

Tim Herd's

# Watchable Wildlife Guide

wildlife observation in the right place at the right time

Week of Feb. 11-17, 2007

## *Duckz N the Hood*

Taxiing across the top of the water, a slender duck with a puffy crest throttles up for powered flight. Rapid and shallow wing-beats trill with the sound-track of migrating mergansers as they return northward to breeding ponds and forested backwaters.



Photo by Leonard Lee Rue III.

Back in the old neighborhood, the drake fans his distinctive white crest with black trim, roundly transforming his head's profile, and excitedly parades his hooded charms by swimming circles around a favored hen. Usually, however, she pays him no immediate notice – which only goads him to further theatrics. Circling ever faster, and vibrating with frenzy, he ultimately launches himself vertically clear of the water to execute a thrilling toes-over-tail somersault to literally shower her in a splendid splashdown. Eventually, she notices and acquiesces.

So the consenting ducks breed. She assembles a cushy nest of down plucked from her own breast in a tree cavity or hollow log, he deserts her, and she is left to incubate her glossy white eggs – although not necessarily all on her own. Hen hoodies are known to share nests with other females, including wood ducks and goldeneyes, in large dump nests that may contain up to 36 eggs.

### WHERE TO OBSERVE

White River National Wildlife Refuge, Ark.  
Reifel Bird Sanctuary, British Columbia  
Muscatatuck NWR, Ind.  
Shawnee National Forest, Ill.  
Daniel Boone National Forest, Ky.  
Crane Pond Wildlife Mgt. Area, Mass.  
Hiawatha National Forest, Mich.  
Allagash Wilderness Waterway, Maine  
Adirondack Park, N.Y.  
Cornwall Dam, St. Lawrence River, Ontario  
Rogue River National Forest, Ore.  
St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, Wis.

### LOOK FOR

small duck with puffy crest  
thin, serrated bill  
*male*: black head with a large white patch on each side; white chest with 2 black bars on each side; dark back, brown flanks  
*female*: brown overall with yellowish lower bill and orange tinge on crest  
tail often raised when swimming  
fast, shallow wingbeats

### Hooded merganser

*Lophodytes cucullatus*

16-19 inches

**Habitat:** wooded lakes, ponds and streams

**Range Key:** ■ Breeding ■ Year-round ■ Nonbreeding

