



Photo: Eric VanderWerf

## Migratory Birds

# American Wigeon

*Anas americana*

### SPECIES STATUS:

State recognized as Indigenous

**SPECIES INFORMATION:** The American wigeon, or "Baldpate," is a widespread North American dabbling duck (Family: Anatidae), which winters in small numbers in the Hawaiian Islands. Wigeons are common across most of North America, with a breeding population estimated in excess of three million. While wigeons are dun-colored across most of the body, breeding males sport a bright white stripe across the crown of the head, bright green patches on either side of the head, and contrasting white and dark plumage on the rump. During the breeding season, males' contrasting colors are used in courtship displays to attract females and discourage competing males. However, in winter, male plumage is much more similar to that of females, retaining the brown body coloration but changing to dark gray on the head and neck. Wigeons are the most vegetarian of dabbling ducks, eating the stems and leafy parts of aquatic plants, leafy parts of grasses, and leaves and seeds of some marsh and crop plants. Breeding females, however, feed largely on insects (including dragonflies and damselflies), mollusks, and crustaceans.

**DISTRIBUTION:** In North America, wigeons' winter range extends across the central and southern United States, south through Mexico, and along the U.S. east coast as far north as Cape Cod. In Hawai'i, they have been sighted throughout the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) but have not been recorded in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

**ABUNDANCE:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys from 1955 through 1997 yield an average breeding population estimate of approximately 2.62 million birds for North America. The 1997 estimate was  $3,117,600 \pm 161,600$  (SE), about 19 percent higher than the long-term average. In Hawai'i, State Waterbird counts of American wigeons from 1986 to 2003 have averaged  $19.5 \pm 8.4$  (SE) birds throughout the MHI.

**LOCATION AND CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT:** Wigeons winter in a wide range of habitats including freshwater marshes, rivers, lakes, impoundments, estuaries, bays, and agricultural lands that provide an abundance of emergent and submergent vegetation. In Hawai'i, wigeons winter at Kanahā Pond State Wildlife Sanctuary and Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge on Maui, and near Waipi'o on O'ahu. Use of agricultural lands suggests flooded taro fields could attract wigeons. Some suitable habitat of these types is already protected, primarily wetlands within the bounds of wildlife refuges and sanctuaries.

**THREATS:** Primary threats include the following:

- Loss of wetland habitat to development.
- Degradation of habitat due to pollution, hydrology alteration, or invasions by alien species.
- West Nile virus or other avian diseases.

**CONSERVATION ACTIONS:** To protect the ability of wintering American wigeons to survive while in Hawai'i and to return in good condition to breeding grounds in North America, statewide and island-specific conservation actions should include:

- Protection of current habitat.
- Protection and restoration of additional wetland habitat, especially where it can be reclaimed from abandoned urban or agricultural uses.

**MONITORING:** Continue surveys of population and distribution in known and likely habitats.

**RESEARCH PRIORITIES:** Little study of visiting wigeons has been undertaken, probably in part because of their annual presence and numbers are uncertain. Research priorities should include the following:

- Better understanding of habitat needs and preferences, including foraging and population limiting factors.
- Increased understanding of movements of individuals that overfly the Hawaiian Islands.

**References:**

Mowbray T. 1999. American wigeon (*Anas americana*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 401 (Poole A, Gill F, editors.). Philadelphia, (PA): The Academy of Natural Sciences; and Washington DC: The American Ornithologists' Union.