

# American Black Duck

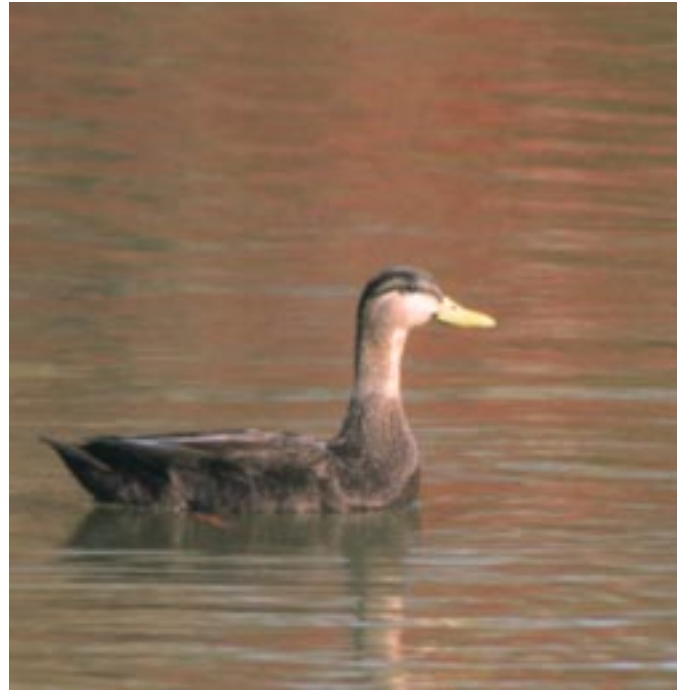
## *Anas rubripes*

American Black Ducks were formerly locally common summer residents within portions of Ohio. By far the largest breeding population occupied the marshes bordering western Lake Erie and Sandusky Bay where Hicks (1935) considered them to be “common” summer residents. Campbell (1940) estimated the Lucas County breeding population at “no more than 400 ducks” as of 1940. Smaller numbers were locally distributed throughout the northeastern counties where they were reportedly “not uncommon” in the vicinity of Cleveland (Williams 1950). Black Ducks were rare summer residents in central Ohio, with breeding records south to Mercer, Shelby, Logan, Franklin, Fairfield, and Guernsey counties (Hicks 1935, 1937). Essentially absent as a summer resident in the southwestern counties, the only known nesting record for this region was documented in Butler County prior to 1953 (Kemsies and Randle 1953).

Their Ohio breeding population has substantially declined in subsequent decades, a trend described by Peterjohn (1989a). Similar declines have been evident throughout their range (Johnsgard and Di Silvestro 1976). The causes of this decline have become a matter of considerable debate (Ankeny et al. 1987, Conroy et al. 1989, Grandy 1983). However, competition from an expanding Mallard population has certainly contributed to the reduced numbers of American Black Ducks presently residing within Ohio and other states at the southern edge of their range.

During the Atlas Project, the presence of American Black Ducks was positively established at 14 priority blocks and 12 special areas. This species was reported from several other locations, but the identities of these ducks could not be conclusively established and these records were not mapped. In addition, Black Ducks appearing in late July or early August were treated as migrants and were not mapped.

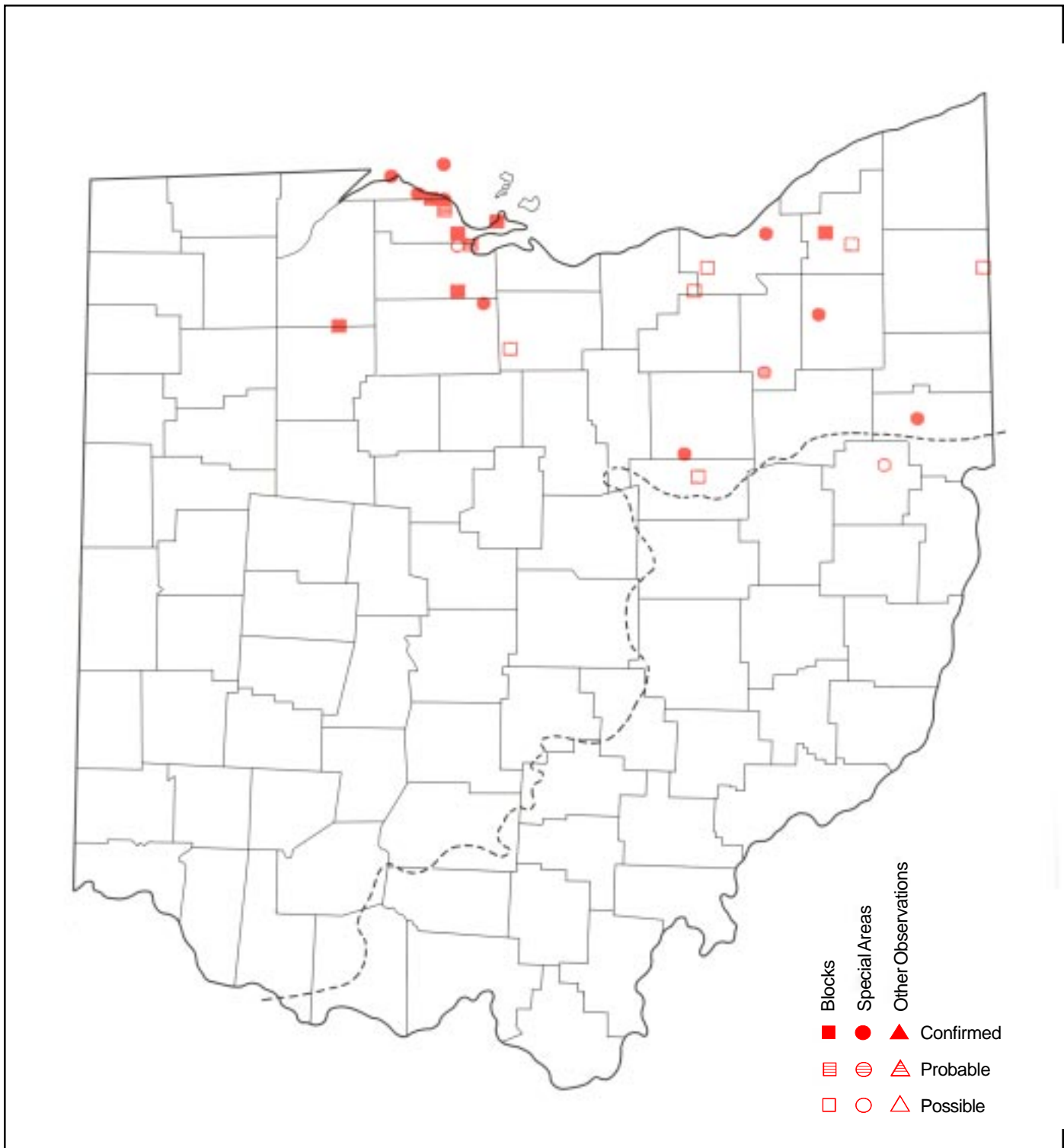
Of these 26 acceptable records, six pertained to individuals observed on only one date and were probably nonbreeders. The remaining records were either confirmed nesting attempts or pairs considered to be probable breeders. Ten of these records were from the extensive marshes bordering western Lake Erie and Sandusky Bay in Lucas, Ottawa, and Sandusky counties. These marshes hosted small numbers of breeding Black Ducks during each year of the Atlas Project, and currently support the largest remaining breeding population in the state. The exact size of this population is not known, but certainly numbers fewer than 100 pairs. Away from the western Lake Erie marshes, Black Ducks proved to be slightly more numerous than the few recent breeding records cited in Peterjohn (1989a). Of the 10 records scattered across the Glaciated Plateau in northeastern Ohio, most reports were of locations occupied for a single season only. Only Lake Rockwell (Portage County) consistently hosted a small breeding population of 3-5+ pairs annually. The remaining six records were also of Black Ducks observed during single seasons. Four of these reports were from the Till Plains in northern Ohio and two of the reports were from the Unglaciated Plateau, including a confirmed nest at Guilford Lake in Columbiana County.



Tim Daniel - Division of Wildlife

In recent years, most breeding pairs within Ohio have occupied marshes dominated by emergent vegetation. While Black Ducks occupied these wetland habitats in earlier decades, they also nested in bogs and marshy habitats bordering ponds and lakes (Williams 1950). Elsewhere within their range, their breeding habitats are so diverse that the presence of water is the only characteristic in common (Palmer 1976). They thrive in saltwater marshes but are equally at home in freshwater marshes bordering rivers and lakes, sphagnum bogs, alder swamps, and rocky islands in the middle of large lakes (Peck and James 1983). Within Ohio, their nesting chronology is fairly similar to Mallards. Black Ducks establish their territories during late March and most clutches are laid during April (Andrews 1952). Published egg dates are between April 14 and May 31 (Campbell 1968, Williams 1950). The first broods hatch during the second half of May, and most are reported during June and July. Females with dependent young have been observed as late as August 17 (Buchanan 1980).

The future for Black Ducks in Ohio appears to be bleak. Their inability to compete successfully with Mallards, habitat destruction, and other factors have substantially reduced their range. As Mallards continue to expand throughout Ohio and wetland habitats become increasingly scarce, our remnant breeding population of Black Ducks may be expected to disappear within the foreseeable future.



**Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region**

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	7	7.4	50.0	<0.1
Till Plain	271	3	1.1	21.4	–
Ill. Till Plain	46	–	–	–	–
Glaciated Plateau	140	4	2.9	28.6	–
Unglaciated Plateau	212	–	–	–	<0.1

**Summary of Breeding Status**

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1.8%</b>
Confirmed	6	42.9%
Probable	2	14.3%
Possible	6	42.9%