

HYBRID DUCKS

Throughout the year, officers from the Department's Wildlife Research Centre at Wanneroo have been involved in a programme of controlling domestic ducks on metropolitan lakes.

Domestic ducks are cross-breeding with the wild Black Ducks on metropolitan lakes and the results are strange hybrids with strange colours and ungainly bodies. There have also been reports from shooters in the country of peculiar looking Grey Teal and Mountain Ducks in their bags.

Apparently, people are keeping domestic Mallards, Muscovies and Kahki Campbells as backyard pets to keep down snails in their gardens. After their owners have grown tired of them, the birds are disposed of at suburban lakes where they are thought to add to the lakes' attraction.

The domestic drakes are very aggressive birds and can breed at almost any time of the year. They will take wild indigenous females away from their mates, the result being a brood of hybrid offspring.

Generally, wild species do not inter-breed with each other although they may share the same habitat. Nature keeps them separate by coding each species to respond to a different set of breeding rituals, colours and plumage displays.

Domestic ducks, all of which are descended from the mallard, not only break the natural laws by freely mating with black ducks, but their offspring are fertile and can continue cross-breeding.

On the first cross some of the offspring, but not all, can fly.

More can fly in the second and third crosses, giving them the numbers and mobility to follow the wild birds back to their winter breeding grounds and further contaminate the species.

It is not just a matter of appearances that is causing concern; the domestic duck can introduce new disease strains by diluting the gene pool which has given the native birds some resistance. The introduction of these elements which damage physical characteristics and break down old immunities can easily wipe out a species.



Mallard x Black Duck hybrid.