

## Winter “Temps” – David deCalesta Reprinted from the 3-09 KLA Newsletter

Almost all the birds inhabiting forested and agricultural lands above the lake, and those living on or near the lake, are “temps.” There are the “summer temps,” the wood thrushes, the robins, and the wood ducks that arrive in spring, breed, and migrate south in winter. There are the “winter temps,” such as the huge rafts of redhead ducks that winter on the lake, which arrive sometime in November, and leave with ice break-up in March for the interior wetlands in Canada where they breed. And there are the “temporary temps,” the ones that stop over and rest a bit on their way south in fall and on their way north in spring. Now there is a new category, the “used-to-be temps,” the ones that used to breed and leave, or winter and leave, or just stopped over but which somewhere along the way changed their minds. Some are very common, some are very rare, but all are interesting. We’ve learned to keep the binoculars and bird guide handy, and every winter we’re a bit surprised by what we see. Whether you winter on the lake, or just pop up at intervals, take a gander on the lake every now and then, what you see during winter may be unusual and/or certainly will be entertaining. Most of what you will see will be on the usually ice-free part of the lake, south of the bluff. A few favorite “winter temps” are:

Redhead ducks—these are the mallard-sized ducks with the gray bodies and burnt orange heads that appear around November. They “raft-up” in huge congregations of hundreds and dive in shallow waters, seeking out aquatic plants for food. After a few weeks of such group foraging, ALL the weeds disappeared from out front of our dock. This has been going on for three years now and we don’t have to control the weeds—there never are any. These ducks breed in the prairie potholes of the Mid-west and Canadian Prairie provinces. They winter on the Great Lakes and Finger Lakes, and depart in March for their traditional breeding grounds. Common “winter temps.”



Tundra or whistling swans—these huge white swans occasionally winter on Keuka Lake. This year we saw groups of three and six, others have reported a dozen or more. About one-third larger than Canada geese, these birds breed on barren Arctic and Canadian tundra. They winter along the eastern coastline and occasionally on larger lakes. Like redheads, they feed on aquatic vegetation and can be seen tipping up with their elongated necks reaching a foot or more under water. Immature birds are the same size, but are a dirty gray, especially around the head and neck. Uncommon “winter temps.”

