



NEW JERSEY
AUDUBON

All About the American Black Duck

2025



The American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) is a large dabbling duck that overwinters along the East Coast, especially in the Mid-Atlantic region.

They are identifiable by a dark brown body and purple band along their wings in flight

They rest and look for food in low growing native coastal or freshwater grasses, shrubs, and surrounding waters.

Their diet consists of nutrient rich seeds, roots, tubers, fruits, stems and leaves, and an occasional insect or fish treat (for extra protein in the breeding season)

American Black Ducks breed and nest in shallow depressions on the ground in densely vegetated, secluded areas like forested wetlands or under low growing trees and shrubs close to water. However, this portion of the species' lifecycle mainly takes place in eastern Canada and the far northeastern United States.

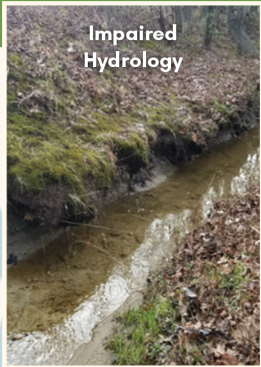
New Jersey is a stronghold for the population due to:

The high-quality overwintering habitats in Southern New Jersey within coastal estuaries and tidal wetlands.

The critical migratory stopover habitat of northern New Jersey provided by inland freshwater forested and emergent wetlands.



Conservation Concerns and Goals



Between the 1950s and the 1980s, roughly 50% of the American Black Duck population was lost, which is a stark statistic.

This decline is attributed to

- Habitat loss due to development and sea level rise
- Overwintering habitat degradation from roadway or agricultural runoff contaminants
- Fragmentation of breeding grounds and overharvesting

In New Jersey, impacts on the population include

- Wetland loss due to impaired hydrology from agricultural activity that once allowed farmers to keep fields dry for cropping or to manually control water flow in systems such as cranberry bogs with ditches, tile drainage, and berms
- Invasive species, especially **Phragmites** or **Common Reed**, have degraded many high-quality wetlands



WLFW species are umbrella species, meaning that managing for them on agricultural or forested lands can also help other wildlife that share the same habitat

Due to the species' close ties to agriculture, the American Black Duck has been a United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) **Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW)** species in New Jersey since 2017.



WLFW species exemplify the importance of a connected wildlife habitat and working landscape interface

When a ditch is plugged on an old corn farm along the Delaware Bay to restore tidal flow, it will benefit American Black Duck and also support other wildlife such as horseshoe crabs and diamondback terrapins that rely on similar ecosystems and hydrology.

Since there is such a broad range of restoration benefits, New Jersey Audubon has made supporting American Black Duck habitat a priority.

Two main priorities for American Black Duck habitat conservation in New Jersey:

Restoration

- Restoration activities include repairing the hydrology of wetlands by plugging ditches, breaching berms, breaking tile drainage, or controlling invasive plants.

Protection

- Land protection is recommended where prime habitat exists, or if there is habitat that needs minimal improvements.
- It involves the use of a voluntary but permanent conservation easement, via a deed restriction

Conservation easements protect land from detrimental land use conversions and prevents destructive activities from occurring



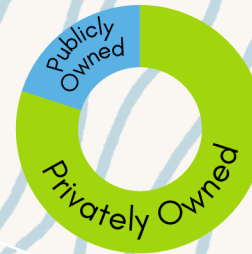
Before restoration



After restoration

How New Jersey Landowners Can Help

American Black Duck need the restoration and protection of coastal, freshwater, forested, and emergent wetlands.



With over **80% of the land in New Jersey privately owned**, these dabbling ducks need *your help* to ensure that they have sufficient overwintering and migratory stopover habitat for food and rest.

Common NRCS practices in New Jersey

Goals:

- **Restore** wetland hydrology and native vegetation communities
- **Control** invasive species
- **Reduce** wetland degradation for the benefit of American Black Duck

Practices:

- Brush management
- Conservation cover
- Critical area planting
- Herbaceous weed control
- Riparian forested buffer
- Riparian herbaceous cover
- Tree/shrub establishment
- Upland & wetland wildlife habitat management
- Wetland enhancement
- Wetland creation
- Wetland restoration
- Wildlife habitat planting



How New Jersey Audubon and Conservation Partners Can Help:

If you own land that might be suitable for habitat creation or restoration, contact New Jersey Audubon's Stewardship Department to learn how you may be able to increase habitat that supports American Black Duck on your working ground.

Available Assistance

New Jersey Audubon can provide technical assistance:

USDA-NRCS offers:

- Conservation assistance programs
- Supplemental technical support
- Financial support to eligible landowners for habitat restoration implementation and permanent habitat protection

Available USDA-NRCS programs include:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)



For more information or to schedule a site visit,
please contact **New Jersey Audubon** at
conservation@njaudubon.org.