



WATERBIRDS OF SOUTH-WEST WETLANDS

What bird is that?

Bush Books are a series of practical field guides to help you learn about and discover WA's unique plants, animals and special features, region by region.

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WATERBIRDS OF SOUTH-WEST WETLANDS

by Carolyn Thomson-Dans and Stuart Halse

INTRODUCTION

In the South-West of Western Australia, waterbirds are among the most visible wildlife. Even in the heart of the city, and in every metropolitan suburb, there are wetlands packed with waterbirds, such as ducks, coots, gulls and black swans.

The first exposure that most children have to wild animals is on expeditions to their nearby swamp to see the ducks. This book is an excellent resource to help children discover the diversity of waterbirds. Once they have learnt to recognise the difference between a black duck and a coot, they can turn their attention to cormorants, egrets, ibises and other graceful creatures.

Western Australia's South-West is home to some remarkable waterbirds. Think of the unusual looking musk duck or the elegant and graceful great egret. However, few birds can rival the incredible feats performed by the migratory shorebirds which arrive here every year to spend summer in Australia. The tiny red-necked stint, for instance, just 15 centimetres long and weighing only 30 to 40 grams, migrates from its breeding grounds in Siberia to spend summer in feeding grounds in Australia and south-east Asia. Their journey takes them through Mongolia, China and Japan.

Some of the most common South-West waterbirds can also impart great pleasure. The antics of squabbling silver gulls can keep people entertained for hours. If you watch a group of gulls for a while, you will notice that each individual has its own personality and behaviour. Because gulls are so common, few people inquire into their life history, but there is much information available about this fascinating bird.

It is hoped that *Waterbirds of South-West Wetlands* will inspire even more interest in our local bird life.

Opposite: *Juvenile nankeen night heron.*

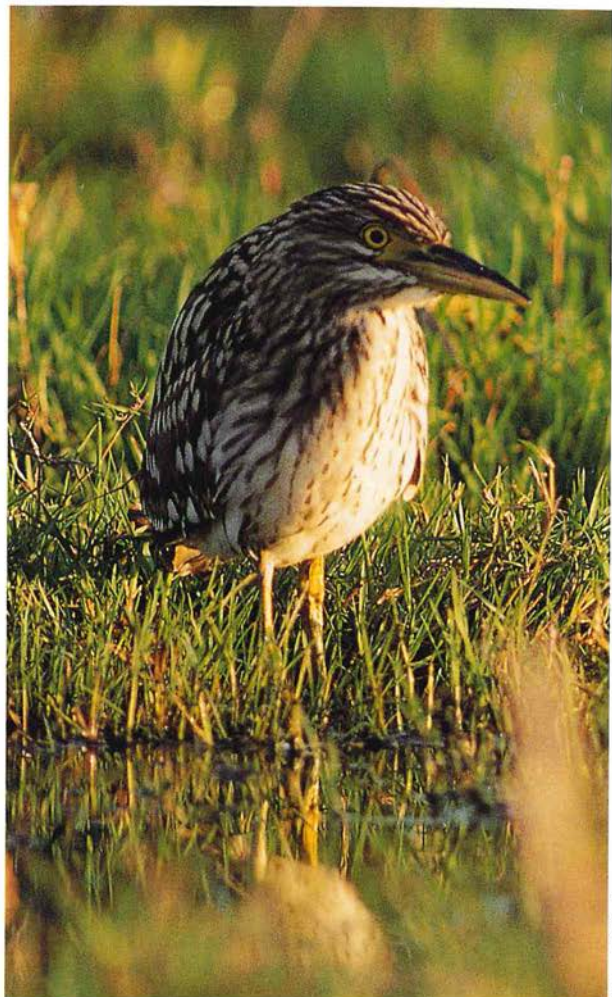


Photo – Jiri Lochman

GREAT CRESTED GREBE

(Podiceps cristatus)

The crests on its forehead and the chestnut and black frills on each side of its head give this bird a striking appearance. Though they are not especially common in south-western wetlands, their unmistakable appearance ensures they are noticed. They dive mostly for fish, but insects, crustaceans, tadpoles and plants are also eaten.

DESCRIPTION: There are black crests on each side of the crown above a red eye. Ruffs on each side of the head are chestnut at the base and black on the ends. The crest and ruffs are less prominent outside the breeding season. The cheeks and throat are white. The rest of the body is dark brown above and whitish beneath. Great crested grebes are about 50 centimetres long.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: In WA, great crested grebes are found mainly in the south-western corner from Shark Bay to the Fitzgerald River National Park, although they extend through to the Kimberley. They are extensively distributed in the eastern states. Crested grebes are widespread, being found in New Zealand and temperate parts of Eurasia and southern Africa.

PREFERRED HABITAT: These birds prefer open expanses of fresh water. They breed in spring in reedy areas submerged in water along the shore, or on islands of reeds in deeper water, defending their nesting territories vigorously.

LIFE HISTORY: Great crested grebes display some fascinating behaviour. Courting involves all manner of ceremonies, such as ripple dives, presentation of weeds, swaying and other displays. When the young hatch, after being incubated on floating nests (anchored to surrounding vegetation) built from weeds and reeds, they hitch a ride on the back of one of their parents, while the other brings them food. Every so often the parent will eject its load. The chicks tumble into the water then swim to the other parent, using its foot as an aid to clamber onto its back.



CALL: Great crested grebes have quiet calls, consisting of a low-pitched, guttural trill and a series of single notes.

AUSTRALASIAN GREBE

(Tachybaptus novaehollandiae)

Curiously, Australasian and other grebes eat their own feathers and even feed them to their chicks. It has been speculated that this behaviour prevents bones from piercing the intestine of fish-eating species. More conventional food includes small fish, freshwater snails, water insects and crustaceans. They are most active at dawn and dusk, when they dive deeply for food or chase their prey at the surface.

DESCRIPTION: When they are breeding, Australasian grebes are distinguished by the oval patch of bare yellow skin on their face and their bright yellow eyes. There is a chestnut patch at the back of the head. The rest of the head is glossy black. The black bill has a white tip and is slightly longer in males. The rest of the body is greyish-brown above and paler beneath. When not breeding, the throat and sides of the face become white, the bill is greyish-brown and the plumage on the head is no longer glossy. Adults reach 25 to 27 centimetres long.

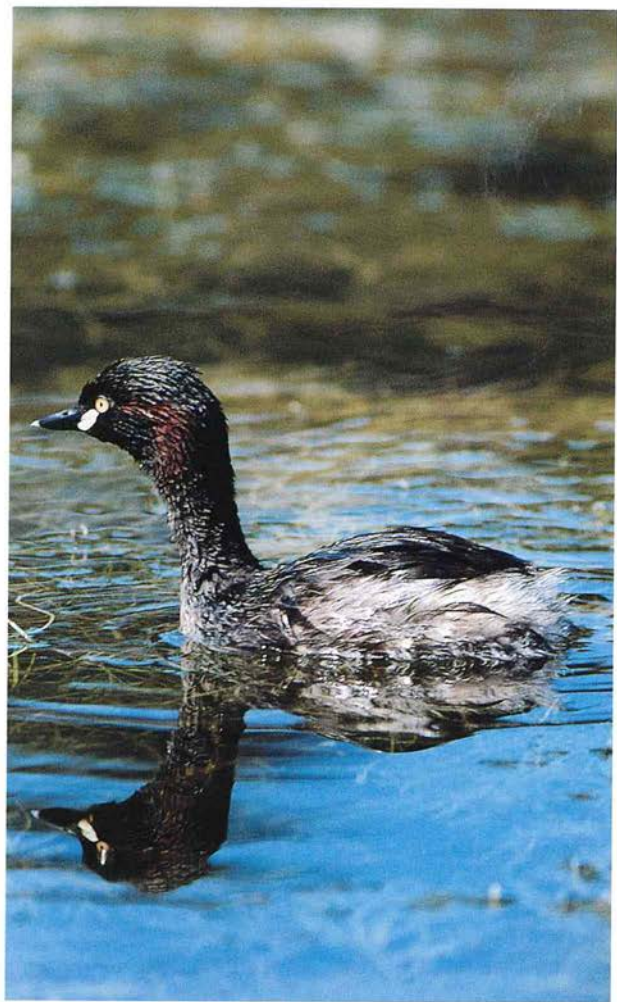
OTHER NAMES: Little grebe, Australian dabchick, black-throated grebe.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: The birds occur across most of the Australian mainland in areas of suitable habitat. They also extend to south-western Pacific islands and New Zealand.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Australasian grebes usually inhabit freshwater ponds and lakes. They are less likely to be found in open water than hoary-headed grebes.

LIFE HISTORY: Breeding occurs in spring and early summer. Two broods are sometimes raised. Four to seven eggs are laid on a floating nest and incubated by both sexes, which takes about three weeks. When not breeding they sometimes occur in small groups.

CALL: Australasian grebes are quite vocal, emitting a rattling, high-pitched trill and sometimes a single sharp note.



HOARY-HEADED GREBE

(Poliiocephalus poliocephalus)

Hoary-headed grebes are communal by nature, and up to 400 birds will nest together. Roosting and other activities are also carried out in groups. These grebes dive for aquatic insects.

DESCRIPTION: Hoary-headed grebes are grey above and off-white below. During the breeding season, the head develops characteristic white markings caused by the growth of narrow white feathers that overlay the dark greyish-black head. The bill is black with a paler tip. When it is not breeding, the top of the head is dark grey and the sides of the head and throat are white. The bill becomes largely pale. Adults are 27 to 30 centimetres long.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Hoary-headed grebes are found throughout Australia. They are most numerous, however, in south-western and south-eastern Australia.

PREFERRED HABITAT: They live on open sheets of water, whether fresh or saline. They are nomadic birds, well positioned to take advantage of temporary waters following good rains in the interior, and are the most common grebe in such areas.

LIFE HISTORY: In the South-West, they breed in spring and early summer, with floating nests that are constructed from water plants. Five or six eggs are laid and incubated by both parents. Pairing is not permanent. These birds often sunbathe.

CALL: Hoary-headed grebes are usually silent but sometimes issue soft, guttural sounds when in groups or while mating.



GREAT CORMORANT

(Phalacrocorax carbo)

An adept diver, the great cormorant mostly eats fish. The young are sometimes fed insects and crustaceans as well. Great cormorants can remain underwater for more than 60 seconds, using their webbed feet for propulsion.

DESCRIPTION: Males are a little larger than females, but both sexes look similar. The birds are black all over, apart from yellow facial skin at the base of the bill and some white or grey around this facial skin when breeding. White patches also appear on the flanks, just behind the legs, of breeding birds. Breeding birds also have a crest on the back of the head, which may be raised or lowered. The bill is greyish. Great cormorants reach 70 to 90 centimetres long and are the largest cormorants in Australia.

OTHER NAMES: Black cormorant, black shag.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: In WA, great cormorants are most common in estuaries and wetlands close to the coast. They are found from the northern Kimberley to Fitzgerald River National Park. They are present in most of the rest of Australia, apart from some central arid parts of the Northern Territory and South Australia, and are found in most parts of the world.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Freshwater lakes, rivers and estuaries.

LIFE HISTORY: Breeding can occur throughout the year, although it is usually in winter, and takes place in colonies. Males kick off proceedings by waving their wings near the nest site to expose the white patches on their sides. A nest of sticks and other material is built by the pair in a tree, a bush or on the ground. Three to five eggs are incubated by both parents over about four weeks. The young take another seven weeks to fledge.

CALL: Males have a couple of guttural calls, one harsh and one much more melodic, that they make while courting, whereas females hiss softly.



Photo – Simon Neville

LITTLE PIED CORMORANT

(*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*)

Little pied cormorants are often seen on the Swan River. Like all cormorants, after fishing, they spread their wings wide to dry off in the sun, and can often be seen doing this along the river banks. They feed on crustaceans and fish. Other cormorants seen in the Swan River and estuary are pied cormorants, little black cormorants and great cormorants.

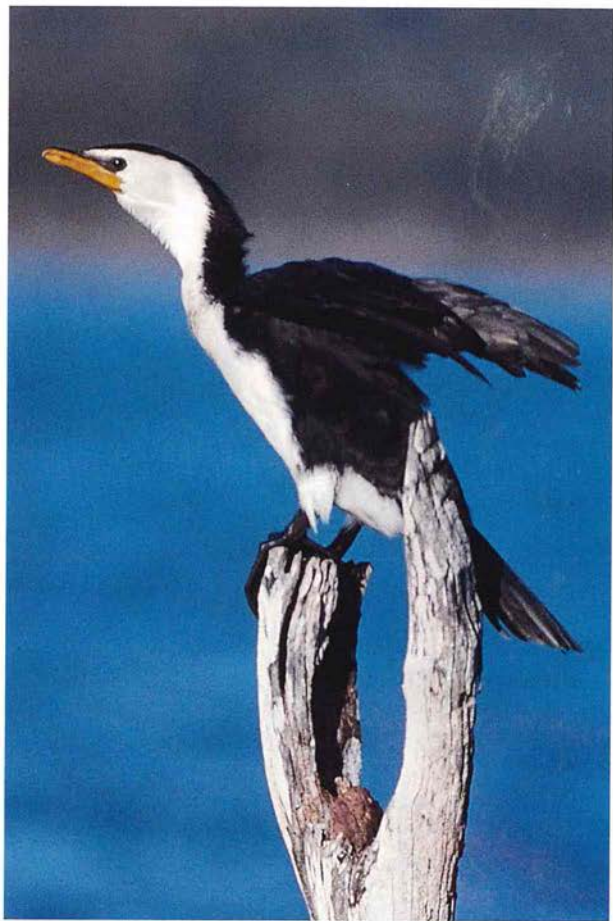
DESCRIPTION: Little pied cormorants are black above and white below. They are smaller than pied cormorants, with an average length of about 61 centimetres, and do not have the bright yellow facial skin in front of their eyes that characterises the pied cormorant. Like other cormorants and darters they have a large elongated body and long neck. Their feet are black and webbed to help with underwater propulsion and the bill is relatively blunt and hooked. During breeding they have a black tuft on the forehead, white frills on the sides of their crown and an orange bill and chin.

OTHER NAMES: Frilled shag, little black and white cormorant.

DISTRIBUTION: Little pied cormorants are the most widespread cormorants in Australia. They are found through most of the continent in any area with a body of water, even those well inland. They also extend to Indonesia, New Guinea, New Zealand and some Pacific islands.

PREFERRED HABITAT: These extremely adaptable birds live in salt and fresh water estuaries, rivers, swamps and marine areas.

LIFE HISTORY: Little pied cormorants consume crustaceans and fish. They no longer breed in the Swan River. They breed in colonies in spring, building platform nests in flooded trees along rivers and in swamps. Each male calls from a suitable nest site until he is chosen by a female, then sets about collecting material so she can build the nest. Both parents take turns to incubate the three to five eggs that are produced.



CALL: When breeding, and sometimes in roosts, they utter harsh chirping calls.

LITTLE BLACK CORMORANT

(*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*)

Little black cormorants can often be seen on the Swan River in large rafts of hundreds of birds, congregating around schooling fish. Like all cormorants, after fishing, they spread their wings wide to dry off in the sun, remaining in their flocks to do so. The little black cormorant associates with all of the other cormorant species found in the Swan River and estuary.

DESCRIPTION: Little black cormorants have entirely black plumage, but during the breeding season they may have small areas of white on the side of their head. They are about the same length of little pied cormorants, at about 60 centimetres. Like other cormorants and darters they have a relatively large elongated body and long neck. Their feet are black and webbed to help with underwater propulsion, and the bill is longer and thinner than that of the little pied cormorant.

DISTRIBUTION: Little black cormorants are very widespread. They are found through most of Australia in areas with large water bodies, and are common inland, as well as being abundant in estuaries. They also extend to Indonesia, New Guinea and New Zealand.

PREFERRED HABITAT: These communal birds live in deep, large water bodies such as rivers, lakes, estuaries and inlets.

LIFE HISTORY: Little black cormorants consume a variety of crustaceans and fish. They breed in colonies in spring through to autumn, building platform nests in flooded timber and trees along rivers and lakes. Both parents take turns to incubate up to six eggs.

CALL: Ticking and creaking sounds are made when nesting.



DARTER

(Anhinga melanogaster)

With only its head and neck rising from the water, the darter resembles a snake. This waterbird submerges its body and quietly stalks its prey, then suddenly strikes with its S-shaped head and neck. Small fish, insects and other small aquatic animals are the targets of these unwelcome attentions—they are speared with the sharp, pointed bill.

DESCRIPTION: These large birds are between 85 and 90 centimetres in length. The males are predominantly glossy black with some chestnut on the throat. A long white strip extends from the bill below the eye and along part of the long neck. The upper wings have decorative grey streaks, which can be seen to great effect when their wings are stretched out to dry. The females are greyish-brown above and greyish-white below. During courtship, both sexes develop a green upper beak.

OTHER NAMES: Snakebird, diver.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: The darter is found throughout most of the Australian mainland, apart from some arid areas, and is also found in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Darters inhabit lakes, rivers, swamps and coastal estuaries.

LIFE HISTORY: These supple birds are quite closely related to cormorants. The males select and defend a nest site and collect all the nesting material to build a rough platform of twigs. They attract females by waving their wings alternately. Four or more eggs are laid at intervals of two or three days. Both parents sit on the eggs and brood the young in shifts, while the other collects food. Most nesting activity is in spring and summer.

CALL: When breeding, darters utter several calls, including a harsh, rolling 'kah', oft-repeated and decreasing in volume. A clicking sound is made when not nesting.



WHITE-NECKED HERON

(*Ardea pacifica*)

While white-necked herons usually inhabit the temporary rivers and swamps of more inland areas, they occasionally appear in numbers in the coastal South-West during times of drought. Their *modus operandi* is to wade around the shallows, poised to gobble up any small creature they manage to flush out. They prefer to perch or nest in open or bare trees.

DESCRIPTION: These large birds stand almost a metre high. They have a greyish-black body and white neck and head, though the front of the neck is decorated with fine black spots. The white breast and white bend of the wings can be clearly seen in flight, as can the white 'windows' on the leading edge of the wing. When flying, they fold up their long necks and tuck their heads in close to the body, trailing their long legs behind them. The tail is quite short. A patch of bare skin between the black bill and the eye may be blue or yellow.

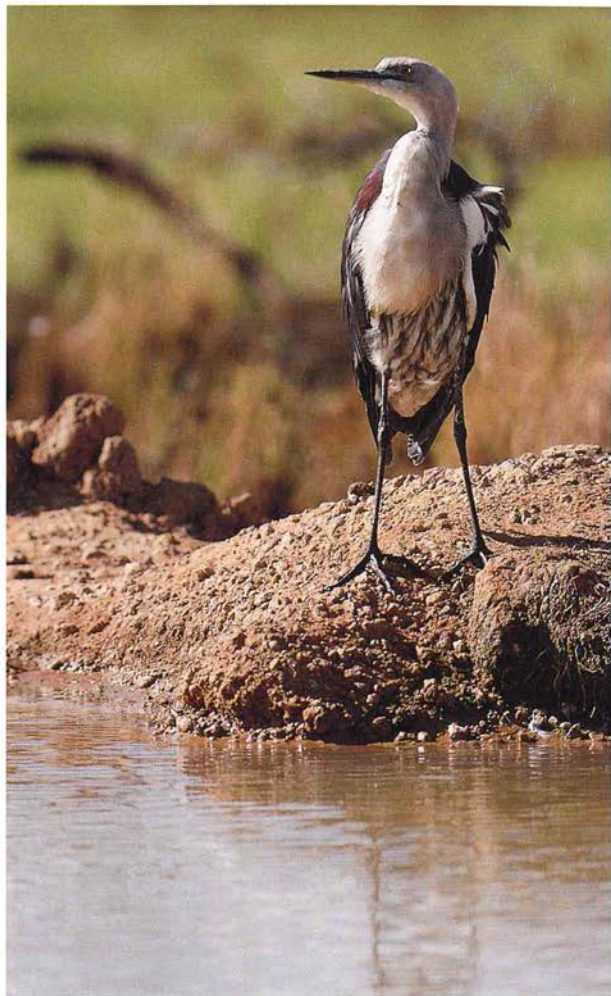
OTHER NAMES: Pacific heron.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Found across most of Australia, they sometimes wander to Tasmania, New Zealand and New Guinea.

PREFERRED HABITAT: These birds are quite nomadic and usually inhabit temporary inland rivers and swamps and wet grasslands. In the South-West, they are usually seen in ones or twos, often in roadside pools. Bigger flocks are seen in the north.

LIFE HISTORY: White-necked herons dine on insects, crustaceans, tadpoles, frogs and fish. They breed in spring. Their nests are platforms of sticks, placed in trees up to 30 metres above the ground. These usually overhang water. Both parents help to incubate up to six eggs. Breeding is related to the abundance of food, but is usually in spring and summer.

CALL: These birds give a harsh, loud alarm croak, a loud 'oomph' at the nest and make other quiet croaking calls.



WHITE-FACED HERON

(Ardea novaehollandiae)

The white-faced heron is the most common species of heron in the South-West. This nomadic bird is also the most widespread heron in Australia, foraging in a wide range of habitats varying from tidal mudflats to wet pasture. They feed on invertebrates (in and out of water), fish, tadpoles and frogs.

DESCRIPTION: Male and female birds have similar colouring, though males are slightly larger. The birds have attractive light grey and bluish-grey plumage, apart from their white face and throat. The beak is black. Adults reach 65 to 69 centimetres long.

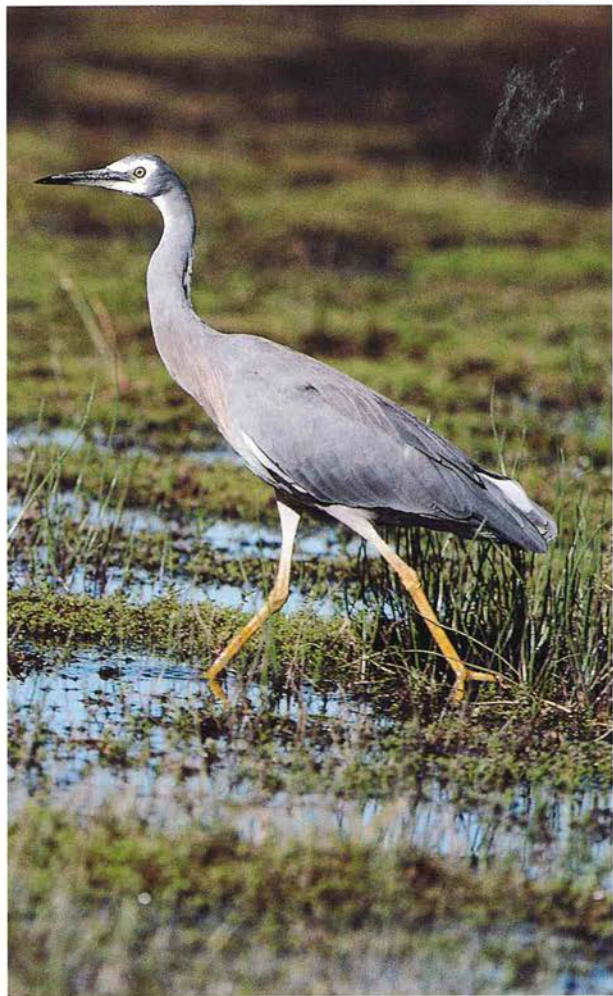
OTHER NAMES: White-fronted heron, blue crane.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: They are distributed throughout the Australian mainland and extend to Indonesia, New Zealand and many Pacific islands.

PREFERRED HABITAT: White-faced heron frequent swamps, lakes, estuaries, wet grasslands and mudflats. They are sometimes found at moderately saline wetlands in the Wheatbelt.

LIFE HISTORY: Breeding usually takes place in spring. A platform of sticks is built in a tree which is often, but not always, near water. Each pair produces about four eggs, sharing incubation and other parental tasks. The young take about 40 days to fledge and then remain with their parents until they begin to nest once again.

CALL: When alarmed, these birds will make a loud croak sounding like 'oooooark'. Other sounds are made at the nest and on feeding grounds, where a guttural 'graaw' is often given.



GREAT EGRET

(*Ardea alba*)

One of the most elegant birds of south-western wetlands, the great egret is usually seen alone. It will stalk slowly through waters up to 30 centimetres deep, often staying motionless for long periods. Fish form its staple diet but insects, crustaceans and frogs are also eaten. The similar, but smaller, little egret is less common in south-western wetlands. The little egret's plumage is also entirely white but it is only about 56 centimetres long, has a patch of bare yellow skin on the face, a slender black bill and two fine plumes on the back of its head when breeding. The intermediate egret, which is similar in appearance to the great egret, is found only in northern Australia.

DESCRIPTION: The great egret has a sinuous neck that is longer than the body. When this bird is not breeding, the bill, face and eyes are all yellow. The bill turns black when courting, the eye becomes red, the facial patch is bluish-green and there are long white plumes on the back that extend beyond the tail. Great egrets are 80 to 90 centimetres long.

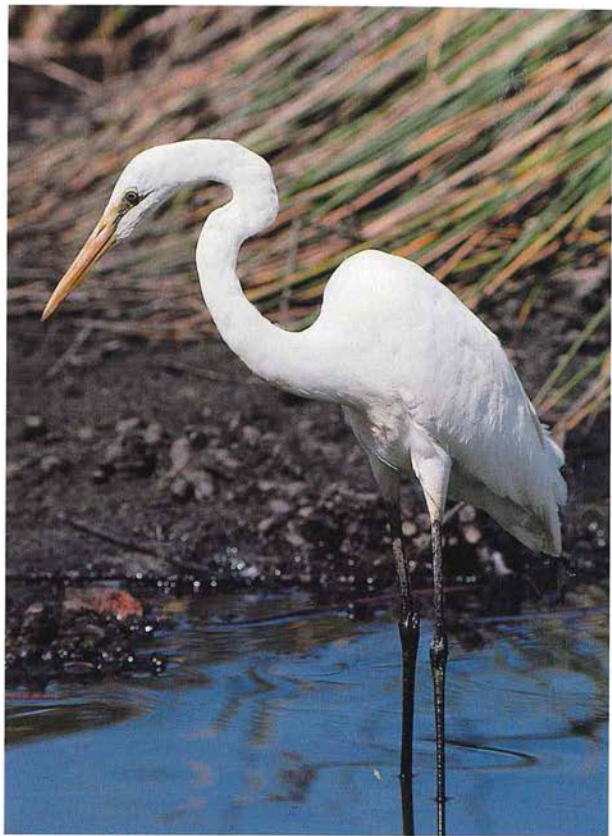
OTHER NAMES: Large egret, white egret.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: The great egret has a wide distribution through all but the most arid parts of Australia and most other tropical and temperate parts of the world, including Europe and Asia.

PREFERRED HABITAT: The great egret is mostly a freshwater species, inhabiting lakes, swamps, rivers, dams and estuaries.

LIFE HISTORY: Great egrets nest in spring and usually construct a nest of sticks in a tree up to 15 metres above the ground. Both sexes incubate three to six eggs. However, only two young are usually reared, and they take about six weeks to fledge.

CALL: When alarmed, great egrets emit a loud, harsh and elongated croak. A variety of calls are made during nesting.



NANKEEN NIGHT HERON

(*Nycticorax caledonicus*)

These large pale brown birds are sometimes disturbed from trees by people approaching water, and flap, awkwardly at first, to a new rest. Nankeen night herons are the only Australian herons that are nocturnal. These predatory creatures stalk their prey in the shallows, often using their sharply pointed bills to spear fish, amphibians, crustaceans and large invertebrates. They sometimes steal the eggs and chicks of other birds.

DESCRIPTION: These birds are quite large, between 56 and 65 centimetres long. The crown and back of the head is greyish-black and two or three white plumes decorate the rear of the head. The neck is short, imparting a hunched appearance. Nankeen night herons have a cinnamon back and wings and a white breast and belly.

OTHER NAMES: Rufous night heron.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Nankeen night herons occur throughout Australia. They range as far as Indonesia and the Philippines to New Caledonia.

PREFERRED HABITAT: They inhabit permanent and semi-permanent fresh and brackish wetlands and rivers and roost in large trees, sometimes a short distance from water, during the day.

LIFE HISTORY: These nomadic birds breed in the basin of the Murray and Darling rivers in huge colonies that number tens of thousands and in smaller numbers in WA, including the South-West in spring. After the males stake out nesting territories they perform ritualised dance and song displays to attract a mate. The bright yellow legs change to pinkish-red, the yellow eyes turn orange, and the facial skin becomes bright blue during courting. The resultant pairs stay together only one season. Two or three young are raised on a messy tangle of twigs collected by the male.

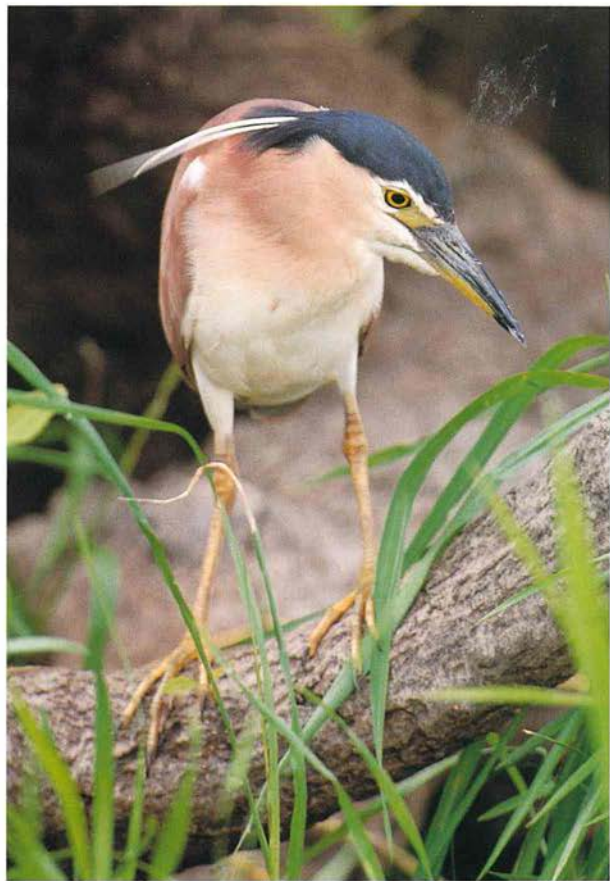


Photo – Simon Neville

CALL: At the nest and at roosting sites, these birds produce a loud musical screech. They make a quiet chlucking sound when feeding young.

STRAW-NECKED IBIS

(Threskiornis spinicollis)

Straw-necked ibises often fly in V-shaped formations. These birds can often be seen on lawns and other grassed areas, feeding methodically. They are abundant and the most widely distributed of Australia's three species of ibis. They are named because of the straw-like feathers that hang from the neck. The other species are the glossy ibis (smaller, dark and with a metallic sheen) and the Australian white ibis (white with a black head). All are found in the South-West.

DESCRIPTION: These reasonably large birds have a black head with a very long, curved and tapered beak. The neck is largely white, as is the breast, belly and tail. The back and the wings are an iridescent bluish-black. During courtship, they also develop red patches behind the eyes and on either side of the breast but these quickly fade. The legs are red.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Straw-necked ibises are found through most of the Australian mainland.

PREFERRED HABITAT: They inhabit swamps, the margins of lakes, and grassy paddocks, especially if they are wet.

LIFE HISTORY: Straw-necked ibises breed in large colonies in spring, building nests in suitable thickets or on islands within swamps. The nests are essentially a platform of sticks. The birds lay up to five eggs, which are incubated by both parents. They consume caterpillars, grasshoppers, beetles, frogs, snakes, molluscs and water-dwelling invertebrates. The courtship ritual is quite ceremonial and incorporates much bowing and preening. They also bow when changing shifts to incubate eggs and to the young before feeding commences.

CALL: They grunt in flight and make a longer grunting sound in nesting colonies.



YELLOW-BILLED SPOONBILL

(*Platalea flavipes*)

These large and attractive birds are usually seen in small numbers, foraging along the edges of freshwater bodies. Here, they slowly walk through the water, stirring up debris and sweeping their pale yellow spoon-shaped bill from side to side. Water insects, crustaceans, fish and molluscs are the preferred items of food. Two species of spoonbill are found in Australia. The royal spoonbill is easily recognised by its regal black and grey spoon bill, but is very uncommon in the South-West.

DESCRIPTION: The featherless face of the yellow-billed spoonbill is outlined in black. Most of the plumage is snowy white, sometimes with a pinkish tinge, and the legs and feet are pale yellow with black joints. When it is breeding, there is a bib of spiky white plumes on the breast and the face can be pale blue. Adults reach 80 to 90 centimetres long.

OTHER NAMES: Yellow-legged spoonbill.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: The yellow-billed spoonbill is reasonably common through most of southern Australia, where it breeds. It is fairly nomadic and will wander to northern areas, occasionally straying as far afield as Tasmania, New Zealand, Lord Howe Island and southern New Guinea.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Yellow-billed spoonbills like swamps, dams, shallow lakes and the edges of rivers, all with fresh water.

LIFE HISTORY: Yellow-billed spoonbills breed in late winter and spring. They return to the same breeding areas every year and will defend their nest site vigorously. Up to four eggs are laid in a large nest of sticks and rushes, which is placed in a tree up to 20 metres above the water or the ground. Both parents incubate the eggs and gather food for the chicks, which leave the nest at about four weeks of age but remain nearby. They begin to accompany adults at about seven weeks of age.



CALL: These birds often give a reedy grunt, especially when nesting, and make a soft 'toot' or 'woofing' noise with their wings.

BLACK SWAN

(Cygnus atratus)

In January 1697, a party led by Dutch navigator Willem De Vlamingh became the first Europeans to see black swans when they sailed up and named the Swan River. They took three swans to Batavia (Indonesia) with them, but the birds died. An exploratory party led by Captain James Stirling marvelled at the spectacle of hundreds of black swans rising from the water as their boats navigated the Swan River in March 1827. Each evening they enjoyed roast swan for dinner. Today, sadly, the sight of black swans on the river to which they gave their name is quite uncommon. However, black swans are about to make a comeback on the Swan River. The City of Perth has plans to encourage the birds to return to Heirrisson Island. To breed, black swans require a small secluded vegetated island within a water body. The City of Perth intends to create such habitat.

DESCRIPTION: Black swans are entirely black, except for the white outer flight feathers, and have an orange to dark red beak. The white eye becomes red during the breeding season. Males average about 1.3 metres long whereas females are slightly shorter at 1.2 metres in length. Females also have slightly shorter necks than those of males. The cygnets are covered with a light grey down. This changes slowly to black, over the course of the first year.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Black swans live throughout southern Australia, and extend north into the tropics on large lakes.

PREFERRED HABITAT: The birds live in freshwater rivers, estuaries and lakes, and saline swamps. They can drink salt water.

LIFE HISTORY: Black swans moult their wing feathers every year between September and February, after they finish breeding. Unable to fly when moulting, they gather on open lakes in large numbers. They feed predominantly on vegetation growing in the



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water, grazing on aquatic plants at the surface as well as growth from the bottom, which they obtain by making use of their long necks. Breeding is mostly between May and September, but can occur in any month of the year. A number of displays are undertaken before mating, which begins after the female lays outstretched in front of, and often beneath, the male. The pair constructs a nest built of sticks and vegetation, that forms a low mound. It is usually built in shallow water and rests on the lakebed, although sometimes a fallen tree is used as an anchor point. While older birds generally bond permanently with one partner, younger birds may pair up for only a short time, breed then desert the nest, leaving the other partner of either sex to care for the young. After leaving, the deserter will often mate again and females may produce up to four broods in the one year. Three to nine eggs are usually produced. Both sexes incubate the eggs, which takes 39-45 days, and defend their nesting territories.

CALL: A rather soft trumpeting noise is made. The call is usually two-toned and was described by an early observer as being like 'the creaking of a rusty ale house sign on a windy day'. Males make deeper and longer calls than females.



AUSTRALIAN SHELDUCK

(*Tadorna tadornoides*)

The common name of mountain duck is incorrect as this species lives nowhere near mountains. They live in a variety of waterbodies, especially saline ones, and sometimes graze on pasture. They are also seen on some islands in the South-West, such as Rottnest Island and Bird Island off Rockingham, where they breed. They are easily recognised by their handsome plumage.

DESCRIPTION: These birds have a glossy, greenish-black head and neck and a white collar around the neck. Their breast is a rich chestnut brown and the rest of the body is black, apart from patches of white and chestnut on the wings. Males, 59 to 72 centimetres long, are larger than females, 55 to 68 centimetres long. Females also have white around the bill and eyes.

OTHER NAMES: Mountain duck, chestnut-breasted shelduck.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Australian shelducks are common throughout the southern half of the State and breed extensively in the Wheatbelt. They also have strongholds in Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Saline lakes, freshwater lakes, estuaries and offshore islands.

LIFE HISTORY: The birds graze on green plants in water or on land but also take insects, molluscs and crustaceans. They moult their wing feathers after breeding, usually about November, and are flightless for three to four weeks. They breed in winter and nest in a variety of situations, including tree holes and caves. Breeding trees are often well away from water. After hatching, the young are led to water by their mother. Crows often kill young ducklings during this trek. The female incubates five to 15 eggs, while the male establishes and defends a territory in which the ducklings will be raised. The territory may be some distance from the nest, but it is here that the female feeds when she temporarily leaves the eggs.



CALL: The call consists of a series of loud honks.

AUSTRALIAN WOOD DUCK

(*Chenonetta jubata*)

The wood duck spends more time walking than it does swimming and will often perch in trees, where it nests. It grazes largely on green plants close to water, but will also consume insects and grain.

DESCRIPTION: Male wood ducks have a brown head and neck with a small 'mane' of black feathers at the back of the head. The rest of their plumage is greyish-white and dusky to black. The bill of these birds is short and unduck-like. Males are 42 to 59 centimetres and females are 42 to 55 centimetres long.

OTHER NAMES: Maned duck, maned goose.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Wood ducks are common throughout inland Australia and extend in a wide band through WA's coastal and subcoastal regions, from the Pilbara through the Wheatbelt to the Fitzgerald River National Park. They are also found across most of the eastern half of Australia. Wood ducks have only become common in the South-West since widespread provision of farm dams. Numbers in Perth have been increasing over the past 15 years. They usually form flocks of up to about 50.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Breeding birds prefer open woodlands near water, as they nest in tree hollows, and they can often be seen perched in trees during this time.

LIFE HISTORY: In the well-watered South-West, breeding is in late winter and spring, but in more arid areas it coincides with rain. The nest hole is lined with woodchips. The female incubates nine to 12 eggs for about four weeks, while the male protects the nest. After hatching, the parents stand at the bottom of the tree and encourage the ducklings to jump out, then lead them to water. The young fledge in about 50 days. They remain with their parents for a further two weeks, then the entire family merges into a flock.

CALL: The call is a distinctive drawn-out 'mew'.



Above: Male wood duck

Below: A female



PINK-EARED DUCK

(Malacorhynchus membranaceus)

Pink-eared ducks are not closely related to other ducks and their appearance is quite distinctive. They have a small bright pink patch behind their eye, and plumage that is striped like a zebra. Their shovel-like bill is further extended by flaps of skin that help them scoop plankton from water. These nomadic birds are well adapted to Australia's arid interior, arriving in flooded areas and claypans in big flocks, moving on when conditions become unsuitable. However, they do use south-western wetlands.

DESCRIPTION: The top of the head is grey, with a dark brown mask around each eye. The neck, back and wings are brown and the rump is white, with barred plumage on the neck and undersides. The grey bill has black flaps. Males reach 38 to 45 centimetres long, while females average 40 centimetres in length.

OTHER NAMES: Pink-ear, zebra duck, whistling teal.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: These birds are confined to Australia, but roam over most of the continent. Their numbers in any given area fluctuate according to conditions.

PREFERRED HABITAT: They are typically a bird of large freshwater lakes of the inland, but also occur in fresh and brackish coastal lakes and swamps. They are highly nomadic, moving between wetlands as one dries and another floods.

LIFE HISTORY: Food is mainly minute freshwater organisms such as algae, insects and copepods, and is collected by swimming through the water with their bills immersed and slightly open at the tip. The food is filtered out and the water expelled through the sides of the beak. They will also trawl along the bottom. Inland breeding is associated with floods, whatever the time of year, but in the South-West most nesting occurs in spring. The female will incubate five to eight eggs, while males defend the nest. Most nests are placed in tree hollows or in the fork of a live tree in



wetlands. Males help to care for the young, but after the brood is dispersed the pairs separate. Another mate is found next time conditions become suitable for breeding.

CALL: The call is a distinctive whistling or chirruping, often uttered in flight or just after landing.

GREY TEAL

(*Anas gracilis*)

The grey teal is a nomad, wandering far and wide to find suitable conditions. A few will be found on almost any wetland. They dabble for food or take seeds from plants in, or overhanging, water. They also take insects, larvae, molluscs and small crustaceans.

DESCRIPTION: The top of the head and the back of the neck are blackish-brown, whereas the throat and neck are a pale greyish-white. Most of the feathers on the body are dark brown, with pale edges. The bill and feet are dark grey. Males are 41 to 48 centimetres while females are 37 to 44 centimetres long.

OTHER NAMES: Slender teal.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: These common birds take advantage of rains to wander anywhere in Australia offering suitable conditions. Small numbers have moved to New Guinea, New Zealand, New Caledonia and other islands.

PREFERRED HABITAT: The grey teal can be seen in any habitat with water, from salt water estuaries to desert floodplains.

LIFE HISTORY: In the South-West, most nesting occurs in spring, although it can take place at any time of the year in inland areas, and is triggered by rainfall. Eggs may be laid within two weeks of the water level beginning to rise. If flooding takes place over long periods, a number of broods will be raised. The grey teal is just as flexible in its choice of nest sites and will nest on the ground or in low shrubs, but the most common nest sites are hollows of trees standing in water. Between four and 14 eggs are laid and incubated by the female. However, because of the boom and bust cycle, few of the young survive more than two years.

CALL: The female gives a characteristic 'decrecendo' call, consisting of a series of quacks that rise rapidly in pitch and then decline. It can sound as though these birds are laughing. The male gives a loud quack or 'burp' and occasionally utters brief whistles.



PACIFIC BLACK DUCK

(*Anas superciliosa*)

Every Australian would be familiar with the Pacific black duck, which inhabits wetlands throughout most of the continent, including those in almost every city suburb. In most city areas they are very tame and approach people to be fed. Their natural diet consists largely of seeds, aquatic insects and crustaceans.

DESCRIPTION: The top of the head and the back of the neck are dark brown. A dark brown stripe from the bill to the eye, on a cream background, and a thinner paler stripe beneath give this bird its typical striped face with its lovely benign expression. The brown feathers that cover most of the body have cream edges and there is a broad green/purple patch on each wing, known as a speculum.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Pacific black ducks are common and widespread in Australia. They also occur in New Zealand and New Guinea. They are fairly nomadic, especially in inland areas. In some areas interbreeding with the introduced mallard (see pages 44-45) presents a problem to this species.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Black ducks live in a wide range of habitats including streams, swamps, rivers, lakes, even drainage ditches, with fresh or brackish water. They do, however, prefer deep freshwater swamps.

LIFE HISTORY: In the South-West, the black duck breeds between June and October. Nests range from a scrape on the ground to elaborate cups in shrubs and are placed in a variety of situations, including tree holes, but forks in trees standing in water are probably the most common site. Each female incubates between seven and 11 eggs and her mate will accompany her on feeding expeditions.

CALL: The female quacks raucously, often as a descending series of notes that get shorter, whereas the male will warble softly and whistle during courtship. Both sexes give loud single quacks.



Photos – Simon Neville

MALLARD

(*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Most strains of domestic duck have originated from the northern hemisphere mallard, which was introduced into Australia late last century. Mallards are now common in parks and gardens throughout Australian cities and on swampy farms. As a result, this bird poses a threat to the Pacific black duck, to which it is closely related. In instances when the two species interbreed, the mallard strain is dominant. Mallards also compete with the black duck for food. In New Zealand they are swamping the local black ducks with their genes.

DESCRIPTION: Males are easily recognised by their glossy dark green head and neck, which is circled with a white ring beneath. They have a pale yellow bill and the breast is a rich brown. The tail is upwardly curled. Females have a dusky orange bill. Most of their body is light and dark brown, with dark brown wings and a lighter tail. Both males and females have a purplish-blue speculum.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: In WA, the mallard is confined to the more densely populated parts of the south-western corner, from north of Perth to the Leeuwin-Naturaliste area. It is much more widespread in the south-eastern states and Tasmania.

PREFERRED HABITAT: City parks and gardens are the main strongholds of this fairly sedentary bird.

LIFE HISTORY: The female incubates eight to 12 eggs, which are laid on the ground, usually on islands in ornamental ponds. The resultant ducklings look similar to those of the black duck but have feet that are a brighter orange.

CALL: The call is similar to that of the black duck. Females quack loudly and raucously, while the males warble softly and whistle.



HARDHEAD

(*Aythya australis*)

Hardheads are superb divers and may stay submerged for a minute, travelling underwater over a distance of 30 or 40 metres. During these forays, they capture small fish, crustaceans and molluscs, though a wide range of plant species also make up a large component of their diet. They will also dabble at the edge but do not leave water to feed.

DESCRIPTION: Male ducks are mostly dark brown with a white eye and a slate blue bar at the tip of the black bill. They are 41 to 49 centimetres long. Females are similar in colour but have a brown eye, are a lighter colour all over and have a narrower bar on the bill, which is paler. They are also larger than the males at 42 to 54 centimetres long.

OTHER NAMES: White-eyed duck, brownhead, coppertop.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: These birds are still moderately common, despite having declined in numbers on the eastern coast. The range of the hardhead is extensive, taking in most of Australia.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Hardheads prefer inland freshwater lakes, which is where the biggest breeding populations occur. They are nomadic and, during droughts, they disperse widely through Australia and overseas to Indonesia, New Guinea and other islands.

LIFE HISTORY: In the South-West, hardheads usually breed between August and October. They weave a neat cup of reeds and other plant matter, positioning it in dense vegetation growing in water or on land. Their nests are hard to find. The female usually lays and then incubates nine to 12 eggs.

CALL: Though they are silent for the most part, females sometimes emit a soft croak or barking call, while the males make a soft whistle.



BLUE-BILLED DUCK

(Oxyura australis)

Only the male blue-billed duck has a blue bill, and even then only during the breeding season, during spring and early summer. The rest of the time the bill fades to grey. The bill of females is greyish-brown all year round. Blue-billed ducks are helpless on land and fly only at night but are fast swimmers and can dive for 50 metres or more underwater to avoid danger. They feed on aquatic insects and plants.

DESCRIPTION: When breeding, the males have a glossy black head and neck and the rest of the body is largely chestnut and dusky dark brown. Otherwise the head is black and grey and the rest of the body is duller in colour. Females have blackish-brown upper parts with a mottled light brown and black head and belly. Adult birds can reach 35 to 44 centimetres long.

OTHER NAMES: Spinetail, diving duck.

DISTRIBUTION: The birds are confined to the south-western corner of WA but are also found in Victoria, New South Wales, eastern South Australia and most of Tasmania.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Blue-billed ducks inhabit freshwater swamps with dense vegetation.

LIFE HISTORY: Most breeding in the South-West is in spring. The female duck builds a cup-shaped nest unassisted, by trampling plants into a platform. It is usually sheltered beneath bent over reeds. She also incubates the eggs alone, then leads her ducklings away to dive and dabble for food when they are just a day old.

CALL: For the most part the birds are silent, but males will give a low-pitched rattle when trying to attract a mate. Females will also quack when alarmed and hiss to warn intruders from the nest site.



MUSK DUCK

(*Biziura lobata*)

The musk duck is found on most of the waterways of south-western Australia and is usually seen floating motionless or kicking up great jets of water far from shore. During the breeding season, an intense odour emanates from the oil or preen gland of the male musk duck, which is situated on its rump. When one was brought on board the *HMS Discovery* in 1791 Captain George Vancouver complained that 'A very peculiar one was shot, of a darkish grey plumage, with a bag like that of a lizard under its throat, which smelt so intolerably [sic] of musk that it scented nearly the whole ship'.

DESCRIPTION: This bird is perhaps the most prehistoric, unduck-like looking creature found in our wetlands. It has a blackish-brown plumage with numerous fine lines of light brown, and floats very low in the water. Under the chin of the mature male is an unusual leathery bag. Female musk ducks can easily be confused with female blue-billed ducks.

HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION: Musk ducks tend to occur in permanent swamps in higher rainfall areas of southern Australia, although they are also found in estuaries and brackish swamps.

LIFE HISTORY: During courtship, the birds stage a remarkable display by blowing out cheeks and neck, inflating their chin bag, spreading their tiny tail feathers over their back, throwing water and giving a piercing, most unduck-like whistle with each kick. Water levels determine breeding, so from the first rains in March through to September you are likely to see these individuals perform. Nesting occurs from late winter to early summer. Musk ducks feed entirely by diving and can remain submerged for up to a minute as they search deep for aquatic insects, mussels, snails, crustaceans and frogs. The birds are entirely aquatic and almost helpless on land. To escape detection they sink into the water, leaving only their eyes and nostrils exposed.



CALL: The male musk duck has two very distinctive 'calls'. A loud 'ker-plonk' noise is made by its feet, followed by a high-pitched whistle, 'pi-oing'. The male can usually be seen splashing and displaying when the calls are heard.

DUSKY MOORHEN

(Gallinula tenebrosa)

Dusky moorhens lead a communal lifestyle, forming groups of between two and seven birds. Within each group, there are between one and three males to each female. The group cooperates to roost, preen, breed, nest and rear the young together. They feed on vegetation, insects, snails and other small animals.

DESCRIPTION: These birds are a dusky grey to brown. They have white lines on each side of the tail and sometimes white flecks on the rear. The red bill has a yellow tip and above it is a red frontal shield. Dusky moorhens have green feet and red knees. Birds are 34 to 38 centimetres in length.

OTHER NAMES: Black moorhen.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Dusky moorhens are common in Perth but relatively rare elsewhere in WA. They are mostly confined to the south-western corner of the State but are more widespread in eastern Australia.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Moorhens live in freshwater swamps and lakes adjacent to grassy areas suitable for grazing.

LIFE HISTORY: After the group establishes and defends a territory, the females initiate sexual activity and mate with all males in their group. The entire group cooperates to build the nest in spring, by trampling reeds or other vegetation into a shallow dish. Each female lays five to eight eggs, with incubation also a group affair, taking about three weeks.

CALL: Dusky moorhens entice their mate with a soft mewing. When defending their territory a loud crowing 'kurk' is given. Squawks, clicks, mewing calls and short grunts are also made.



PURPLE SWAMPHEN

(Porphyrrio porphyrio)

Swamphens are full of character and have an interesting lifestyle. Groups undertake egg incubation and chick rearing in a collective manner, with all laying in the same nest. Courting males present the females with plants, while bowing and chuckling.

DESCRIPTION: These birds have a large bright red beak that extends to the top of the head, an 'apron' of dark blue feathers on the breast and a white undertail. The remaining feathers are a dusky black. The tail is quite stubby. Swamphens have large pinkish-red feet. The eye is small and red. Adults are between 44 and 48 centimetres long and males tend to be larger than females.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Swamphens are mostly confined to the South-West of WA, where they are common in most permanent freshwater swamps containing dense reeds, especially in Perth, but they also occur in the Pilbara and Kimberley. They are widespread in eastern Australia and are found in Africa, Asia and the islands to the north of Australia (Indonesia and New Guinea).

LIFE HISTORY: Swamphens mostly eat the stems of young reeds. Fruits, seeds, eggs, invertebrates and other small animals form a lesser part of the diet. Most breeding occurs between August and November. The birds form groups of between two and 10, and the dominant males are responsible for defending their collective territory. Three to eight eggs are laid on a large platform of reeds which is trampled into a dish shape by group members. Several females may lay in the same nest and share the incubation duties. A separate nest is constructed as a 'nursery' in which the chicks are raised. Various adults (mostly those lower down in the pecking order) supervise the foraging activities of the chicks and brood them at night.

CALL: Swamphens often make a loud, screeching 'kee-oww'. While feeding they 'chuck-chuck' softly at one another and also stay in contact using two-syllable 'n-yip' calls.



EURASIAN COOT

(*Fulica atra*)

The coot, with its white frontal shield, is very common in south-western wetlands and is easily distinguished from the dusky moorhen, which has a red frontal shield. Some invertebrates, frogs and fish are consumed, but they feed mostly on aquatic plants, for which they are capable of diving to more than seven metres. They occasionally venture ashore to graze. Flocks of hundreds of coots are sometimes seen.

DESCRIPTION: The plumage of Eurasian coots is entirely dark greyish-black. The bright red eye stands out. The bill is white and the legs are grey. Adults are 32 to 39 centimetres long. Males are slightly bigger and tend to have broader frontal shields.

OTHER NAMES: Australian coot, toorie.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Eurasian coots are found throughout Australia. The birds also occur in Europe, Asia, Indonesia, New Guinea and New Zealand.

PREFERRED HABITAT: They are found in most fresh or brackish waters of the South-West, spending much of their time diving for submerged vegetation. They can be nomadic and will occasionally travel large distances.

LIFE HISTORY: In the South-West, breeding usually takes place between July and October. It is a very noisy affair, with males squabbling over territories. The birds will also attack and even sometimes kill other bird species. Mating involves pursuit, calling and other displays, such as clapping the wings on water. Both sexes are involved in nest building, incubation and rearing the young. Four to 15 eggs are deposited in an open nest on a small mound of sticks and other plant material, often positioned in the open or attached to a shrub or fallen tree.

CALL: Numerous calls are made but the most often heard is a reedy 'kowk', often repeated several times.



BLACK-WINGED STILT

(Himantopus himantopus)

Black-winged stilts wade through muddy shallows in search of tasty morsels, their slender, red, stilt-like legs elevating them above the water line. Molluscs, aquatic invertebrates and small crustaceans are the most sought after items. They sometimes maximise their catch by foraging spaced out in family parties of two or three. The inland-breeding banded stilt, also known as the Rottne Island snipe, looks similar but lacks the black neck and often has a dark brown band on the breast.

DESCRIPTION: Black-winged stilts are attractive in their simplicity. These birds are mostly white, with a black nape, back and wings. The rear of the neck, the eyes and the long narrow bill are also black.

OTHER NAMES: Pied stilt, longshanks, white-headed stilt.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Black-winged stilts are found throughout Australia and most of the world.

PREFERRED HABITAT: They inhabit the edges of freshwater and brackish wetlands.

LIFE HISTORY: Black-winged stilts nest in samphire or shrubs, on islands, or on a muddy depression at the water's edge. The breeding season in the South-West extends from August to December. Twigs and other vegetation are often used to build up the nest site into a platform. Four eggs are usually laid and incubated by both parents. The young leave the nest within hours of hatching, but are brooded each night.

CALL: This bird makes a yelping noise that sounds like a small puppy. When in flight it makes a high-pitched piping call.



RED-NECKED AVOCET

(Recurvirostra novaehollandiae)

The red-necked avocet is one of the most attractive wetland birds. As well as their handsome chestnut head, these wading birds have upcurved bills, which look impossibly long and thin. They feed in shallow water or soft mud, sweeping their partly opened bill from side to side to glean crustaceans, worms, molluscs and insects.

DESCRIPTION: The white eye ring surrounding a dark reddish-brown eye stands out from the bright chestnut head of these birds. The body and tail are white with some dusky feathers on the wings. Adults are 40 to 45 centimetres long. They have long pale grey legs that stretch beyond their tail during flight.

OTHER NAMES: Cobbler, trumpeter, painted lady.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Red-necked avocets are found through most of Australia.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Saline lakes and estuaries are the favoured habitat of these birds, but they also occur in shallow freshwater wetlands. Good places to see them include the Peel Inlet and Vasse-Wonnerup estuary. When rains come to the inland areas, and claypans fill up, the avocets will arrive to take advantage of the resulting food.

LIFE HISTORY: Red-necked avocets usually lay four eggs in a lined depression on an island between July and November in the South-West. These are incubated by both parents and hatch almost simultaneously. The young soon leave the nest to forage with their parents. When they are not breeding, red-necked avocets flock together in groups of 100 or more.

CALL: Various soft whistles and clicks are made. They also make a 'toot-toot' to stay in contact and when alarmed.



BLACK-FRONTED DOTTEREL

(Elseyornis melanops)

Black-fronted dotterels are often seen scampering along the shoreline, as though not daring to get their feet wet. When approached too closely, they take a short flight in an arc over the water, landing once again on the shore. The broad 'V' on their chest is distinctive. These little birds have short legs and short bills and tend to take aquatic insects, crustaceans and sometimes seeds from the wet ground along edges of bodies of water, rather than wading through shallows. They are quite nomadic birds and are often found wherever there is temporary or permanent water, even well inland. While there may be quite a number of them within a particular area, they are not communal, usually feeding alone or in pairs.

DESCRIPTION: These birds are only 16 to 18 centimetres long. There is a bright red eye-ring and a red bill that has a black tip. Both male and female birds have a black patch above the bill and a thick black eye band that extends to the edge of a broad, black V-shaped collar on the breast. The rest of the breast and underparts are white. The top of the head, the back and the wings are a streaky brown. However, the shoulders are chestnut, the rump is rufous and the flight feathers are black. The tail is black with white edges.

OTHER NAMES: Black-fronted plover.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Black-fronted dotterels are reasonably common across most of the Australian mainland and also occur in New Zealand.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Black-fronted dotterels inhabit the shores of freshwater swamps, lakes, streams and dams.

LIFE HISTORY: Black-fronted dotterels usually feed alone or in pairs. In the north, breeding takes place between May and September, whereas in the South-West they breed between July and January. They lay two or three eggs in a shallow depression



lined with stones, shells and twigs. These may be on bare, caked mud, on a bank or on a dry stony riverbed. Both sexes share parental duties. They may fake injury to distract potential aggressors.

CALL: These birds make a soft chizzing noise when courting and if alarmed. They make a 'tip' to keep in contact when flying.

MIGRATORY WADERS

Tens of thousands of waders visit the South-West every summer, and congregate in areas such as the Swan Estuary Marine Park. They come from as far afield as Asia, Mongolia and Siberia. About 33 of these species are protected under the Japan-Australia and China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreements. They include the red-necked stint, bar-tailed godwit, black-tailed godwit, whimbrel, eastern curlew, wood sandpiper, greenshank, marsh sandpiper, common sandpiper, sharp-tailed sandpiper, red knot and curlew sandpiper.

Their ability to fly great distances and to navigate with pinpoint accuracy has been the subject of much study and research, particularly in the northern hemisphere. It seems the urge to migrate is triggered by the changes in the length of daylight and it is further suggested that birds use the sun, stars and perhaps even the Earth's magnetic fields for navigation. However, the actual mechanisms remain unknown.

The estuarine mudflats and coastal wetlands in many areas around Australia contain high concentrations of food, which replenish the energy of the exhausted birds after their long flight south.

The transitory waders are fascinating birds. Different species arrive at varying times between August and November. Some of the birds will be sporting their breeding plumage when they arrive. Others will moult to their breeding glory in February. Most waders will have left the Perth region by late March.



SILVER GULL

(*Larus novaehollandiae*)

The silver gull is a majestic bird and its cohabitation with people has brought pleasure to many. However, the great adaptability of silver gulls to human environments—especially open rubbish tips—and the bad habits of people hand-feeding them with food scraps, have seen this bird become an urban nuisance, and made the naturally aggressive gull even bolder. The birds breed on about 100 islands around the coastline, mostly in small colonies. Around centres of human habitation such as Penguin Island, however, the colonies have exploded, displacing other seabirds.

DESCRIPTION: Adult silver gulls are white, with a silvery grey back and wings. The outer tail feathers are tipped with black. The white eye is circled with a maroon ring and the legs and beak are scarlet. See if you can pick out young and subadult birds by the colour of their plumage. Young birds are a mottled sandy brown with black spots. Immature gulls have orange, rather than red, bills and brown legs. The shoulders and back usually have brown mottling.

OTHER NAMES: Seagull, red-legged gull, red-billed gull.

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION: Silver gulls are common and now found in greater numbers than before European settlement. There are an estimated 80,000 in WA. They range over the whole Australian coast, and are also seen in some inland areas.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Most people think of silver gulls as seabirds, but they are in fact shore birds. They breed on offshore islands but on the mainland they are found anywhere where there is ample food, such as rubbish dumps, together with fresh water. They sometimes breed in small numbers in freshwater and saline inland lakes. They are also at home in city parks and coastal beaches.



Photos – Hans & Judy Beste Lochman Transparencies

FEEDING: These birds eat almost anything but their diet varies with the location. They feed naturally on dead fish, plankton and crustaceans washed up on beached seaweed. However, research has shown that a high proportion of gulls' food now consists of fried chicken, sausages and bread. Silver gulls will also sometimes steal the eggs and eat the young of other birds. Because people have changed the gulls' natural behaviour by feeding them, local recreation grounds and picnic spots are often turned into gull begging sites with squabbling, noisy free-for-alls. Please resist the temptation to add to these problems by feeding the birds.

BREEDING: Around Australia, most gull species nest once a year, but because of Perth's climate, local silver gulls lay more than one clutch of between one and three eggs between April and November. Two broods are usually raised each year. The eggs are olive with brown and black blotches and are easy to see. The parents share the task of raising the young. Incubating the eggs takes from three to four weeks and the young leave their nests about four weeks after hatching. After this, life becomes a struggle. Younger birds are at the lowest end of the pecking order and will be driven away from feeding areas by adult birds. You can observe this behaviour if you take the time to watch a feeding flock.

CALL: Seagulls make the drawn-out, melancholy 'kwarr' with which most people are familiar.



Photos – Jiri Lochman

SIGHTING RECORD

SPECIES	DATE	LOCALITY	REMARKS
great crested grebe			
Australasian grebe			
hoary-headed grebe			
great cormorant			
little pied cormorant			
little black cormorant			
darter			
Pacific heron			
white-faced heron			
great egret			
nankeen night heron			
straw-necked ibis			
yellow-billed spoonbill			
black swan			
Australian shelduck			
Australian wood duck			



SIGHTING RECORD

SPECIES	DATE	LOCALITY	REMARKS
pink-eared duck			
grey teal			
Pacific black duck			
mallard			
hardhead			
blue-billed duck			
musk duck			
dusky moorhen			
purple swamphen			
Eurasian coot			
black-winged stilt			
red-necked avocet			
black-fronted dotterel			
migratory waders			
silver gull			



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