

Species Fact Sheets

Order: Anseriformes
Scientific Name: *Anas acuta*

Family: Anatidae
Common Name: Northern Pintail

AZA Management: Green Yellow Red None

Photo (Male):



Photo (Female):



NATURAL HISTORY:

Geographic Range: Europe Asia North America Neotropical
 Africa Australia Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Habitat: Forest Desert Grassland Coastal
 Riverine Montane Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Circadian Cycle: Diurnal Crepuscular Nocturnal Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Cold Tolerance: To 70° F To 60° F To 50° F To 40° F
 To 30° F To 20° F Other Can be maintained outdoors as long as they have access to moving water to keep their feet from freezing

Heat Tolerance: To 30° F To 50° F To 70° F To 90° F
 To 110° F Other Can be kept outdoors as long as water and shade are available

Diet: Frugivore Carnivore Piscivore Insectivore
 Nectivore Omnivore Folivore Other (Add Below)

Captive Dietary Needs:

Captives can be fed commercial waterfowl diet, supplemented with chopped greens and with insects (crickets, mealworms)

Life Expectancy in the Wild: Males: Up to 20 Years Females: Up to 20 Years

Life Expectancy in Captivity: Males: Up to 20 Years Females: Up to 20 Years

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BREEDING INFORMATION:

Age at Sexual Maturity: Males: 1 Year Females: 1 Year

Courtship Displays: The male will swim close to the female, keeping his head down and whistling as he approaches. He will bob his head, then mount her, grasping the feathers on her neck with his beak. Sometimes multiple males will converge on a single female, which will result in a chase until she loses all but one. Copulation takes place in the water.

Nest Site Description: Hollow on the ground (usually in dense vegetation) lined with grasses and down feathers

Clutch Size, Egg Description: 7-9 Cream-Colored Eggs, 55 x 38 millimeters, 45 grams

Incubation Period: 22-24 Days

Fledgling Period: 46-47 Days

Parental Care: Eggs incubated by female alone. Ducklings may stay with their mother until her molt is completed.

Chick Development: Ducklings able covered with down and able to leave the nest shortly after hatching. They are flighted at 46-47 days, but may stay with the mother until her molt is completed.

CAPTIVE HABITAT INFORMATION:

Social Structure in the Wild: Large Flocks

Social Structure in Captivity: Pairs or Flocks

Minimum Group Size: Pair

Maximum Group Size: Flock

Compatible in Mixed Species Exhibits: Yes **Comments:** Can be housed with other waterfowl species, as well as herons, ibises, turkey, and other birds. Can also be displayed with turtles, beavers

Optimal Habitat Size: 100 Square Feet Per Pair

Management Challenges: Very common in captivity and popular with aviculturists due to simple husbandry needs and beautiful appearance. Can hybridize with other dabbling ducks. Popularity may lead to its over-representation in captivity at the expense of higher-priority species of waterfowl.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

The northern pintail is one of the most common and widespread ducks in the world. Its breeding extends across the northern hemisphere, including North America, Europe, and Russia. Its winter range extends as far south as East Africa, northern South America, and South Asia. Vagrants have appeared as far south as Micronesia. Unusual among such wide-ranging birds, there are no recognized subspecies, though Eaton's pintail (*Anas eatoni*) was once considered a subspecies.

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Body length is 50-65 centimeters with a wingspan of 80-95 centimeters. Average weight is 850 grams. The male has a chocolate brown head, white neck and underparts, and a long, black tail with yellow patches on the border. The sides and upper back are gray. The female is brown with whitish underparts and bronze bands on the wings. Both sexes have blue-grey bills and feet. Pintails are slender ducks with a long, elegant neck, useful for seeing over tall grasses and dabbling in deeper water. The common name refers to the elongated, spiky central tail feathers which are part of the male's breeding plumage, which is as long as 10 centimeters. The tail may also serve as a counter-balance to the long neck; the pin of the female is only about one-quarter the length of the males. The male's call is a soft whistle, whereas the female has a mallard-like quack.

Northern pintails feed by night, as well as in the early morning and late afternoon. The middle of the day is spent roosting on open water. They are highly social during their migration, often forming large flocks in association with other species. Males leave the breeding areas before females in order to gather in large, single-sex molting flocks, where they are flightless for four weeks.

Natural predators of northern pintails include mammalian predators, such as foxes and mustelids, as well as birds of prey. The species is a popular sport bird and is heavily hunted by humans. Other threats include poisoning from lead shot, habitat loss, and various diseases, such as avian influenza and avian botulism. Though still common, the northern pintail is in decline. It is common in waterfowl collections, where it breeds freely.

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