



## A GUIDE TO WINTER BIRDS & WATERFOWL ON BUZZARDS BAY

This is a quick guide to birds you are likely to see along the shores of Buzzards Bay during the winter. The descriptions were provided by wildlife biologist Andrew Single, who also recommends apps such as eBird and Merlin. If using an app, it is best not to record specific observations publicly unless you are certain of your identification. Get out there and have fun!

### Ducks



**Common Eider-** *Large sea duck, males are mostly white in color while females are overall brown. Spend their winters in Massachusetts, but go further north for the summer. King eiders are occasionally seen with Common eiders, but are uncommon.*



**Greater/Lesser Scaup-** *Greater and Lesser scaups are extremely similar to each other, and can't always be distinguished from each other. Males for both species have white sides with a grey back, and have iridescent green heads with noticeably golden eyes. Females are brown overall, with a patch of white in front of their golden eyes.*



**Bufflehead-** *Relatively small diving duck. Males have white sides with a black back and head, with a large patch of white in the back of their head. Females are a drab grey/brown, but have a white cheek patch that helps distinguish them.*



**Red-breasted Merganser-** Look for a long, narrow bill that sets mergansers apart from other ducks. Males have a scraggy black head, with a rusty brown breast and grayish body. Females appear mostly grey with a pale brown head, and somewhat visible crest similar to males. Spend their summers throughout most of Canada.



**Surf Scoter\***- All three scoter species are large, mostly black ducks. All of the scoters have a large bill, with varying degrees of orange on them. Surf scoters can be identified by the white on the back of their neck, on their forehead, and mixed in with the orange on the bill.



**White-winged Scoter\***- This scoter will have a white comma under its eye, and white may or may not be visible on the wing (the secondary feathers on the wings are white, giving the bird its namesake, but because of how the wing folds when the bird is on the water you might struggle to see the white).



**Black Scoter\***- This scoter is entirely black, except for the yellow-orange on its bill. Note that the orange is paler than that of the other two scoters.

*\*A note about scoters; like most ducks, scoters are sexually dimorphic and females look different from males. Because of how far out on the water scoters tend to be, it may be especially difficult to ID a lone female. Take time to consult a guide when ID'ing females.*

## Loons and Geese



**Brant-** *This goose is smaller than a Canada goose, but looks somewhat similar. Their entirely black head and neck is broken up by a small white 'necklace', Their back is a dull grey-brown, and their sides are a scalloped white and grey pattern. They stay very close to shore, and ID'ing them is no challenge. Unlike the ducks, brants are not sexually dimorphic, making the two sexes impossible to distinguish.*



**Loons-** *Common loons out of breeding plumage can be confused with Red-throated loons, as they are also out of breeding plumage during the winter. Both are common sights along the coast of New England in the winter. Pay attention to the amount of white on the face and neck when ID'ing a wintering loon. Red-throated loons should have a white face and mostly white throat, while Common loons will have more grey on their necks and face. Red-throated loons also have some white speckling on their back.*

## Passerines



**Snow Bunting-** *A small passerine just a little bigger than a sparrow, Snow buntings appear white with patches of cinnamon during the winter. Their white color alone is enough to distinguish them from other passerines in the area, but always consult a guide before reporting it on a site like eBird.*



**American Goldfinch-** *While they are easy to see and most people know what a goldfinch looks like, they do molt for the winter and have a different color in the winter. Their clean, bright yellow gives way to a dirtier gold that is more localized towards the head. The wings will be a surprisingly lively black color compared to the other colors on the body, and the wings will have white stripes (wing bars) across them. This is because goldfinches molt their wing feathers at a different time than when they molt their body feathers.*