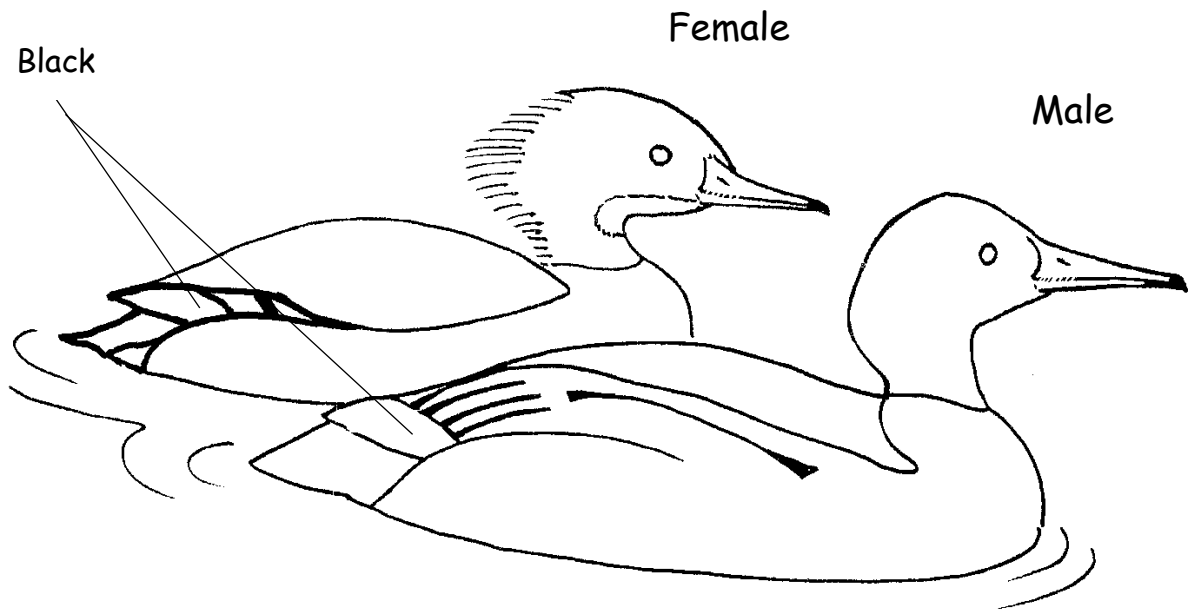


# Common Merganser



## Coloring instructions for both the male and the female:

Reddish orange - the bill

Yellow brown - the eye

## For the male:

Blackish green - the head and throat

Black - the back and primary feathers

Gray - the tail

White - the belly, breast, and the wing except for the primary feathers

## For the female:

Rusty red - the head and neck

White - the throat patch, breast, and two white patches on the inner wing

Gray - the back and the tail

# Common Merganser

**Length:** 18"    **Wing span:** 37"

**Habitat:** Resident in lakes and rivers

**Field marks:** Large diving duck with bright reddish orange bill. The male has a blackish green head, and the female has a rusty red head with a crest.

In some ways, the *Common Merganser* is like the *Mallard*. They are both ducks. They both are common on the Sacramento River. Both males have dark green heads.

But there are differences, too. The merganser is a bigger, longer duck. The merganser has a bright orange bill which is longer and thinner than the bill of the *Mallard*. But the biggest difference is that the merganser is a diving duck while the *Mallard* is a dabbling duck.

You will not see a merganser with its head down in the water and tail up. You will see a merganser suddenly plunge forward and disappear beneath the surface, often for a long time. Mergansers swim after fish and catch them in their bill, which has sharp saw-like "teeth."

After reaching the surface, they swallow the fish. Because mergansers are diving ducks, you will usually see them in deeper water than you will see Mallards.

Dabblers have feet in the middle of their body so they can walk about easily. Divers have feet near the end of their body so they can propel themselves faster underwater. You normally can't see the legs but you can see the effect when they try taking off. Mallards can spring into the air because their feet are right beneath them. A diving duck can't do this, so it uses its legs to run across the water and get enough speed to take off. Since diving ducks are heavier than dabblers, take-offs take longer. Mergansers look like heavy planes trying to get into the air.

Because dabblers such as Mallards can launch straight up into the air like helicopters, they can feed in tiny ponds of water that are often choked with cattails and other vegetation. Diving ducks can't do this. They need to have large open expanses of water that give them a long runway. But that is all right because any body of water that doesn't have a large surface of open water is probably not deep enough to dive in.

# Common Merganser Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- See a male with its green head. The merganser has a white breast and is noticeably larger than a Mallard, which has a brown breast.
- See a female with its reddish brown head.
- See the long, thin orange bill.
- See a merganser dive underwater. Count how many seconds it remains underwater.
- See a merganser run across the water as it takes off.
- Compare the number of mergansers that you see in winter with the number that you see in the spring and summer.

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