

American Wigeon

Anas americana

The American Wigeon is a duck of northwestern North America. It is a ground nester, concealing its nests in upland cover near shallow, freshwater wetlands. Populations fluctuate with variations in water conditions in the Prairie Pothole and Aspen Parkland regions of the United States and Canada (Mowbray 1999a). In the mid-1950s, the species expanded its range in the eastern United States and Canada, presumably in response to drought conditions in its core breeding range and the increased availability of farm ponds and wastewater treatment lagoons in the East. Its range in eastern North America now extends from the Great Lakes east to Nova Scotia, where nesting populations are sparsely distributed.

The first documented breeding of American Wigeon in Vermont was in 1962 at Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area in Addison County (Fuller and King 1964). Although there were no confirmed records during the first atlas, probable breeding was observed in 1981, when several pairs loitered near Young Island. In five of the ten years from 1987 to 1996, breeding behavior was noted off the north end of Grand Isle (Vermont Bird Records Committee). Confirmed breeding by multiple females occurred there in 1989 and from 1991 to 1993, with broods first observed between 25 June and 11 July. In 1991, up to seven broods may have been raised on Grand Isle. From 1996 until the start of the second atlas, there were no summer records for American Wigeon in Vermont. During the second atlas, 1 possible and 2 probable breeding records were documented in priority blocks, but there were no confirmations. Possible and probable breeding also was verified on 4 non-priority blocks. In 2008, a year after atlas fieldwork concluded, a female American Wigeon with six ducklings was photographed just west of Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area in a block where atlas workers had documented probable breeding (Vermont Bird Records Committee).

Although American Wigeons breed sporadically in Vermont and should continue to do so, it is unlikely they will become regular breeders. Population estimates for American Wigeon in eastern Ontario, Quebec, Maine, and the combined Maritime Provinces peaked in 1998 at about 58,100 birds and have since declined to about 8400 (USFWS 2008a). In New York the number of blocks with

American Wigeon declined by 48 percent between atlases (McGowan and Corwin 2008). During the second atlas, continental populations were below the long-term average, presumably as a result of unfavorable hydrologic conditions in the Prairie Pothole Region. With improving conditions in the West, however, their numbers have since increased (USFWS 2008a).

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