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Mallard

Mountain Duck

Pink-eared  
Duck

Black Duck

Freckled Duck

Water Whistle Duck

Grass Whistle Duck

nut Teal

Grey Teal

# **A GUIDE to AUSTRALIAN WATERFOWL**

# A GUIDE TO AUSTRALIAN WATERFOWL

Text: G. Goodrick

Pictures and Design: F. Knight

Produced jointly by Australian  
National Parks and Wildlife  
Service, New South Wales  
National Parks and Wildlife  
Service and by CSIRO Division  
of Wildlife and Rangelands  
Research and with the  
co-operation of wildlife  
authorities in each state.

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1985

This booklet is intended to enable you to identify the waterfowl (ducks, geese and swans) in Australia.

It is intended primarily for the hunter, but all those interested in identifying waterfowl should find it useful.

For sound conservation, it is essential that you should be able to identify your duck before you shoot.

All the waterfowl likely to be encountered in Australia are illustrated in this booklet, but many of them are not legal game birds and are protected by law. The regulations governing hunting may vary from State to State so you should know the laws of the State or Territory in which you are hunting and ensure that you shoot only those ducks which are legal game.

Also there are many species of waterbirds such as coots, swamphens, grebes and cormorants, not included in this booklet and which you are likely to encounter. These birds are not legal game and are usually protected by law.

# DUCK HUNTING

**Warning.** Shooters may incur a penalty of up to \$10,000 for shooting birds which are not legal game and are fully protected. All waterfowl in the Australian Capital Territory and Jervis Bay Territory are fully protected and must not be shot.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY WATERFOWL

All species of Australian waterfowl are readily identified, especially so when within shotgun range.

You should concentrate on the distinctive field marks shown in bold type. The distribution of light and dark plumage is particularly important, especially in the presence and position of white areas on the wing and the contrast between underwing, neck and body. Some species have distinctive voices.

Size may sometimes be helpful, the mountain duck is a large bird, the black duck is a medium sized bird and the grey teal a small bird. The cover shows the relative sizes of waterfowl.

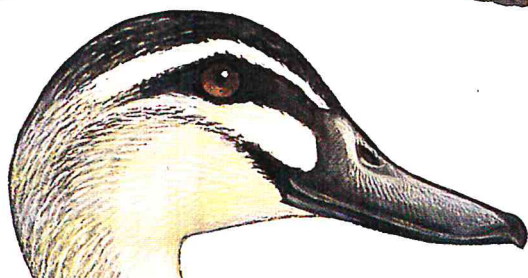
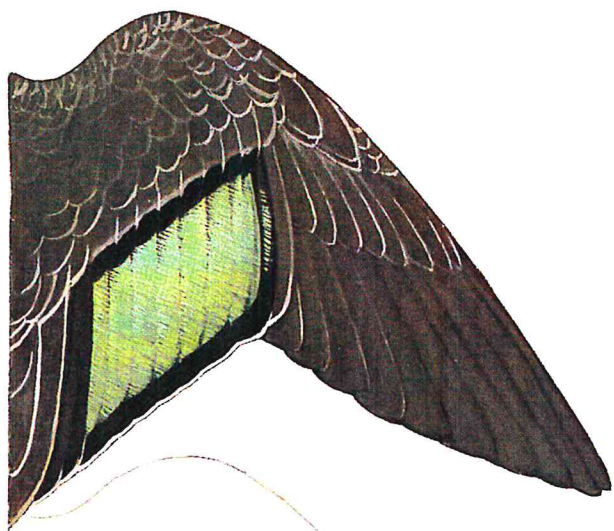
The maps show the usual range of the species but most Australian waterfowl are nomadic or occasional vagrants and may be found outside their usual range.

We suggest you first learn to identify those waterfowl you are most likely to encounter in the region in which you hunt.

The illustrations on the left hand page are intended to give positive identification of the bird in the hand.

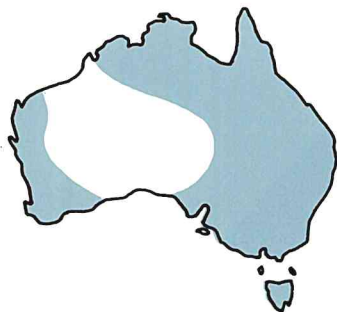
The Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union's recommended English name appears in brackets where it differs from the name that has been in common use.





# BLACK DUCK

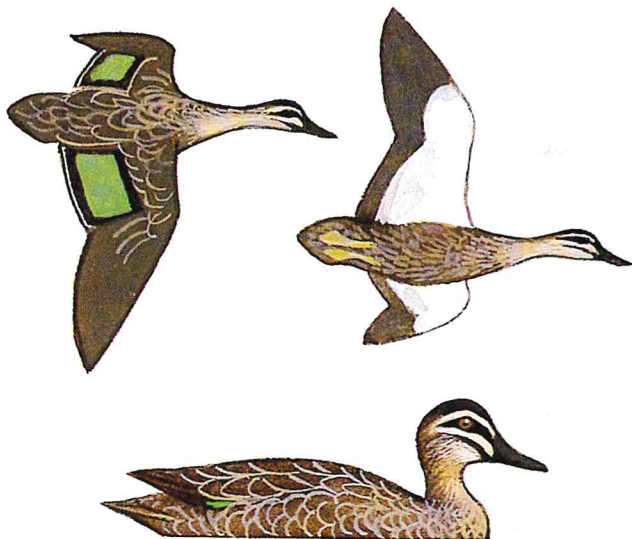
(Pacific black duck)



A major game species common and widely distributed throughout Australia.

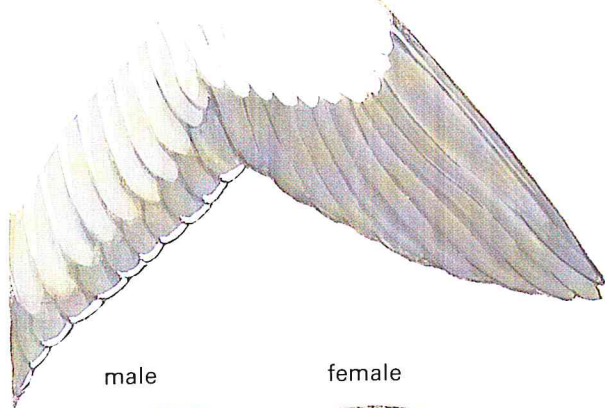
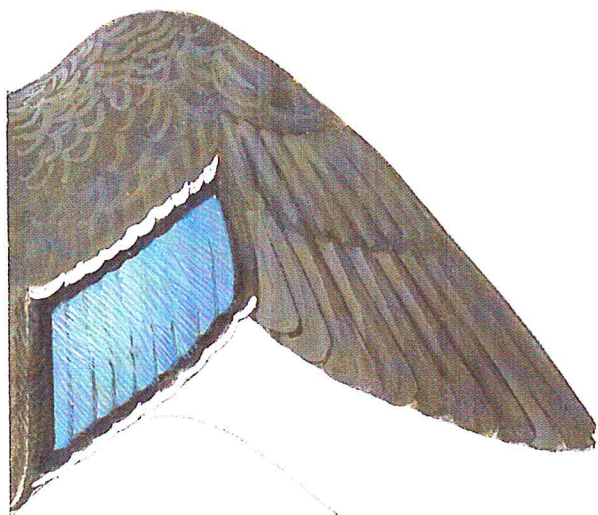
Male and female have similar appearance.

**In flight**, a dark duck with swift wing beats, a slender neck, **white underwings**, no white on upperwings but a glossy green colour patch flashes in certain lights.



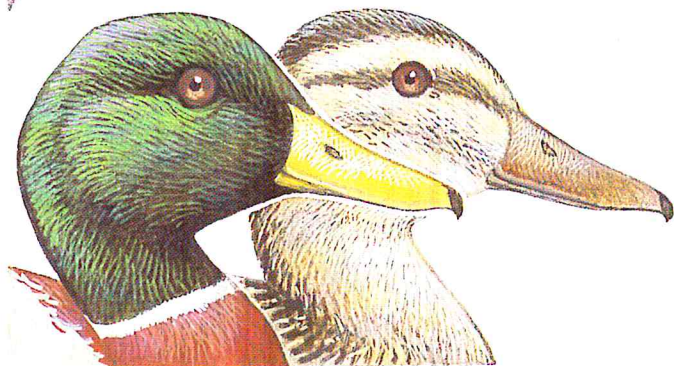
**On the water**, a medium sized duck with a slender head and neck carried erect, and **distinctive face stripes**.

Female has a loud raucous quack repeated four to six times.



male

female



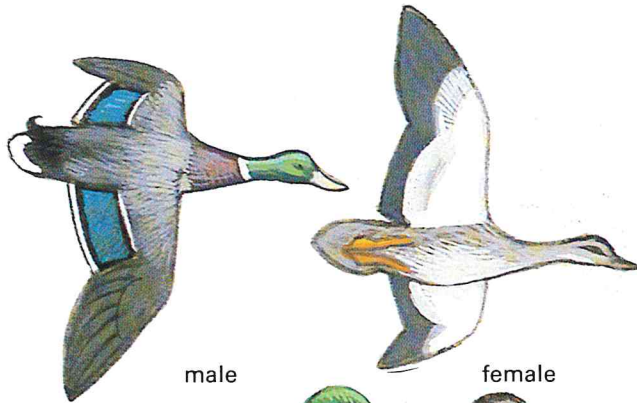
# MALLARD



An introduced species, mostly in city parks and gardens, occasionally occurs in the wild, undesirable as it competes with Pacific black duck for habitat.

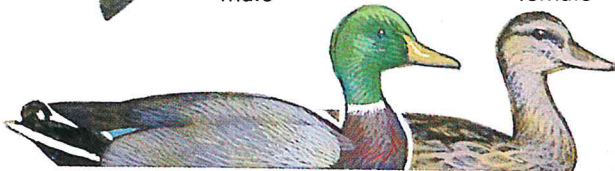
Male in non-breeding (eclipse) plumage is similar to female but has a dull green bill, may have traces of green head and chestnut breast. Hybridises with Pacific black duck.

**In flight**, male has **dark foreparts and undertail**, white breast and underwing, female has white underwing and paler belly than Pacific black duck, both sexes have two white bars on upperwing.



male

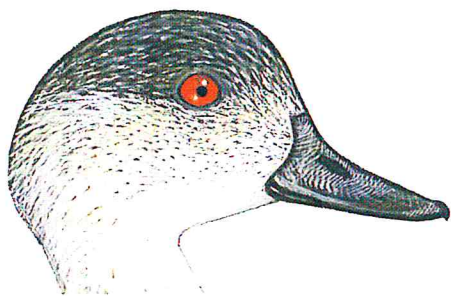
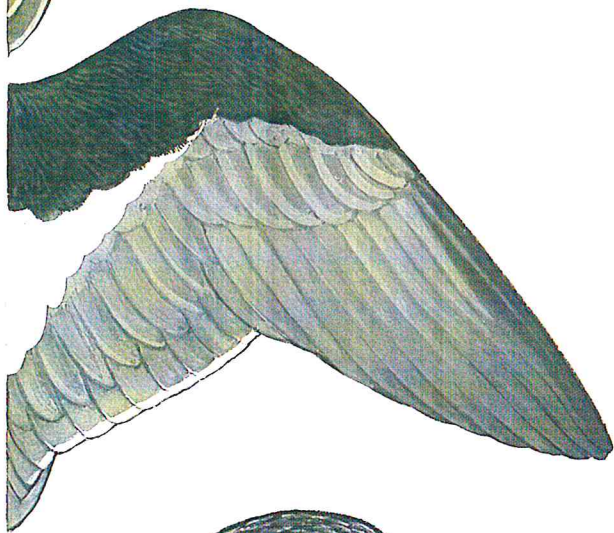
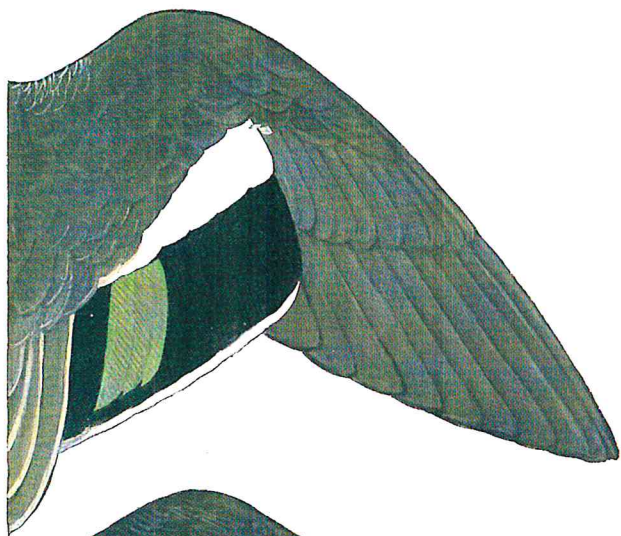
female



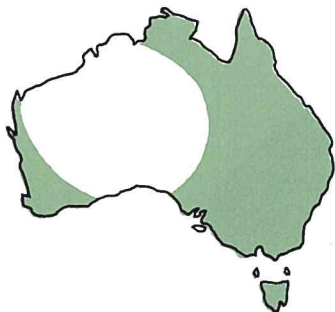
**On the water**, a medium sized duck, male has greyish body, dark head, neck and chest, female has a much less distinct face stripe than Pacific black duck, both sexes have a whitish tail.

Female has a loud raucous quack, similar to Pacific black duck.





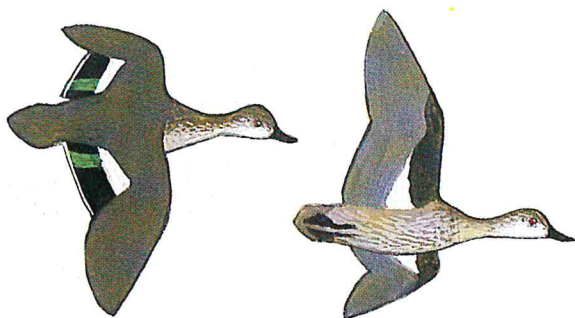
# GREY TEAL



A major game species, common and widely distributed throughout Australia.

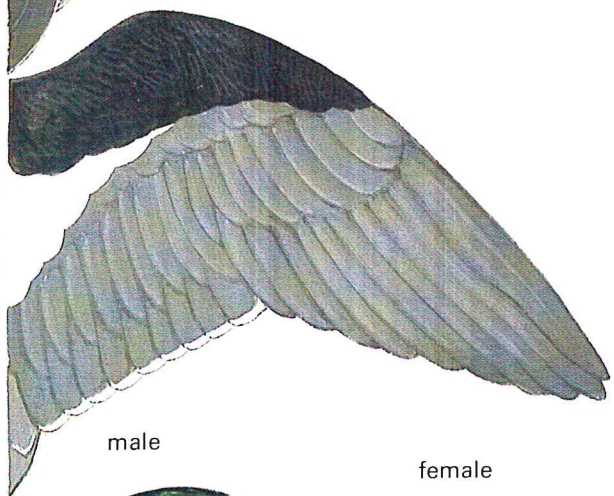
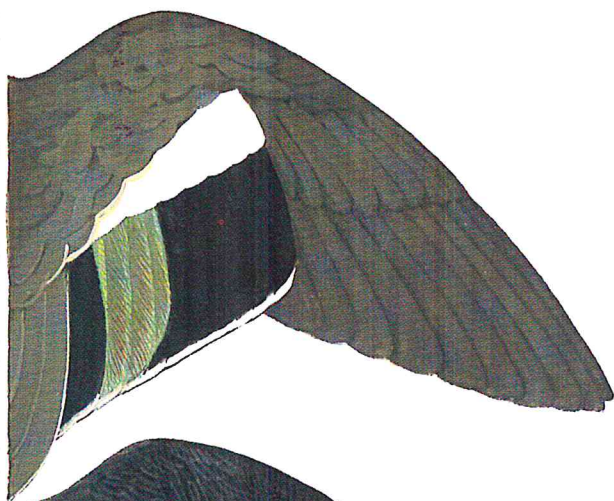
Male and female have similar appearance, lighter in colour than chestnut teal, particularly around head and neck.

**In flight**, a wedge shaped white patch on upper-wing, shorter and thicker neck than Pacific black duck.



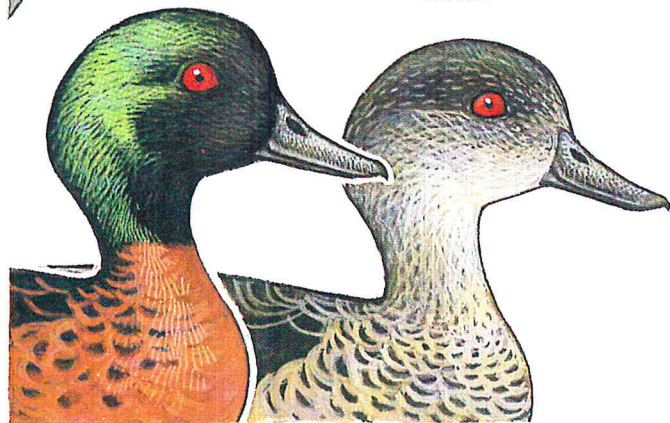
**On the water**, a small duck floating high, general colour above, dark grey-brown, a large head, **pale almost white face and throat**, no eye stripe.

Female has a loud penetrating 'laughing' quack repeated rapidly fifteen or more times.



male

female



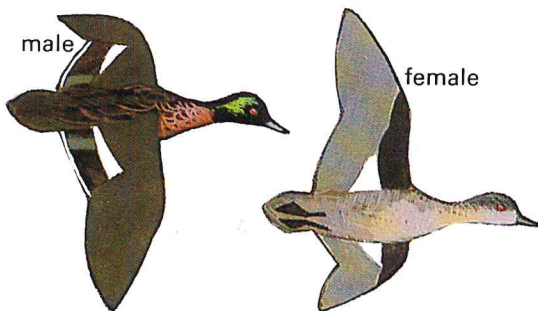
# CHESTNUT TEAL



Distributed in south-eastern and south-western Australia, particularly in coastal districts, vagrants may occur elsewhere.

Fully protected in N.T. and Qld where it must not be shot.

**In flight**, a wedge shaped white patch on upper-wing, the male is a dark bird with a very dark head.



male

female

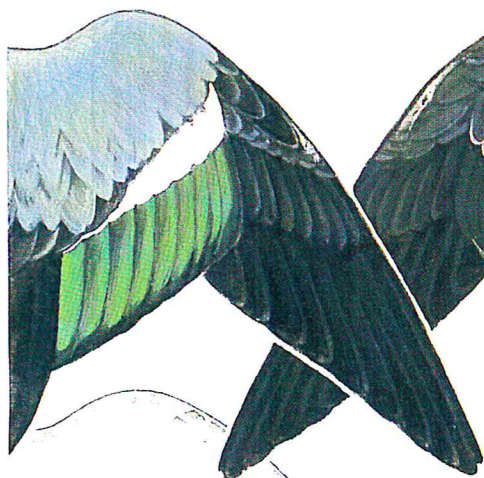


**On the water**, a small very dark duck floating high, the male has a glossy green head and a white flank patch, the female and juvenile male are similar to grey teal but are darker and lack the white throat.

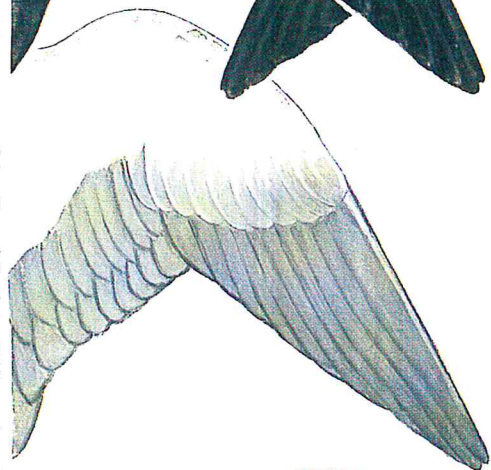
Female has a loud penetrating 'laughing' quack repeated rapidly nine times or more.



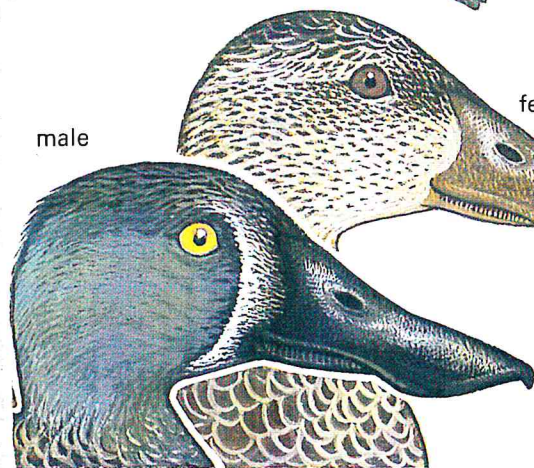
male



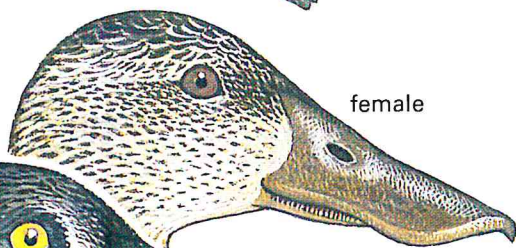
female



male

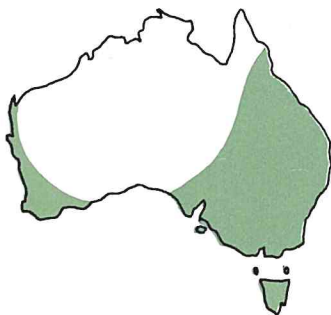


female



# SHOVELER

(Australasian shoveler)

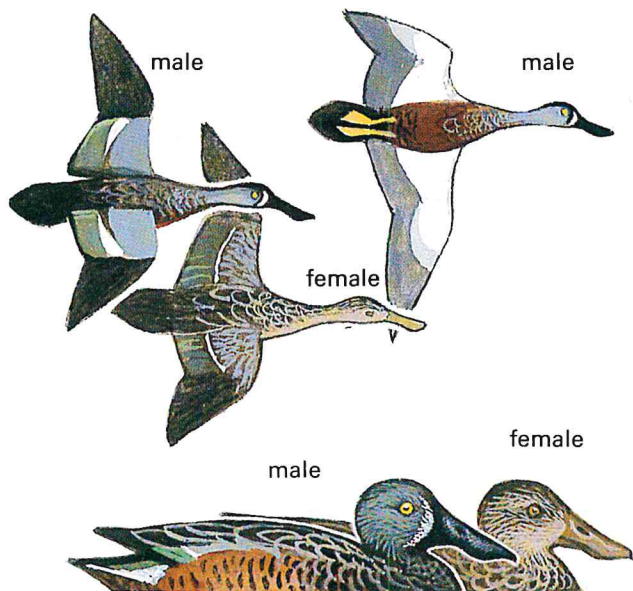


Usually an uncommon duck, distributed in south-eastern and south-western Australia, particularly in inland districts, vagrants may occur elsewhere.

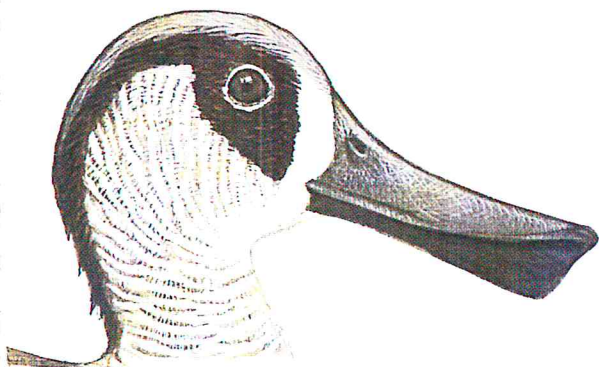
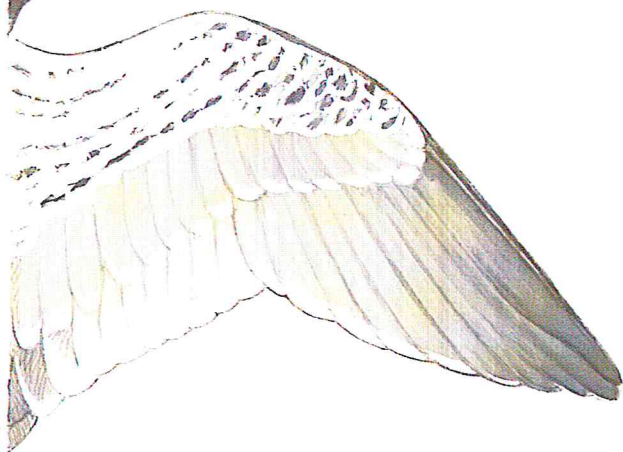
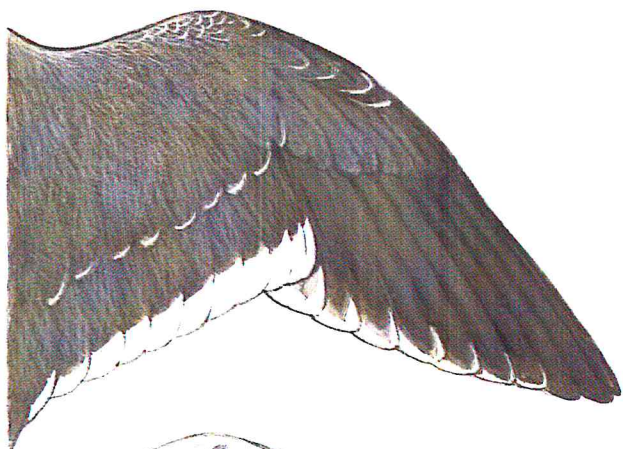
Fully protected in Tas., N.T., Qld where it must not be shot.

Male in non-breeding (eclipse) plumage is similar to female but considerably brighter and has orange legs.

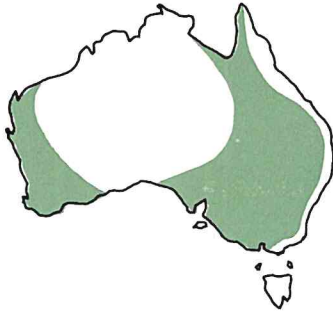
**In flight**, very quick wing beats with a distinctive whirr, white underwings, large pale patch on upperwing, **male has bright orange legs**.



**On the water**, a medium sized duck floating low, a large bill forming a straight line with top of head — no distinct forehead, male has a white patch on rump.



# PINK-EARED DUCK

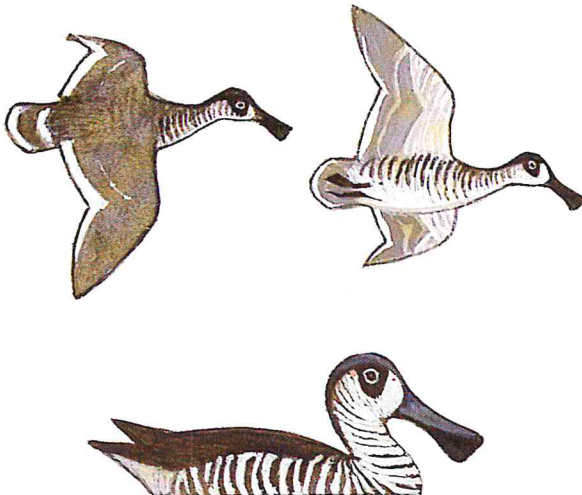


Widely distributed in inland south-eastern Australia, also south-western Australia, vagrants may occur elsewhere.

Fully protected in Tas. and Qld where it must not be shot.

Male and female have similar appearance.

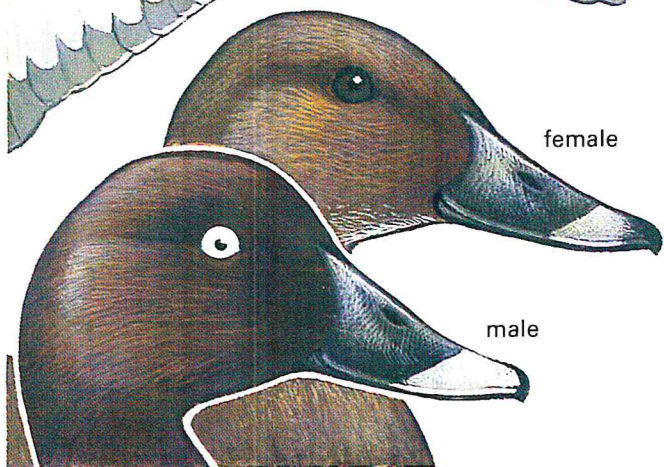
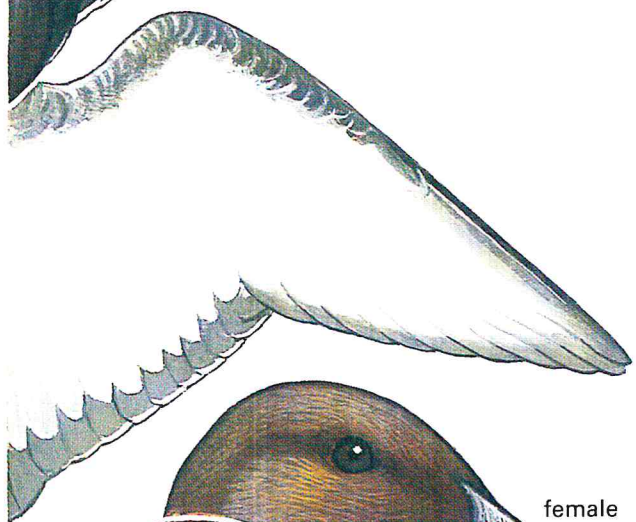
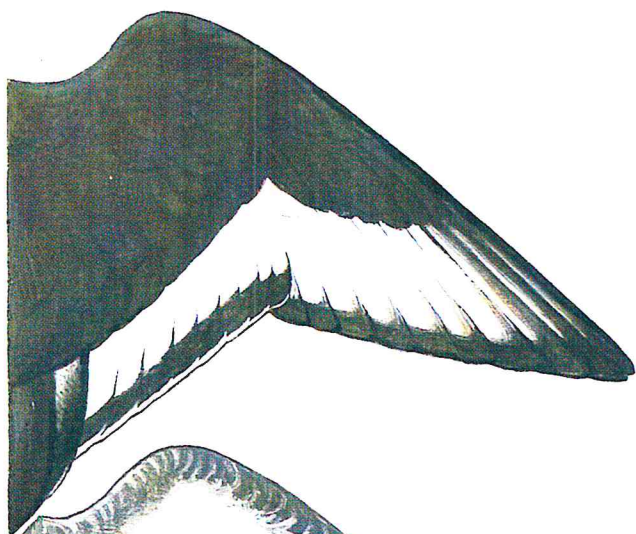
**In flight**, head held high, light underbody, white edge to upperwing and tail, and white crescent on rump.



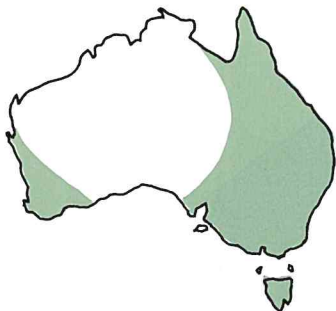
**On the water**, a small, light coloured duck floating high, a large bill and distinct forehead.

Chirrup uttered in flight.





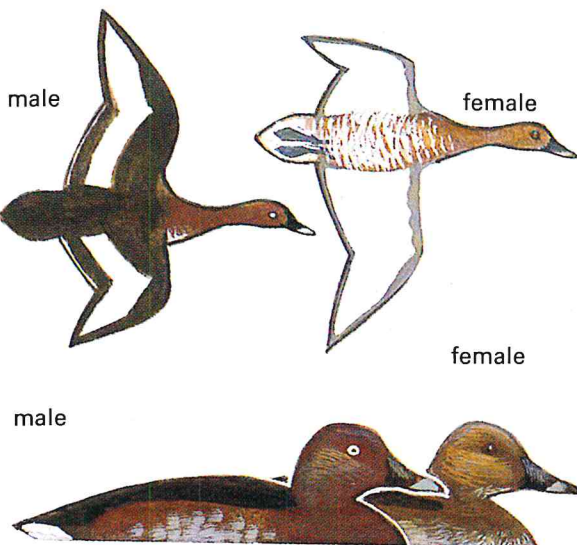
# HARDHEAD



Widely distributed throughout Australia. Fully protected in Tas. where it must not be shot.

Juvenile male is similar to female.

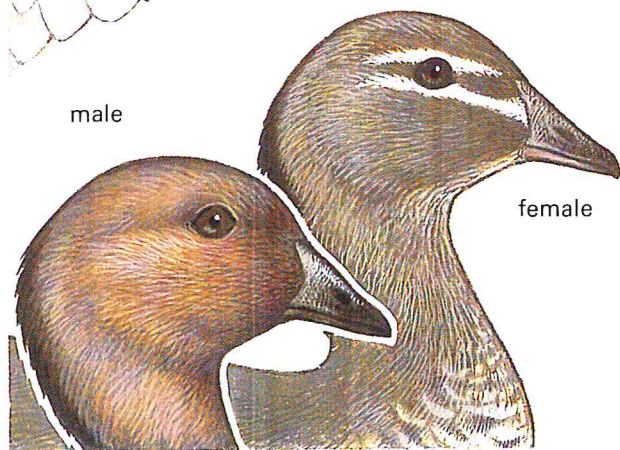
**In flight**, very swift, the narrow, pointed wings set far back on body have a very rapid and short stroke, **underwings** appear translucent white, **upperwings** have a distinct white bar, a pale belly.



**On the water**, a medium sized, dark coloured duck, floating very low, white undertail sometimes visible.



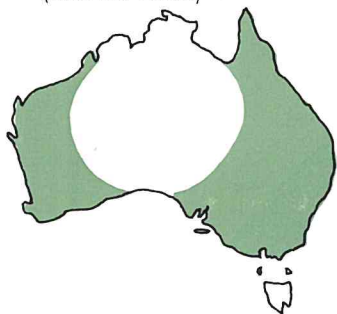
male



female

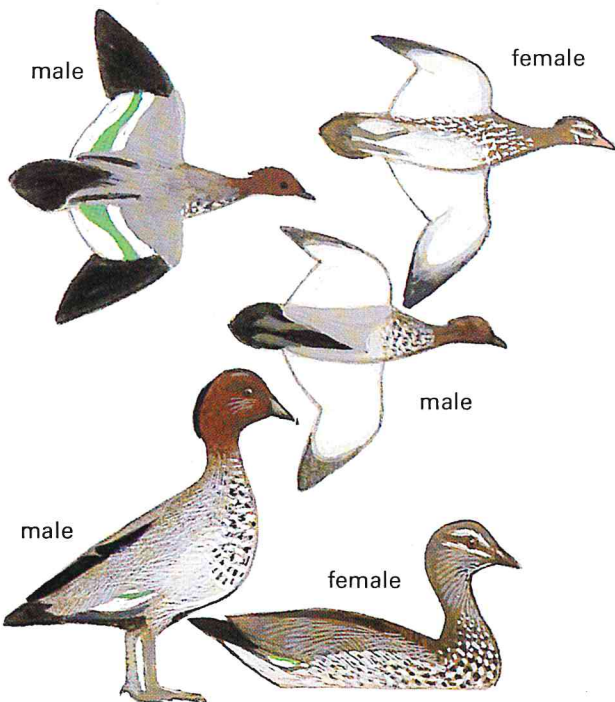
# WOOD DUCK

(maned duck)



Widely distributed and common throughout much of Australia, rare and vagrant in tropical Australia and in Tasmania. Fully protected in Tas. where it must not be shot.

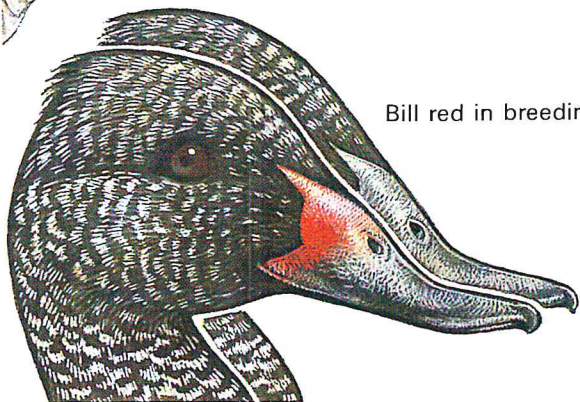
**In flight**, a slow wing beat, large white patches on rear of upper wing near body, white triangle on underwing near body, male has a black undertail and belly, female has a white belly.



**On the water or on the land**, a medium sized, light coloured duck with a dark head, a characteristic high tailed posture on water and erect posture on land.

Female has a long drawn-out 'mew' call.





Bill red in breeding male

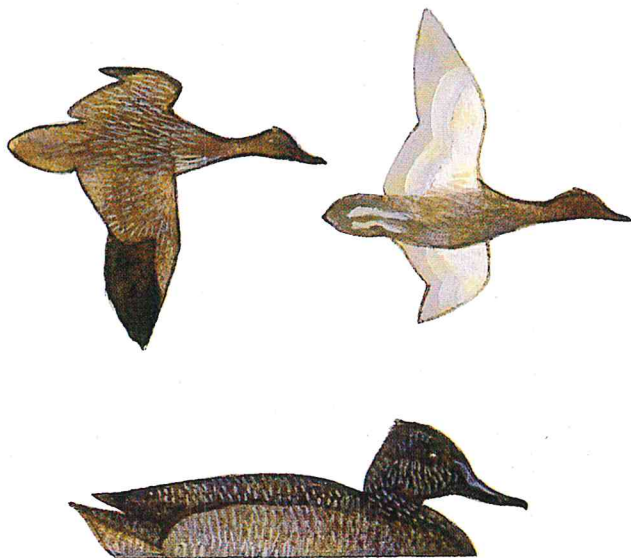
# FRECKLED DUCK



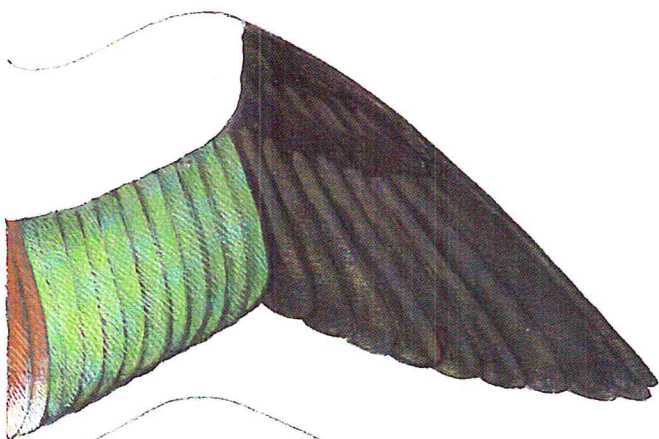
A rare duck found in inland south-eastern Australia and the south-west of Western Australia, vagrants may occur elsewhere. Fully protected in all states. **MUST NOT BE SHOT.**

Male and female similar, but male has a bright red base of the bill during the breeding season.

**In flight**, an all dark duck, paler on belly and underwing, large head and fairly short thick neck carried slightly depressed giving a hunched appearance.

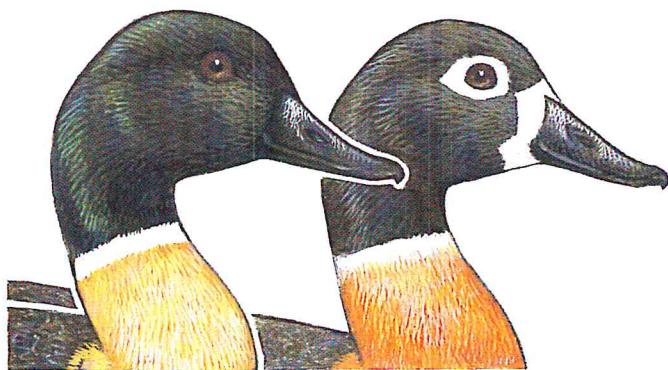


**On the water**, a medium sized, very dark duck floating high, with a **high crown** giving a heavy head appearance.



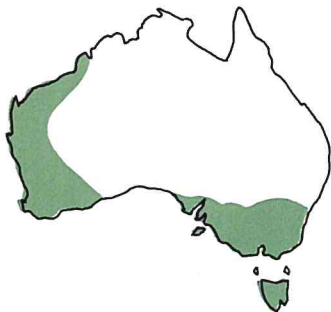
male

female



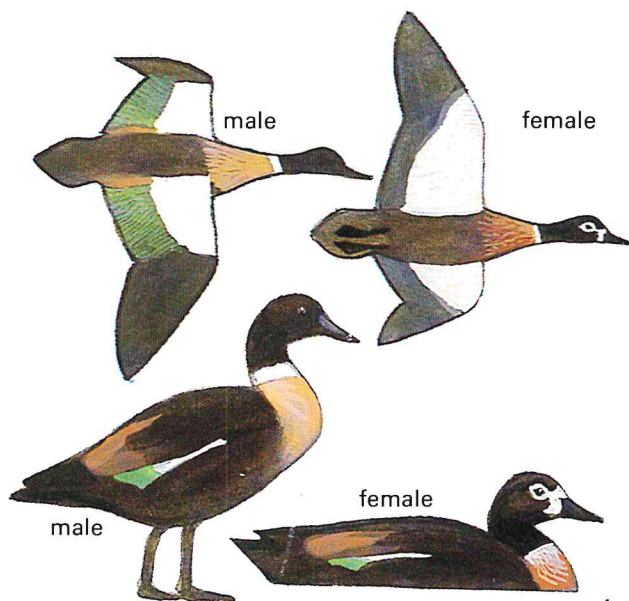
# MOUNTAIN DUCK

(Australian shelduck)



Distributed in south-eastern and south-western Australia.

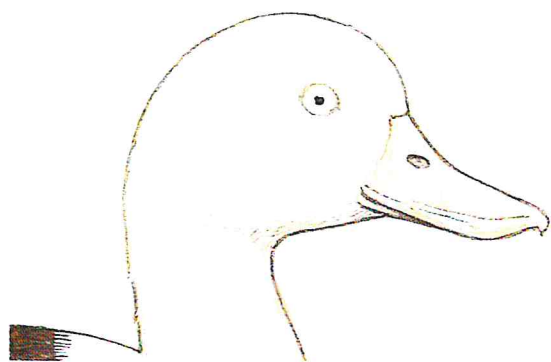
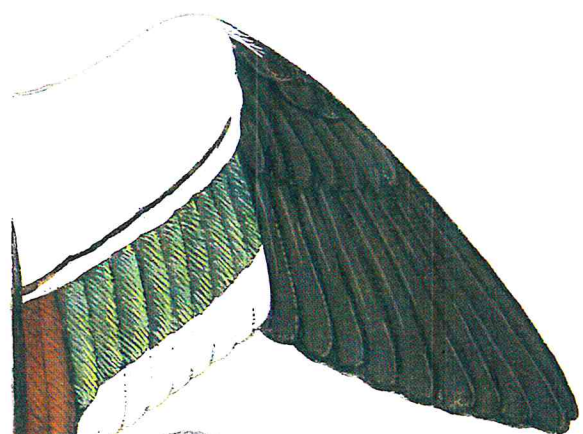
**In flight**, large prominent white patches on shoulders of wing, dark body, white underwings, light breast, white neck ring.



**On the water or on the land**, a large duck, with a very dark head, white neck ring or eye spot, yellow-brown or chestnut breast.

Very vocal, especially in flight, male call is a low pitched honk, female call a high pitched honk.





# BURDEKIN DUCK

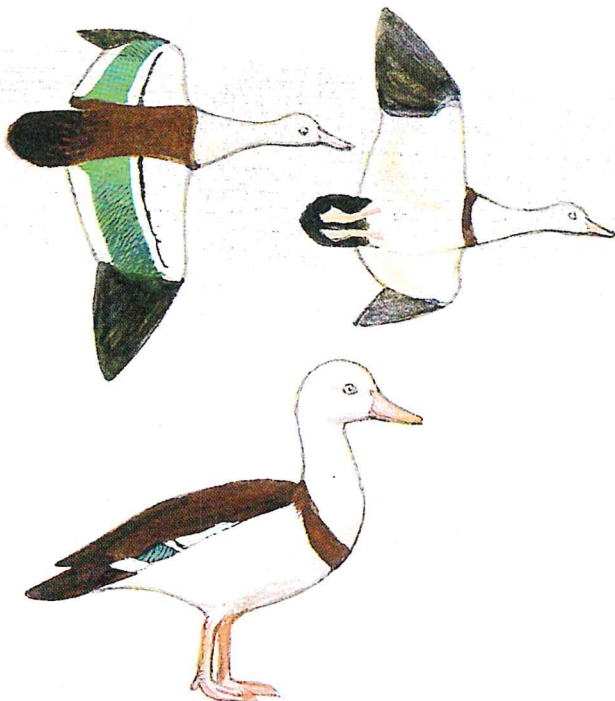
(radjah shelduck)



Distributed in coastal tropical Australia, particularly in mangrove mud flats and paperbark swamps. Fully protected in N.T. and Qld where it must not be shot.

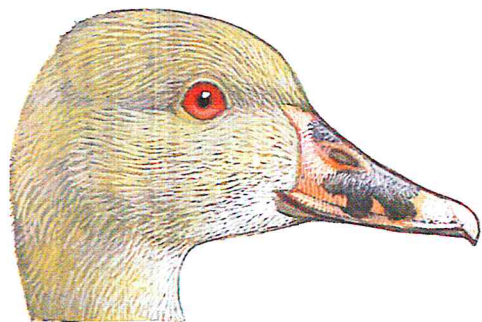
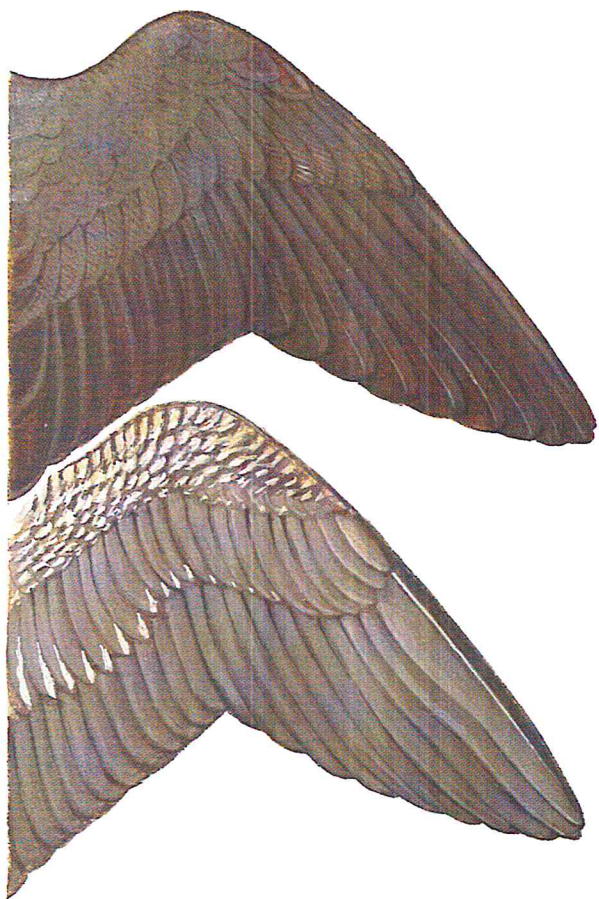
Male and female have similar appearance.

**In flight**, prominent white shoulder patches, seen overhead an all white head, neck, belly and bases of wings, dark neck ring, wing tips and tail.



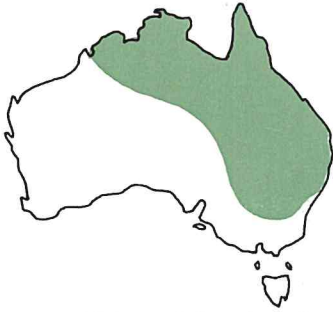
**On the water or on the land**, a medium sized duck with a white head, neck and belly, and a dark back.

Very vocal, female has a harsh rattle, male a hoarse whistle.



# GRASS WHISTLE DUCK

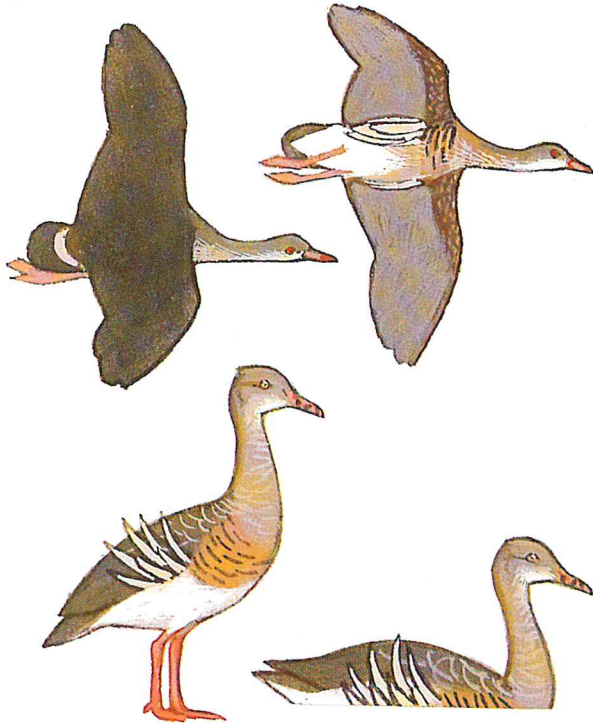
(plumed whistling-duck)



Very widely distributed throughout northern Australia, widely scattered groups in much of New South Wales. Fully protected in N.S.W., Vic. and S.A. where it must not be shot.

Male and female have similar appearance, occurs in dense flocks whether on land, water or in flight.

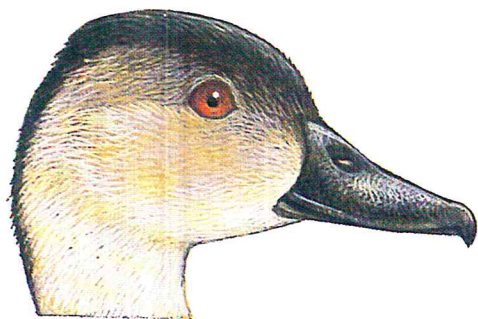
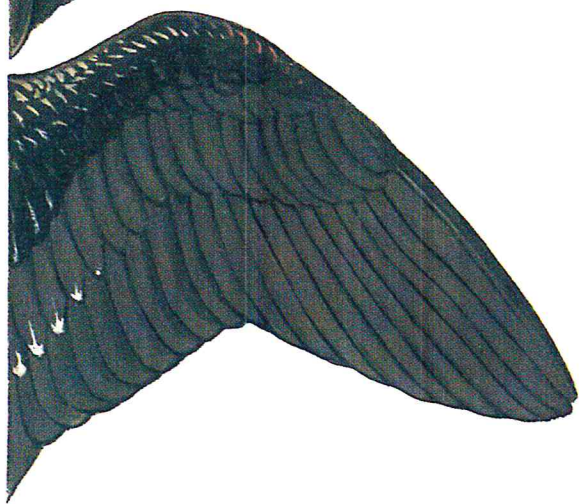
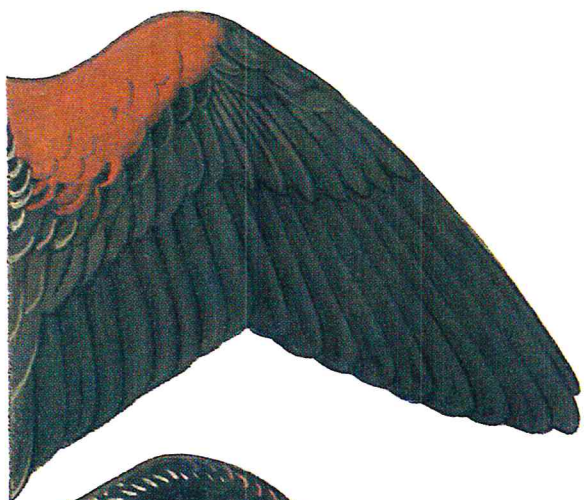
**In flight**, a distinctive posture with depressed neck and trailing legs, short, rounded wings, slow wing beat, light belly and less obvious white rump than water whistle duck.



**On the water or on the land**, a medium sized duck with a pale body and long, buff plumes on the flank, distinctive erect posture.

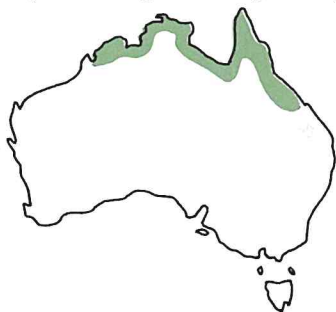
Whistles incessantly in flight.





# WATER WHISTLE DUCK

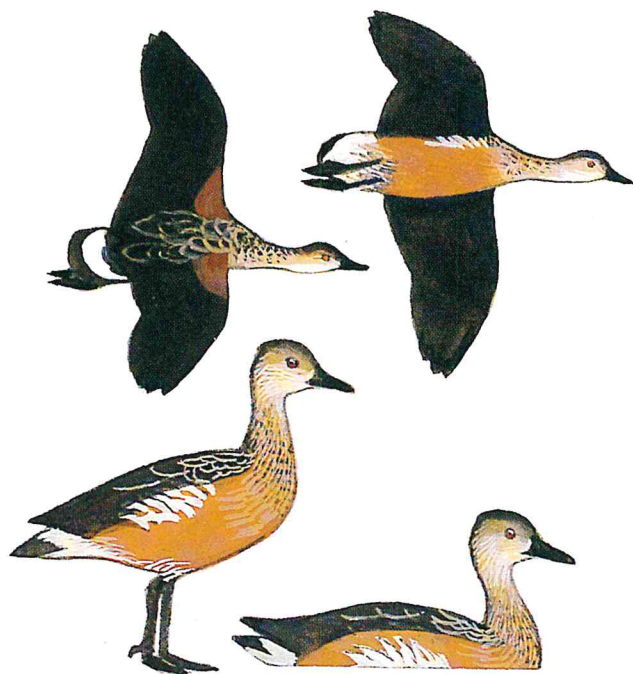
(wandering whistling-duck)



Widely distributed throughout coastal tropical Australia, vagrants may occur elsewhere. Fully protected in N.S.W., Vic. and S.A. where it must not be shot.

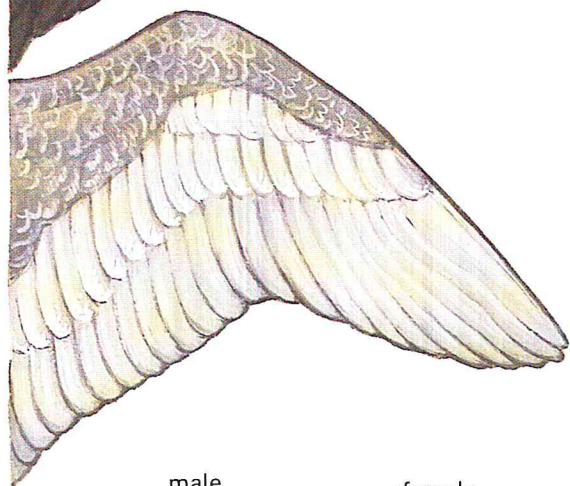
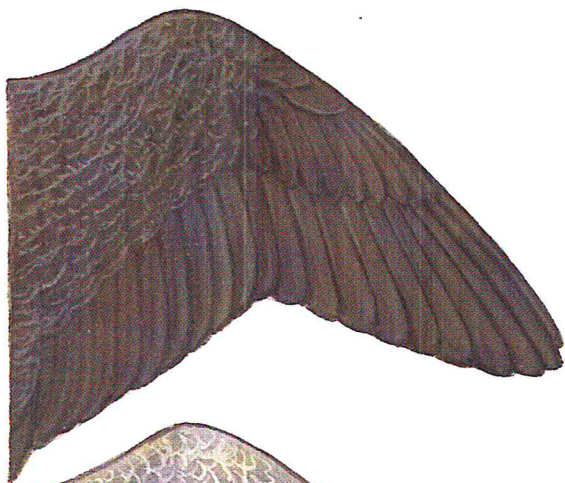
Male and female have similar appearance, occurs in dense flocks whether on land, water or in flight.

**In flight**, a distinctive posture with depressed neck and trailing legs, short, rounded wings, slow wing beat, dark belly, chestnut shoulders and white rump.



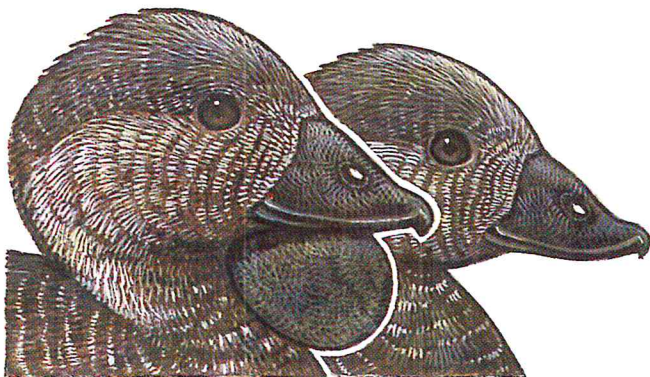
**On the water or on the land**, a medium sized duck with a dark body and short, white plumes on the flank.

Whistles incessantly in flight.

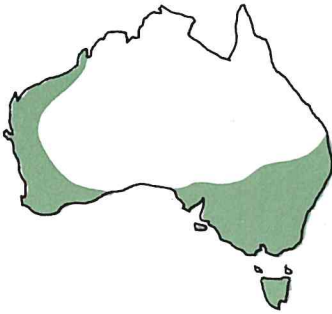


male

female



# MUSK DUCK

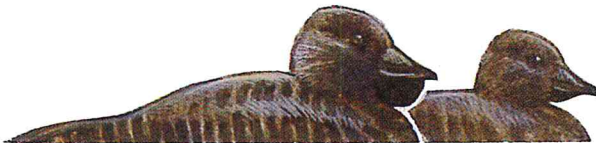


Widely distributed throughout all of southern Australia. Fully protected in all states. MUST NOT BE SHOT.

Very rarely seen in flight.

male

female



**On the water,** dives repeatedly, a large black duck floating very low with a heavy head and frequently erect stiff tail, male has a pendulous lobe beneath bill.

Male has a shrill whistle, and a deep plonk made with the feet, also a noisy splashing of water.

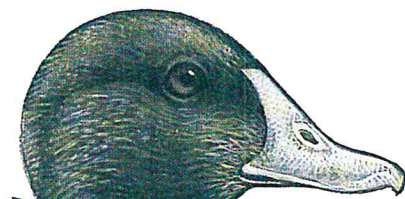


male

female

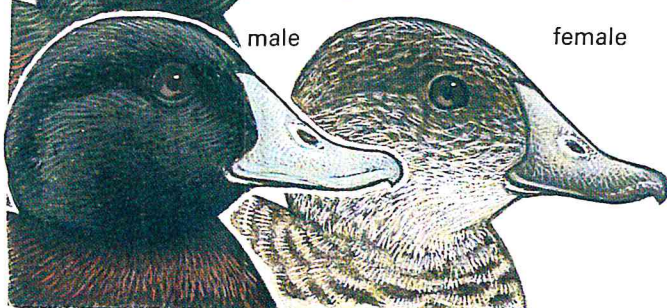


male in eclipse

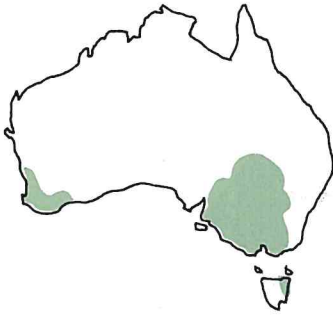


male

female



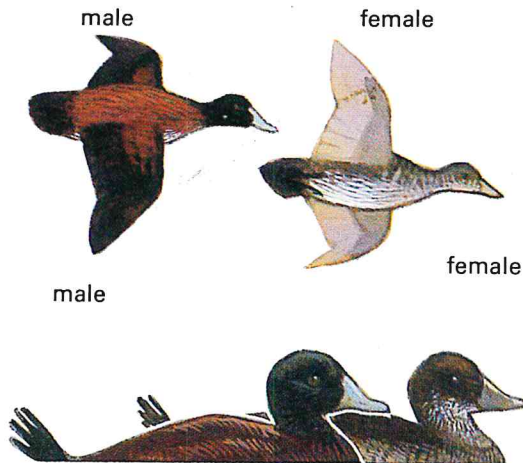
# BLUE-BILLED DUCK



Occurs in south-eastern and south-western Australia, very rarely found outside this range. Fully protected in all states. **MUST NOT BE SHOT.**

Male is in the non-breeding (eclipse) plumage for most of the winter.

**In flight**, seldom flies, patters along surface before take-off, tail heavy posture, very rapid noisy wing beat.

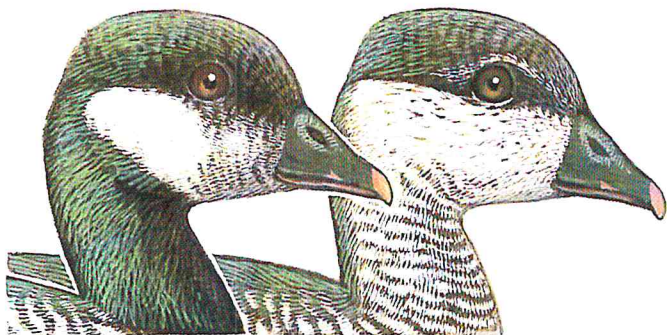


**On the water**, swims swiftly and dives repeatedly, a small dark duck floating very low with a heavy head, compact body and occasionally a stiff erect tail. Male has a brilliant blue bill.



male

female

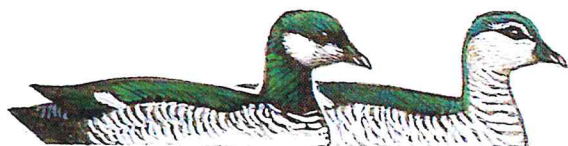
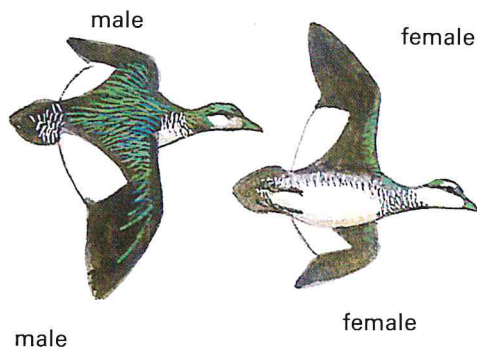


# GREEN PYGMY-GOOSE



Occurs in waterlily lagoons throughout coastal tropical Australia. Fully protected throughout its range. **MUST NOT BE SHOT.**

**In flight**, distinctive white patches at base of wing, male has a dark throat and neck.



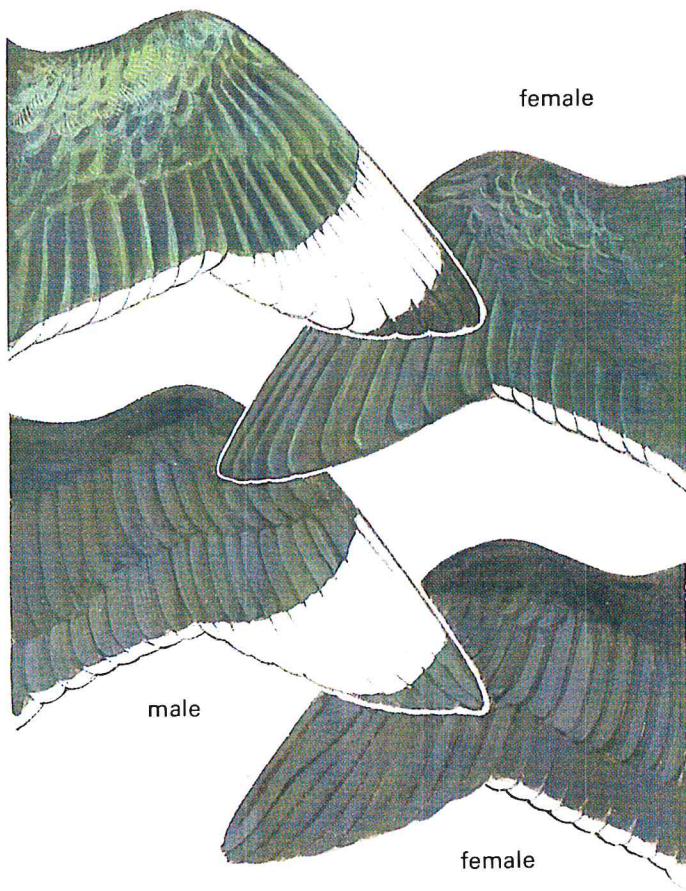
**On the water**, a small, dark duck floating high, male has a white face patch, and a dark neck, female is similar to that of white pygmy-goose but somewhat darker and with a less distinct white eyebrow.

A shrill chirruping whistle is uttered continuously in flight or at rest.



male

female

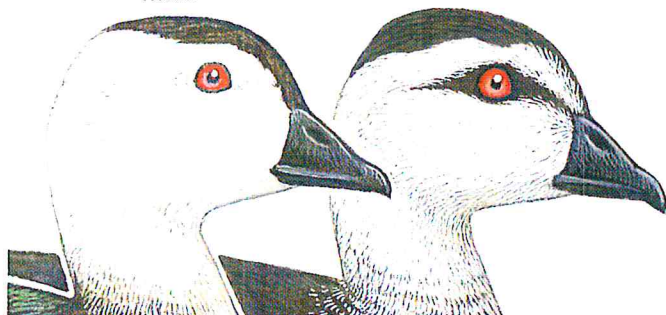


male

female

male

female



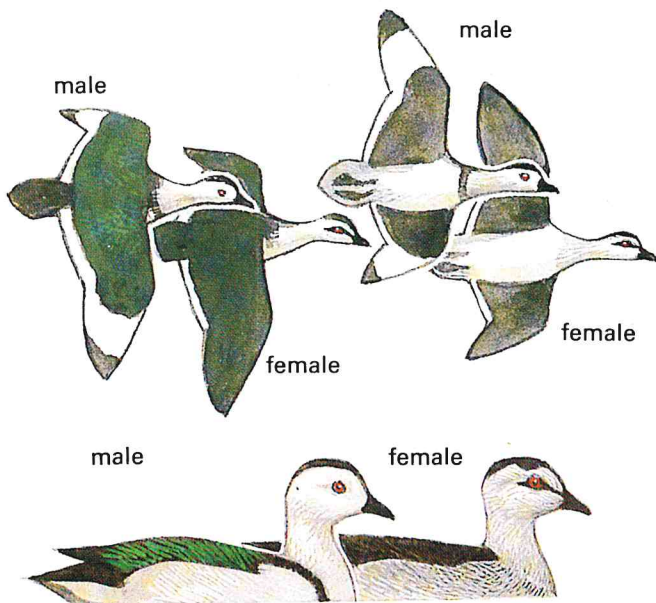
# WHITE PYGMY-GOOSE

(cotton pygmy-geese)



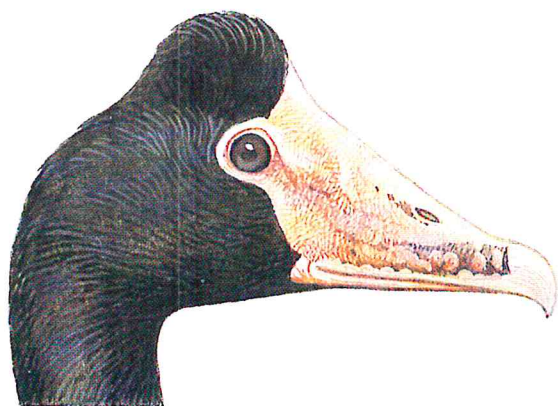
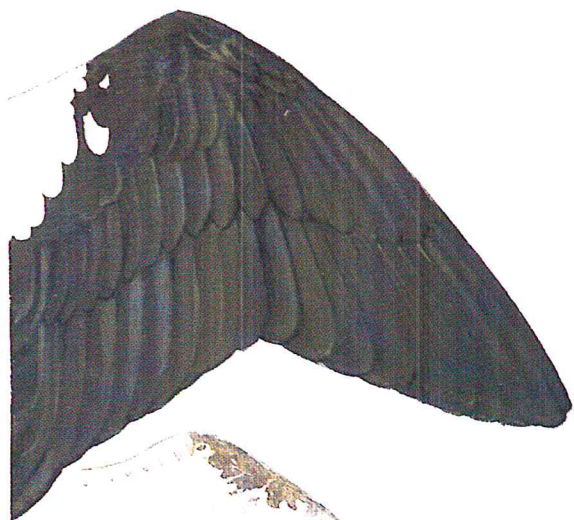
Occurs in waterlily lagoons and swamps on the east coast of tropical Queensland. Fully protected throughout its range. **MUST NOT BE SHOT.**

**In flight**, male has a broad white wing stripe near wing tips, a white neck, throat and body, female has a narrow white hind margin on the inner wing.



**On the water**, a small duck floating high, male has a white neck and all white face with dark crown, female is similar to that of green pygmy-geese but somewhat lighter and with a more distinct white eyebrow.

Male utters a rapid staccato trumpeting in flight.



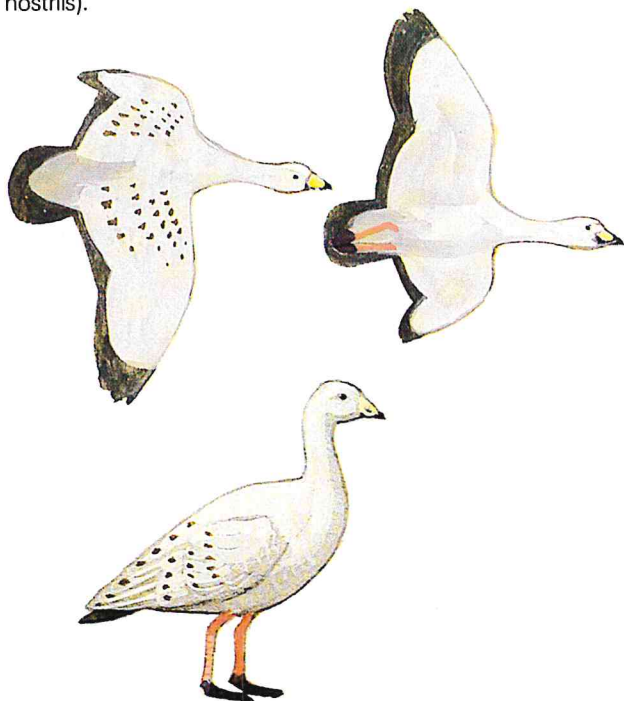
# CAPE BARREN GOOSE



Distributed on islands off the southern coast of Australia and adjacent parts of the mainland. Fully protected in all states. **MUST NOT BE SHOT.**

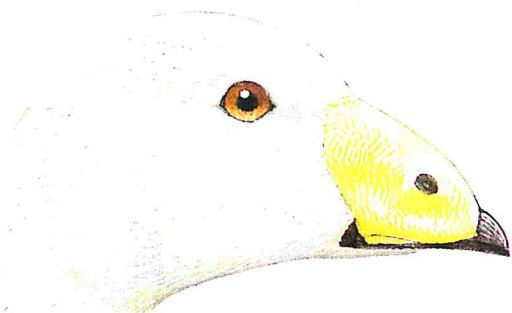
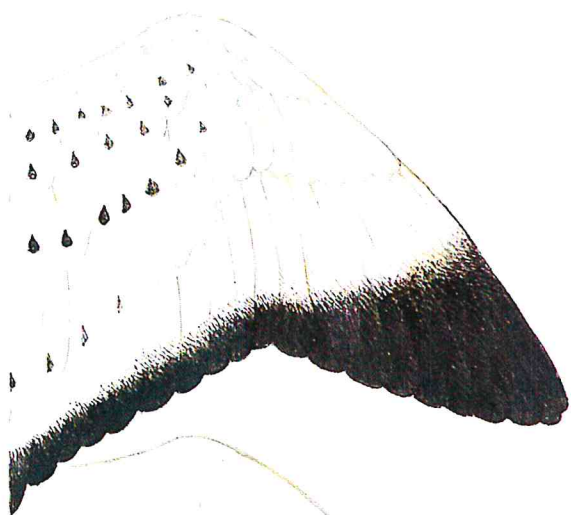
Male and female have similar appearance.

**In flight,** a large grey goose, **uniform grey except for black tail and wing tips,** large pink legs, black feet and prominent greenish yellow cere (fleshy covering around the nostrils).

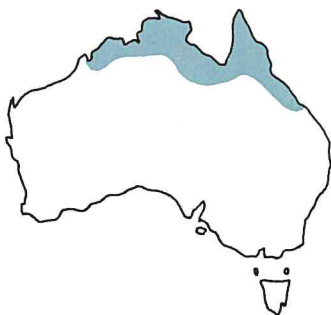


Male utters a rapid honk in flight.





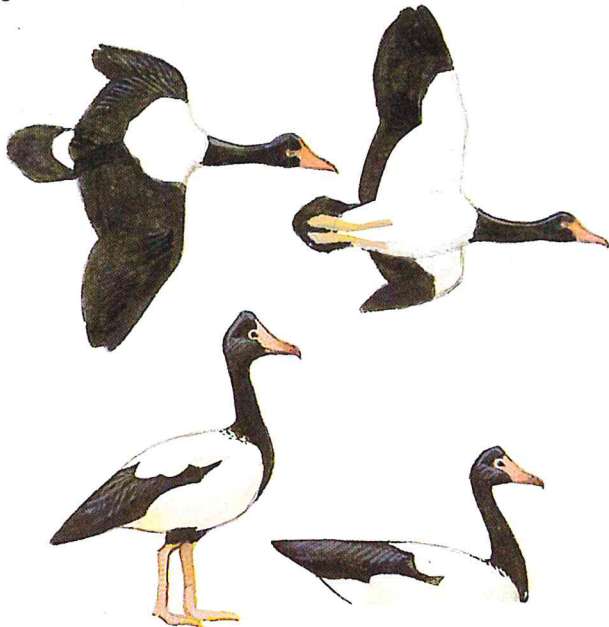
# MAGPIE GOOSE



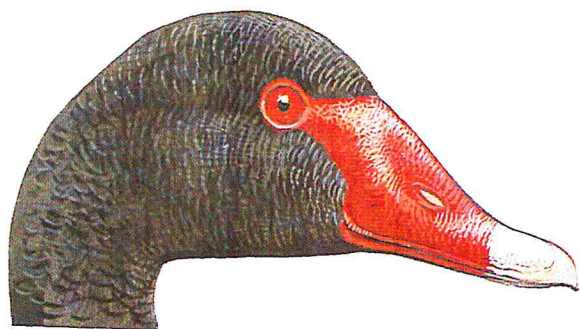
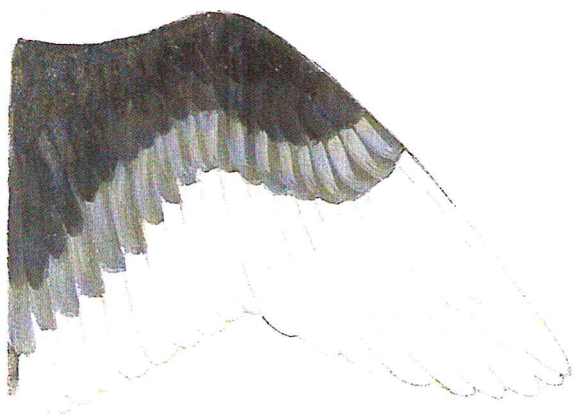
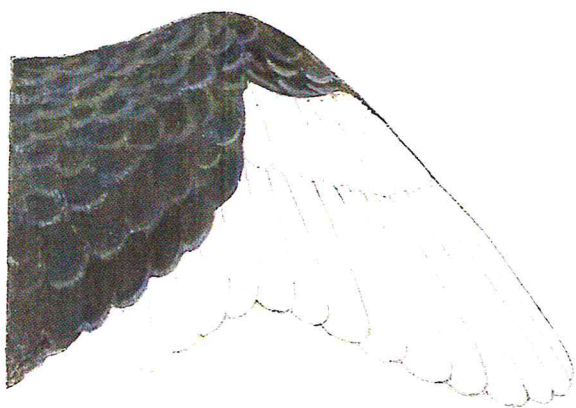
Distributed in tropical Australia, particularly coastal areas, vagrants occur elsewhere. Fully protected in Qld and W.A. where it must not be shot.

Male and female have similar appearance.

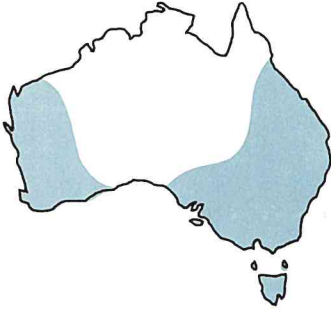
**In flight**, a large black and white goose, mainly black on upperparts contrasting with white underparts, rounded wings with a slow flapping beat.



A loud resonant honk is uttered in flight and on the ground.



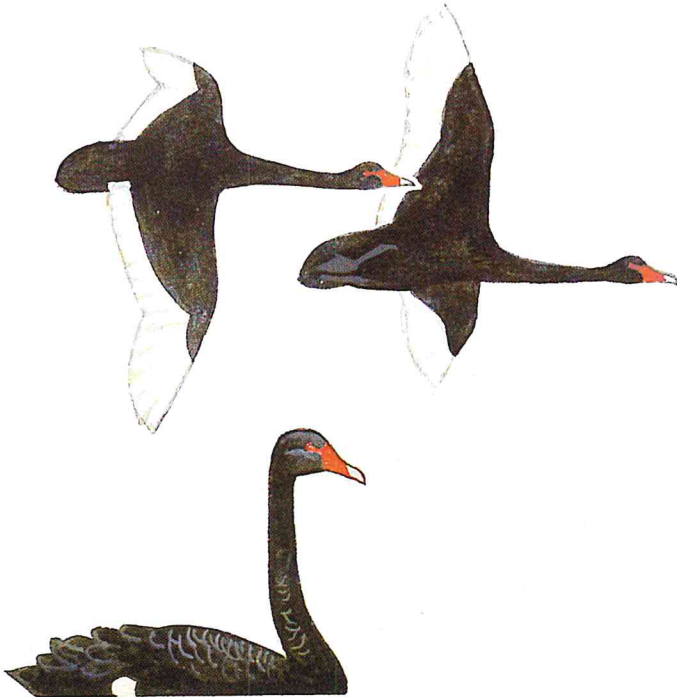
# BLACK SWAN



Distributed throughout much of Australia, particularly numerous in south-eastern and south-western Australia. Fully protected in all states. **MUST NOT BE SHOT.**

Male and female have similar appearance, juvenile is grey-brown with black tips to the outer white flight feathers, cygnet is light grey, downy, with grey-black bill and feet.

**In flight,** a large black swan with a very long slender neck, white flight feathers in wings.



A high pitched bugle often uttered in flight.



Cape Barren Goose

Black Swan

Magpie Goose

Hardhead

Wood Duck

Shoveler

Burdekin Duck

Chest

Green  
Pygmy Goose

White  
Pygmy Goose

Blue-billed Duck

Musk Duck

