

Common Goldeneye

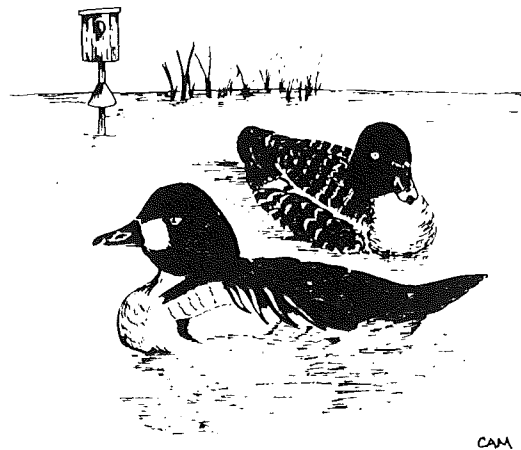
Bucephala clangula

As a cavity-nesting duck, the Common Goldeneye is limited by the availability of suitable nest sites and the abundance of potential competitors for those sites. The goldeneye's major habitat requirements are large bodies of water near open wooded areas that contain cavities for nest sites. The species will readily occupy duck-nest boxes and has apparently benefited from the proliferation of nesting structures intended for Wood Ducks.

Unless an observer regularly surveys duck boxes, nests are very difficult to locate. More than 80% of confirmed breedings in Vermont during the Atlas Project refer to the observation of broods with hens.

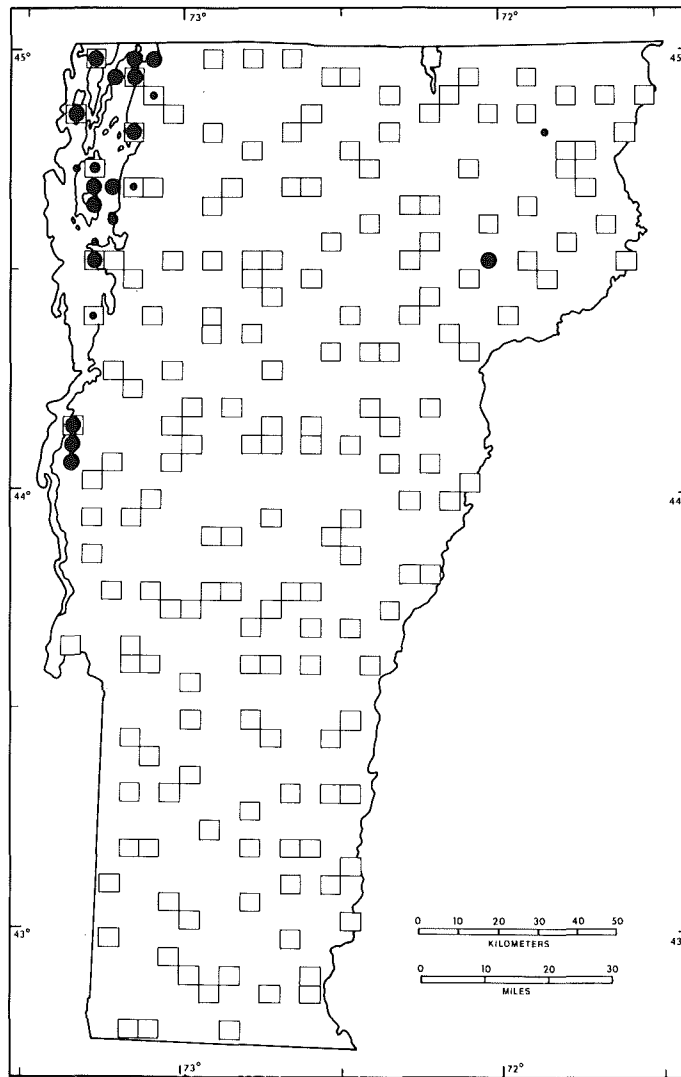
Goldeneyes occur throughout the year in Vermont; a few winter on the state's larger rivers in ice-free areas and on the few unfrozen portions of Lake Champlain. Courtship activity may begin among wintering birds as early as late January, and peak in March. The male executes a variety of displays involving forward head stretching, snapping the head onto the back with the bill in a vertical position, and kicking vigorously rearward with the legs. The displays are accompanied by a buzzing call somewhat similar to that of the Common Nighthawk. Since goldeneyes pair before arrival on the breeding ground, display behavior is not useful for ascertaining breeding status.

Paired goldeneyes return to breeding areas in late March and early April in Vermont. In two New Brunswick studies, nests were initiated as early as April 7 (Carter 1958), with a peak in laying indicated for May 11–20 (Prince 1968); the last clutches were started in late May (Carter 1958; Prince 1968). Gibbs (1961) indicated a peak in nest starts for late April in Maine. The nest is built in a natural cavity or nest box. Goldeneyes showed a distinct preference for nest boxes at 5.5–6.1 m (18–20 ft) heights in a Minnesota study (Johnson 1967), indicating a predilection for high nest entrances. Prince



(1968) found that natural cavities selected by goldeneyes often possessed an opening to the sky. Clutch size ranges from 5 to 17 eggs; reports of larger clutches refer to nests in which more than one female contributed to the clutch. The average clutch for 75 North American nests reported in Bellrose (1980) was 9.2. The eggs are elliptical or ovate, and range from pale green to olive in color. Vermont egg dates range from May 9 to June 30 (four records). Incubation lasts from 27 to 32 days, with an average of 30 days (Cramp and Simmons 1977; Bellrose 1980). Drakes leave the nesting area soon after the hens commence incubation (Carter 1958). After hatching, the young remain in the nest for another 1–1 1/2 days. Downy young have been reported in Vermont between June 7 and July 10 (three records). Goldeneyes can fly at 56 to 60 days of age (Gibbs 1961). Hens desert their broods at about 50 days (Cramp and Simmons 1977); 36.7% of all broods observed by Carter (1958) in New Brunswick were parentless.

Vermont is along the southern periphery of the Common Goldeneye's primarily boreal breeding distribution. Documentation of the species' breeding in Vermont dates back to 1915 when O. Durfee and F. H. Kennard located a nest in Averill. According to one report (GMAS records, F. J. Perry), the species was first recorded breeding in Milton, on Lake Champlain, in 1928. Surprisingly, the species is found in Vermont almost en-



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 10 (6%)

Possible breeding: 3 (30% of total)

Probable breeding: 1 (10% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 6 (60% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	10	32	100
Green Mountains	0	0	0
North Central	0	0	0
Northeast Highlands	0	0	0
East Central	0	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	0
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

tirely in the Champlain Lowlands, rather than in the boreal Northeast Highlands. It has probably benefited from management for the Wood Duck in the Champlain Lowlands, especially at the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area in Addison, where suitable trees are scarce but nest boxes are plentiful. All of the priority blocks in which this species occurred were in the Champlain Lowlands.

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