

NORTHERN EXTENSION OF BREEDING RANGE FOR WOOD DUCK IN INTERIOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

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In the late 1960s, Wood Duck was beginning to extend its distribution into the Cariboo region of the province. R. D. Harris (pers. comm.) suggested that the thousands of nest boxes erected across southern areas of the province may be partially responsible for the species' northward dispersal into new interior locations. At Williams Lake, the first pair nested successfully in 1971 (Anna Roberts pers. comm.) and by 1995 breeding populations were slowly increasing, reaching about 20 pairs in the early 2000s. Wood Duck remains an uncommon, but local summer visitant that arrives in early April and leaves in late September and early October (Roberts and Gebauer 1992; A. Roberts pers. comm.).

Prior to 1990, the breeding range of the Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) in British Columbia extended from southeastern Vancouver Island eastward to the extensive marshes of the Columbia River and north to Mount Robson Park, McLeese Lake, and Kleena Kleene (Campbell et al. 1990). Within this vast area the species was distributed locally, usually in the vicinity of mature deciduous riparian woodlands, with the centre of abundance in the lower Fraser River valley. In the interior, extralimital occurrences were reported from central and northeastern portions of the province at Kersley, Spillimacheen, and Fort St. John (Campbell et al. 1990).

During the 1990s, spring and summer sightings of Wood Ducks continued to be reported from central areas of the interior including the Bulkley River valley, the Vanderhoof region, and the vicinity of Prince George. In the Peace River region additional extralimital occurrences were reported at Swan Lake in 1992 (Phinney 1998) and the vicinity of Chetwynd in 2004 and 2006 (Campbell et al. 2007).

In July 1996, I watched a brood of four Wood Ducks, accompanied by an adult female, feeding in a

wooded swamp near Prince George (RWC fide), the most northerly breeding occurrence for the province. This observation resulted in the species being added to the area's list of breeding birds (Prince George Naturalists Club 2002).

During travels to and from the southern Peace River region in late spring and early summer between 2004 and 2008, I noticed a small group of Wood Ducks each year on a large roadside pond near the community of Bear Lake. The site is about 70 km north of Prince George along Highway 97. Numbers of ducks ranged between two and nine birds and they were most often seen loafing on fallen tree trunks and branches along the shore. The pond is shallow and is mostly covered with yellow pond-lily (*Nuphar* sp.), patches of dense aquatic plants, and surrounded by mixed stands of mature trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera* ssp. *trichocarpa*). The elevation is 706 m.

On 30 June 2008, I watched six moulting males and an adult female pluck food items from the top and underside of pond-lily leaves in a beaver pond close to the highway 0.9 km south of Bear Lake (UTM 10U 0520706 6087923). Also swimming among the pond-lily leaves was an adult female with two young. The brood was about 10 days old (Class 1B), with down-covered bodies showing fading colours from their first plumage (see Campbell et al. 2008).

Singles and pairs of Wood Ducks have been appearing more frequently in the vicinity of Chetwynd (see Campbell et al. 2007), Hudson's Hope, Fort St. John, and Dawson Creek (see Phinney 1998, 2006) over the past seven years but the species still remains very rare and may not be found annually. The breeding range of the Wood Duck appears to be expanding northward and eastward and if it

continues the species may be able to take advantage of the many nest boxes that have been erected by conservation organizations in the south Peace River region.

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