

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 3000 - 5000 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 freshwater rivers in New Brunswick, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut, Greenland, and Iceland.

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.



Female

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Male

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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.



© IUS PWS

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

- Winter: oil/bilge contamination, boating activities, illegal and incidental hunting, fisheries bycatch, aquaculture operations, and human disturbance.
- Breeding grounds: hydro developments, forestry activities, resource extraction, and human disturbance.



How You Can Help

Keep your distance: human disturbance may cause harlequins to avoid prime feeding 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 you observe any coastal oil spills or bilge dumps.



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Harlequin Duck survey

Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports

Contact: Environment Canada (506) 364-5044 or www.ec.gc.ca

Info: www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca, www.hww.ca

Sighting Reports: 1-866-727-3447 or sightings@speciesatrisk.ca