

# Harlequin Duck

*Histrionicus histrionicus*

**STATUS**

Special Concern 

Endangered 

23



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## Species Description

The Harlequin Duck is small (33-54 cm) and looks dark coloured from afar. Males are slate blue with chestnut sides, and have white streaks on the neck and along the back. Females are brownish grey. Both sexes have a round white spot behind their eyes and a white patch near the base of the bill. They have relatively long tails. Juveniles look similar to females, but have darker bellies.



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Winter along the Nova Scotia coastline. Only 2000 - 3000 individuals winter in eastern North America.



**Population Range**

## Habitat

Congregates in coastal marine areas near rocky shorelines or subtidal ledges. Found close to the shore in turbulent places where the surf breaks against the rocks and there are low levels of ice. Breeds in fast flowing rivers in Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut, Greenland and Iceland; with occasional breeding records for New Brunswick.



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Harlequin Ducks are typically observed from November until April in turbulent areas along the coast. They are often seen in the Eastern Shore Islands Wildlife Management Area, Port L'Hebert, Chebucto Peninsula, and along the Digby Neck.

## Interesting Points

- Often return to the same wintering location every year.
- Also known as “lords and ladies” and “sea mice” because of their showy appearance and squeaky mouse-like call.
- The term *Harlequin* describes a character in Italian comedies who wears a black mask and a brightly coloured costume.



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## Similar Species

Female and juvenile Harlequins may be confused with:

### Surf Scoter (photo) & Black Scoter:

Larger (43-60 cm); large bulbous bill; females have a white spot on back of neck.



© ALAN WILSON

Female

### Long-tailed Duck:

Often in same habitat; similar size (38-58 cm); lighter-coloured heads; males have long tail feathers.



© US FWS

Female

In flight, Harlequins travel in tightly packed groups while other ducks have a more loose formation. In the water they are typically close to the shore in tight groups.

## Threats to Survival

- Wintering grounds: oil/bilge contamination, human disturbance (on the shore and boating), subsistence and illegal hunting, fisheries bycatch, and aquaculture operations.
- Breeding grounds: hydro developments, forestry activities, resource extraction, and human disturbance.



## How You Can Help

Watch from a distance to ensure that this species can feed in the safest and best coastal areas. Hunters can familiarize themselves with the plumage of females and juveniles so they are not mistaken for other species. Contact the Coast Guard (1-800-565-1633) if coastal oil spills or bilge dumps are observed.



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Wild for Waterfowl survey

## Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

**Contact:** Environment Canada (506) 364-5044 or [www.ec.gc.ca](http://www.ec.gc.ca)

**Info:** [www.sararegistry.gc.ca](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca), [www.hww.ca](http://www.hww.ca), Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas: [www.mba-aom.ca](http://www.mba-aom.ca)

**Sighting Reports:** 1-866-727-3447 or [www.speciestrisk.ca/sightings](http://www.speciestrisk.ca/sightings), [eBird.org](http://eBird.org)

**Stewardship:** Join NCC & BSC's Wild for Waterfowl Count: 1-877-231-4400 & 902-426-4055