

Buffleheads visit the Chesapeake Bay and Elizabeth River from autumn through spring, with a peak in November.



Bufflehead

Bucephala albeola

Common Names: Bufflehead, butterball

Size: 15 inches long with a 2 foot wingspan, they are the smallest diving duck in North America!

Lifespan: 2.5 years

Habitat: Open waters and wetlands of the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers. Can also be found on farmland and in lakes and ponds throughout the watershed.

Range: Buffleheads are only winter residents of the Chesapeake Bay, arriving in October and leaving in mid-April to go back to their breeding grounds in Alaska and Canada.

Diet: Buffleheads are diving ducks and will eat their food whole while underwater. They eat many seeds and aquatic plants and will also eat small animals like insects, fish, mollusks (like snails), and crustaceans.

Appearance: Males are mostly white with a black back and a glossy green-black head with a large white patch that looks like a bonnet. Like in most birds, the female is much more drably colored to help protect her and her offspring. Female buffleheads have a light gray chest with a brownish-gray back, wings, and head.

Predators: Squirrels, raccoons, and black bears are known to eat bufflehead eggs. Adults are preyed on by falcons, bald eagles, hawks, and foxes.

Voice: Outside of breeding season buffleheads are usually very quiet. In their breeding colonies males will make hoarse squeaks, squeals, and rasps and females will respond with a loud and deep response. When calling to their young they use a low note that may speed up if the mother senses danger.

What can you do? Pick up and properly dispose of trash. Avoid feeding wild ducks.

On-Line Resources

<https://www.chesapeakebay.net/S=0/fieldguide/critter/bufflehead>

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Bufflehead/id>

<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/bufflehead>



www.elizabethriver.org