black band near the outer edge. The band on the cock's tail is usually complete and distinct, while on the hen it is broken by central unbanded tail feathers. An adult cock weighs about one and a half pounds (680 g), slightly more than the mature hen.

Habits

Ruffed grouse are found in northwestern New England, the eastern and Great Lakes states and most in Canada. They usually occur in association with aspen and willow cover or in areas of mixed hardwood and conifers and occasionally they may be found around cultivated fields.

The low muffled "drumming" of the ruffed grouse is a familiar spring sound in North America. As part of the mating ritual display, the cock finds a suitable "drumming log" within

the established territory. Standing on the log, he beats his wings, slowly at first, then much more rapidly. The drumming sound can be heard for up to half a mile.

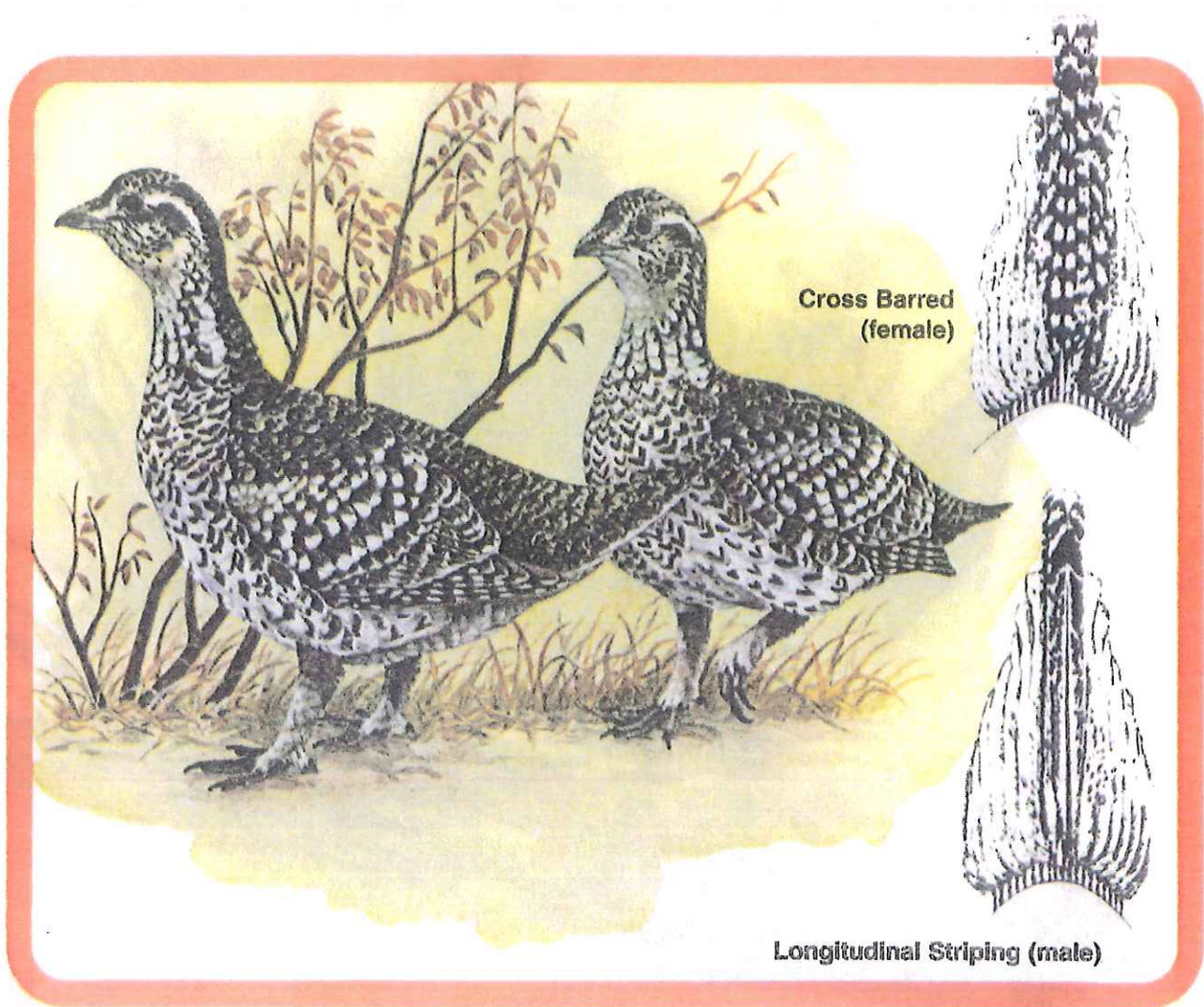
Family groups, after remaining together through summer, break up and disperse in the fall. Through most of the hunting season the birds are found singly, but some regrouping takes place in early winter.

In summer and fall, the diet of the ruffed grouse is green plants such as clover and a variety of seeds and berries. In winter, when these foods are scarce, the ruffed grouse eats poplar and willow buds.

Ruffed grouse are a popular game bird over most of their range in the U.S. While they can be approached quite closely in areas where they are not hunted extensively, grouse are much more wary when they are subjected to constant hunting. Their abrupt erratic flight provides a challenge to even the most practiced hunter.

Ruffed grouse are the only native grouse that may be commonly found in urban areas.

Sharp-Tailed Grouse



Identification

Sharp-tailed grouse are a pale-brown color, speckled with black and white. In flight, the short, white tail distinguishes this bird from the ruffed grouse. Mature birds of either sex weigh slightly less than two pounds (900 g).

The cock has a yellow comb over the eyes. Two sharp, tail feathers extend beyond the rest of the short tail. The markings on these feathers differ between the cock and the hen. These tail feathers give the sharp-tailed grouse its name.

Habits

Sharp-tailed grouse are found in the northern states of the mid-west and in central Canada. They prefer brush to open areas. Patches of bush scattered throughout grain and grassland areas are ideal habitat.

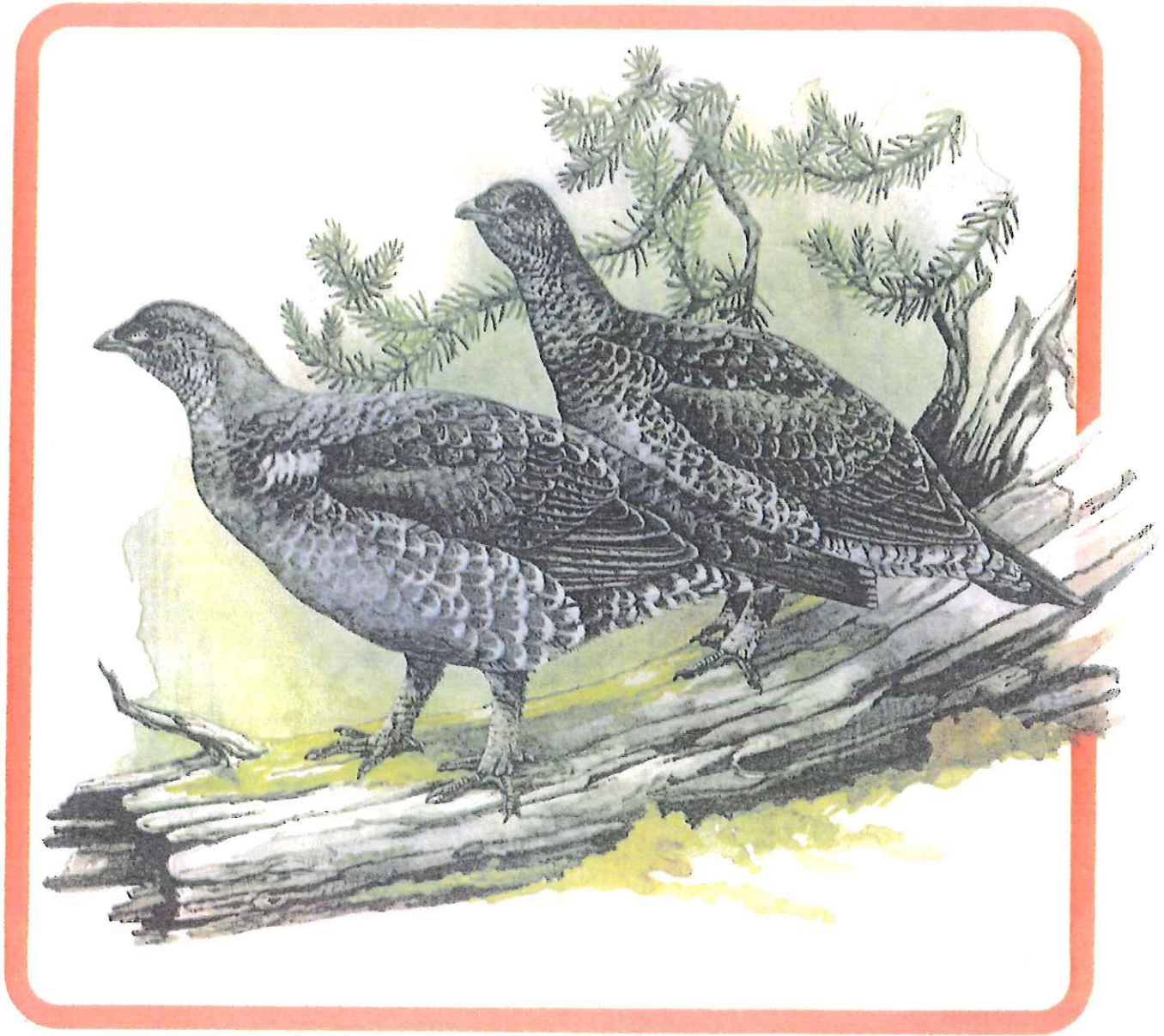
In early fall the birds are found in small family groups. By late fall they have merged into large flocks containing as many as 100 birds.

The sharp-tailed grouse may often be seen feeding in grain or stubble fields in early morning. Later in the day they commonly roost and sun themselves on bales, stacks or in trees. On cold frosty mornings, they often sit motionless in tall trees or bushes.

When flushed, birds usually make a "clucking" sound as they fly away.

Hunters who are aware of the importance of traditional "dancing grounds" to the species can use this knowledge to help locate sharp-tail flocks during the hunting season.

Blue Grouse



Identification

Blue grouse have no well-defined markings but their slate gray color, solid black tail and large size are distinguishing features. Adult birds commonly weigh two and three-quarter to three and a half pounds (1250 g - 1590 g). Their color is darkest on the back and brownish on the wings. The long, square tail of the blue grouse is usually tipped with a band of gray.

Habits

Blue grouse are found in the mountains and foothills of the western United States and northwestern Canada. These birds winter in the high coniferous forests near

timberline. They eat the needles and buds of trees, and when available, the leaves of shrubs. In spring, blue grouse move down to lightly wooded mountain valleys or to aspen forests of the foothills to nest and raise their young. Family groups break up before fall. The birds make their way back, singly or in small groups, to the high coniferous forests where they will stay all winter.

During the fall, blue grouse are usually found alone at the high elevations near timberline. For this reason, few hunters pursue them. When flushed, they will invariably fly downhill.

Spruce Grouse



Identification

Spruce Grouse cocks have a black breast and white spots on the sides. The hen is a dark rusty brown. Both sexes have black and white barring on the breast and a tail tipped with pale brown.

Franklin's grouse, a variety of spruce grouse, does not have this brown-tipped tail. It has white spots on the sides of the base of the tail.

Adults of both sexes weigh about one and half pounds (545g)—about half the size of the Blue grouse.

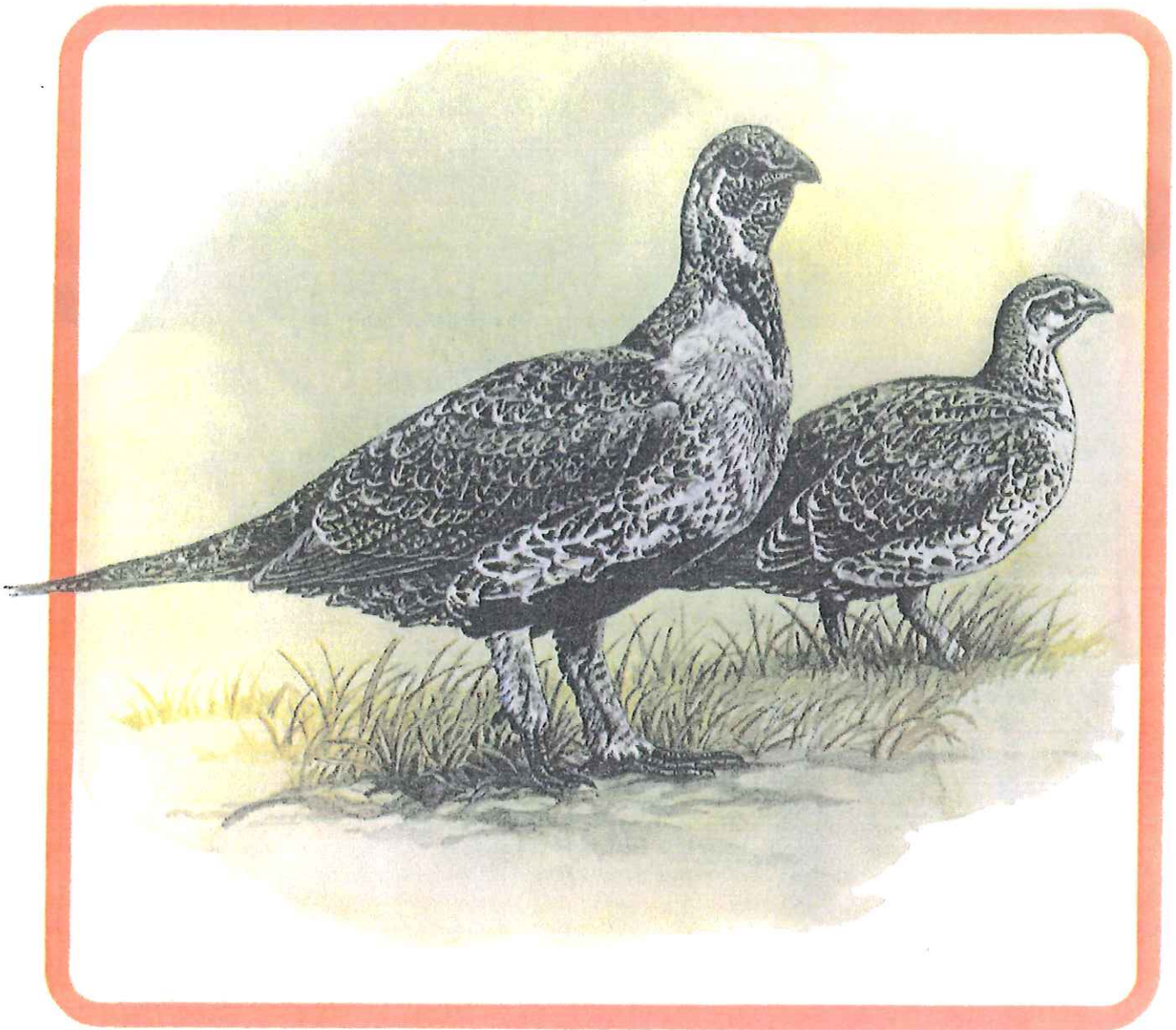
Habits

Spruce grouse are found throughout most of the coniferous forests of the northwestern United States and Canada. In spring and summer they feed on the ground, eating insects, leaves and berries. In fall and winter, they feed almost exclusively on conifer needles. This change in the birds' diet strongly flavors the meat.

When flushed, the spruce grouse will usually flutter up into a spruce tree and sit, relying on its coloration for camouflage and protection. Because of its apparent lack of fear, the spruce grouse is often called "fool hen."

Spruce grouse are generally found singly or in small groups during the hunting season. They frequent lower elevations than do blue grouse.

Sage Grouse



Identification

A large upland bird, a mature cock may weigh as much as seven pounds (3000 g). Hens are smaller at three to four and a half pounds (1300-2000 g). Both sexes are similar in appearance. Their backs and wings are brownish-gray while their undersides are lighter in coloration. The large, black abdominal patch and long pointed tail feathers of equal length are distinctive characteristics of the species.

Habits

Sage grouse will often try to elude the hunter by running through the sage rather than taking flight.

Distribution of sage grouse is restricted to the sage brush plains of the northwestern and western regions of the United States. During the fall, sage leaves and buds form the major part of its diet, imparting a strong flavor to the flesh. At other times of the year, a variety of plants and insects are also eaten. Sage grouse use traditional dancing grounds for their elaborate spring mating ritual. By late fall, small family groups will have merged into large coveys and can usually be found on or near these same dancing grounds.

Their large size and striking appearance make the sage grouse a handsome trophy.

Bobwhite Quail



Identification

The sexes are very different in appearance. The Bobwhite is a chunky reddish-brown bird with a gray tail. A mature bird will measure 9.5—10.6 inches. (24-27 cm) in length. Males have a white throat and eye-stripe that extends back to the base of the neck, and a black collar. Females have buffy colored plumage on the chin, throat and eye-stripe in place of the white coloration of the males. The females also lack the black colors of the male.

Habits

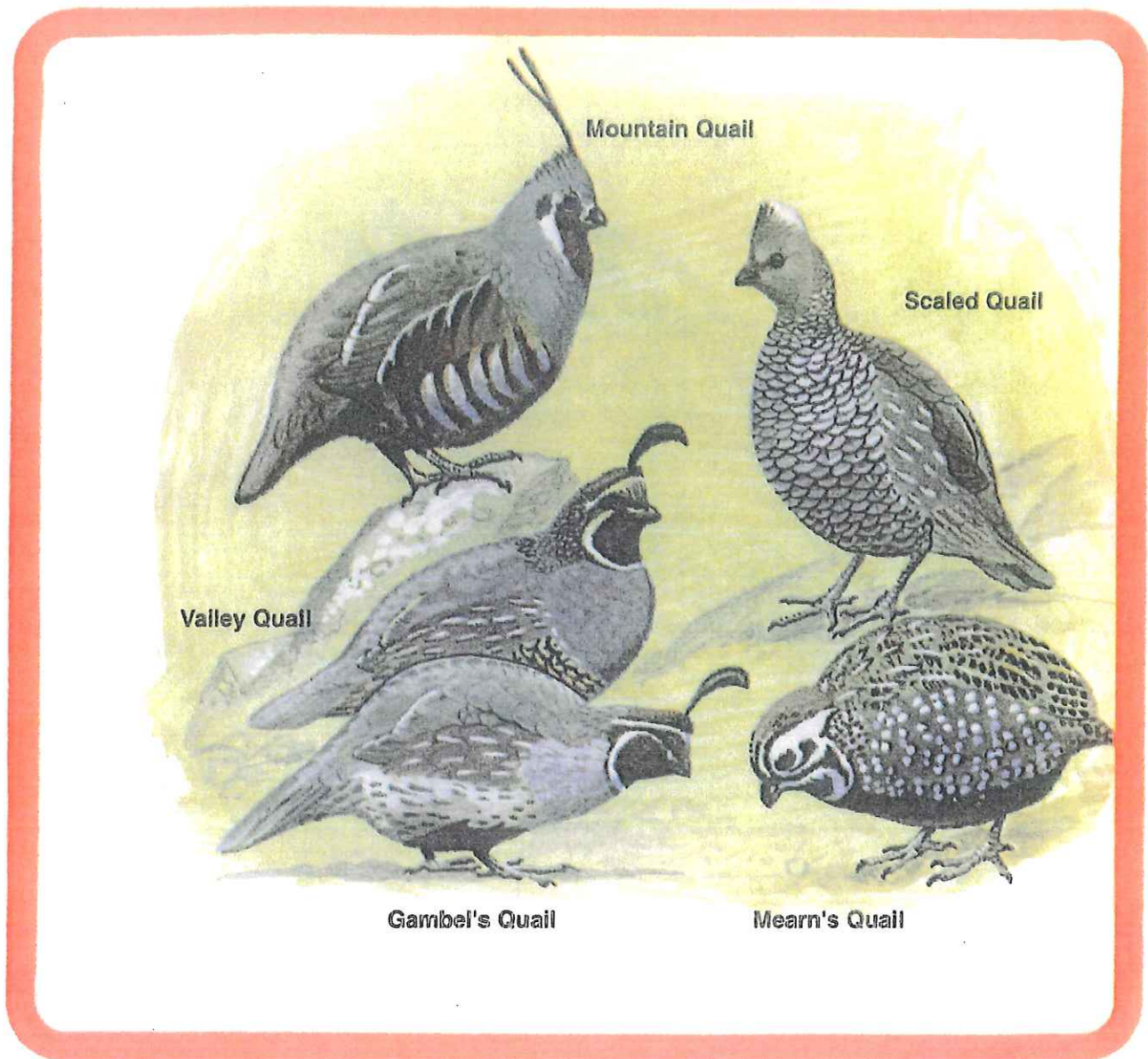
The range of this bird covers virtually all of the eastern United States north to southern Maine, New York, southern Ontario, Central Wisconsin, and Central Minnesota, west to Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico and south to parts of Mexico. The bobwhite quail is mainly a farmland game bird.

Ideal habitat for this species is a combination of cultivated fields, brush and weed patches and wood lots. Brushy fence rows and brush piles are conducive to high populations. The food of Bobwhite includes seeds, such as lespedeza, corn, ragweed, sorghum, and oats, supplemented with small insects.

Breeding begins as early as January in the south, and early March in the north. The average clutch size is 12-15 eggs, and the incubation period is 23 days.

Bobwhite quail is the number one game bird of eastern and southern United States. The exploding flush of coveys and singles and fast darting flight make this bird a challenge for the hunter.

Western Quail



Identification

The valley or California quail is the most popular game bird among the different western quail due to its abundance, its readiness to fly, and its habit of holding to a point. Native to the foothills of the Southwest, this quail has been introduced to many parts of the West. Males and females have distinctive, forward curved crests; the belly plumage contains black scaled markings.

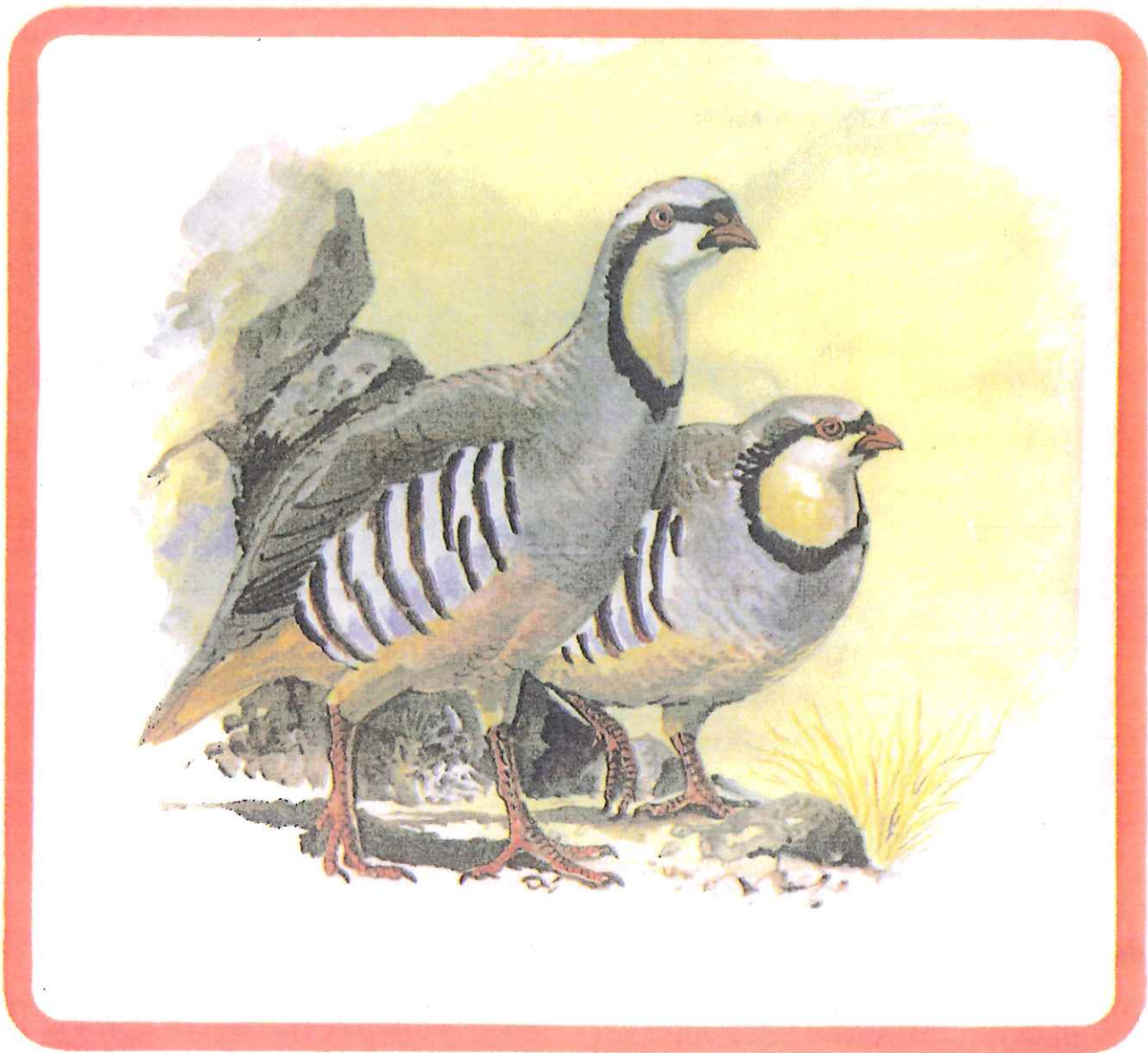
The Gambel's quail which is slightly smaller and lighter in weight than the California, inhabits the Sonoran Desert regions of the southwest. Recognized by its black belly, it is similar in outline to the Valley Quail.

Scaled or Blue Quail share some habitat with the western bobwhite, and gets the name "cottontop" from the white tip of its short crest. It prefers arid grassland habitats.

The Mountain Quail are larger than the other western quail and prefer the brushy clearings of the Pacific Northwest. The straight-plumed crest of this species is distinctive.

Mearns's or Montezuma Quail, also known as Harlequin or Foot Quail is found in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. It tends to freeze and remain motionless until nearly stepped on using its black, spotted feathers as camouflage.

Chukar



Identification

An Adult Chukar may range from 13-15.5 inches (31.5-40 cm) in length. The sexes are identical in appearance, with white or buffy-white cheeks and throat separated from the breast by a black collar that passes through the eyes. The upper parts are grayish brown to olive, while the under parts are shades of black and chestnut. The bill, feet, and legs are reddish, and mature males have slight spurs on the legs.

Habits

The first introductions of this game bird to the United States were made in the mountains of the western states. The present range of the species is from southern British Columbia southwards through eastern Washington,

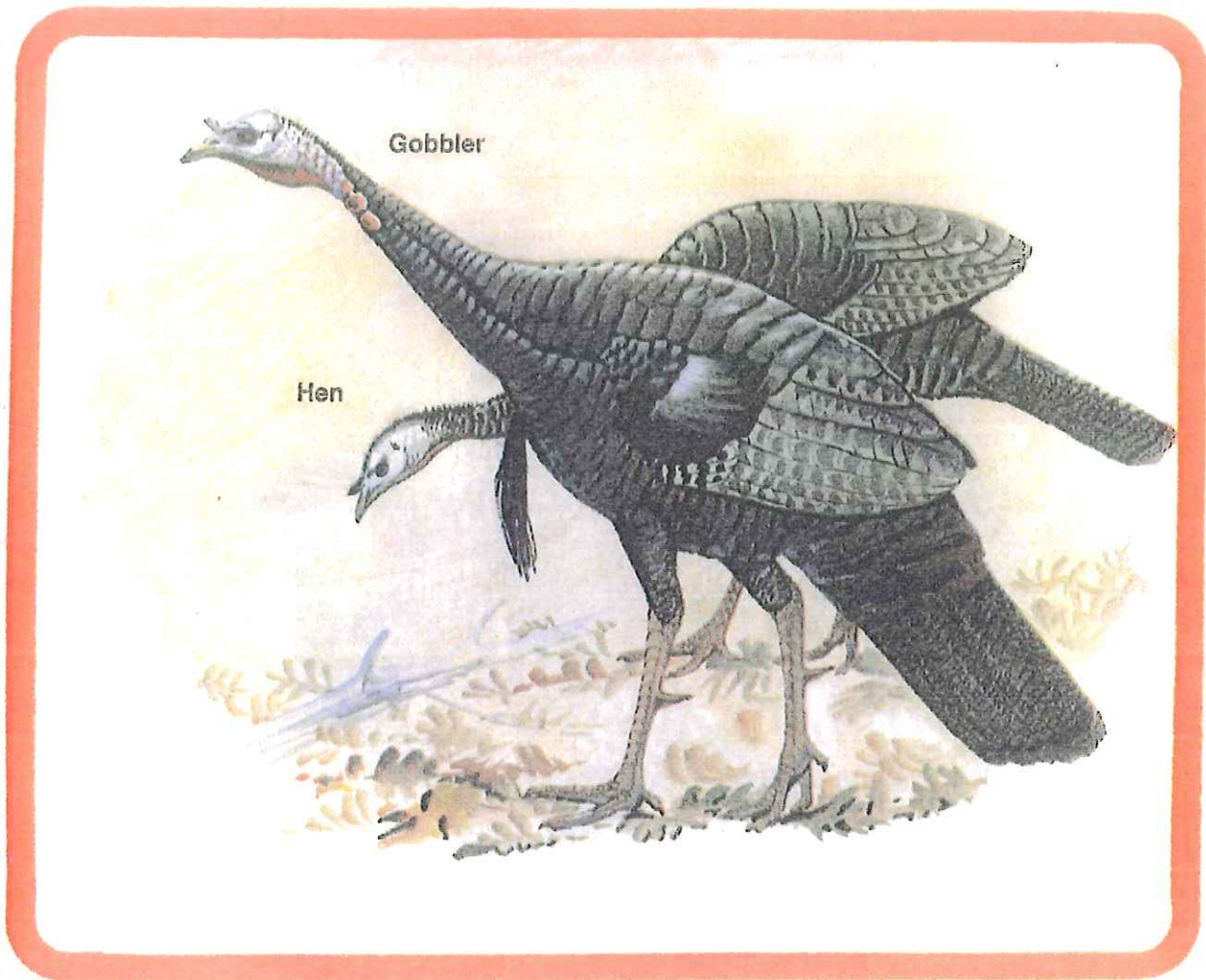
Oregon and California and east through Nevada, Idaho, Utah, western Colorado and Montana. Chukars are found on talus slopes, cliffs and bluffs with surrounding sage brush and cheatgrass. These birds can survive bitter cold temperature but not large amounts of snow.

They feed on grasses, especially cheatgrass, seeds, grains and insects.

Breeding takes place between February and mid-March. The egg clutch is from 14 to 20 eggs and the incubation period is 24 days.

Hunting this game bird requires top physical condition and excellent shooting ability.

Wild Turkey



Identification

The wild turkey is the largest upland game bird in the United States. An adult bird weighs between 13-20 pounds (4.8-7.4 kg) with some exceptional individuals weighing 24 pounds (8.9 kg) or better.

Plumage of the wild turkeys is basically the same in both the hen and gobbler, with shades of dark brown, brown and black predominant in the feathers. The most colorful part of the turkey is the head, which varies from hues of bluish gray and red, to neutral gray and purple; the appearance of the variations depending on the season and the degree of excitement of the bird.

The legs, wings and tails are proportionately longer than those of domestic turkeys. Spurs of about 1 inch (2.5 cm) in length are characteristic of an adult gobbler. The second most prominent characteristic of the gobbler is the beard; beards, however, occasionally are found on hens, too. The beard of a mature gobbler will measure 3.5-9 inches (8.7-22.5 cm).

Habits

Mixed hardwood forests with scattered openings are ideal habitats for wild turkeys. The exact composition of the forest will vary with the geographical location. Recent experiences with transplanting wild turkeys into new areas show that this species also flourishes in woodlot and stream valley-type habitat. As a result of modern game management practices and game restoration programs, healthy, huntable and self-sustaining turkey populations now exist in almost every state in the nation.

The primary food of the wild turkey is nuts, berries, seeds, tubers and insects. Wild turkeys are polygamous. Mating takes place in April and May. Hens lay 4 to 10 eggs in ground nests and incubate them for 28-30 days before they hatch.

Depending on the state, turkeys of either sex may be hunted in the fall and gobblers only in the spring. Certain states have just a spring gobbler season, during which the gobblers can be hunted only by calling so that nesting hens are not disturbed.

Waterfowl Introduction

Identification

This large and important group of game birds includes the wild ducks and geese that occur in North America. They nest each spring, raise their young over the summer, and migrate south in the fall. Many other waterfowl are nongame, protected species, which include: loons, grebes, whooping cranes and a wide variety of shore birds. Care must be taken not to confuse these birds with the migratory game birds that may be legally hunted—ducks and geese. Coots, rails and snipe are other game birds that may be taken by the hunter.

All hunters have a responsibility to correctly identify their targets before shooting. When hunting waterfowl, the ability to accurately identify and recognize each species can provide additional enjoyment to the hunt.

What to Look For

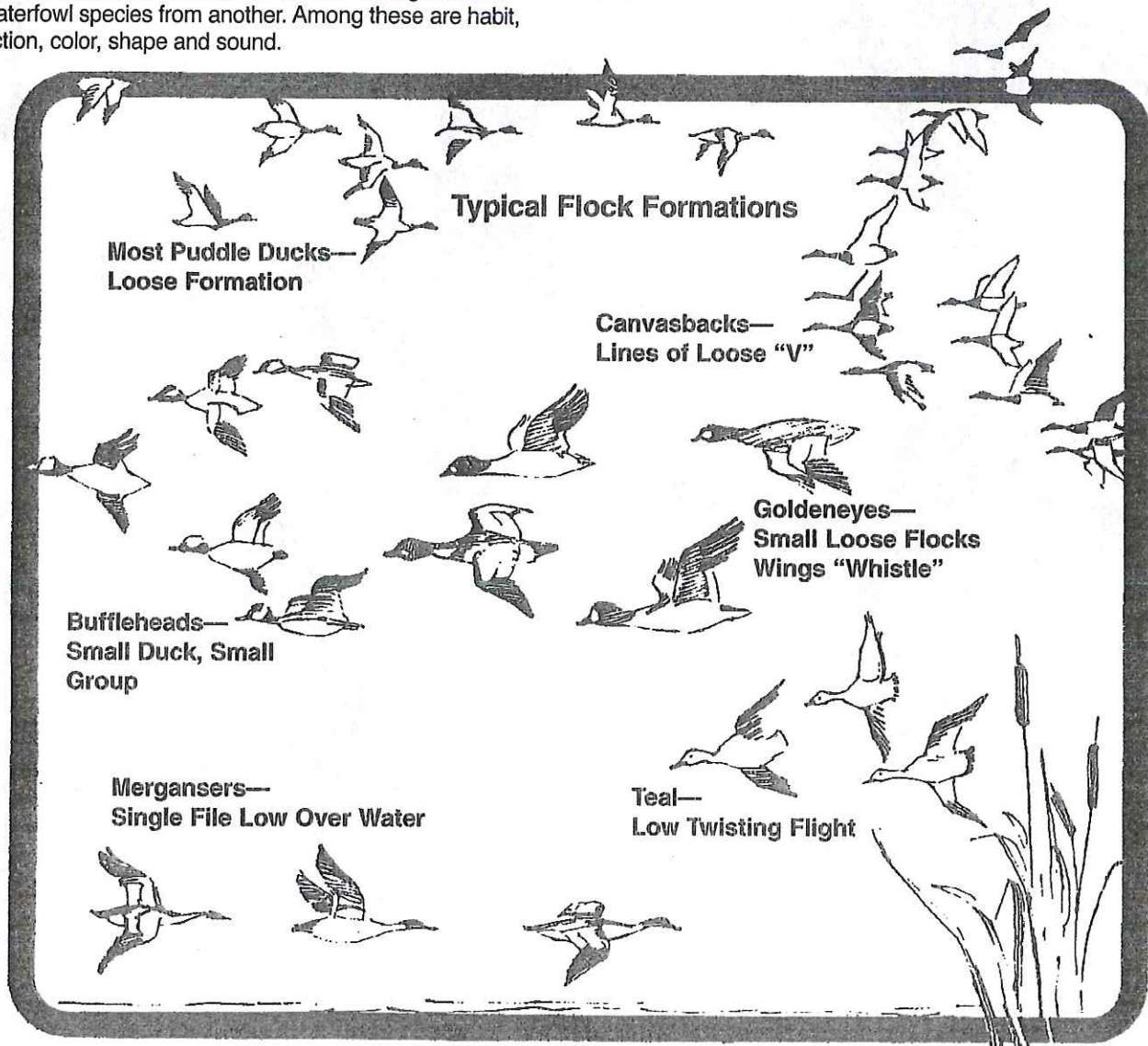
Several characteristics can be used to distinguish one waterfowl species from another. Among these are habit, action, color, shape and sound.

Habits

Each species of waterfowl usually has special habitat requirements. Being familiar with these requirements will aid you in identifying waterfowl in their various habitats. Some species, such as dabbling ducks like the mallard, prefer shallow marshes and small potholes. Others, such as the canvasback, prefer deeper bodies of water. Mallards and pintails are usually the only ducks feeding in stubble or on swathed grain fields.

Action

Wing beat and flocking behavior are also useful identification characteristics. Flying mallard and pintails form long lines and have a slow wing beat characteristic of pond or dabbling ducks. Canvasbacks fly in shifting, waving lines and have a fast wing beat common to diving ducks. Shovelers and teal flash by in small bunches.

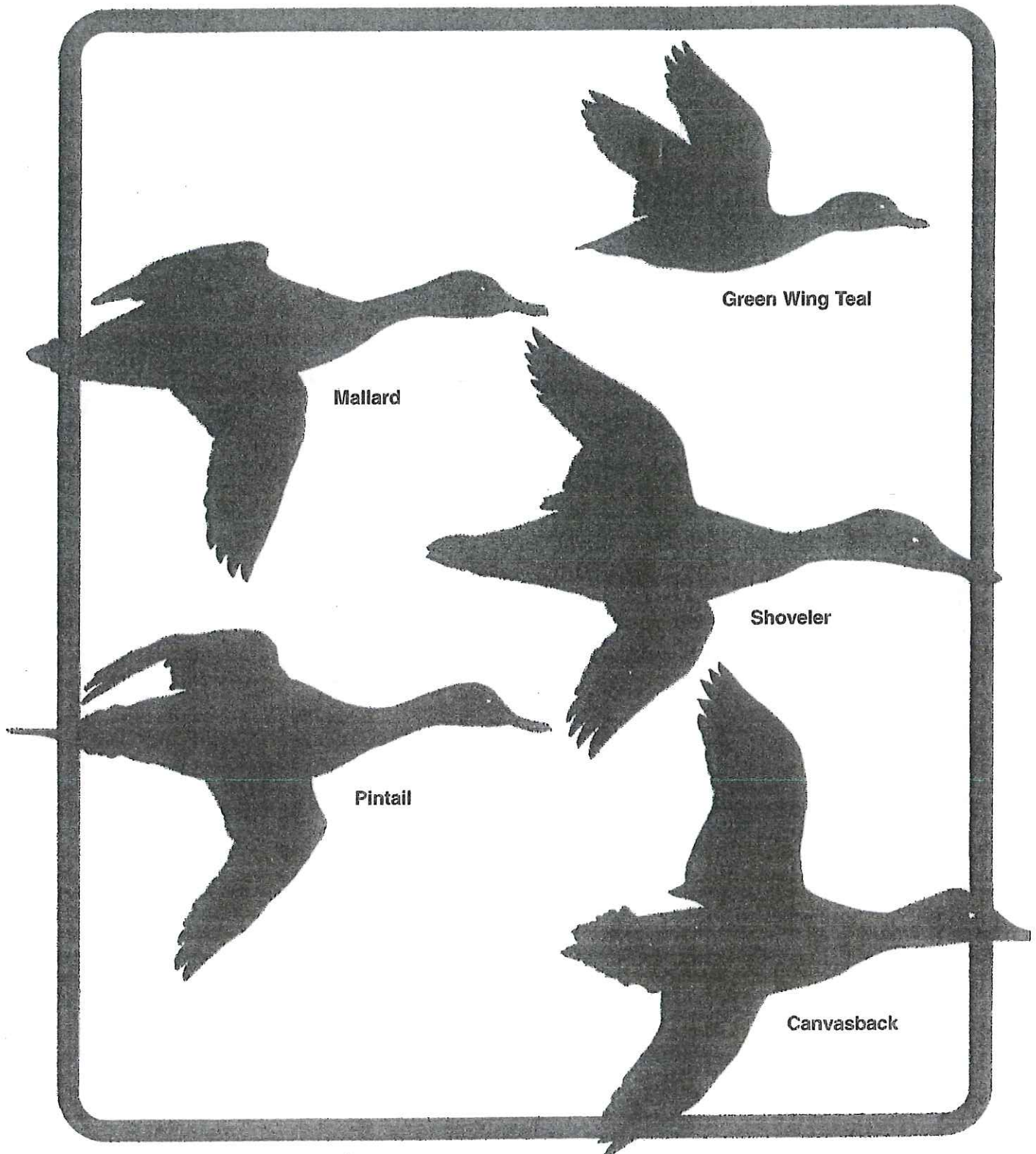


Color and Shape

Waterfowl silhouettes will vary, showing large or small heads, broad or narrow bills, fat or slender bodies, long or short tails. Colors can be seen at close range. Depending on light conditions, birds may not appear in their true color, but color patterns can be a key to their identity.

Sound

The sound of their voice or the noise made by their wings when in flight may both be used as aids in identifying waterfowl. Wings of goldeneye whistle in flight while those of most other ducks do not. Not all ducks quack. Many whistle or squeal. Experience can help you to identify waterfowl from their sounds.



Eclipse Plumage

Most ducks shed their body feathers twice each year. Nearly all adult drakes lose their bright plumage after mating and for a few weeks resemble adult females. This hen-like appearance is called the eclipse plumage. Return to breeding coloration varies between species. Blue-winged teal and shovelers retain eclipse plumage into the winter.

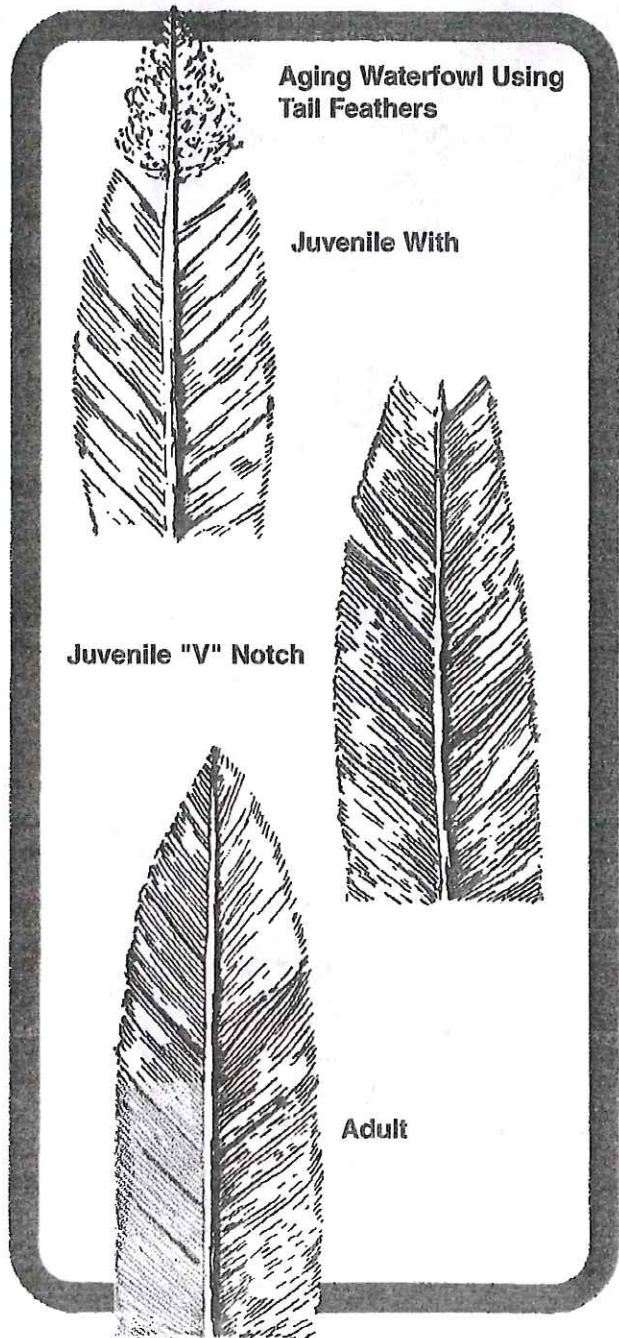
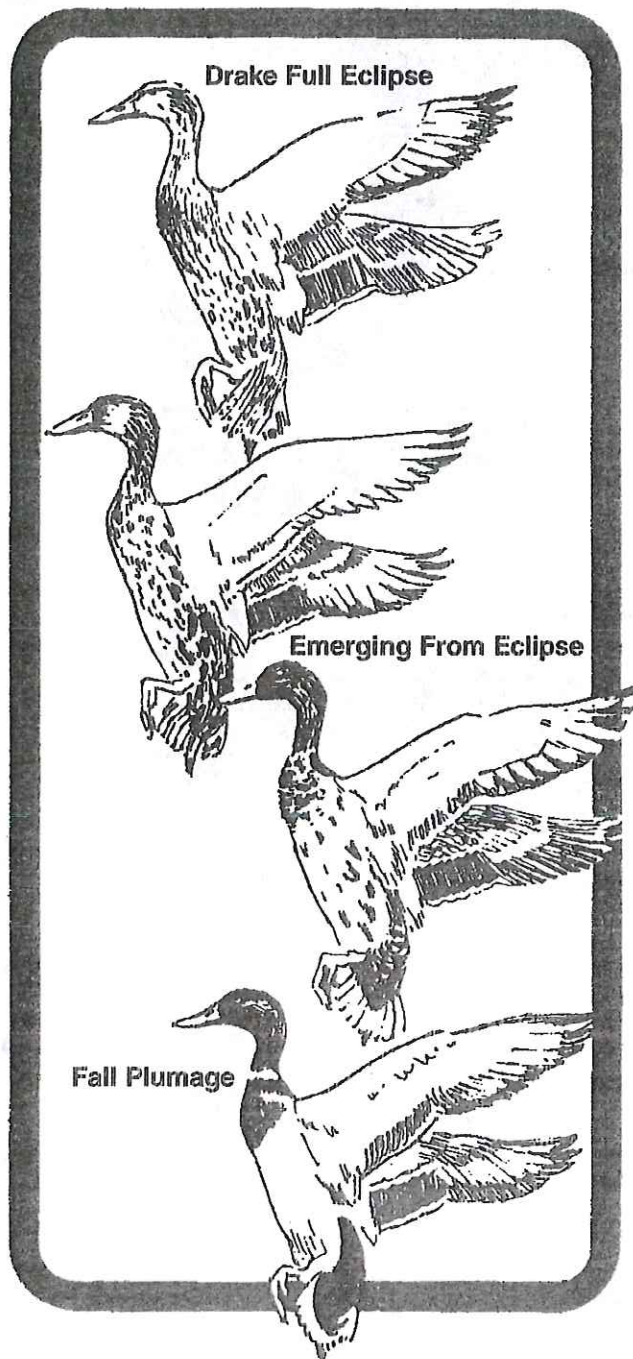
Wing feathers are only shed once a year. Wing colors are always the same and are the most reliable feature for identifying a duck in hand.

Plumage of juvenile ducks early in the fall is very similar

to that of the adult female. During the fall, juvenile males start to change to their first adult breeding plumage. Therefore, a juvenile drake mallard with green feathers on the head may be confused with an adult drake coming out of eclipse plumage.

Age Determination

A simple technique for accurately identifying juvenile ducks is to closely examine the tips of the bird's tail feathers. If any of the feathers have noticed tips, the bird is a juvenile. By late fall however, these juvenile tail feathers will have molted and been replaced by pointed feathers. Other methods will then be needed for accurate aging.



Ducks

Based on their habitats ducks are commonly separated into two broad groups—puddle ducks and diving ducks.

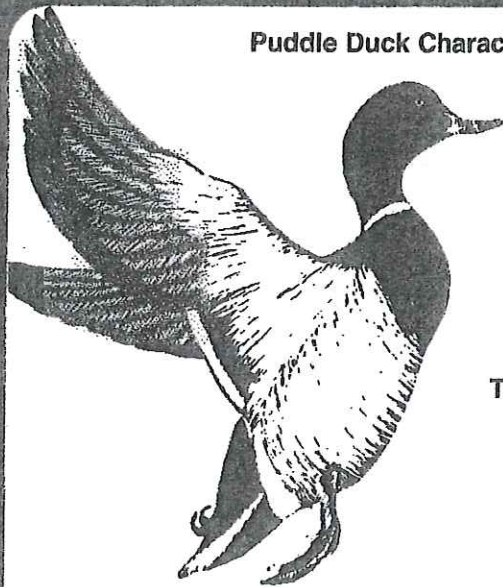
Puddle Ducks

Puddle ducks usually frequent shallow marshes and river edges rather than large lakes and bays. They usually feed by “dabbling” or dunking their heads in the water. They ride

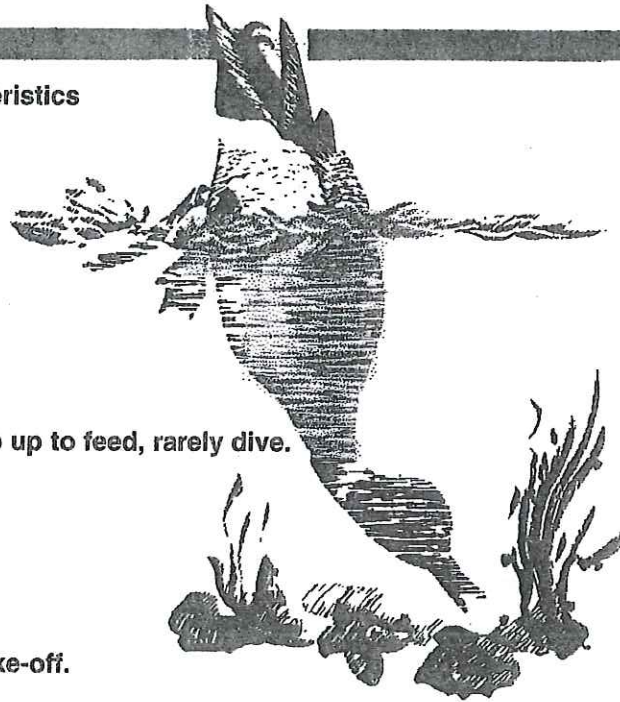
high on the water and jump directly upward when taking off. The colored wing patch, called the “speculum,” is generally iridescent and bright.

Ducks feeding on croplands will probably be puddle ducks because this group can walk and run on land. Their diet is mostly vegetable.

Puddle Duck Characteristics



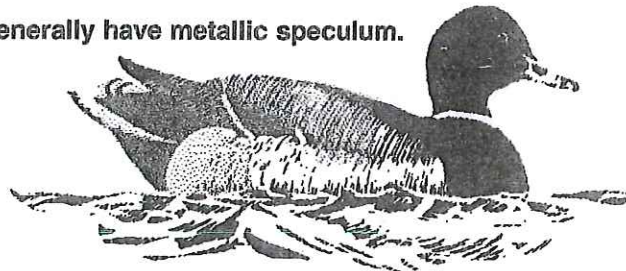
Tip up to feed, rarely dive.



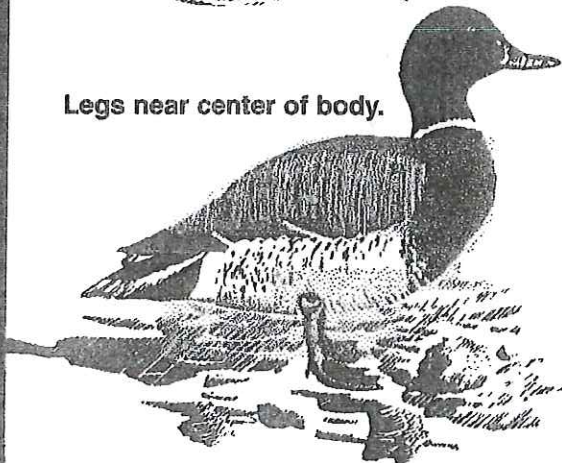
Spring into air on take-off.



Generally have metallic speculum.

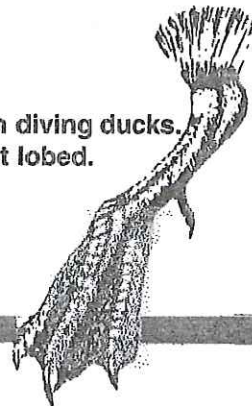


Legs near center of body.



Usually swim with tail clear of water.

Smaller foot than in diving ducks.
Hind toe not lobed.



Diving Ducks

Diving Ducks usually frequent large, deeper lakes and rivers. They feed by diving, often to considerable depths. To escape danger they can swim a considerable distance underwater. They may then emerge only far enough to expose their head or bill before submerging again.

Wing patches of diving ducks lack the iridescence of those of puddle ducks. To compensate for their short

tails, they use their large paddle-shaped feet as rudders in flight. These are often visible when they are flying. When launching into flight, most of this group run or patter along the water before becoming airborne. Because their wings are small in proportion to their bodies, they have a rapid wingbeat in comparison to that of puddle ducks.

Their diet is chiefly fish, shellfish, and aquatic plants. The flavor of their meat is often different than that of puddle ducks, which feed on grain.

Diving Duck Characteristics

Dive completely underwater to feed.

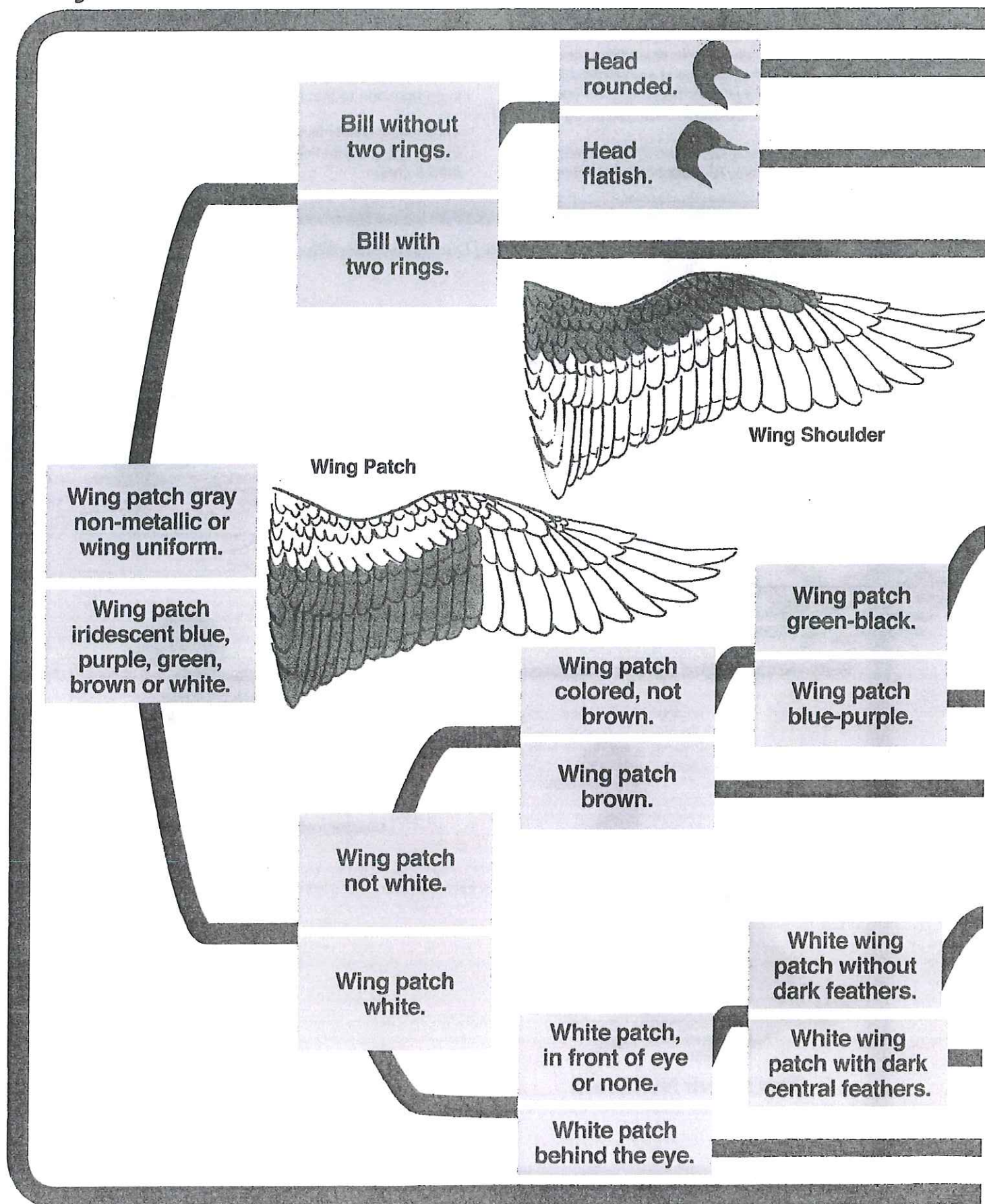
Patter along surface for some distance to take-off.

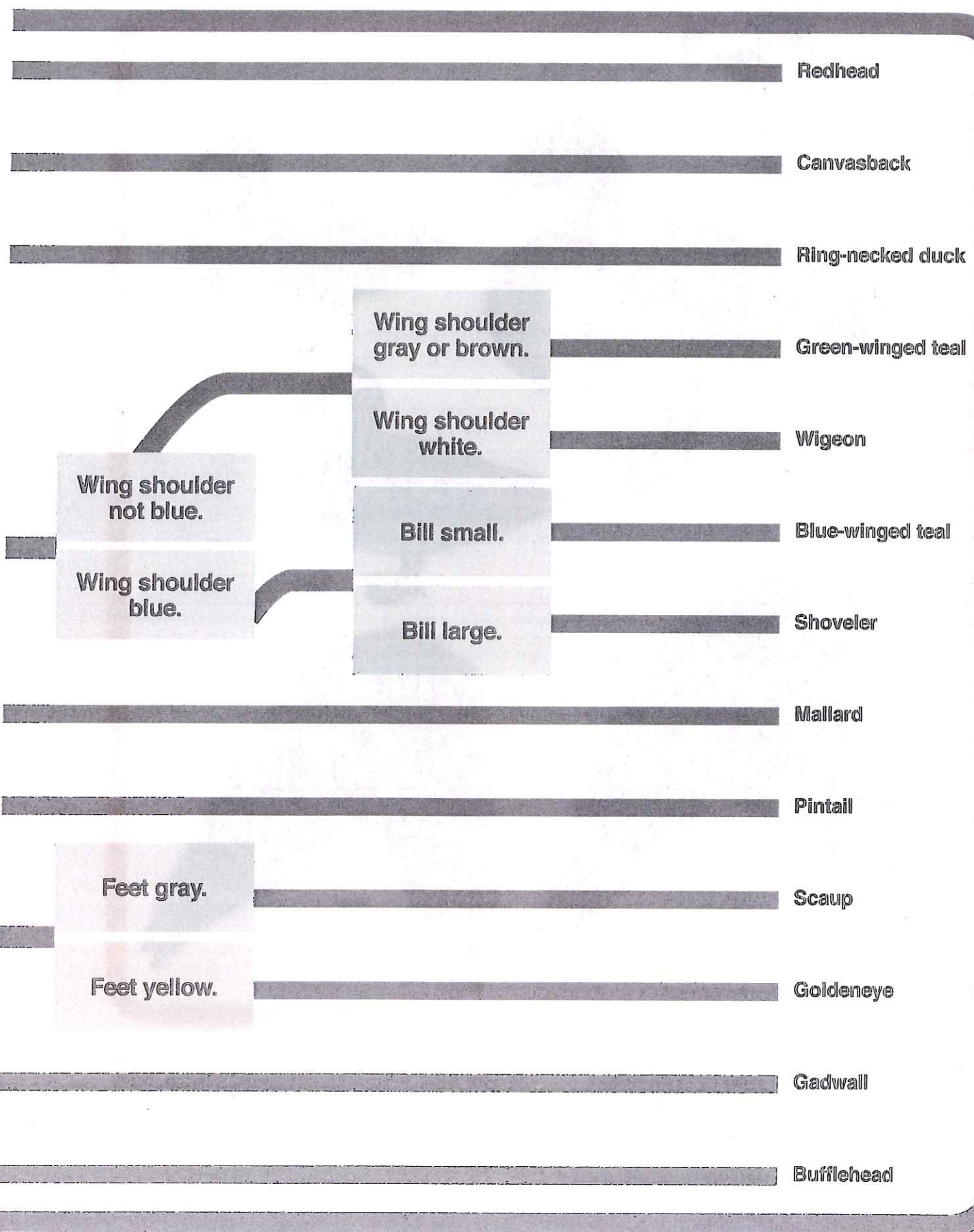
Usually swim with tail close to water.

Legs set near rear of body.

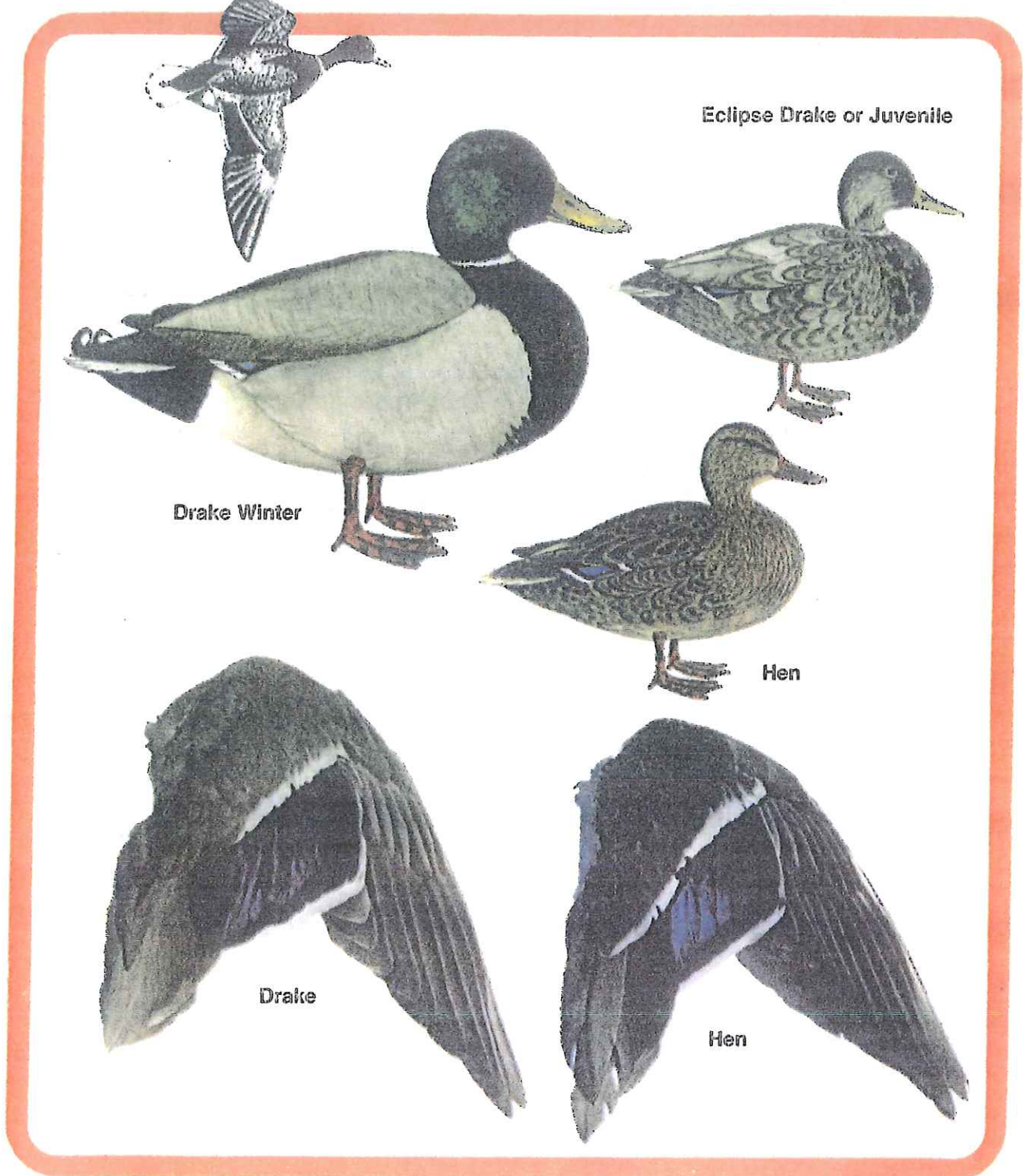
Hind toe lobed.

Key to Waterfowl





Mallard

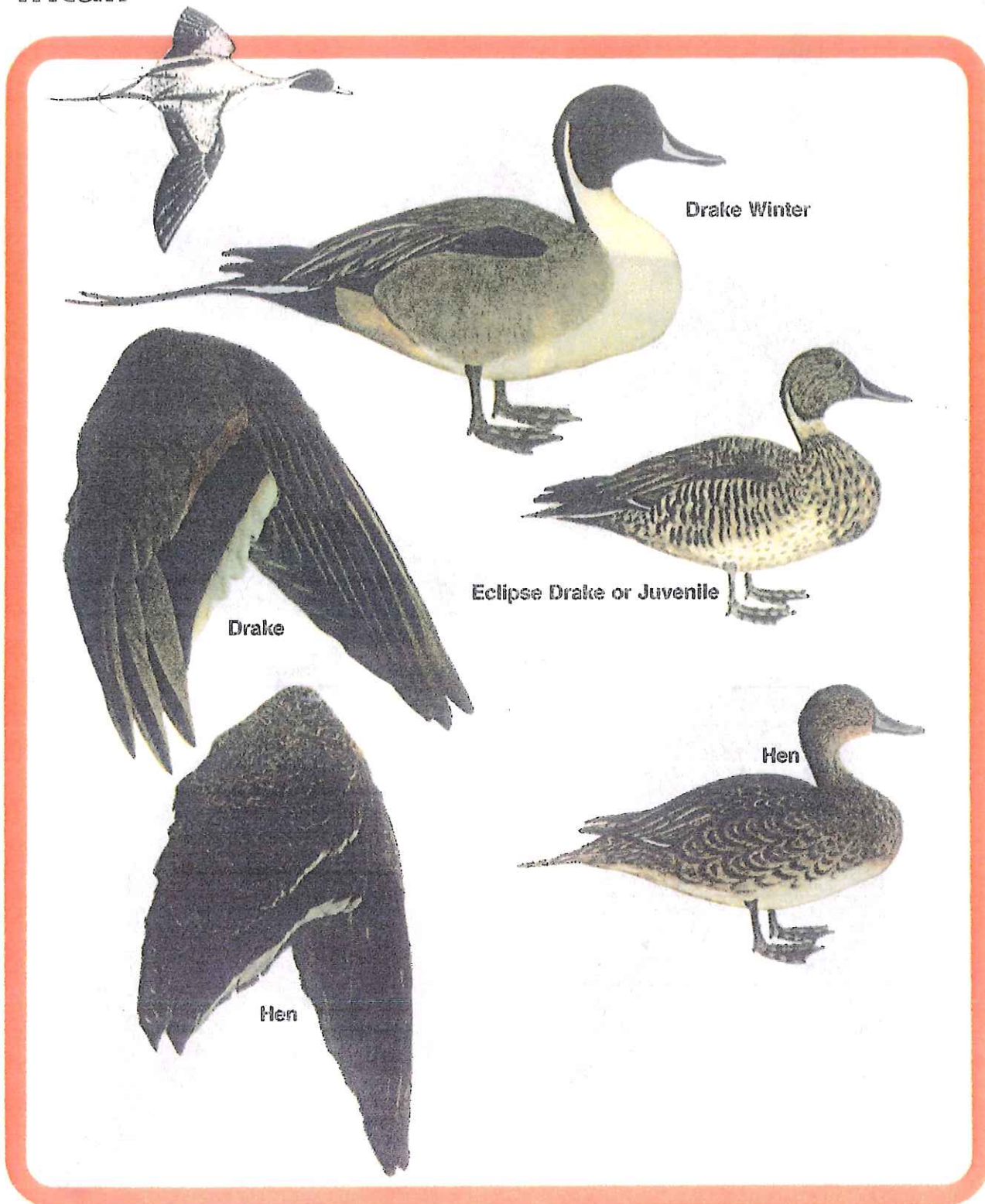


Mallards are among the largest—two and a half to three pounds (1140 to 1360 g) - and are the most numerous of North American ducks. They are often called green heads because of the shiny green head of the mature drake.

Shovelers and gadwalls are sometimes confused with hen or juvenile mallards. In any plumage a mallard can be identified by the iridescent blue wing speculum.

Mallards and pintails are the only ducks that regularly feed on grain crops. Some of the best mallard shooting occurs on swathed grain fields, providing benefit to the landowner as well as recreation for the hunter. Usually among the last ducks to leave in the fall, mallards decoy well and are excellent table birds.

Pintail

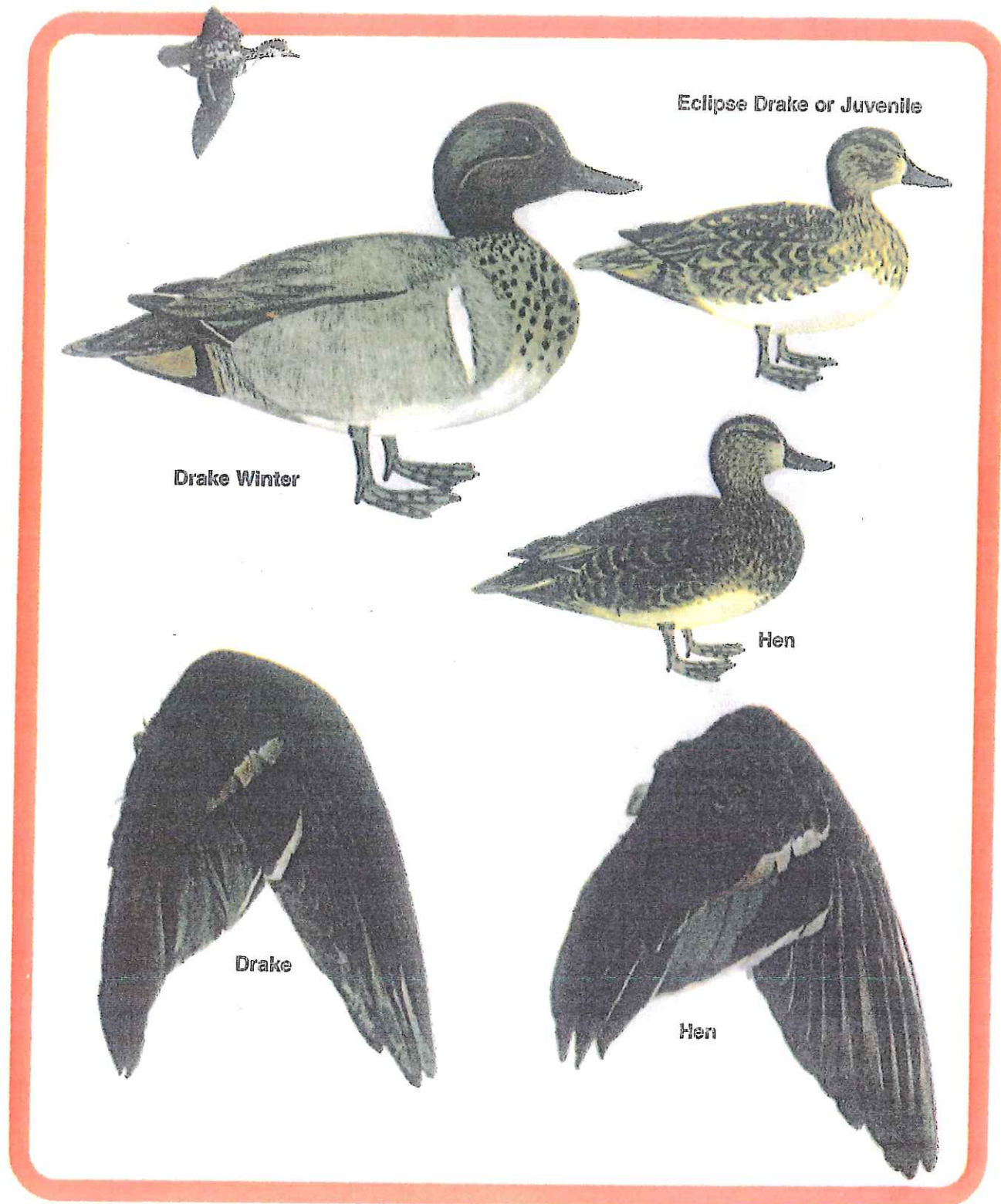


A large duck weighing from two to two and a half pounds (910 to 1140 g), the pintail is smaller than a mallard, and, not as numerous. In flight or in hand, the long neck and sharp tail are distinctive characteristics. The colorful male breeding plumage is seldom seen in fall birds since pintails are a relatively early migrant and most will have moved south

from the northern nesting grounds by late October.

Like the mallard, pintails feed on swathed grain and can cause considerable crop damage. Field shooting provides excellent sport and helps to protect crops. Pintails, with slightly darker flesh than the mallard, are an excellent bird.

Green-Winged Teal

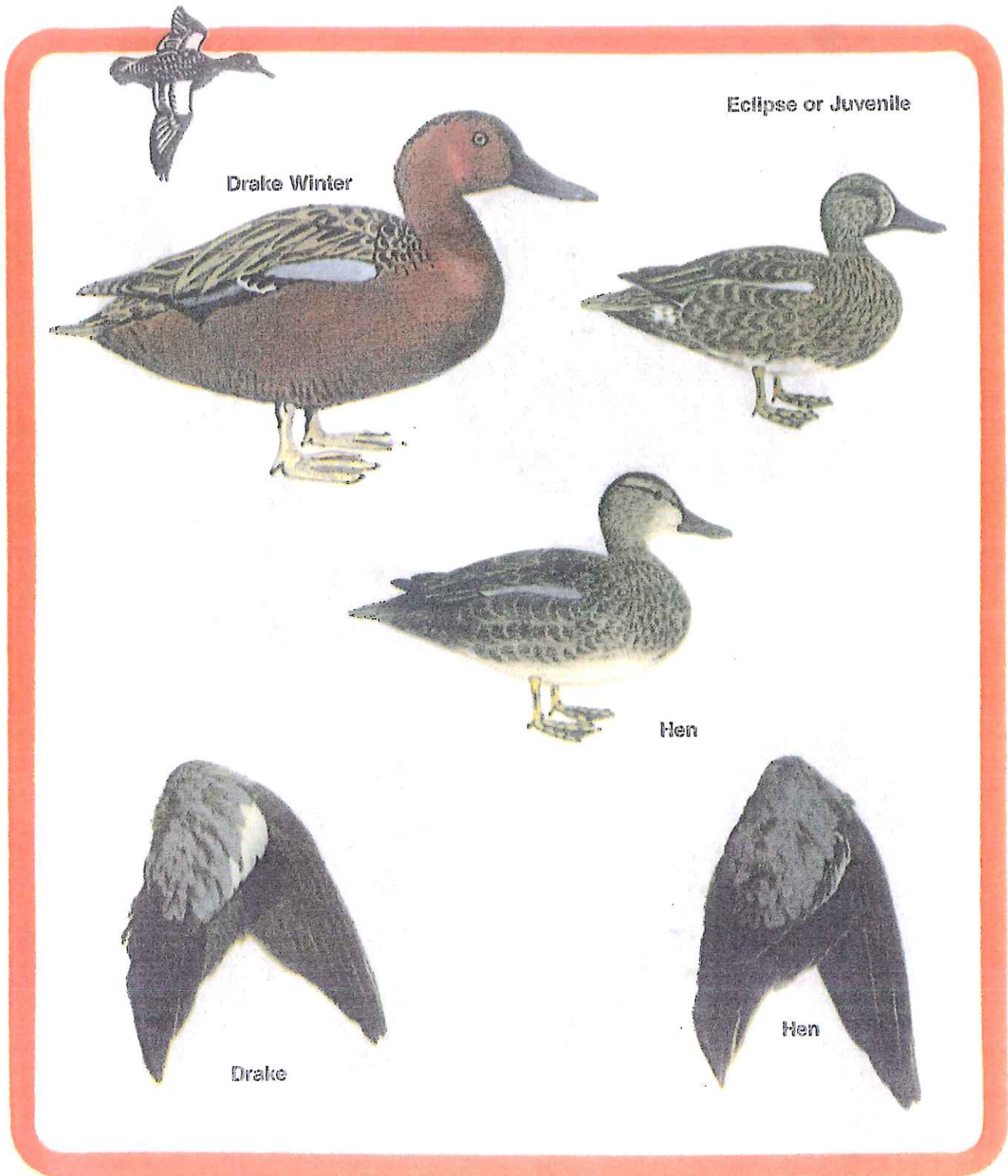


Green-winged teal are the smallest of North American ducks, seldom exceeding 12 oz. (340 g). Their erratic, twisting flight and small size give the impression of great speed and a difficult target. Fall birds are mottled brown with little indication of the colorful male winter plumage. Although green-winged teal are a late migrant, most will

have left before the latter plumage develops.

The species can easily be confused with blue-winged teal, particularly in the early plumages. In hand the iridescent green wing speculum provides positive identification.

Cinnamon Teal



This duck, true to its name, has cinnamon body plumage. The lesser and middle coverts of the wings are sky blue, while the greater coverts form a distinct white bar. The body of a mature Cinnamon Teal is about 16 inches (40 cm) in length and approximately 15 ounces (.4 kg) in weight. The small size of this species and its twisting, turning flight creates the illusion of great speed.

Small compact flocks of Cinnamon Teal commonly fly low over the marshes, often taking the hunter by surprise. It is more vocal than most ducks; its high pitched peeping and nasal quacking is heard commonly in the spring. The Cinnamon is among the first to migrate in the fall.

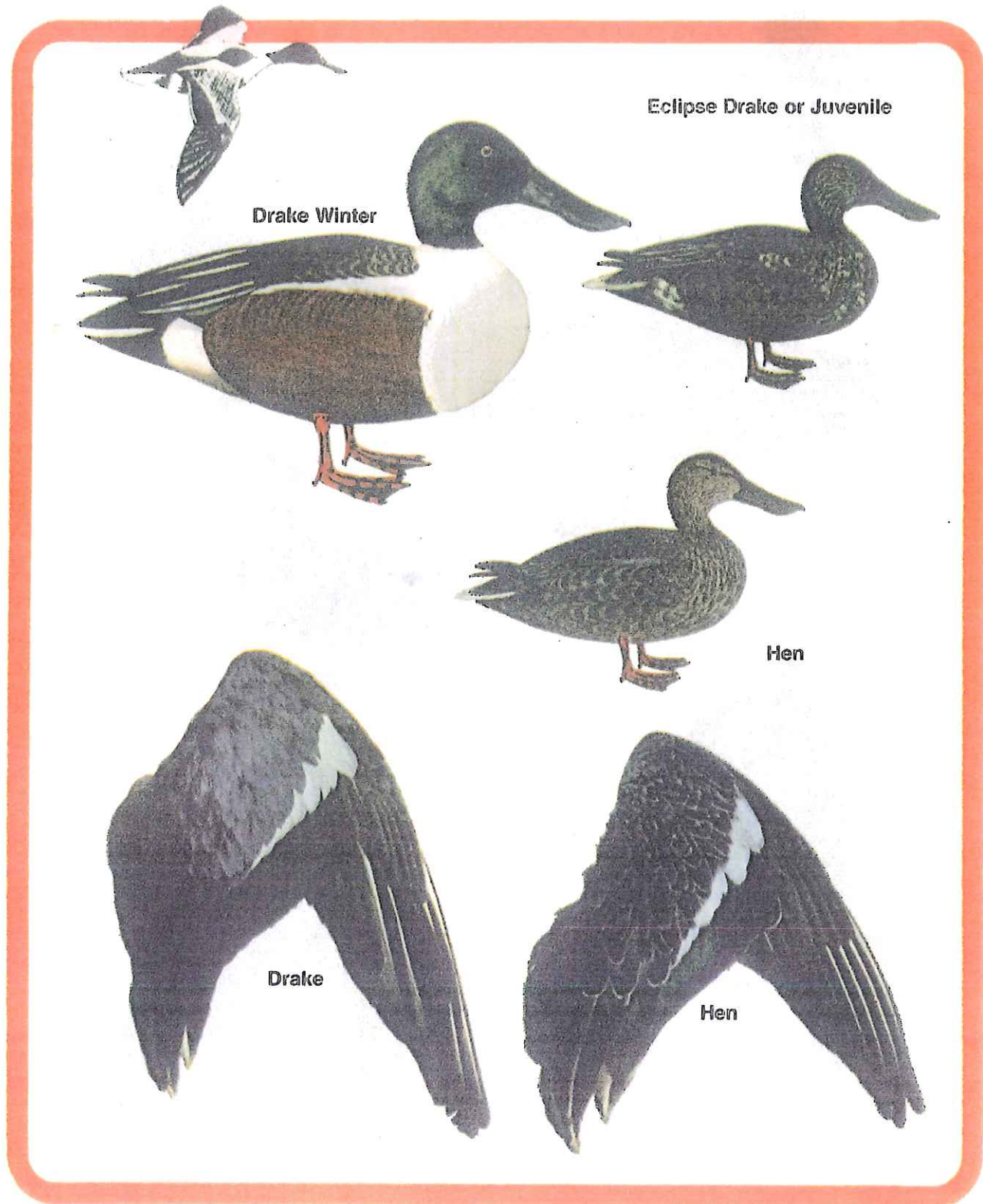
Blue-Winged Teal



One of three species of teal in North America, the blue wing is a small duck weighing slightly less than a pound (450 g). Their small size combined with a rapid, twisting, flight pattern can provide a challenge to the hunter.

Numerous in early fall, the species are among the earliest to leave, some migrating as far as South America. By late September, blue-wings are fat, plump and in spite of their small size, a table bird to be desired.

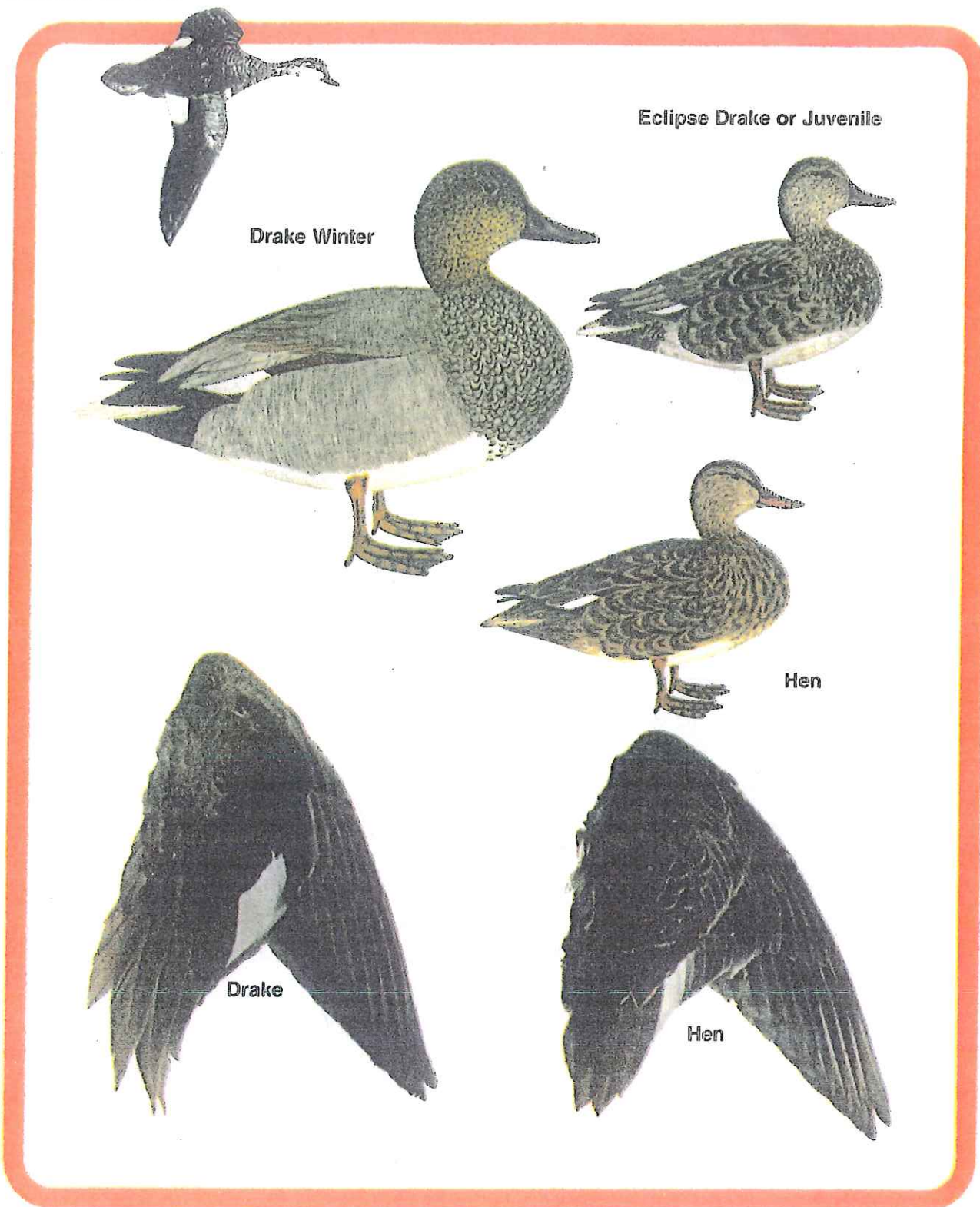
Shoveler



The shoveler is a small to medium bird of up to about one and half pounds (680 g) in weight. The large spoon shaped bill is a feature distinctive enough to make identification of the shoveler or "spoonbill" relatively quick and easy. Mallards are similarly colored, but lack the large bill.

Shovelers are not particularly wary and their steady, direct flight makes them a relatively easy target. This species usually migrates early in the fall. As table birds they are not highly regarded perhaps because of the large number of snails and aquatic insects used as food.

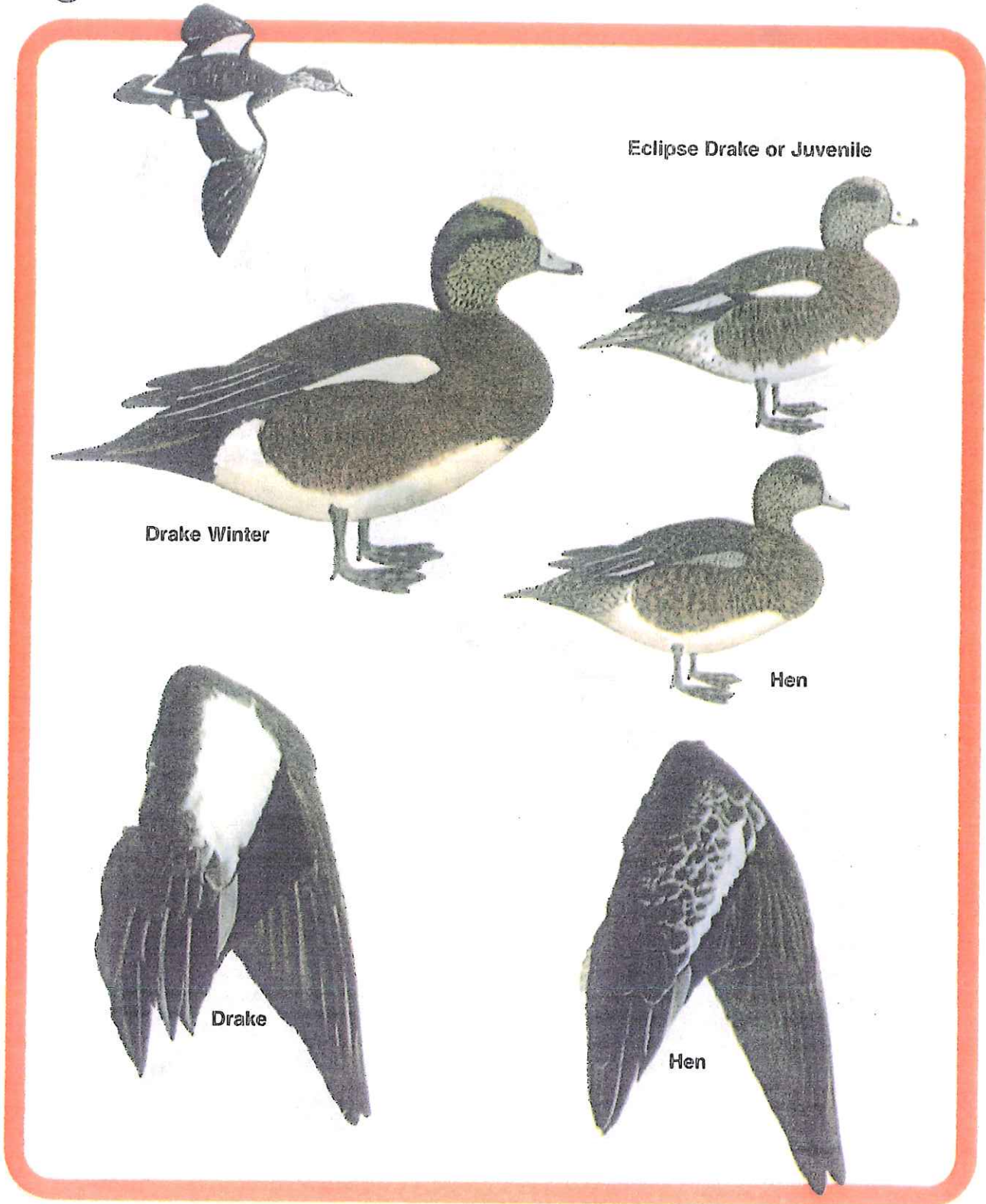
Gadwall



Gadwall is a medium-sized duck of up to two pounds (910 g). They are common early in the fall. By October, most have migrated south. Hunters may confuse gadwall with hen mallards. The white-wing speculum is unique to this puddle duck species and in hand should be positive identification.

Gadwall fly in small compact flocks and are easily decoyed within range. After a shot they will often circle back and make a second pass over the hunter and his decoys.

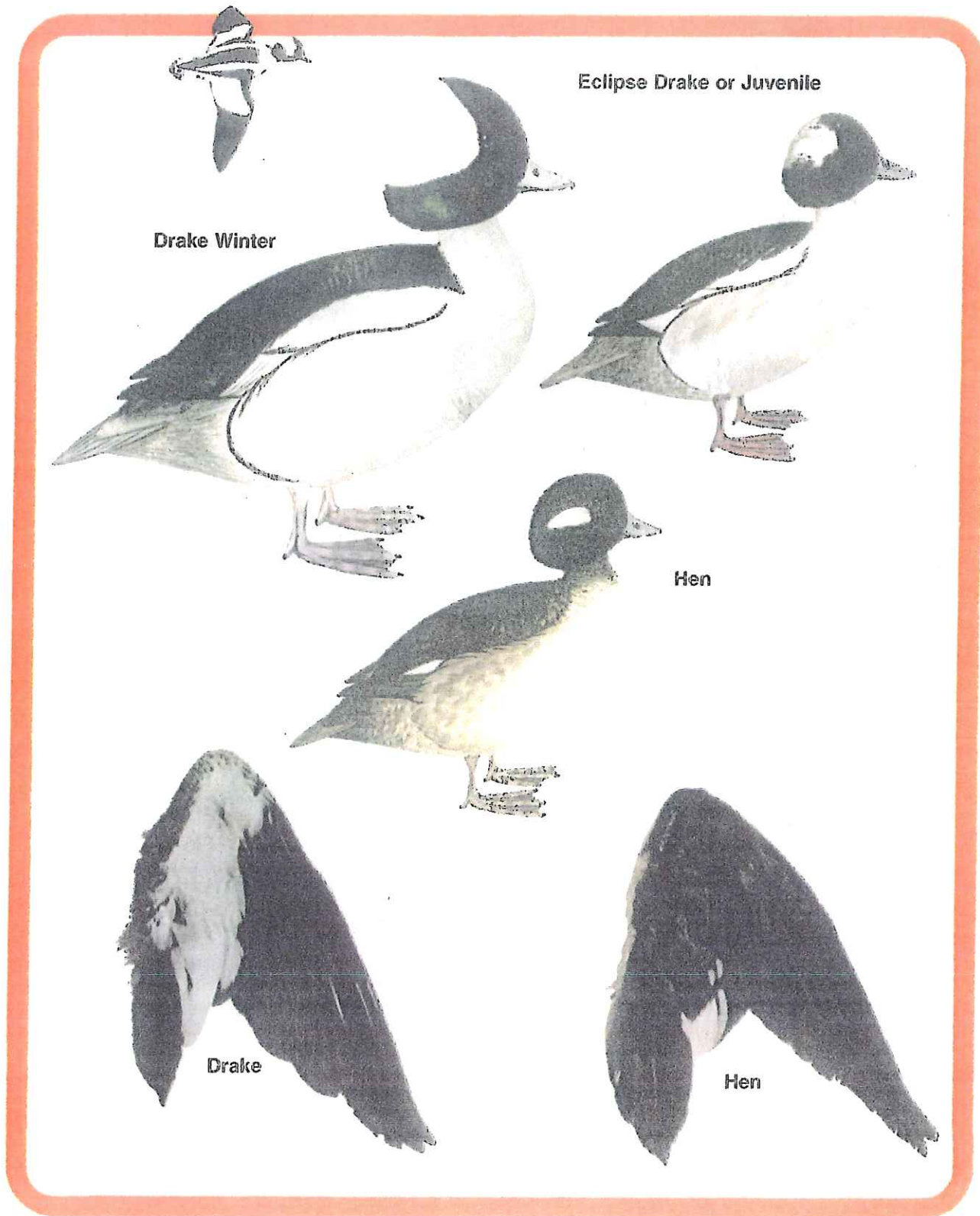
Wigeon



Wigeon is a medium sized duck seldom exceeding two pounds (910 g). They are also often called "baldpate" because of the white crown on the head of the winter male. In addition to wing markings, the bluish bill and feet are reliable characteristics for identification. Even in early plumages, males will generally show some trace of

the green eye mask so prominent in breeding plumage. Wigeon are largely vegetarian in their diet and remain in the northern nesting grounds until mid-fall-often well into October. Usually seen in small tightly bunched flocks, their flight is fast and erratic.

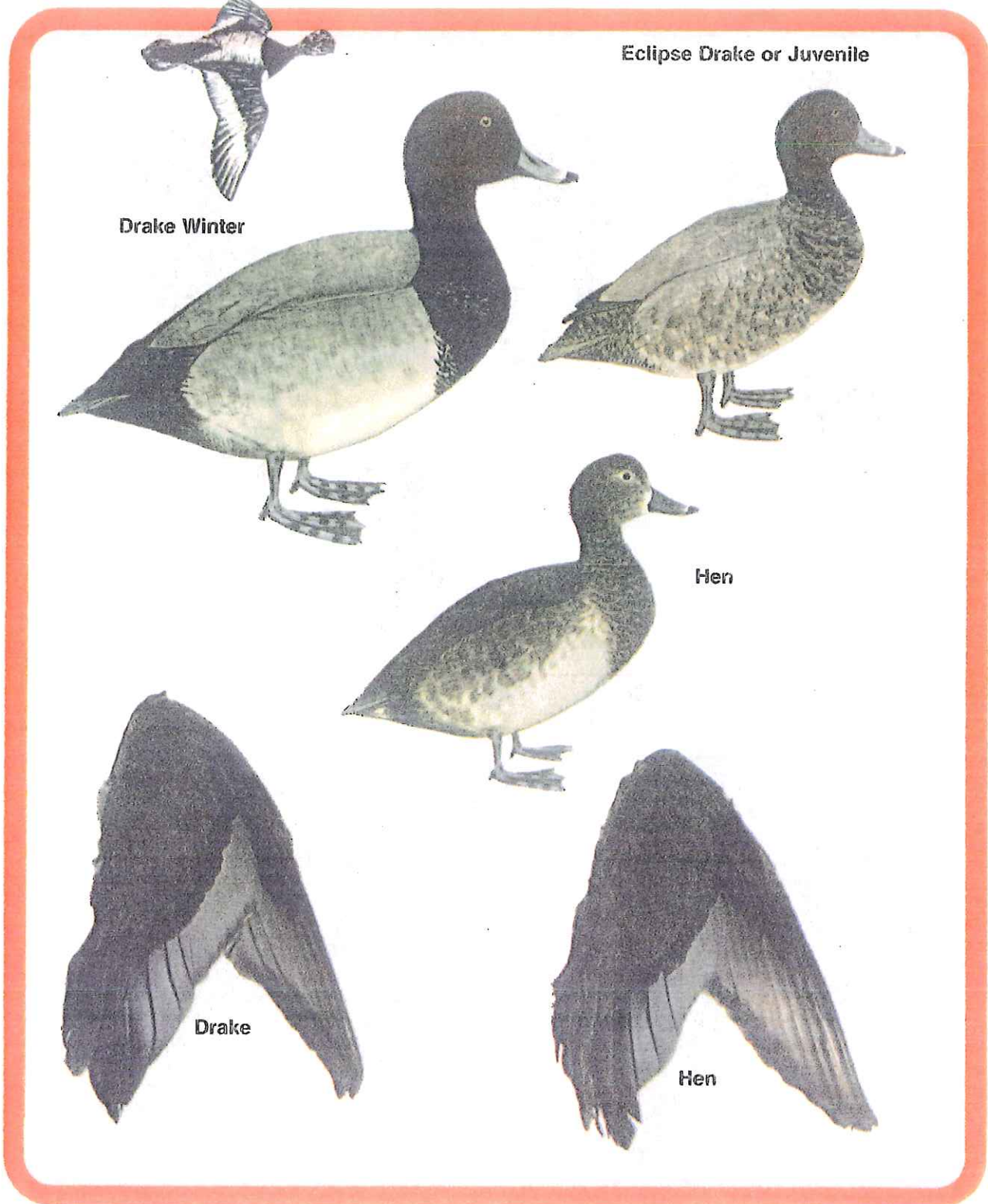
Bufflehead



The bufflehead is one of the smallest diving ducks; it weighs no more than a pound (450 g). Like the golden eye, the bufflehead nests in tree cavities. Bufflehead are late fall migrants, occasionally remaining all winter on open water areas where available. Late in the fall, males are seen

in their distinctive winter plumage. The large iridescent head with a fan-shaped, white patch behind the eye is outstanding. Typical of ducks that eat animal food, their flesh may have a rather strong taste.

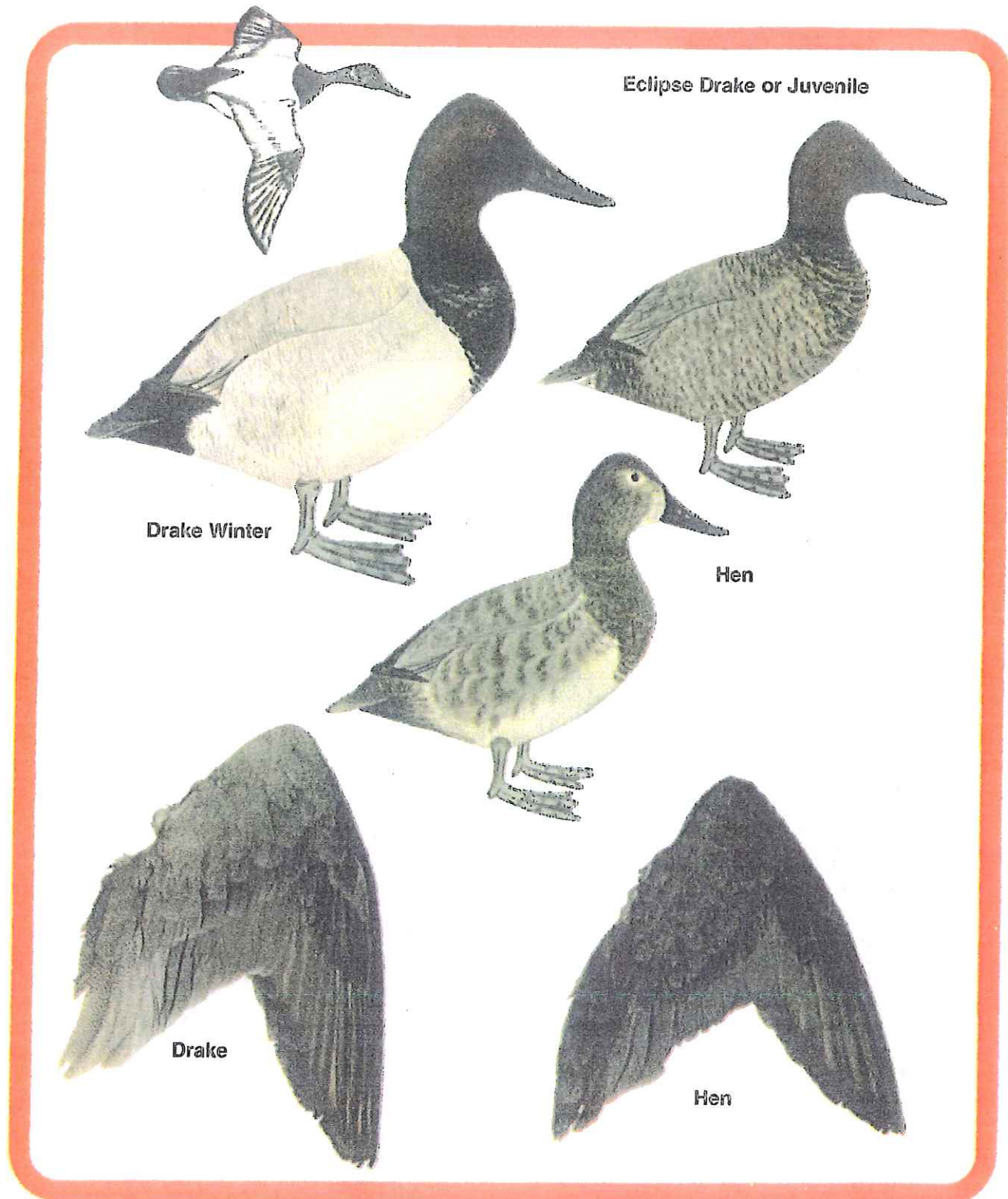
Red Head



The red head is similar in appearance to the canvasback but smaller, two to two and a half pounds (910 g to 1140 g). It has a rounded head shape rather than the flat sloping forehead of the canvasback. Hens may be confused with lesser scaup but they lack the yellow eye and white wing speculum of that species.

Red heads are fairly common in localized areas, particularly around the larger sloughs or lakes. The species is an early migrant and birds are generally gone from the northern nesting areas by late October.

Canvasback

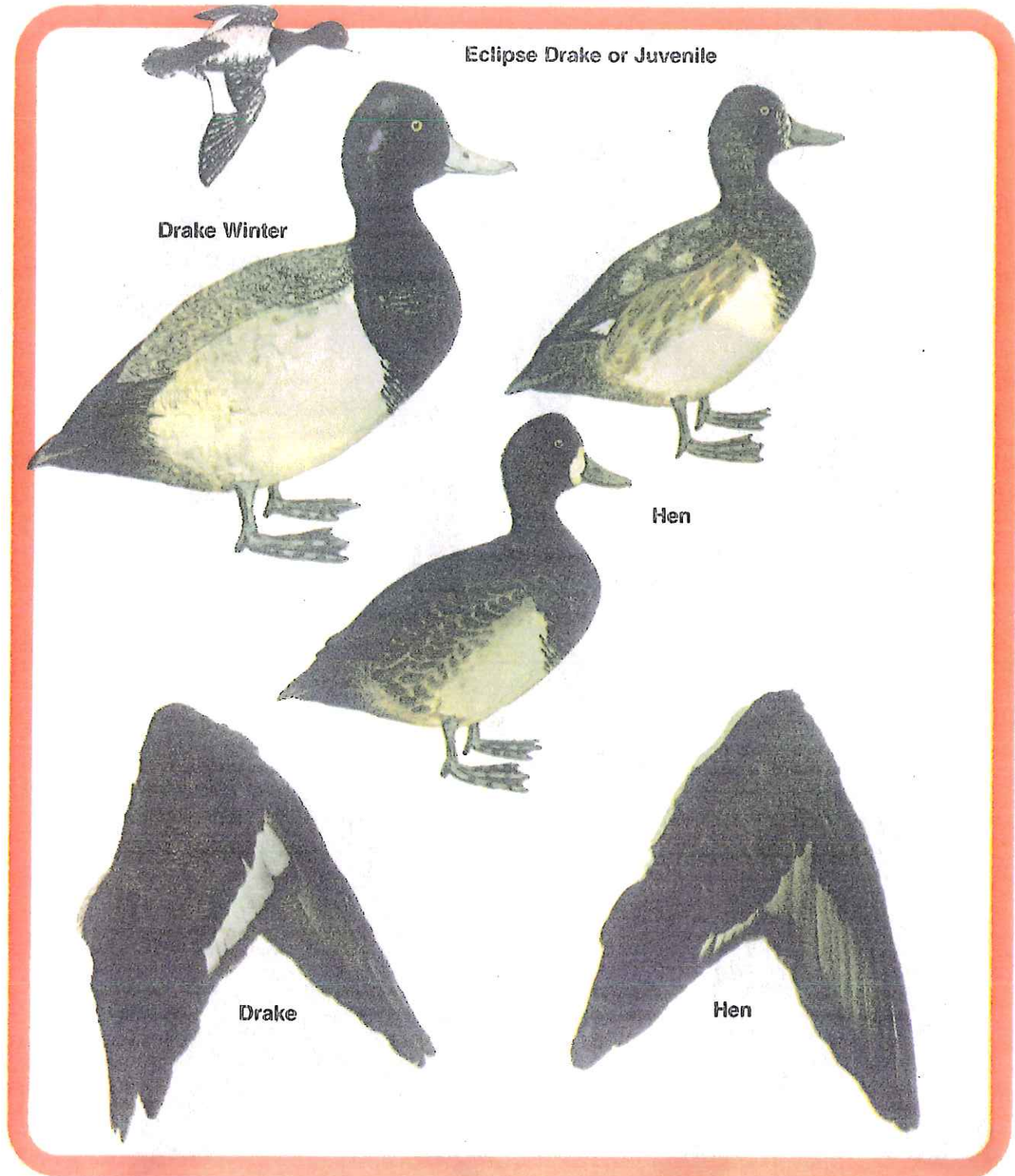


One of the larger ducks, canvasback weigh up to three pounds (1360 g). The large head with its straight flat profile is a reliable identification feature and may be used to distinguish the species from the redhead. Reputed to be the fastest of our ducks, the canvasback has a very rapid wing beat typical of a diving duck. Canvasbacks are no longer

common throughout North America. Hunters are most likely to encounter these ducks when around deeper lakes and reservoirs.

The canvasback is an excellent table bird, considered by many to be gourmet fare.

Lesser Scaup



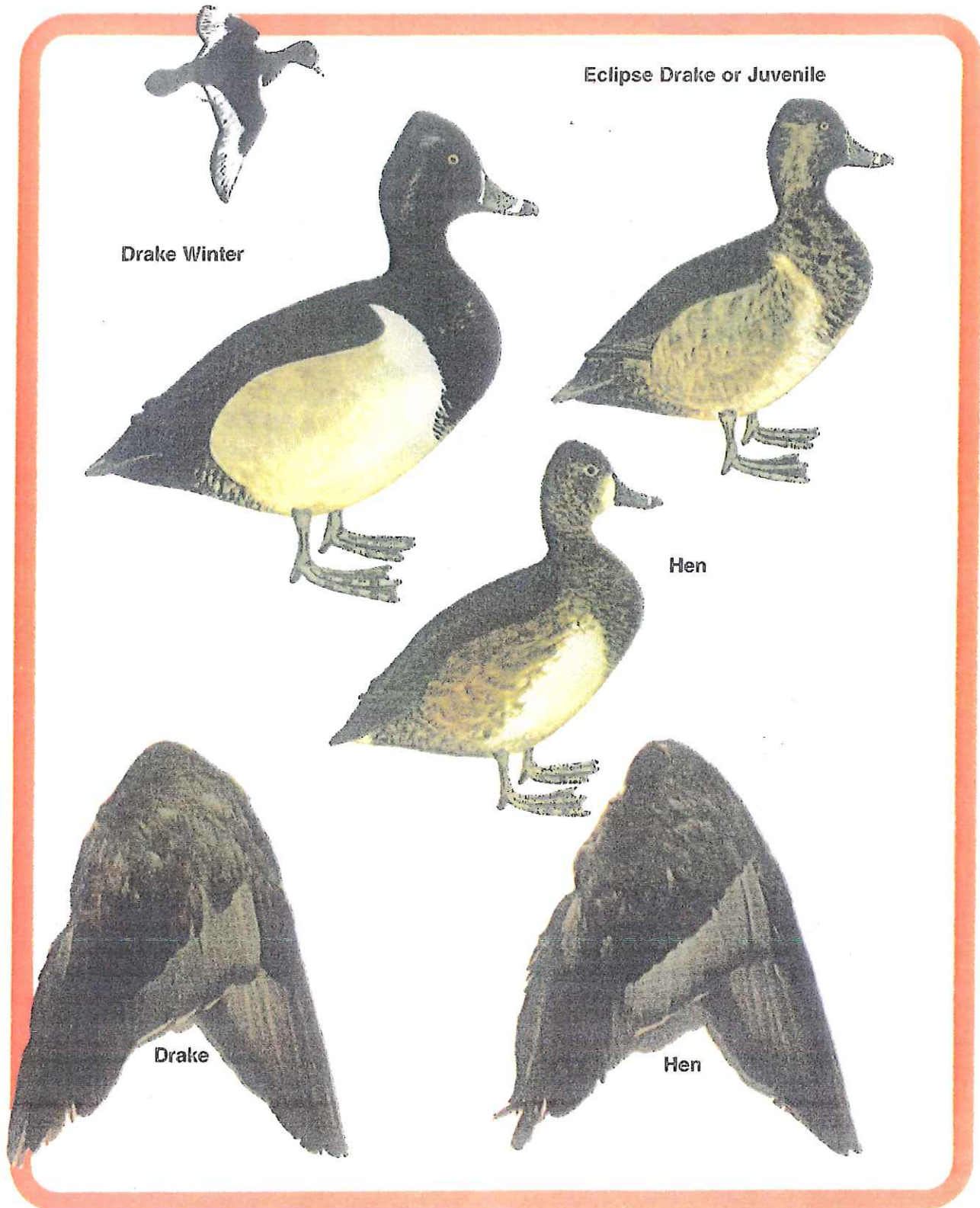
These are medium-sized ducks of up to two pounds (910g). As with other diving ducks, scaup are more likely to be encountered around larger areas of deeper water.

Although it closely resembles the ring-necked duck, scaup do not have the white ring on the bill characteristic of the ring-neck. Both sexes have blue-colored bills, hence the

common name "Blue Bill" is often used for the species. Scaup migrate at about the same time as canvasbacks, when ice begins to cover the lakes.

Flying in tight compact groups, the species decoys will provide hunters with excellent shooting opportunities.

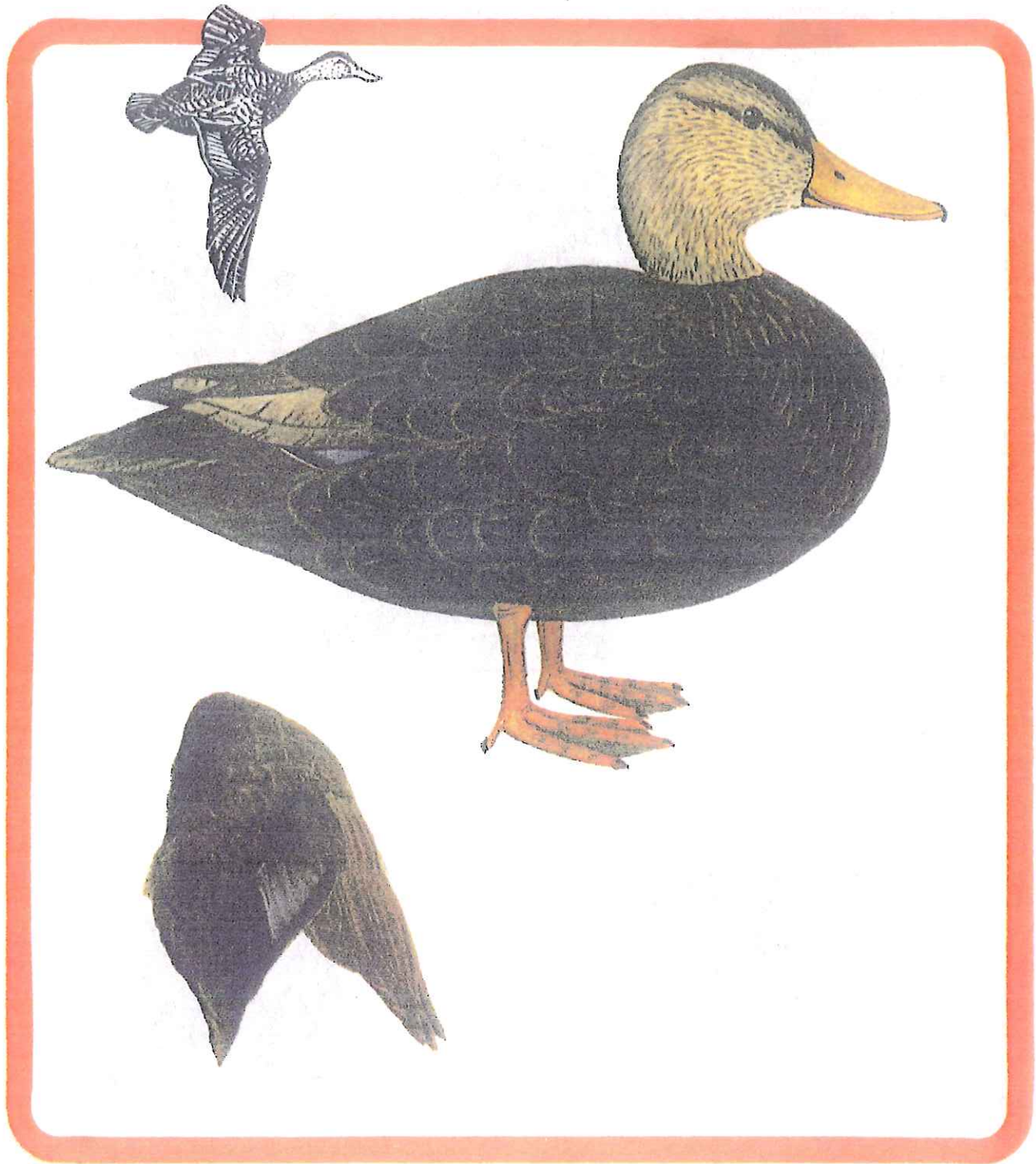
Ring-Necked Duck



Similar in habits and general appearance to the scaup, ring-necked ducks are slightly smaller in size, averaging a little over one and a half pounds (680 g). In hand, the

white band on the bill and pearly gray speculum will confirm identification. Ring-necked ducks are essentially vegetarian in their food preference.

Black Duck



The Black Duck has a dark sooty appearance with a lighter head. Its feet are orange to reddish orange. Average length of the Black Duck is 24 inches (60 cm). It attains a weight of 2 3/4 pounds (1.2 kg). It is a very shy and wary bird, being considered the most elusive of all the ducks.

Often seen in the company of mallards, Black Ducks frequent the salt marshes and ocean much more than

mallards along the Atlantic Coast. Their flight is swift, and they usually travel in small flocks. Their white wing lining in contrast to very dark body plumage is a good identification clue for the waterfowl hunter.

Black Ducks inhabit the Eastern Seaboard, primarily the Atlantic flyway, and to a lesser extent the Mississippi flyway.

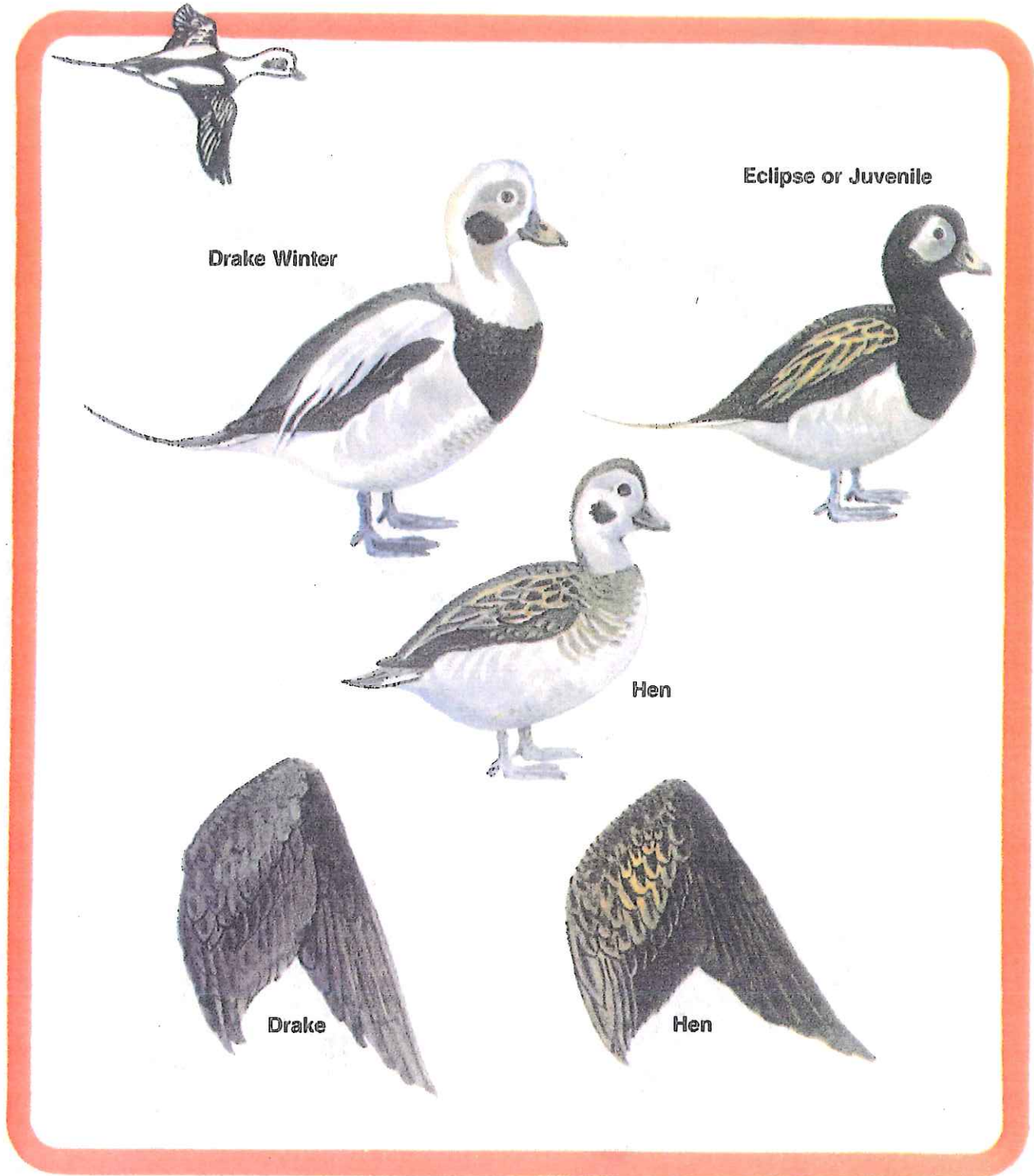
Wood Duck



The wood duck is one of the most colorful of the waterfowl. It is a medium-sized bird ranging in weight up to 2 pounds (.9 kg). It's about 15-18 inches long (38-46 cm). It has dark cinnamon-colored iridescent plumage on the chest with white flecking. The sides are tan and the belly is white. The male has distinct white stripes on its head crest. The eyes are red, the bill is short and

multicolored, and the feet are a dull gold color. The wood duck is found along all flyways, but primarily in the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways. It frequents wooded streams and ponds and nests in natural tree cavities. It can fly through thick timber with speed and ease. It feeds on acorns, berries and grapes. In the flight, wood ducks make a rustling, swishing sound with their wings.

Oldsquaw

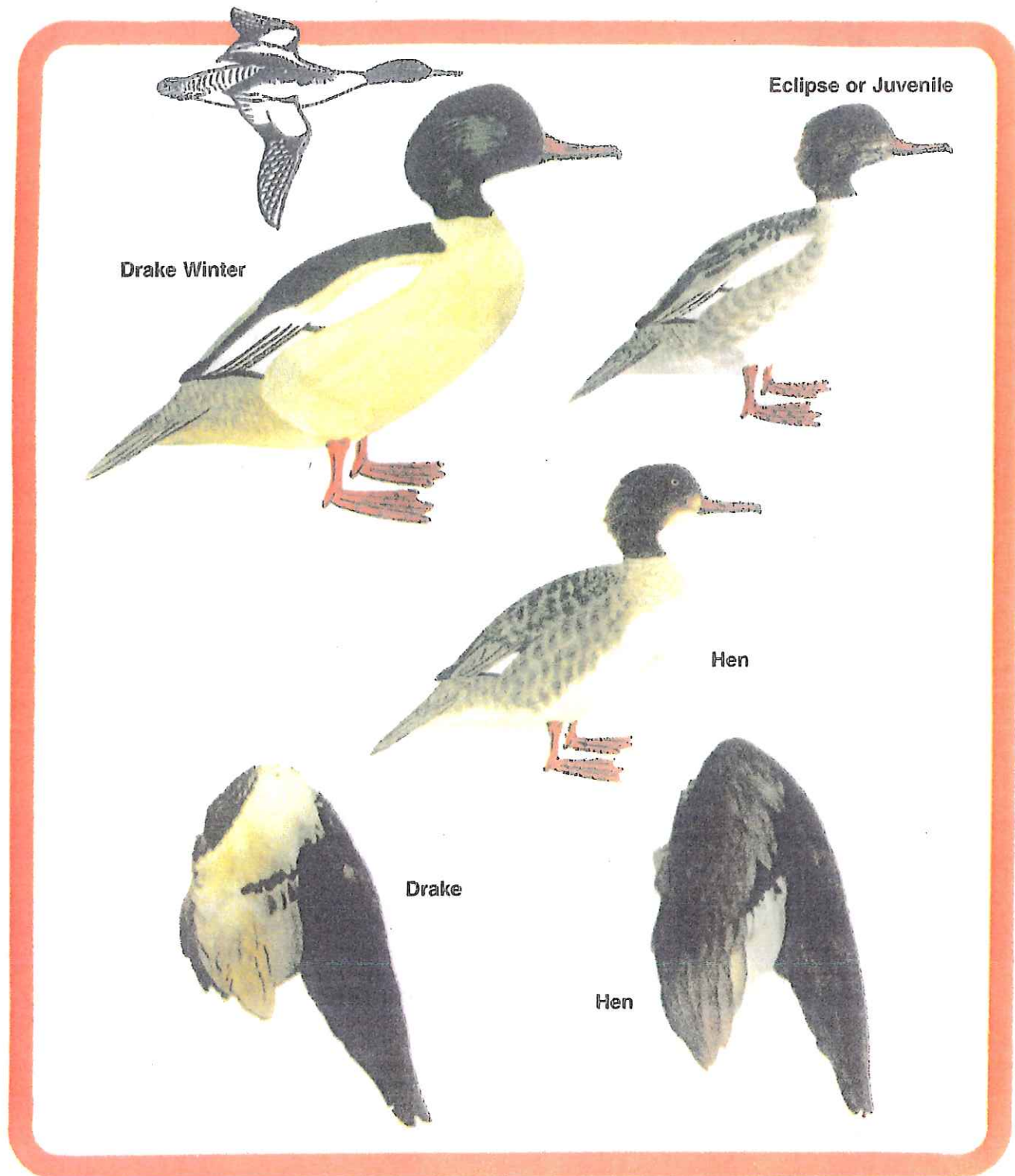


The Oldsquaw is a slim, bright plumaged sea duck, smaller than the scoters or eiders. A mature Oldsquaw will be about 20 ½ inches (52 cm) long and weigh around 2 pounds (.9 kg).

Flocks of this sea duck fly swiftly and low, constantly changing formations. The species is found along both

coasts and in the Great Lakes area. It is one of the most vocal of the ducks. The plumage of the drake is black and white. The chest, breast, hindback, and wings are black; the foreback, sides, flanks, belly and lower tail coverts are white. The head is white with a large brown black patch extending from the cheek down the side of the neck.

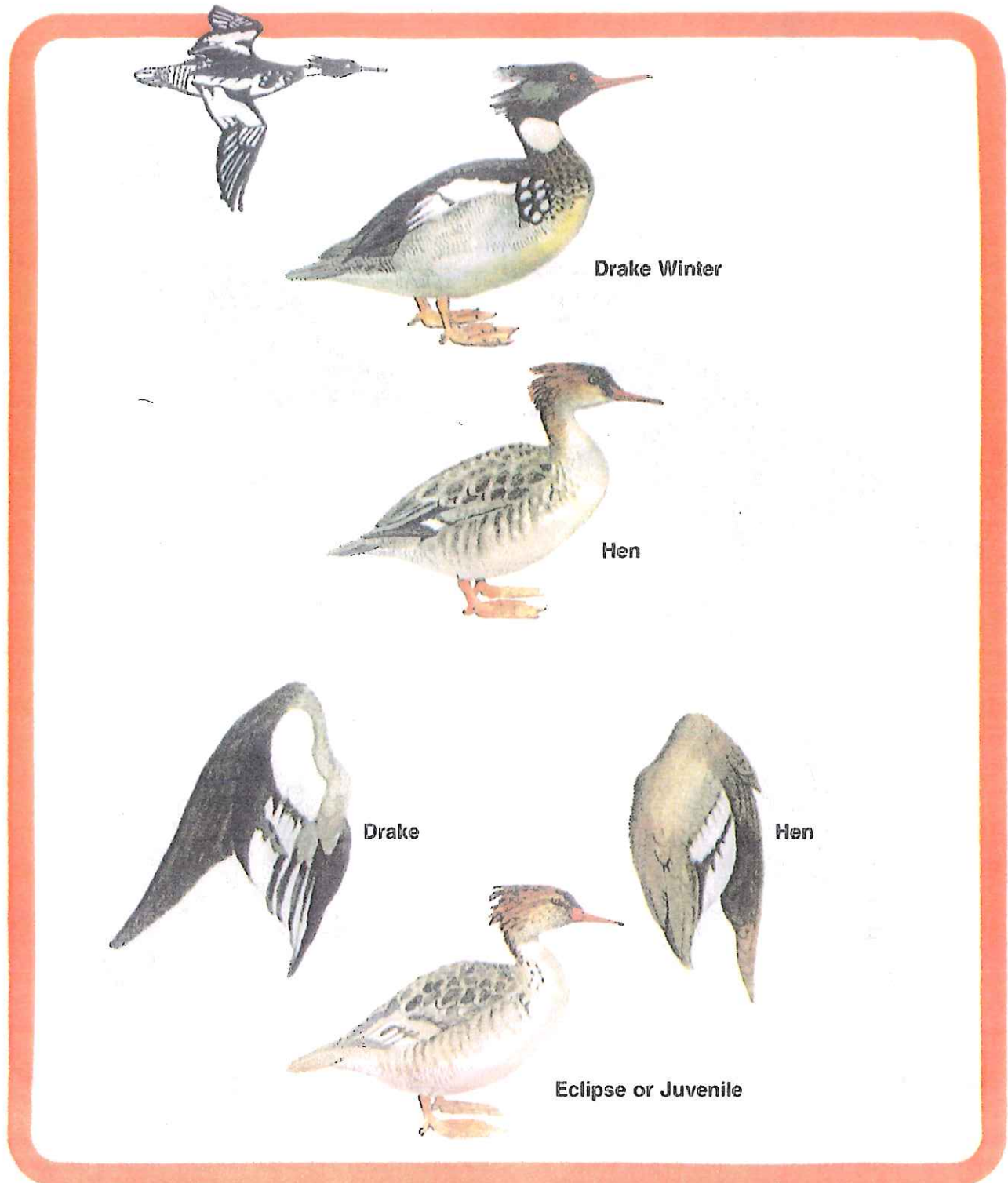
Common Merganser



This species, which is larger than the red-breasted merganser, is one of the largest of our ducks. It will weigh about 3 ¼ pounds (1.5 kg) and attain a length of about 25 inches (65 cm). The merganser has a black back, and a white belly, chest and sides tinted with pink. It has a

greenish, black head, a narrow, serrated, dusky red bill. It is among the last of the waterfowl to migrate south. Flocks fly in a "follow-the-leader" style, low over the water. Their flight is strong and direct. It is an excellent bird to hunt, although the flesh may have a fishy taste.

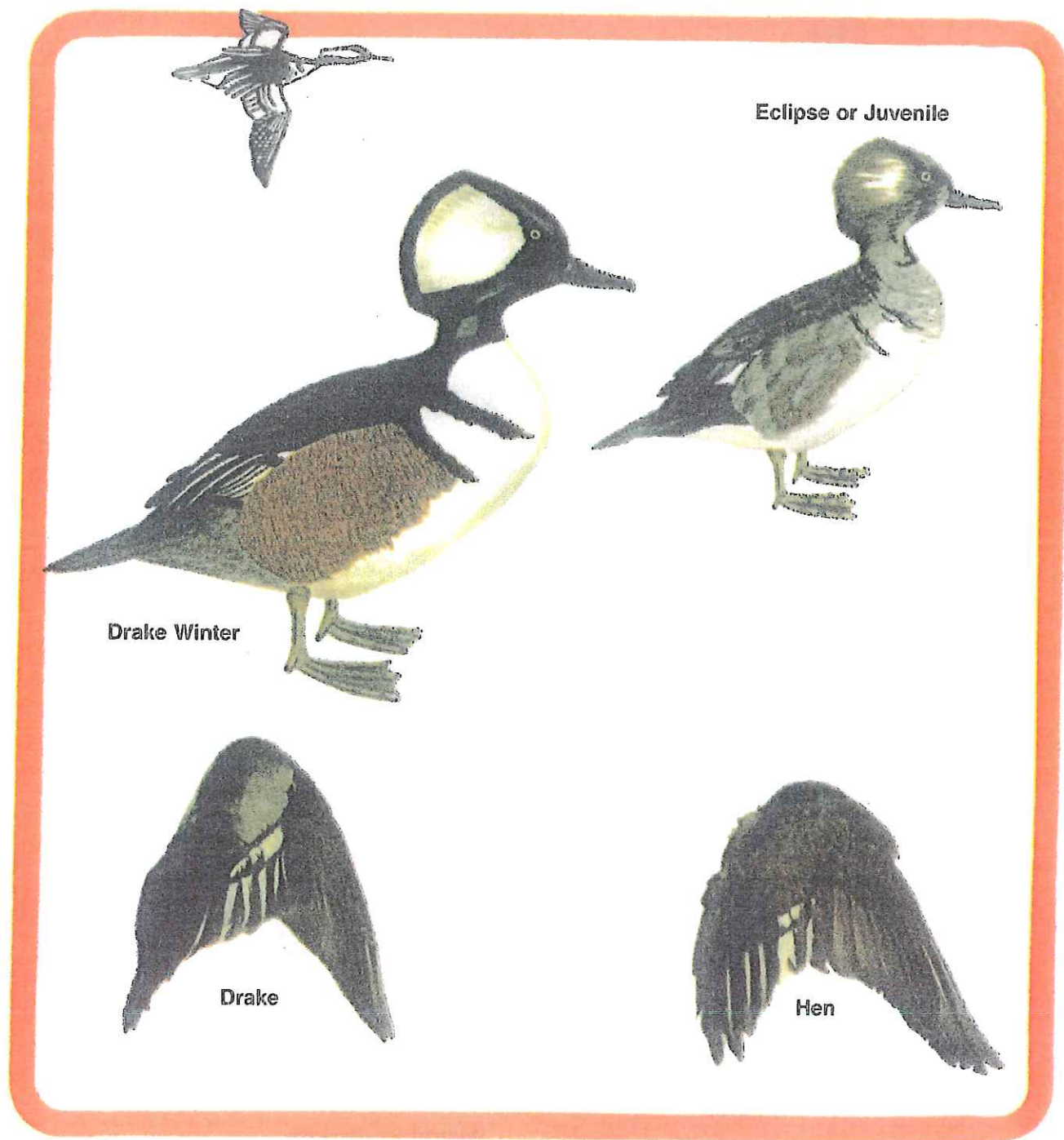
Red-Breasted Merganser



Slightly smaller than the common merganser, the Red-breasted Merganser attains a length of about 23 inches (59 cm), and an average weight of about 2 ½ pounds (1.1 kg). The drake has a black back, a grayish white belly, and an orange chest speckled with black. It has a greenish, black head with narrow, serrated, dusky red bill. Hens have

chestnut-red heads and gray body plumage. This species winters most abundantly in coastal waters including the Gulf of Mexico, and to a lesser extent, the Great Lakes area. Its flight is strong and direct, usually low over the water. It is difficult to distinguish in flight from the common merganser.

Hooded Merganser



This is the smallest merganser. A mature bird measures about 18 inches (46 cm) in length and weighs about 1 ½ pounds (.6 kg). It has the characteristic black back with two prominent black bars between its chest and sides. The belly plumage is white, while the sides are tan. The drake has a dark, greenish black head with a distinct

hood and fan-shaped white area. Its eyes are yellow and the bill is black, narrow and serrated. Hooded Mergansers often are seen in pairs, or very small flocks. Their short rapid wingstrokes create an illusion of great speed. This species winters in the inland waters of all coastal states; very seldom is it seen in salt-water.

Scoters



Scoters are large, chunky sea ducks weighing 2.2-3.5 pounds (1-1.6 kg). Plumage of the males is solid black while the females tend to be dusky brown, as are the immature birds. Three species, common, surf, and white winged, may be seen together during the winter months on both Atlantic and Pacific coasts, flying in long lines just over the waves. The Common Scoter is smallest.

The male is recognized by the butter-yellow knob on its black bill, and by its dark eyes and feet. Other male

scoters have pinkish feet, light or whitish eyes, and their bills are brightly colored with yellow, pink, white, black and red markings. White-winged scoters have white patches in the secondary wing feathers, and surf scoters are recognized by their outlandish bill configurations.

Scoters are most often hunted from a boat. They are easily attracted to decoys, and their rapid flight offers a challenging shoot.

Eiders



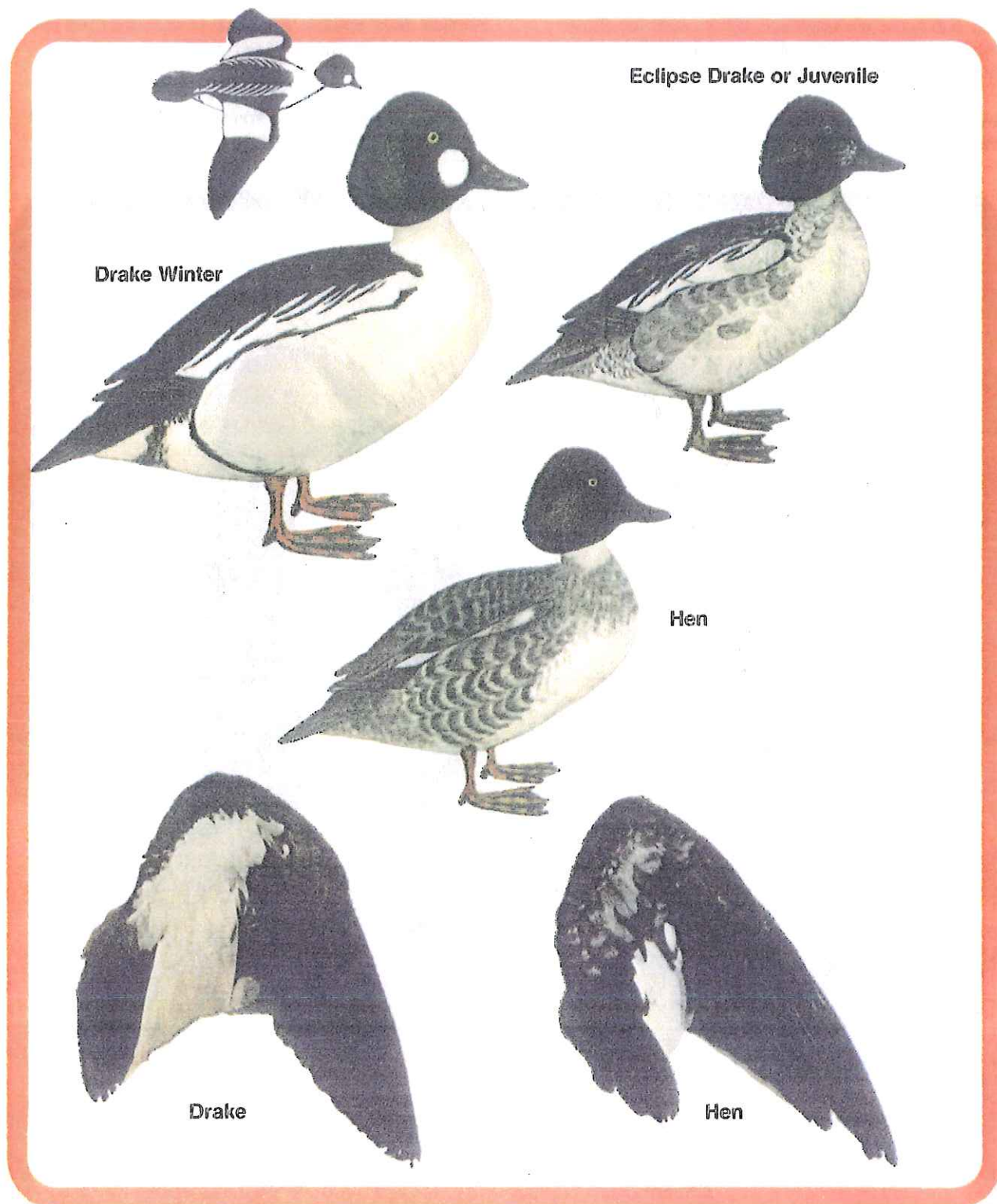
Largest of the sea ducks, Eiders range in weight from 2.9-5.5 pounds (1.3-2.5 kg). The male plumage is black and white, while that of the female is rich brown, barred with black. The Common Eider breeds in coastal areas of the arctic region, together with others of its race, the Pacific and Northern Eiders.

King Eiders, the most majestic of this group, breed in the northern Arctic and winter in the north Atlantic and Pacific coasts, as far north as open water permits. The distinctive black-bordered orange lobes on the bill that cover the front of the face of the male are characteristic of this species.

The Spectacled Eider, named for the circular feather formations and markings about its eye, is slightly smaller than Common or King Eiders, and is one of the rarest of North American ducks.

Its breeding range is along the Bering coast in northwest Alaska. Steller's Eider is the smallest of the Eiders, breeding along the coast of Alaska and wintering along the Alaska panhandle and the Aleutian Islands. The male's chestnut breast and belly plumage and the more mottled plumage of the female make this eider more distinctive than the others.

Common Goldeneye



One of the larger diving ducks, goldeneye may weigh up to two and three quarter pounds (1250 g). In flight, their distinctive wing-whistling sound has earned them the name of "whistler" by many hunters.

Goldeneye, along with the much smaller bufflehead, are unique in their nesting requirements. Both species nest in tree cavities such as abandoned woodpecker holes. Goldeneye are commonly found on deep water bodies in wooded areas.

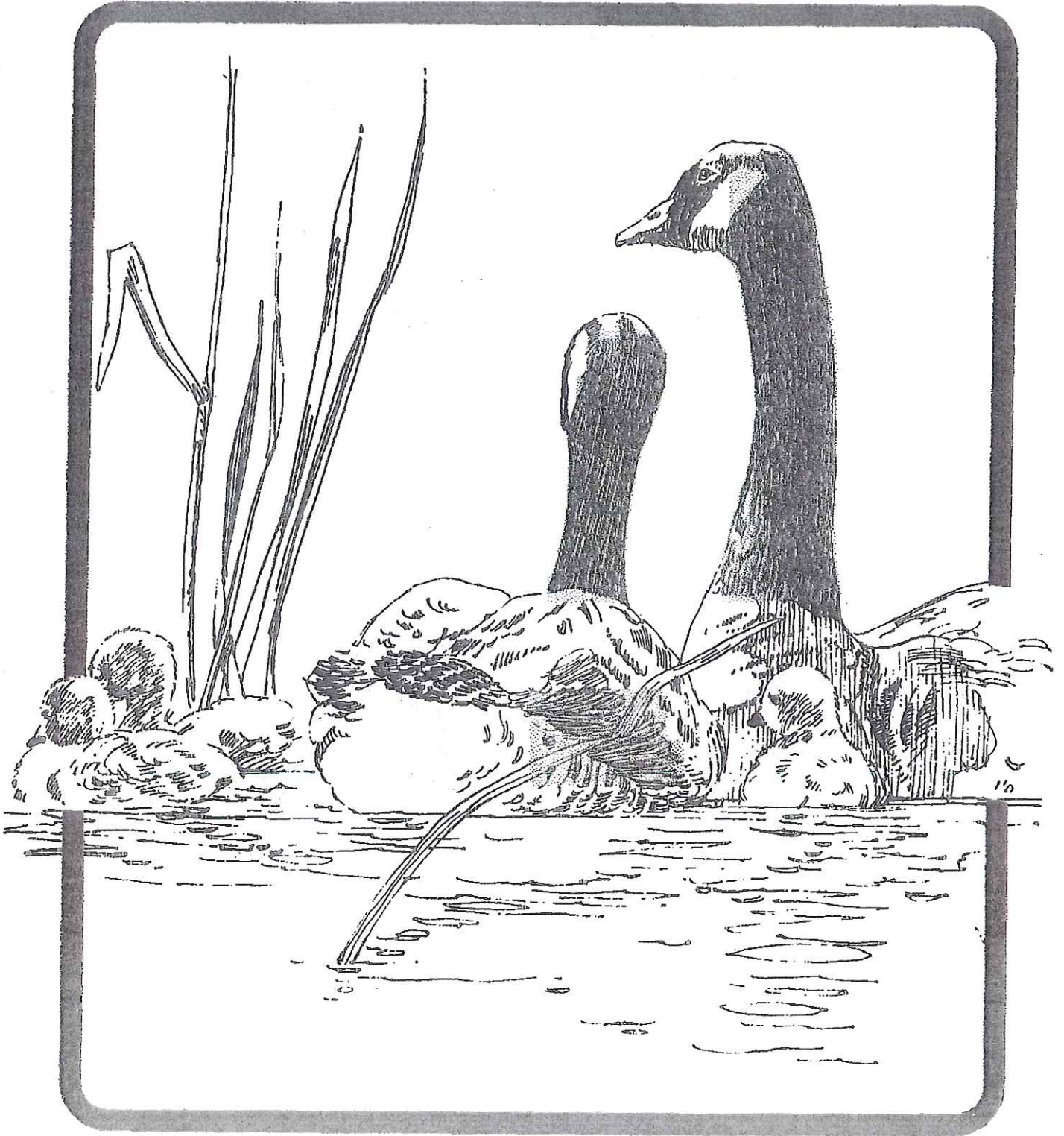
Geese

Geese and ducks are waterfowl, and as such they have many similar characteristics. For example, both have webbed feet, similar feathers, and bills of similar shape.

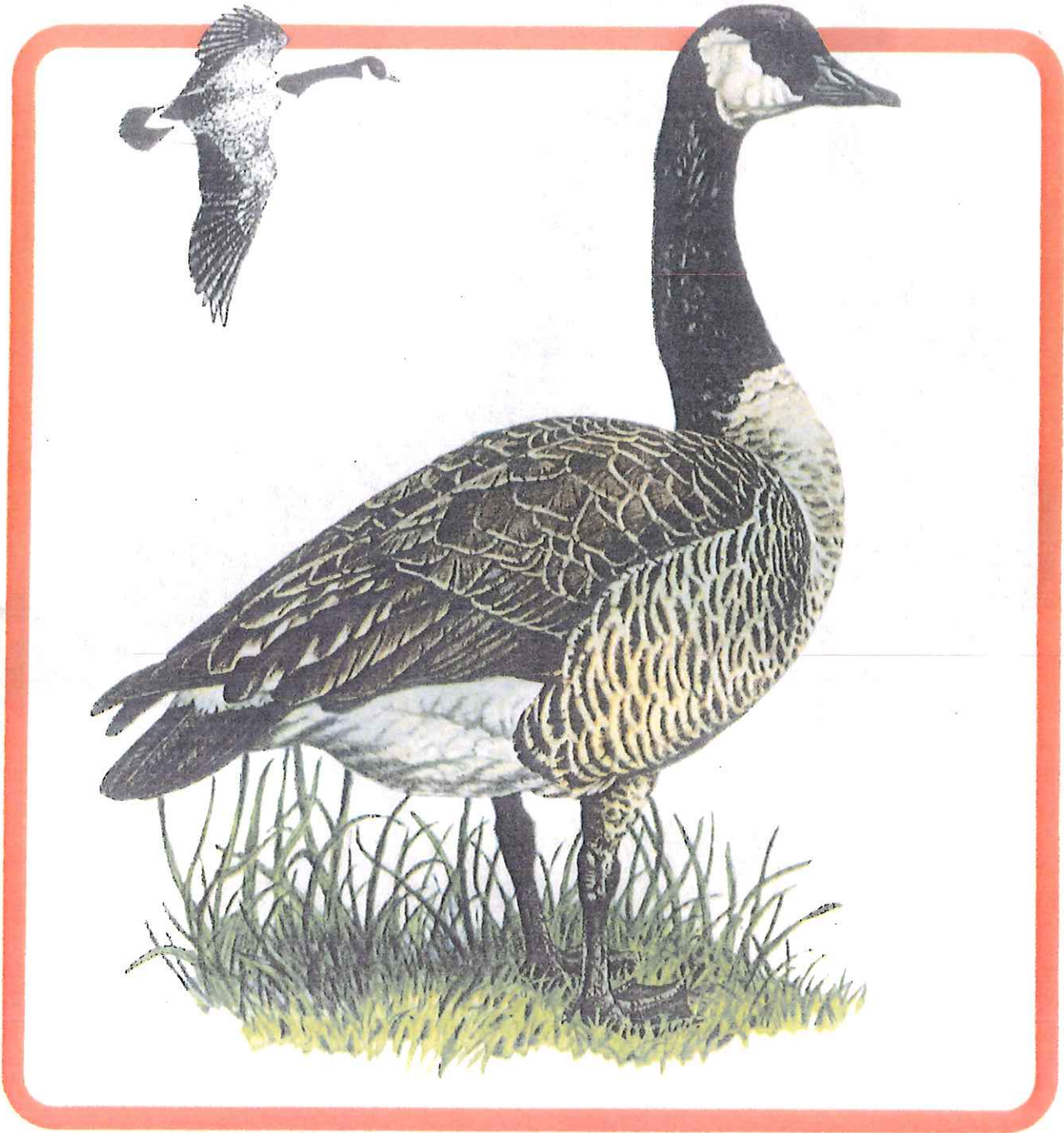
However, geese are generally larger than most ducks. Geese have no eclipse plumage and both sexes are

identical. Most species of ducks mature by their first spring while geese take two years or more before reaching maturity.

Pairs of geese mate for life and both the gander and the goose help to rear their young.



Canada Goose

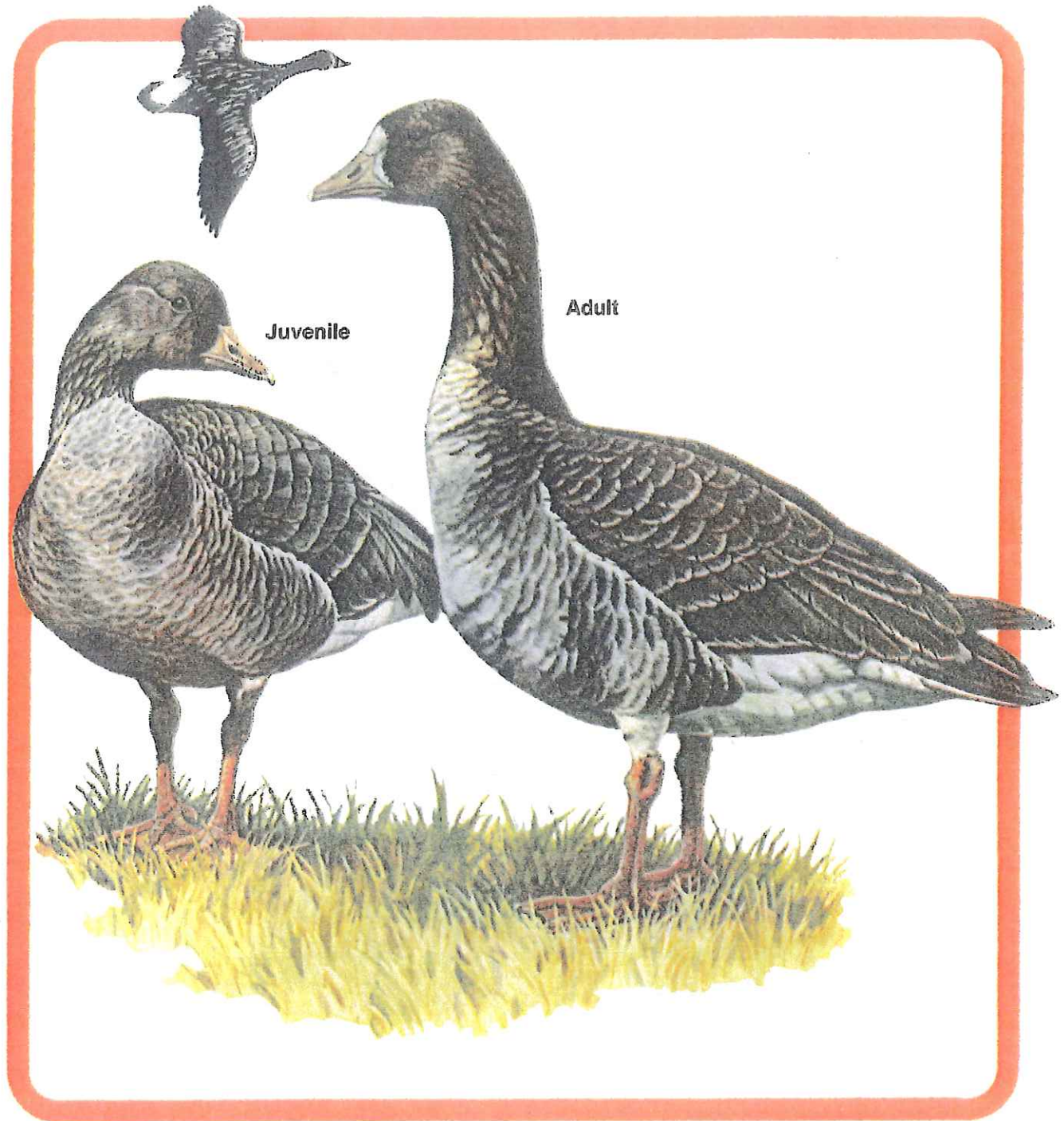


A number of varieties of Canada geese occur in North America. All are similar in appearance but vary considerably in size. The smallest are under three pounds (1400 g) with others weighing as much as 12 pounds (5500 g). Both sexes look alike, having a dark head and neck with a distinctive white chin strap.

The distinctive honking of these geese can often be heard even before the "V" shaped flocks are sighted. Although they may nest in various regions, a great many Canada

geese nest in Canada and migrate south during the fall. In the fall, geese feed on grain stubble or summer-fallowed fields. Usually twice a day, in the morning and afternoon, they fly from nearby water bodies to these feeding areas. If undisturbed, flocks will usually return to the same location for several days. Goose hunters try to "spot" or locate feeding flocks. When the geese are finished feeding and have gone back to the water, pits are dug or blinds constructed near the feeding areas. Decoys are set out and the concealed hunters wait for the geese to return.

White-Fronted Goose

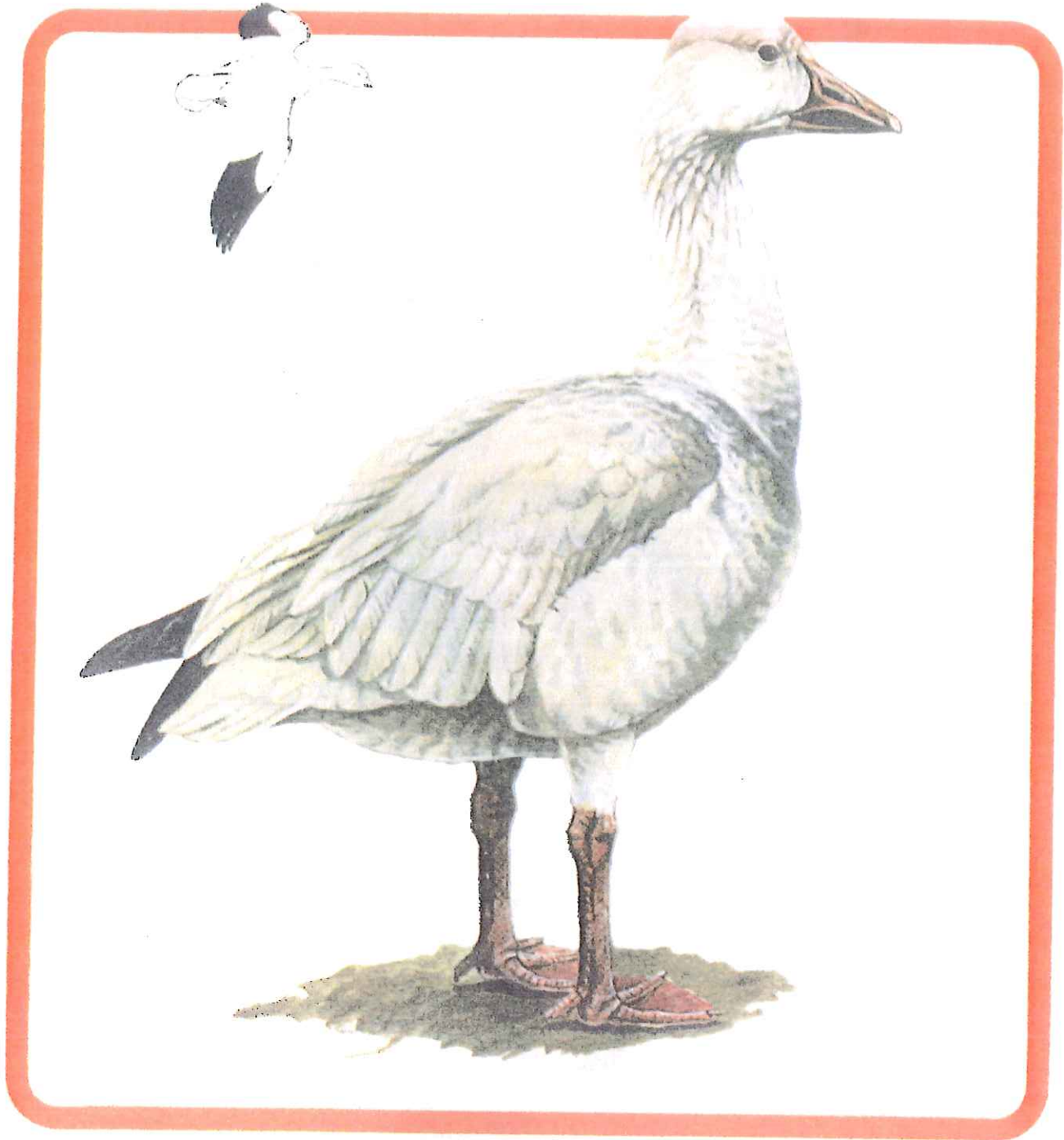


White-fronted geese are medium-sized geese, weighing about six pounds (2700 g). The name is derived from the white band around the face at the base of the bill of adult birds. Both sexes are similar in appearance. They are also called "speckled-bellies" in reference to the irregular black marking across their bellies. Juveniles are more uniformly gray and lack the bill and belly markings.

White-fronts migrate south during the fall. Flocks are generally large and "V" shaped. Their call, a high pitched crackling or laughing sound can easily be distinguished from the deep honking of Canada geese.

Feeding habits and hunting techniques are similar to those of other geese.

Snow Goose



Snow geese are all white with black wing tips and weigh about six pounds (2700 g). Both sexes are similar in appearance but juveniles are more gray than white. Head and neck feathers are usually stained with rusty orange. A dark color phase of the snow goose exists and is called a blue goose. At one time it was believed to be a separate species.

Care must be taken not to confuse snow geese with protected species like whooping cranes, pelicans or swans. Swans lack the black wing tip. Cranes trail legs and feet in flight. Pelicans fly with the neck curved and

have a distinctively large head and bill. Snow geese fly in loose "V" formations but the lines tend to shift and change. A popular common name for the species is "wavey." The call of the snow goose is a distinctive, shrill, high-pitched "yelp" rather than a honk.

Snow geese are generally less predictable in their feeding habits than Canada geese and will not usually return to the same feeding area for extended periods.

Flesh of snow geese is much darker than that of other geese.

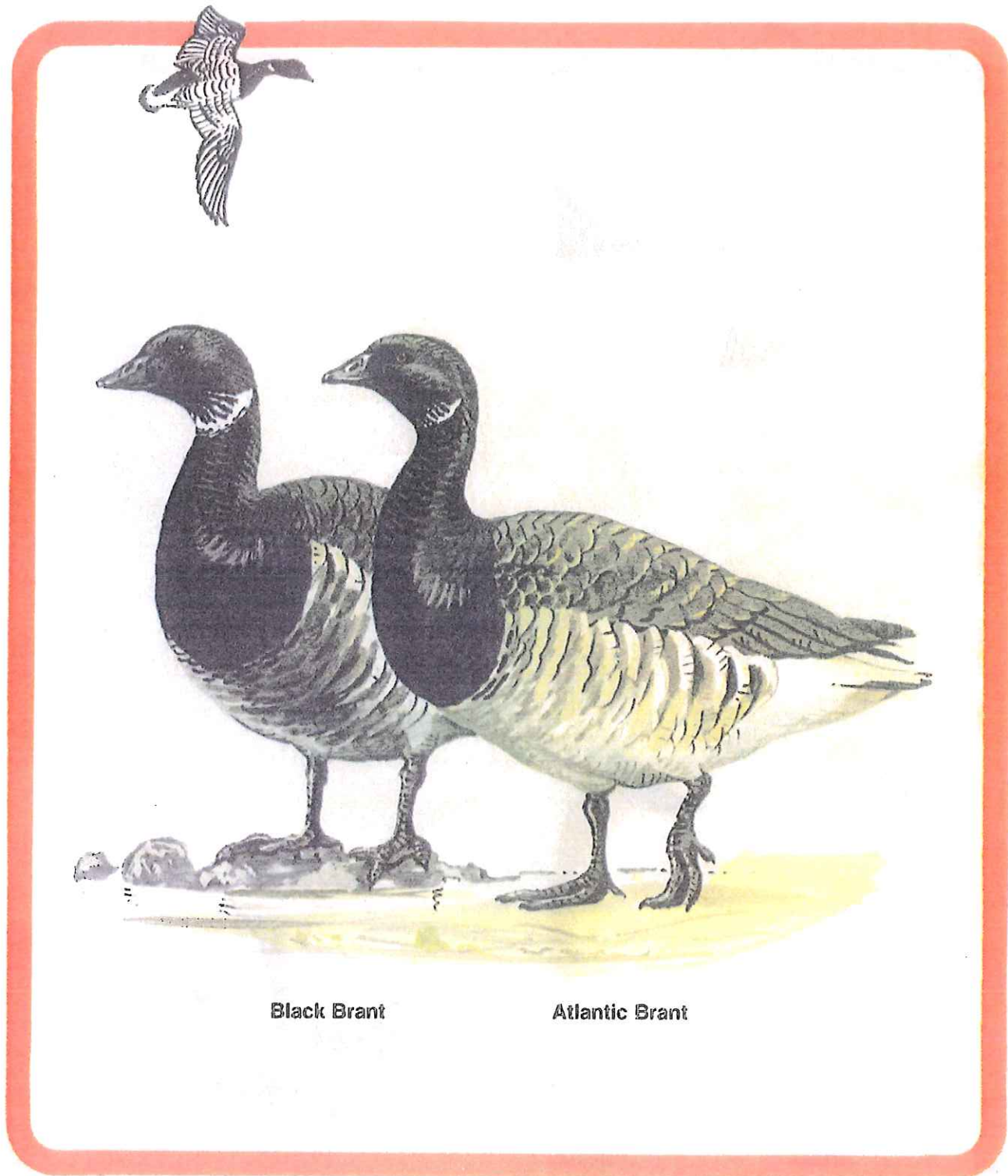
Ross's Goose



In appearance Ross's geese are very similar to snow geese but smaller (about four pounds or 1800 g). In hand, their size and lack of a "grinning patch" distinguish them from

snow geese. While not a plentiful species, there has been a significant increase in the number of Ross's geese in North America in the last 25 years.

Brant



Black Brant

Atlantic Brant

The Brant is a small, dark goose with a short neck and lacking the white cheek of the Canada. The average size of this bird is 3¼ -4 pounds (1.5-1.8 kg); the normal length is 24-25 inches (6.2-6.4 cm).

The Black Brant is a small dark western goose very similar in plumage, size, habits and voice to the Brant but it has

black rather than gray plumage on the breast and belly. Black Brants winter south to Baja, California.

The Brant winters from Virginia northward. Its flights is swift, with irregular and changing flock patterns. Hunters must take special care to heed the Federal regulations regarding the seasons and bag limits of this species.

Whistling Swan



Drake

Juvenile

Whistling swans are now common and increasing. They are hunted by special permit in certain Western States. The adult is entirely snow white, with black feet. Its bill is black with a yellow spot in front of the eye.

Mature birds are very large, weighing from 11-20 pounds (5-9 kg) and measuring 48-57 inches (120-140 cm) in length. In flight their long necks and their black bills and feet are evident. They have a loud and musical call.

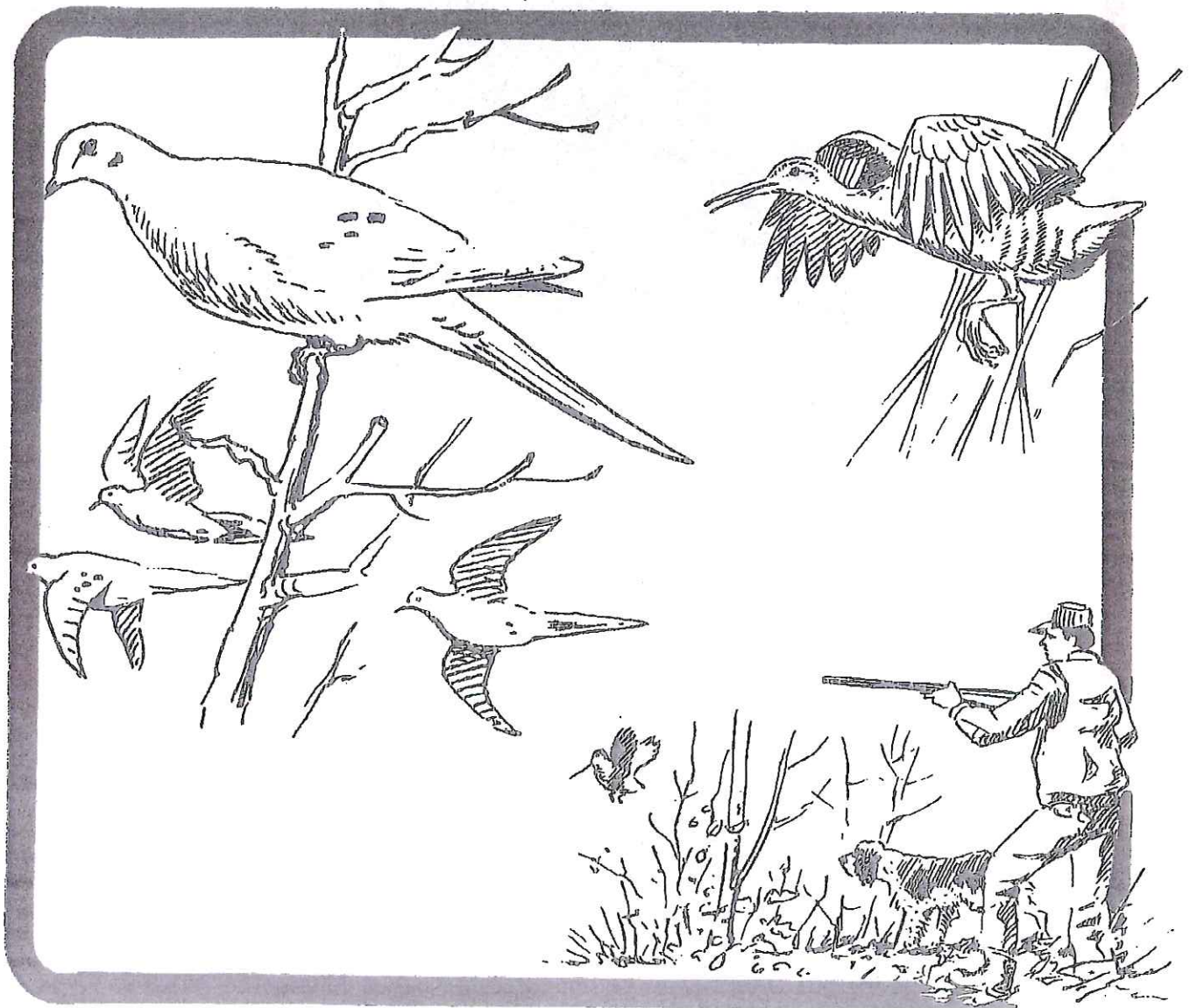
Migratory Birds Introduction

The migratory game birds of North America are a heterogeneous group made up of rails, gallinules, woodcock, snipe and doves. The rails and gallinules are long-legged wading birds which favor the shallow shorelines of lakes and freshwater and saltwater tidal marshes. The snipe and woodcock are inhabitants of inland marshes and bogs and the doves are pigeon-like birds of the open woods and fields.

Rails, and to a lesser extent gallinules, were hunted fairly heavily along the Eastern Seaboard in former years. Hunters either waded the marshes or had a guide with a

light skiff pole them through, flushing the birds ahead of them. The best shooting occurs when the tide waters flood the marsh grasses so that the birds are not able to run and must fly when the hunter approaches.

Today, the woodcock and doves are the most hunted of the migratory birds. Southward migrations of woodcock take place in late September and October. Alder thickets and bottomlands barren of birds one day may fill up overnight. The same thickets which yield scores of birds one day also may empty overnight as the birds move on, leaving only their tell-tale, chalky-white droppings to mark their passing.



Mourning Dove



The mourning dove is a handsome streamlined bird with a small head and long pointed tail. Adult birds measure about 11-13 inches (27.9-33 cm) in length. The plumage is slaty blue above and reddish fawn below, with large white spots on the tail. It has a black spot behind the eye, a black bill, and the legs and feet are red. Its flight is direct and rapid and its wings produce a noticeable whistle when the bird is in flight.

The mourning dove is found throughout the continental United States, southern Canada, and Mexico. Some populations of mourning doves are migratory, while others remain in the south during the summer and winter. This dove frequents woodland areas, farm fields and

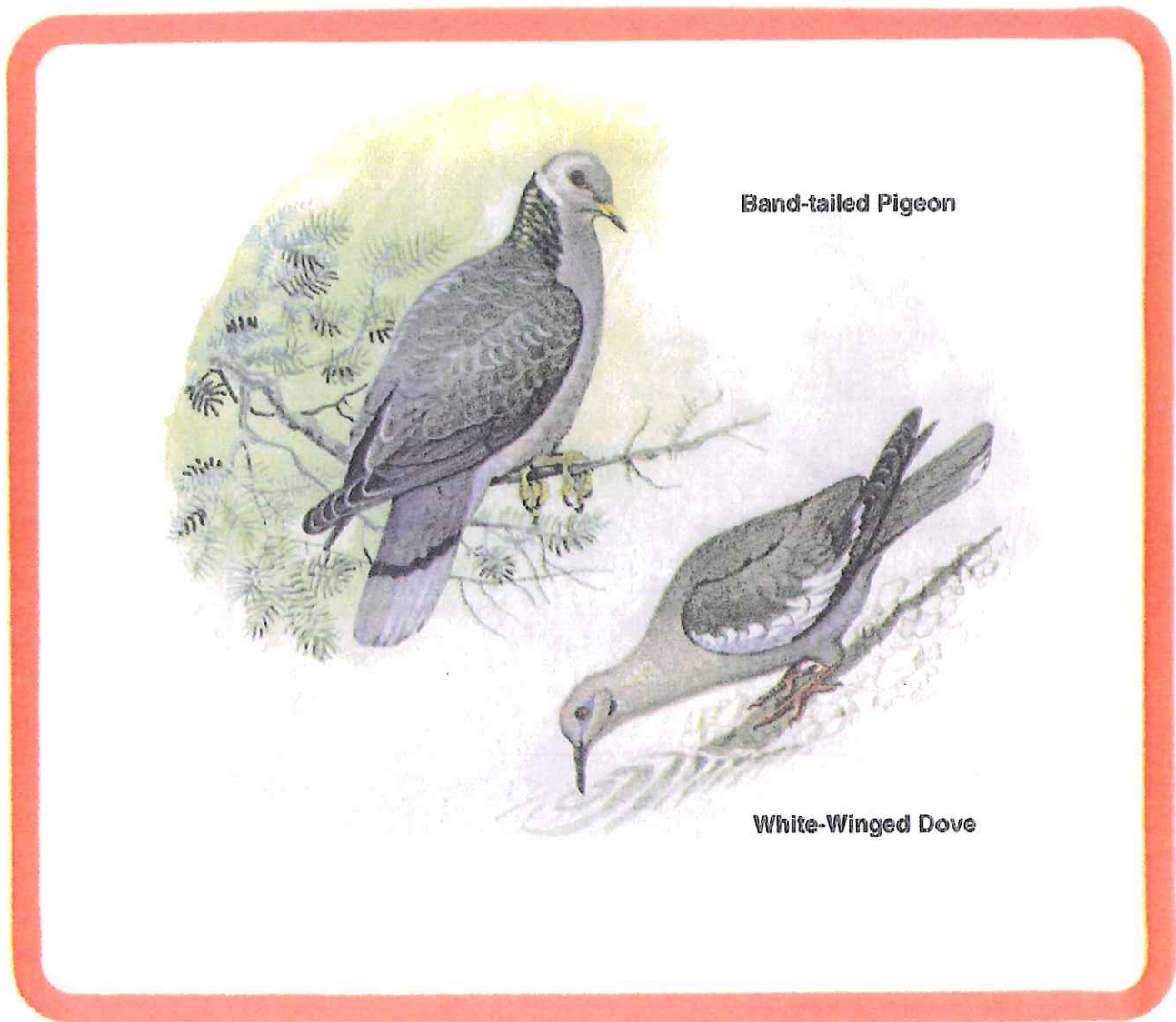
residential areas. It feeds primarily on small grains and weeds.

Nesting takes place from March or April to September. Nests are flimsily constructed and are usually located in trees and shrubs, although occasionally a dove will be found nesting on the ground. The normal clutch size is 2 eggs, but on rare occasions a nest will contain 3. Incubation requires 14 days.

The mourning dove is a popular game bird in some states while it is protected in other states. The hunting of mourning doves provides fast and challenging shooting.

Band-Tailed Pigeon

White-Winged Dove



The name band-tailed is derived from the wide, pale gray band across the tail bordered with black. Band-tails are somewhat longer than domestic pigeons reaching a length of about 13 to 15 inches (350-380 mm). They have slightly shorter wings and are lighter in weight than the domestic pigeon. They are blue-gray in color with a white neck crescent above an iridescent nape.

The habitat of the band-tailed pigeon is in the oak-conifer forests of Western North America. It is a migratory bird and remains in flocks during the winter.

The breeding cycle ranges from mid-May to late August. The female lays one or two eggs per clutch, but may lay and hatch several clutches a year. Incubation requires 18 to 20 days.

This species feeds primarily on small grain and berries.

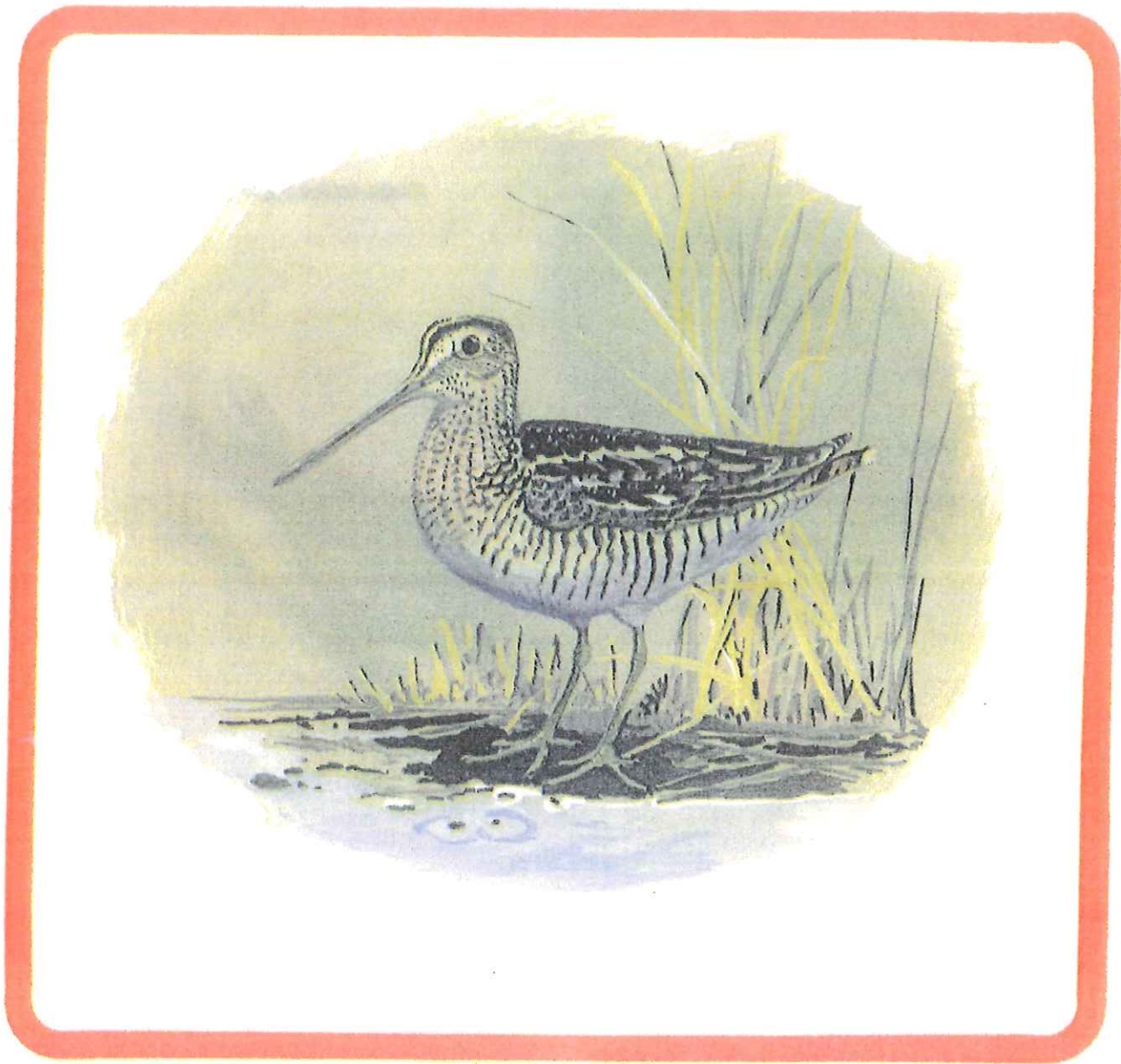
The white-winged dove is chunkier in build and larger in head size than the mourning dove. A band of white across the middle of each wing is an identifying field mark. The eyes of this species have a bright red iris with a patch of blue skin surrounding it.

The white-winged dove is a sub-tropical species, found primarily in southern Texas and Arizona. It is more likely to be found in dense, thicket-like forests or sub-tropical trees, and thorny shrubs.

Nesting occurs in late May through early June; the normal clutch size is two eggs. Incubation is complete in about 14 days.

White-winged doves feed primarily on small grain and also the fruits of certain cactus plants.

Common Snipe



The Common Snipe reaches an average length, including the bill, of 10.4-11.6 inches (265-295 mm). The bill is 2.5 inches (64 mm) long, flesh colored, though darkening to a deep brown. An adult bird weighs between 2.5-5.5 ounces (70-155 gr). The legs and feet are greenish-gray to yellow green. There are broad, blackish, sometimes flecked, crown stripes and also a dark stripe through the eyes and a dark patch on the lower cheek.

The snipe is a migratory bird. Its summer range extends across the central southern region of the United States up to the coast of Alaska, Canada, and California. The winter range runs across the central southern United States as far south as the northern areas of South America.

Breeding takes place in early spring. Clutches consist of four heavily blotched, buffy eggs. The incubation period for the eggs is 19 days.

The diet consists mainly of animal matter, largely insects, earthworms, crustacea, arachnids, and mollusks. Supplementary foods include plant matter, such as seeds, fibers and grit.

The main habitat areas are wetland areas, near bogs and swamps. Snipe frequently are bagged by waterfowl hunters.

Woodcock



The woodcock is a stocky, brown bird with short, rounded wings which enable it to fly in dense cover. The color pattern of its plumage blends with the dry leaf pattern of the forest floor. Distinguishing characteristics are the darker bands on the top of the head, short legs, large eyes set high and far back on the head and a long bill. The bill approximately 2.5 inches (6.4 cm) in length is used for probing the soil for earthworms and grubs. A mature woodcock weighs .3-.4 pounds (125-190 g).

Although classified as a shorebird, the woodcock is physically adapted to a forested habitat. Its distribution covers the forested regions in the eastern half of the United States. It is a migratory bird, nesting in the northern regions and wintering in their southern areas.

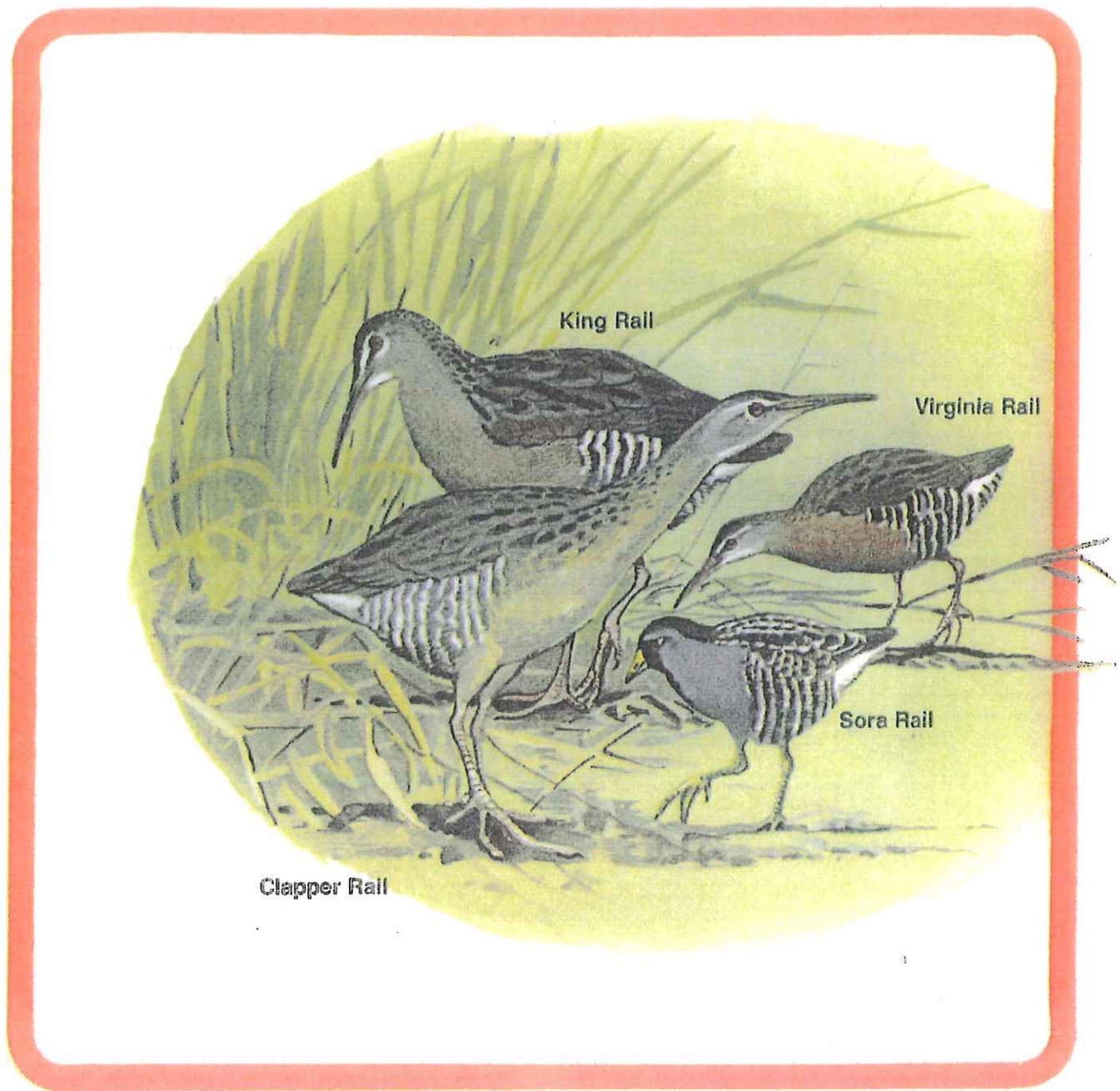
The woodcock prefers forested areas of alder, aspen or birch trees bordering fields or recently logged areas.

The primary diet of the woodcock is earthworms, supplemented with beetle, and fly larvae and some plant life.

Mating which is preceded by a unique courtship display occurs in mid-spring. Nests are located within a few yards of brushy field edges. The nest consists of a well-formed cup on the ground and usually contains about 4 eggs. Incubation takes 21 days.

Hunting this bird with a well-trained bird dog is an experience enjoyed by at least half a million hunters today.

Rails



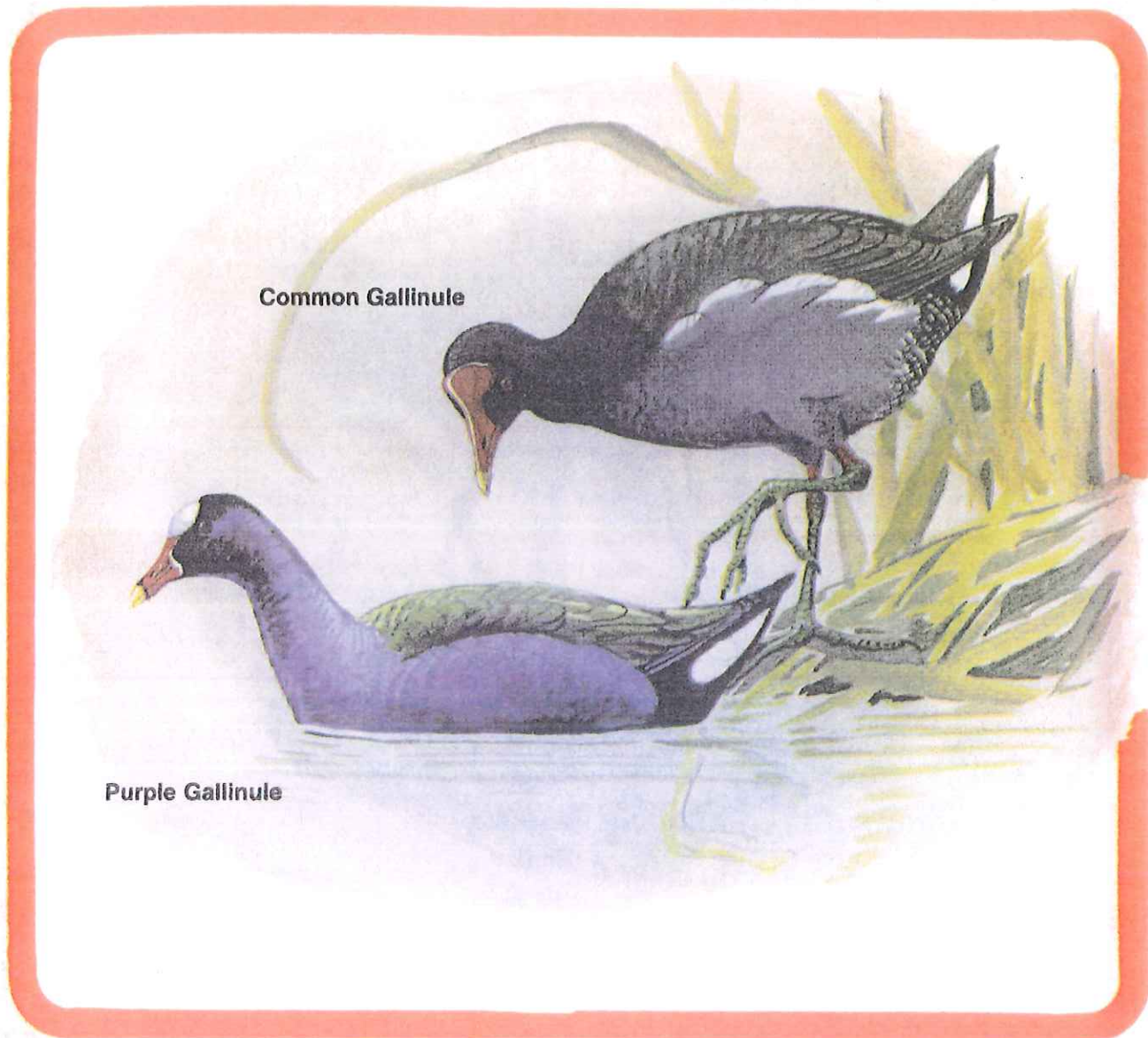
The two larger rails, the King and the Clapper, inhabit coastal marshlands. Nearer the size of small ducks, (18- 22 inches) they are very easily overlooked. They are able to swim and dive as well as hide in the thick marsh grasses. The Clapper rail is pale tan or grayish brown with white-barred flanks and a down-curved bill. It prefers tidal marsh bordered by salt or brackish water. The King is a similar but more brightly-colored, reddish rail which inhabits freshwater marshlands of the Eastern United States.

Virginia rail is a medium sized bird 8-11 inches (20-28 cm) in length. Unless flushed from the sedges in its marshland habitat, it is difficult to observe. Its thin, flattened body enables it to move through thick marsh growth, and its barred plumage of chestnut, gray, brown and black make it nearly invisible. The sora is about the same size. It is more common perhaps than the Virginia rail, and is fonder of cattail marshes. Its gray, barred plumage is set off by a chicken-like yellow bill.

Rails are hunted by walking through the marshes on foot or they are hunted from a flat boat poled through the marshes at high tide.

Common Gallinule

Purple Gallinule



The Common Gallinule is a large rail with a wide distribution throughout the United States. It has the body form of a small coot, but differs in having a red bill and a white line on each side of its body.

The secretive behavior of the common gallinule and its choice of vegetated areas, rather than open water, make it a rarely seen bird. Breeding takes place from early April, through early May. Nests are built of dead vegetation. Clutch size may vary from 2 to 17 eggs; 8-10 being the average size. Incubation periods last between 4-10 days.

Gallinules inhabit bogs and shallow marshes. They feed mainly on aquatic vegetation which is supplemented by some grains.

Gallinules are not hunted extensively in North America. The Purple Gallinule is a brightly colored bird with a bluish purple neck and underparts and a brassy green back. The frontal shield is light blue; the bill is red but tipped with yellow. Its legs are bright yellow.

This species inhabits lowland marshes of Florida and Texas north to South Carolina and Tennessee. It frequents deep water if lily pads are present, and feeds on aquatic insects, water plants, and the seeds of wild rice and millet.

Sandhill Cranes



Sandhill cranes, or one of their six subspecies, are found in the northwestern United States, Mississippi, Florida and Georgia. Their primary habitat is in tundra areas, dunes, shallow marshes, and bogs.

Sandhill cranes have long legs, necks and bills. They attain an average weight of about 6-12 pounds (2.72-5.44 kg). The adult has a dark red skin on the crown. Body plumage is slate gray except in summer when it is stained a rusty brown from having been preened with marsh debris. Immature birds lack the bare patch of crimson red skin which adults have on the forehead.

The Sandhill crane will nest on dry land but prefers to be near the water. Nesting begins in the latter part of spring. Clutches usually contain two eggs and the incubation period is 28 to 31 days.

The prime food of the Sandhill crane is almost exclusively small rodents, frogs and insects, however the young may supplement their food supply with grain in the autumn months.

Hunting the Sandhill crane is limited to only a few states and regulations governing this game bird are strictly enforced.