

Goldeneyes

One of the most charismatic winter visitors to the Gann and Pickleridge Pools are the Goldeneye ducks. These would at first sight seem to be poorly named – the colour of the eye is hardly a prominent field mark!. The male is in fact a very dashing creature in smart black and white and the female is greyish with a chocolate brown head. When viewing through binoculars or telescope it is possible to see that the male does indeed have a beautiful golden eye set in a glossy greeny black face with a big white spot by the bill. Both male and female are compact little ducks with large rounded heads, and they spend a lot of time diving for food – mostly molluscs, insects and small fish.

At this time of the year they are just about to depart to their northern breeding grounds, where they will build a nest near to a forested pool. The nest is usually in a tree hole, often one which has previously been created by a Black Woodpecker. This woodpecker is the largest in Europe and makes a correspondingly large hole, just the right size for Goldeneye. The hole may well be quite high in a tree, so the tiny ducklings have to jump to the ground shortly after hatching. They are so light and fluffy that they seem to survive the skydive in one piece.

Before departing northwards, the Goldeneye males spend a lot of time displaying to the females. The male tosses his head backwards right over his back and splashes vigorously with his feet. It is quite impressive to watch and can often be seen at Pickleridge Pools in the spring.

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