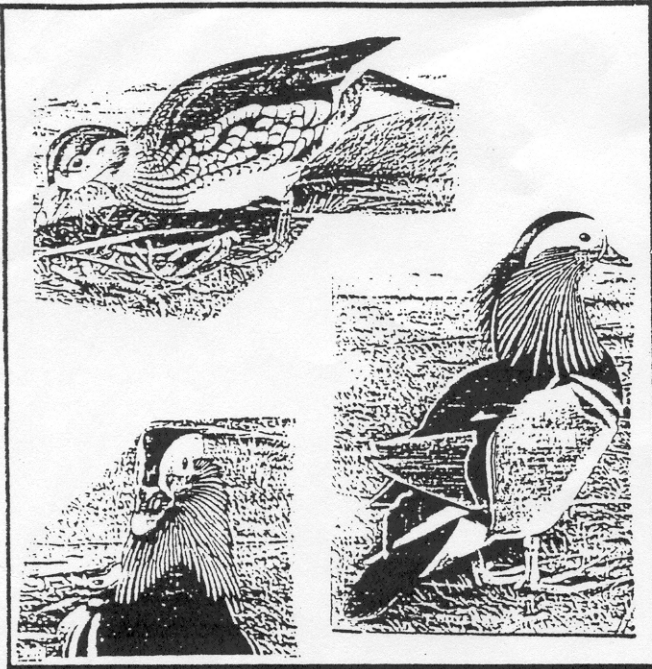


MANDARINS - AND WOOD DUCKS - AT WODOC



On January 20, when Docent Donna Goldstein and her junior docents Leah and Esther returned from leading Sierra Park's 2nd graders, she asked why her field guide didn't include Franklin Canyon's Mandarin Ducks.

I wondered the same thing last year after spotting a pair of these incredibly ornate and beautiful birds on the wild pond behind the earthen dam north of the parking lot. I searched through WODOC's library with no luck. But I finally discovered full page color photos of these mystery ducks in *Ducks of North America* and the *Northern Hemisphere* (Gooders & Boyer, pub. 1986. Except where indicated, all quoted information that follows is from this book.)

Well, the Mandarins are back, and this year they brought friends! How will you recognize them? Don't worry, you can't miss them: "The Drake Mandarin is among the most exotic of the world's birds. A blaze of different colors mark the plumage with red and orange, blue and green and more discrete shades of buffs and browns together with stripes of black and white. A crest of orange and cream feathers gives the head a disproportionately large look, but is balanced by a pair of orange 'wing-sails' rising fan-like from the back."

The female is rather dull by comparison, with "an overall grey appearance marked by a curving white stripe behind the eye and bold, white blotches on the underparts."

No one seems to be certain how they arrived in Franklin Canyon: "Mandarins breed in far eastern Siberia, in China and Japan and winter in southern Japan and China. Exported to Britain as early as 1745, they were first bred in captivity in 1834, and in the twentieth century were released, and escaped, to form a viable free-flying breeding population in Britain. By the mid 1970's there were about 300-400 pair. Habitat destruction has left the status of the Mandarin far from assured in its Far Eastern homeland.

While some of Britain's introduced birds still make lengthy flights (one British ringed bird was recovered in Hungary, and two ringed in Norway were recovered the following day in Northumberland having covered 500 miles in 24 hours), most are sedentary and must be sought at their stronghold south and west of London."

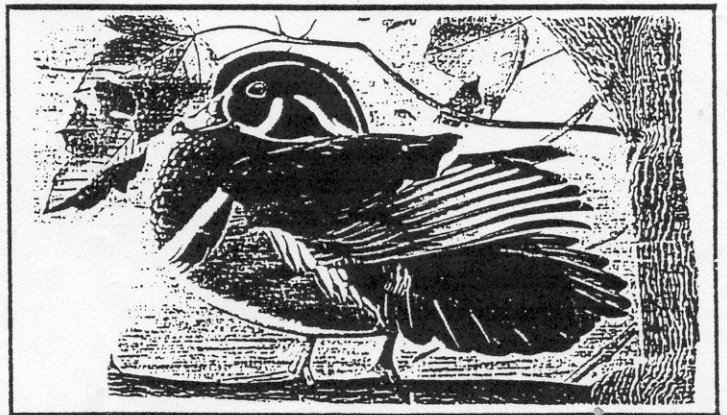
Or here in Franklin Canyon!

Regarded as a symbol of married fidelity, Mandarins are held in high esteem in China. "Pairs are formed at the beginning of winter and may then be maintained over several seasons." Like their close relative the Wood Duck, Mandarins "inhabit small ponds and rivers in densely wooded country."

And do we have Wood Ducks again this year? Close to a dozen pairs have been sighted to date!

"The male Wood Duck is, by any standards, an attractive bird. The bright orange-red bill and eye are set in a head of black patterned with clear-cut white lines and topped by a large curving crest of iridescent green. The body is divided into a series of sharply demarcated sections--chestnut breast neatly spotted white, lemon-colored flanks, and bottle green back." The female is remarkably similar to the female Mandarin: "a dullish brown-grey bird marked only by spotted underparts and a clear pale eye ring and eye stripe extending behind the eye."

Almost totally a North American species, the Wood Duck was one of the first beneficiaries of modern conservation efforts.



"Early American settlers were quick to clear the forests and drain the ponds and swamps where these birds lived. They also found them good to eat and relatively easy to shoot so, as the settlers moved steadily westwards, the Wood Duck steadily declined in numbers. By the early twentieth century the bird was thought to be in imminent danger of extinction and active steps were taken to halt the decline. Legislation to control shooting was introduced and a programme of erecting specially constructed nest boxes was instituted. Sited near suitable waters, these helped compensate for the lack of old trees with natural holes."

Like the Mandarin, the Wood Duck's nest is "situated in a tree hole, usually at a considerable height (nest holes as high as 20 meters from the ground have been recorded). The hole is chosen by the female who is quite particular about its characteristics. Once the eggs are all laid, incubation lasts for 25-31 days. Hatching is synchronized, but the brood takes about 30 hours to all leave the eggs. At first the ducklings are helpless, but in a few hours they become fluffy, down-covered and hyperactive. At this point the female entices them out with calls and they clamber to the entrance hole, throw themselves out, and quickly follow their mother to water or a favoured feeding area."