



SPREAD OAKS RANCH

Go Deeper Into the Heart of Texas



NOVEMBER 2019 NEWSLETTER

Wood Ducks a Special Treasure at Spread Oaks Ranch

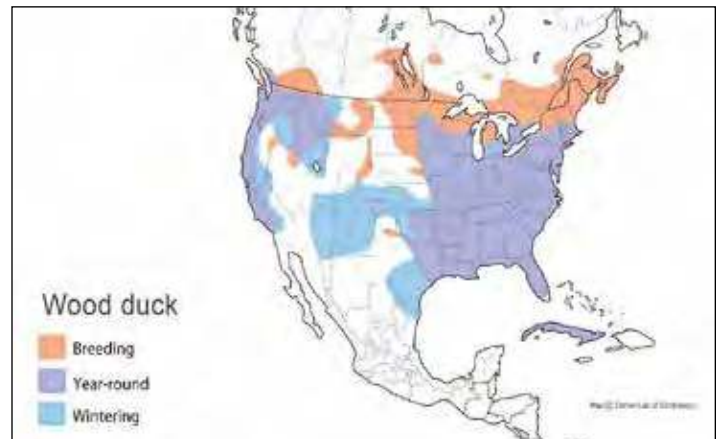
Flooded timber bottomlands holding substantial populations of these spectacular birds

With its distinctive “zee-zee-zeezoo-EET” whistle echoing along riverways and throughout the flooded timber, wood ducks are often heard before seen. Once into view, their sartorial splendor of stained-glass-window colors— iridescent emerald green, royal purple, garnet, indigo, chestnut, and gold, slashed with a brilliant white— make them an easy duck to identify on the wing.

Wood ducks—the only perching duck native to North America—present a challenge for USFWS biologists when it comes to population estimates as they reside primarily in riverine hardwood bottoms, such as the ones on Spread Oaks Ranch, where aerial “pond counts” are impossible.

Yet, biologists concur that populations are either stable or increasing, earning wood ducks a conservation status of “Least Concern,” which is great news for a species threatened with near extinction at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Manmade nesting boxes—wood ducks are cavity nesters— have played a significant role in this bird’s recovery.

Other curious facts about wood ducks are that they’re only migratory in some parts of the country. Throughout the Eastern Flyway and as far west as East Texas (roughly to about Matagorda County) non-migratory birds, such as the



ones we have here at Spread Oaks Ranch, are year-round residents. Not having to withstand the rigors of migration, hen wood ducks are often able to pull off two broods per year each with a clutch of about a dozen pure-white eggs.

Texas hunters are permitted to have three wood ducks in a bag limit. They are excellent table fare, as they dine on seeds, fruits, aquatic grasses, and fat-rich acorns ... all in all, a dazzling, plentiful, tasty treasure.



The brilliant plumage of the wood duck combined with its excellence as table fare makes this hunter’s prize beautiful in the hand and toothsome on the palate. Map ©Cornell Lab of Ornithology; photos by Shannon Tompkins.



Rare Leucistic Teal Shot at Spread Oaks Ranch

Rarity among avian species to become prized mount at the lodge

At first, Spread Oaks Ranch Guide Paul Berger was puzzled by the plumage of the duck he'd just dropped. On closer examination, the telltale pale blue shoulder patch and the distinctive bill told him it was a teal—a leucistic blue-winged teal, in fact.

Most of us waterfowlers have come across hybrid ducks; often it's a mallard crossed with a dusky duck such as a Mexican-like duck, a mottled duck, or a black duck. Mallards have been known to cross with at least 40 other species of ducks. Texas hunters are only

allowed one of these half dusky ducks in their bag limit.

Leucism is far more rare, a pigmentation aberration that occurs in a single species. Unlike albinism, which is a lack of pigment altogether, in leucism pigmentation has gone haywire for some reason. Since the duck is still a purebred offspring of its species, a leucistic bird counts against the regular bag limit for that species.

The unusual blue-winged teal is at the taxidermist, and will be displayed at Spread Oaks Ranch.



Top photo of leucistic blue-winged teal by Tim Soderquist. Inset identification photo of normal blue-winged teal drake and hen by Shannon Tompkins.

Around the Ranch This Month

A “day in the life” of Spread Oaks Ranch Chef Ric Rosser isn’t spent entirely in the kitchen



Chef Ric Rosser’s days aren’t confined to the kitchen, as you can see above. Clockwise from upper left: Monday-morning rush-hour traffic enroute to the barn; checking on the lambs; lighting the fire in the smokehouse hearth; roasting a whole pig over a wood fire; and relaxing with a Spread Oaks Ranch cigar. Photo of Ric holding lamb by Audrey Wylie; other photos by Ric Rosser.

Wild November Skies Above Spread Oaks Ranch

Winter flocks of snow geese, specklebellies, and sandhill crane filling the skies and marshes



TOP: Sandhill cranes and flocks of snow geese descend into harvested fields and shallow ponds; ABOVE: An alert flock of sandhill crane. Photos by Shannon Tompkins.



Spread Oaks Ranch in the Media

Top-tier magazines tout our exemplary architecture, interior design, grounds, and recreation

As our first year of being open to guests draws to a close, we're grateful for many things: Our health, our families and friends, and you, our esteemed guests. We're also appreciative of the magazine editors who have taken time to learn about Spread Oaks so they may share what we offer with their readers.

Click on the links to the right to read what they had to say:

[Spread Oaks Ranch in COWGIRL magazine](#)

[Spread Oaks Ranch in Western Art & Architecture](#)

[Spread Oaks Ranch in Luxury Life](#)



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yet a world away."*

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