

Hooded Merganser

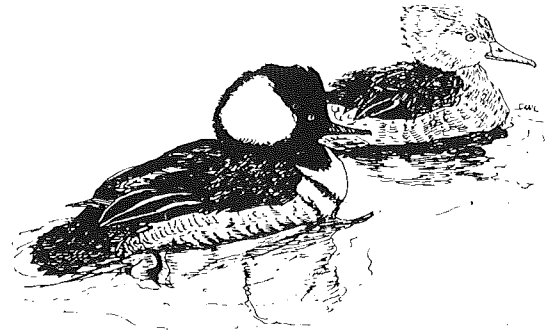
Lophodytes cucullatus

The Hooded Merganser is a Nearctic species whose breeding range in the West is from southeastern Alaska south to Montana and Oregon, and in the East extends from southern Canada south to Louisiana and Georgia (AOU 1983). In the eastern U.S., Hooded Mergansers winter from southern New England to the Gulf Coast states. Small numbers have been recorded in Vermont during the winter months where open water persists. Northbound individuals arrive on open water in Vermont in late March and move to their breeding ponds as the ice disappears. Postbreeding dispersal occurs in September; most Hooded Mergansers are gone by mid November.

During the nesting season Hooded Mergansers frequent swamps, ponds with a plentiful supply of standing dead timber, and beaver ponds. Critical habitat seems to be flooded bottomlands or shorelines with numerous snags and stumps to serve as nest sites (Palmer 1976). The species prefers clear, quiet water, and streams and rivers with adequate prey (crayfish, fish, aquatic insects), wide, deep channels, cobbled bottoms, and swift currents. For raising broods, moderate to heavy forest cover is important (Kitchen and Hunt 1969). Increased forest cutting, particularly of snags, and draining or sedimentation of wetlands could pose threats to this merganser. Winter habitat includes inland freshwater lakes and rivers, estuaries, bays, and coastal marshes.

Hooded Mergansers' nesting requirements are similar to those of Wood Ducks. Nest sites are cavities in snags or stumps. Nest boxes are readily used, even those in open, wetland habitats (McGilvrey 1966). Nest snags or boxes adjacent to water are preferred (Morse et al. 1969). The only record of a Vermont nest is of a cavity about 6–8 m (20–25 ft) high in a dead sugar maple.

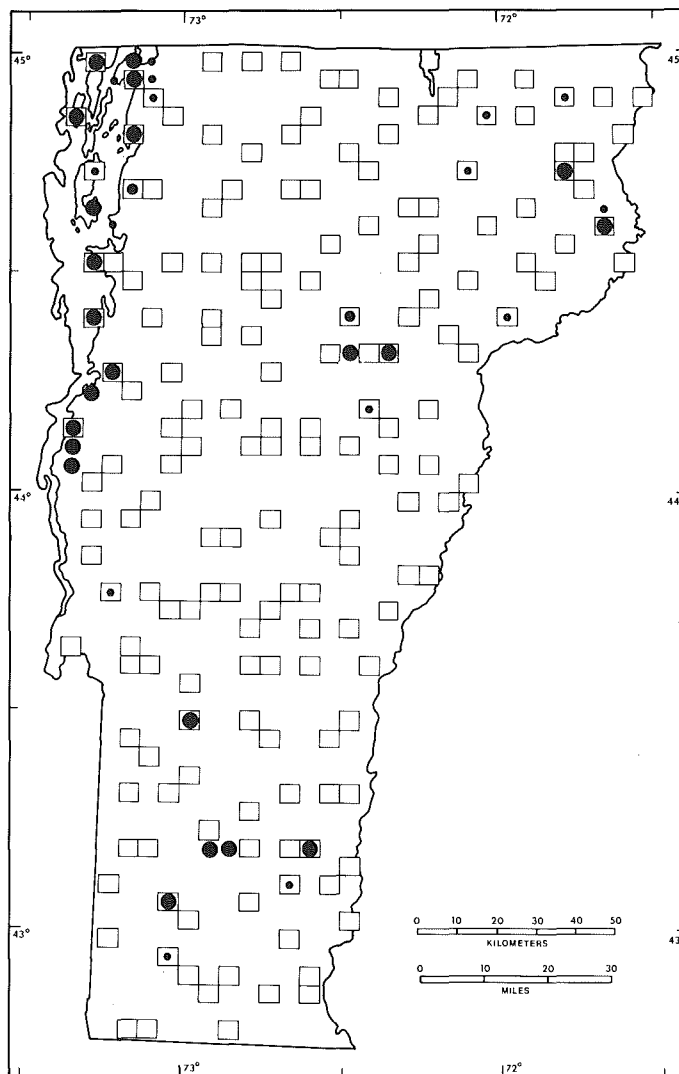
Breeding activity begins in the winter with courtship displays such as upward stretching, wing flapping, and rushing across the



water, all performed by the male, with inciting behavior by the female. The male's crest, which is raised and lowered, is important during encounters with females or other males (Johnsgard 1975). During courtship the drake utters a guttural *crroooooo* (Palmer 1976) that is similar to the call of a pickerel frog. The clutch of 7 to 12 pure white eggs are laid from late April to early June (Bull 1974). Two Vermont egg dates are May 22 and June 6. Hooded Mergansers are known to lay eggs in cavities shared with Wood Ducks (Bull 1974), as well as with Common Goldeneyes and other Hooded Mergansers (Palmer 1976). Incubation, lasting 32 or 33 days, is carried on by females, as males desert breeding areas at this time. The ducklings scramble from the cavity and drop to the ground or water about 1 day after hatching. Vermont dates for downy young are May 30 through July 11 (six records); broods number 8 to 11 ducklings. Fledged young were found on June 23 and August 14.

The estimated number of breeding pairs at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge each year between 1979 and 1983 was 5 to 10, and the estimated number of young produced each year during that period was 15 to 27 (J. Nissen, pers. comm.). Morse et al. (1969) found that females do not breed until they are 2 years old, and that all breeding females in their study area returned to within 4.8 km (3 mi) of nesting sites used the previous year. Raccoons are predators at nest cavities, and northern pike are implicated in some predation losses of ducklings (Palmer 1976).

Like other mergansers, the diet of the Hooded is primarily fish or other aquatic



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 26 (15%)

Possible breeding: 10 (38% of total)

Probable breeding: 2 (8% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 14 (54% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	11	35	42.0
Green Mountains	2	4	8.0
North Central	4	21	15.0
Northeast Highlands	3	19	12.0
East Central	2	11	7.5
Taconic Mountains	2	13	7.5
Eastern Foothills	2	8	8.0

animal life. The Hooded's diet includes a smaller proportion of fish prey than do the diets of the other mergansers (Palmer 1976).

The Hooded Merganser was recorded in all seven physiographic regions, and was confirmed in all but the East Central region. Its occurrence was highest in the Champlain Lowlands, an area of abundant tracts of bottomland timber and swamps, with plentiful standing dead trees and stumps in or adjacent to water. Eight of the 14 confirmations (57%) were in this region, clustered adjacent to Lake Champlain. Comparing the occurrence of Hooded Mergansers with that of Wood Ducks, and taking into account the greater occurrence of Wood Ducks

in all regions, the distribution patterns of these two species are similar, perhaps reflecting similar preferences for nesting habitat.

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