

Wild Monday 15 March 2021 Wood Ducks by Walt Anderson

OK, I admit it. I'm a Duck Fan (Go Oregon!). But when it comes to the Granite Dells, my favorite Anatid resident is surely the colorful, extravagant Wood Duck. These beautiful birds are not common in Arizona; in fact, the Breeding Bird Atlas published in 2005 only had nesting records from Yavapai County, specifically in Prescott and the Verde Valley. In the last couple years, they have nested at the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge down on the border, which is good news, but climate change is predicted to impact them severely as Arizona's few wetlands may not have enough water to support them.

They are pairing off now, even within the small flocks that hang out together in Granite Creek in the Dells. Water in the creek is completely dependent upon releases from Watson Lake, so careful water management will be essential.

These are omnivorous ducks, eating invertebrates, fruits, and aquatic plants. Acorns in the woods flanking Granite Creek may be an important food supply. The birds nest in tree cavities and in nest boxes, such as have been provided in Watson Woods by Prescott Audubon.



There are Wood Ducks “up the creek” in this shot. What made this image special to me was the ripples in the water and the textures of the dry grasses along the stream.

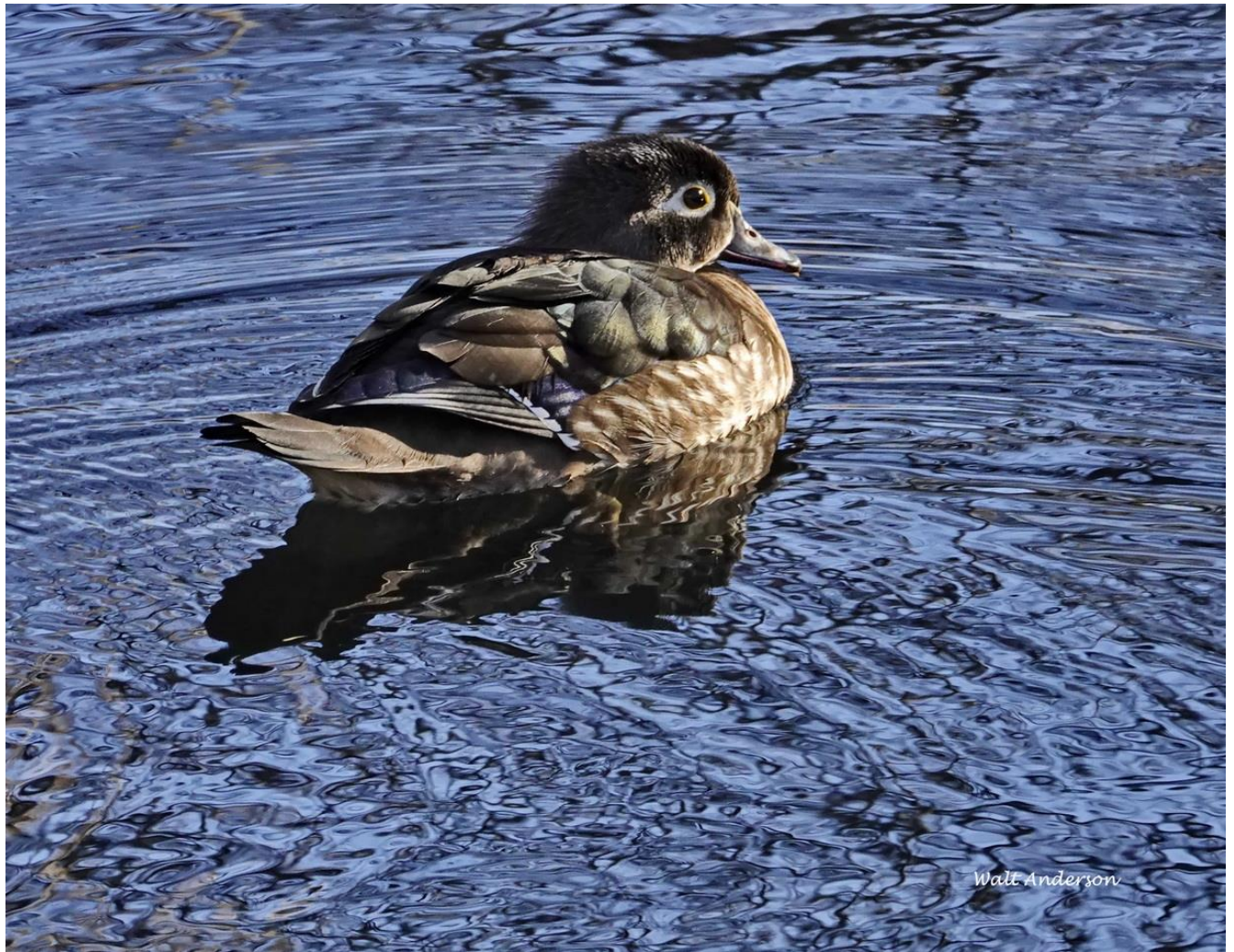


While the male often gets raves for his stunning plumage, I am equally attracted to the more subtle but elegant patterns of the female. This species' closest relative is the equally flamboyant Mandarin Duck of Asia. One showed up recently as a one-day wonder in Prescott Valley. Its origin is likely from a captive collection, though a feral population is now known in California.



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I have hundreds of photos of Wood Ducks from the Granite Dells, but what especially pleases me about this one is the water patterns.



I have painted Wood Ducks three times and want to do it again, but this water pattern would require the exceptional skill of someone like Carel Brest van Kempen, an extraordinary artist from Salt Lake City. I just love these blues!



Here a pair of Wood Ducks has climbed up the bank to find edibles in the grass under the cottonwoods.



And here is a handsome pair at the base of a Velvet Ash.



Snowy weather can conceal food items for these birds, but fortunately, snow rarely persists long, and the birds are highly mobile (can fly at 30 mph), so they find a way.