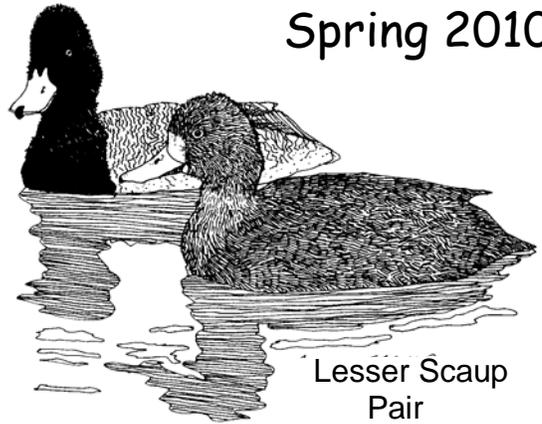


NATURE DETECTIVES

Spring 2010

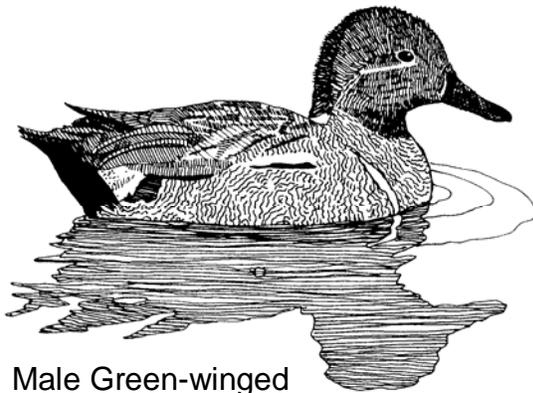


Lesser Scaup
Pair

Dabbling and Diving into Spring

Pretend you are a water bird living on a near-by pond, or design your own water bird on paper. What kind of waterfowl would you like to be or draw? Would you prefer to be a dabbling or a diver? Do you want to squirt water out your bill or snatch fish with your beak? Do you want to fly more like a helicopter or an airplane?

Pull Out and Save



Male Green-winged
Teal

Dabblers and divers are two categories of ducks. The terms describe two different ways many ducks make their living. Dabblers are sometimes called puddle ducks for their ability to find food in very small and shallow waters. Mallards are dabblers and so are northern pintails and green-winged teals, to name a few puddle ducks that spend time in Boulder County.

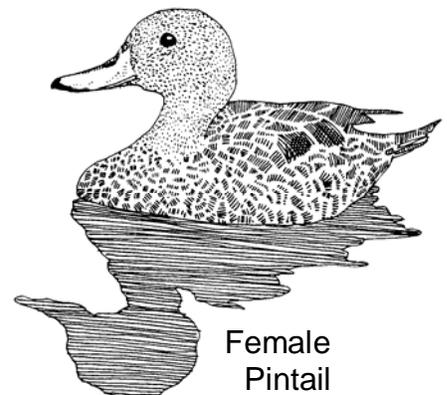
Redhead ducks and lesser scaups are among the divers. They prefer big water and avoid walking around on land more than necessary.

Diving ducks sometimes dabble but dabbling ducks rarely or never dive.

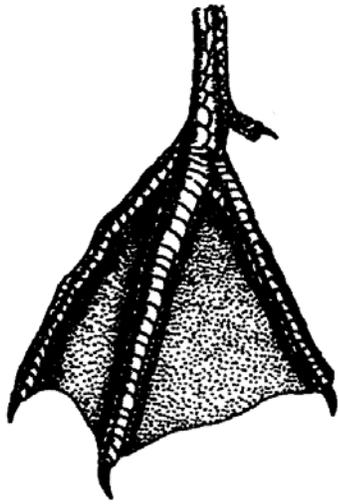
If you would like to dabble and also dive, you might choose to be a coot. Coots are funny birds that look like a cross between a chicken and a duck. Swimming on top of a pond they resemble a toddler's pull-toy. They dabble and dive and walk on land.

Finding Food in All the Right Places

Whatever kind of bird you choose, its body is well adapted for the particular job it does. By having body shapes fitted to different ways of gathering food from the water, species of ducks and other types of birds avoid competing with each other for precious resources. Different body shapes specialize in finding food in different parts of wetland habitats. Turn the page for more information on dabblers and divers to help you choose which bird you might want to pretend to be or to draw.



Female
Pintail



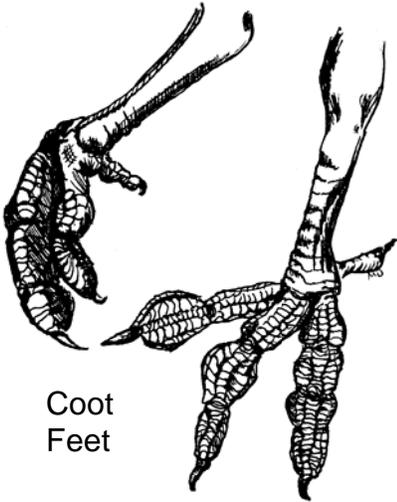
Duck Foot

Walk like a Duck

Duck toes are long with skin stretched between them. These webbed feet are great for swimming and diving and walking on soft mud. Ducks waddle because their feet are wide and set fairly far apart, forcing them to wobble from side to side in the classic duck waddle.

Diving ducks tend to have larger feet and shorter legs than dabblers because they need strong feet propelling them when they dive and swim underwater. The legs of the diving ducks are placed toward the back of their bodies. This makes them powerful swimmers, but they have a slow and awkward waddle on land. Dabbling ducks have their longer legs more centered on their bodies. They walk more easily on land, and they use their longer legs to duck-paddle along while floating on the water's surface.

Ducks don't have to worry about cold feet while swimming in icy water because they don't have nerves in their feet to sense temperature.



Coot Feet

Coots have long toes too; but instead of webbed feet, they have bumpy toes with flaps or lobes of skin to help them swim, dive and walk on mud without sinking deep. When they swim, their heads bob back and forth; and the faster they swim, the faster their heads bob. When they dive, they might go down as far as 25 feet. They look clumsy when they walk on land to graze on grass or seeds.

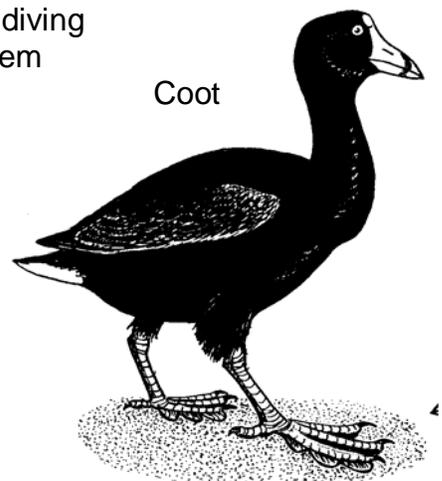
Helicopter Take-off or Airplane Taxi

Dabbling ducks have large, broad wings and are slow flyers. Kind of like feathered helicopters, they can jump straight up into the air into flight and land in tight spaces.

Just as airplanes have to taxi down a runway to pick up speed, diving ducks have to get a running start for their short wings to take them airborne. Once in the air, they fly faster than dabblers, but they land with a splash and slide that looks practically like a crash landing.

Chicken-like, coots are heavy, ungraceful fliers. They have to patter along on the water surface to gain enough speed to fly.

Dabblers, divers and coots flap their wings continuously in flight.



Coot

A Scoop and Squirt Bill or A Seize and Hold Beak



Typical Duck Bill



Coot Head

Duck beaks are usually called bills, and they are soft yet strong with hard hooked tips for grasping food. Bills lack true teeth but some have edges like saw blades or comb teeth.

Dabblers use their wide beaks to suck up mud and water. They separate out the insects, worms and other tiny animals, plants and seeds by feel then squirt the water back out through the sides of their bills. With mouths open, they scoop up food particles from the water surface. They duck under shallow water to reach pond weeds and grasses and tiny animals such as insects in the mud. On land, they graze on plants and forage on farmers' fields for leftover grain and seeds.

Northern shovelers are dabblers named for their wide bills.

Foraging well under the water's surface in deeper water, diving ducks tend to seize more underwater animals such as insects, snails and fish than dabblers, though they eat plants too.

Duck Hunting in the Spring

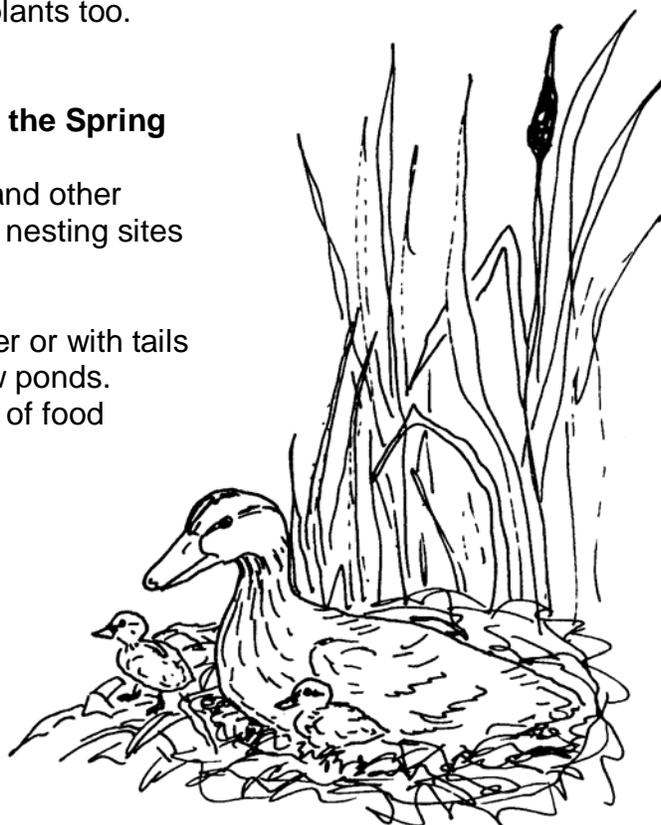
Spring is one of the best times to see ducks and other waterfowl because many stop on their way to nesting sites further north.

Expect to see dabblers sitting high in the water or with tails tipped up and heads down, feeding in shallow ponds. Also look for them waddling around in search of food on land.

Expect to see divers sitting low on deep water where they have plenty of room for their long, pattering, take-off runs on the water surface.

Look for them suddenly plunging underwater then shortly popping to the surface a few feet away.

Expect to see coots floating in noisy groups on the water. Grouchy with each other, the comical coots find something to squabble about frequently and loudly.

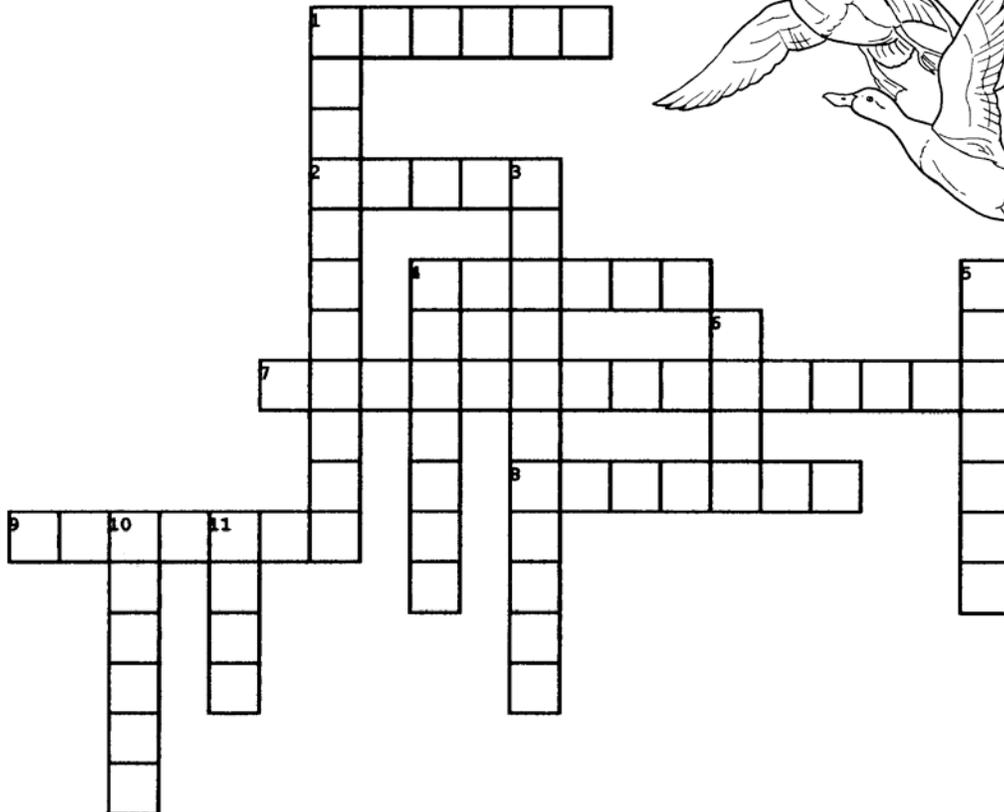
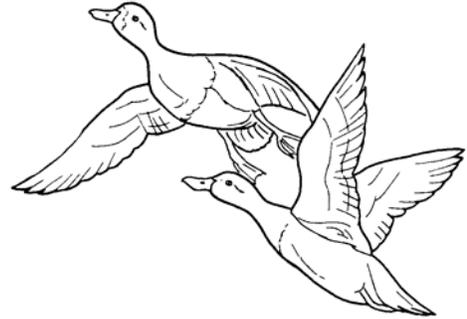


Duck with Ducklings

Go On a Duck Walk

Grab your sketch pad and get outside! Boulder County Open Space properties are home to many of the ducks you just read about, and more. This spring, make a visit to Pella Crossing, Walden Ponds, Twin Lakes or Stearns Lake. Be a duck detective - take a walk, watch carefully, and see how many ducks you can find dabbling, diving, and waddling around. Note how they take off or land and what they are eating, and listen to their calls.

Dabblers and Divers



Across

- 1 duck foot
- 2 duck type that finds food in deep water
- 4 way ducks walk
- 7 puddle duck with long tail (2 words)
- 8 puddle duck
- 9 something ducks eat

Down

- 1 good place to view ducks (2 words)
- 3 diving duck (2 words)
- 4 habitat where water birds live
- 5 most common puddle duck
- 6 beak
- 10 season when many ducks migrate north
- 11 water bird that dives and dabbles

spring, waddle, Walden Ponds, webbed, wetland
 bill, cool, dabbling, diver, insects, mallard, northern pintail, redhead duck
POSSIBLE ANSWERS: