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White-winged Wood Duck

(*Cairina scutulata*)

The developing countries of southeast Asia are covered with vast stretches of primary rain forest. Timber has become one of the most valuable resources for these emerging countries and, of course, huge European, Japanese, and American lumber conglomerates are relentlessly attacking the forests with chainsaws and bulldozers. Many casualties have resulted including the white-winged wood duck.

The white winged wood duck (*Cairina scutulata*) is an endangered species with probably fewer than two hundred pairs left in the wild. They are found in Assam, southeast Asia (where they may range up to 5,000 feet altitude) and in Sumatra. For years these uncommon ducks were over hunted and now with a dangerously low population their most serious plight is the uncontrolled harvesting of the primary rain forests in which they live.

Although these ducks are rather large and bulky (around seven and a half or eight pounds) they display a surprisingly strong and fast flight as they fly through the dense forests. These birds often spend their days perched high in the trees. They tend to avoid direct sunlight and are thus restricted to the deep shady forests. This restrictive characteristic may pose a definite problem. If, for example, a small population of birds habitually ranges over a certain large tract of forest, when a wide road is cut through the middle of that forest the birds' range is, in effect, reduced by fifty percent because they won't cross that wide swathe of direct sunlight. If the white winged wood duck is nocturnal, as it is thought, perhaps they'll cross the open space at night and then, of course, there is no problem.

Although this species is considered endangered, it is rare but established in captivity and is breeding regularly. The Wildfowl Trust raised over one hundred of them between 1971 and 1977. It was bred for the first time in the U.S.A. in 1978 by the National Zoological Park •



White-winged Wood Duck, *Cairina scutulata*