



No.27 Wood duck

The Australian wood duck (*Chenonetta jubata*), is also known as the maned goose, wood duck or maned duck. It occurs in western and eastern parts of mainland Australia and Tasmania and is very common in the south-west of Western Australia, where it is a declared pest of agriculture.

Description

The wood duck has a very characteristic shape and posture with a short goose-like beak, a dark head and pale body. It is 44-51 centimetres in length and weighs 660-980 grams.

Male wood ducks have a chocolate-brown head and neck with a short, black mane. The beak is short compared with other ducks and the body is mainly grey with a speckled, brown breast. The speculum (the upper surface of the wing feathers closest to the body) is large and a shiny green colour with broadly edged white margins (Figure 1).

The female is similar to the male but the head is lighter in colour, with a white line above and below the eye and the body is mainly grey-brown in colour (Figure 1). Immature wood ducks are similar to the female but are duller and browner. Wood ducks give a drawn-out nasal 'gnow' call or a cat-like 'mew'.

Distribution and habitat

In Western Australia, wood ducks are found in the southern Kimberley along the Fitzroy River, east to Stuart Creek and Lake Gregory and from the De Grey River south to the south-west, western Nullarbor Plain and Twilight Cove (Figure 2). In other parts of the State they are vagrant or casual visitors. They feed in short grass in the vicinity of fresh water (especially pastures) and near dams, tanks, river pools and lagoons.

While it was once a rare visitor to the south-west, the wood duck has now become a common resident as a result of the establishment of farm dams and pasture, particularly in the wetter agricultural areas.

Diet

The wood duck collects the majority of its food by grazing. In the Riverina region of New South Wales it feeds almost entirely on the vegetative parts of grasses (not seeds) but will also take insects and cereal grains. Feeding sites may be located up to 10 kilometres from roosts.



Figure 1 Wood duck (*Chenonetta jubata*) male (above) and female (below) (Photo Babs and Bert Wells/DEC).

Breeding

Breeding commonly depends on rainfall. Between February and October, 5-20 eggs are laid in a down-filled eucalypt hollow. The ducklings jump out of the nest hole soon after hatching and when they are all assembled on the ground they are led to the nearest water. They remain there until they can fly (about 50 days later), but stay with their parents for two weeks after learning to fly.

To protect their young, wood ducks sometimes perform 'broken wing' behaviour or freeze with their young with necks out-stretched to distract predators. Both parents care for the young and breeding birds pair for life.

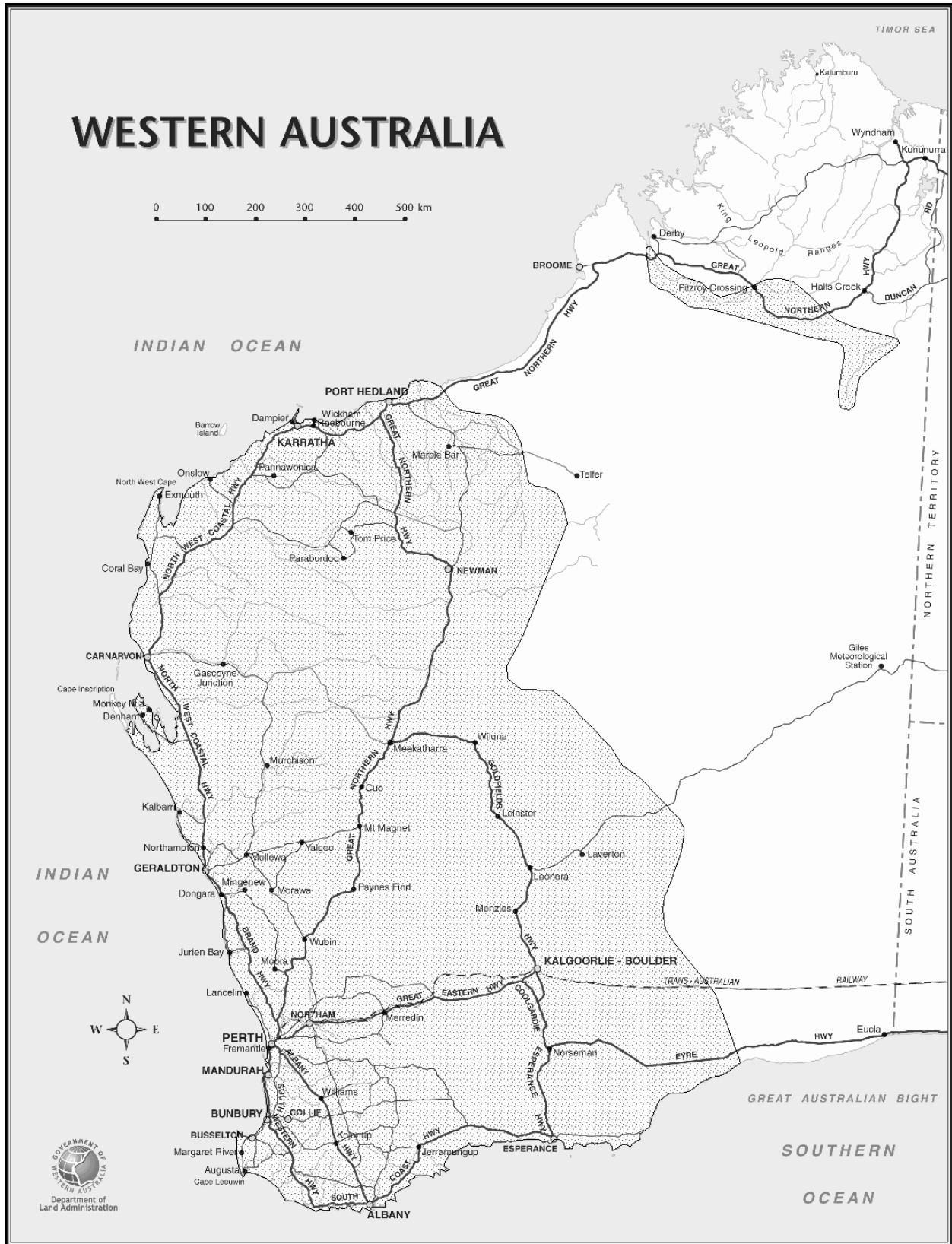


Figure 2 Distribution of the wood duck (*Chenonetta jubata*) in Western Australia (Adapted from Johnstone and Storr (1998))

Behaviour

Wood ducks are better adapted to walking than swimming and usually only take to water for bathing and refuge. The birds are typically seen on the banks of dams during the day, moving out to feed at dusk. They have well-developed claws to help them grip and during the breeding season they are often seen perching in trees looking at potential nest hollows.

Usually observed in pairs, family groups or small flocks, wood ducks occasionally occur in large aggregations of up to 450 birds. Flocks can form around fresh water once the breeding season is over. The birds can then remain together in one area over the summer months before dispersing with the oncoming rains and the return of green feed. Roosts may be used year after year but some individuals may not return to the same roost the following year. Overall, it seems that wood ducks do not disperse widely and most remain in a 200 kilometre radius of the flock.

Damage

Wood ducks have been recorded damaging sprouting rice, cereal and legume crops, eating stock food, eating pasture and fouling pasture, dams and other areas with their droppings. Much of this damage is seasonal.

Status and damage reduction

The wood duck is a declared pest of agriculture under the provisions of the *Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976*, administered by the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food. This declaration allows for the approval and

implementation of a management program in various areas of the state.

As a native species the wood duck is protected under the provisions of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*, administered by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). Under this Act wood ducks can be shot on private land between the 1st January and the 30th June, in accordance with a restricted open season notice, without the need to obtain a damage licence from DEC. The area covered by the notice comprises the south-west land division and Eucla division but excludes the Perth metropolitan region and the district of Mandurah. In these open season areas, wood duck populations are secure and damage to agriculture is likely to be a continual problem.

Outside the open season area and dates, a damage licence must be obtained from DEC prior to shooting. For more information contact DEC and refer to Fauna note no. 10. Destruction of ducks to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia. Destruction should be viewed as a last resort after all other control options have been attempted.

For management options see the table below. A strategy comprising a number of techniques will probably be needed to reduce damage caused by ducks.

Options for reducing damage caused by wood ducks.

Option	Application	Benefits	Costs
Limiting food and habitat	Limit spill grain at feedlots, enclose all grain stores, feed sheep at dusk. Carefully consider building ponds or lakes as they will attract waterfowl. Fauna note no. 11. Limiting access to food to reduce bird damage. DEC, Western Australia.	May reduce bird numbers but is untested for ducks.	Needs continued attention over a long period to be effective.
Shooting	Only legal method of destruction. Damage licences may be required. Fauna note no. 10 Destruction of ducks to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.	Humane if properly carried out.	Not suitable in built-up areas or very small farms.
Scaring	Various devices should be used in combination to be effective. Fauna note no. 2. Scaring and repelling birds to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.	Humane and safer in built-up areas but largely untested on ducks.	Often costly, must be applied intensively. Scarers may breach noise regulations and explosive cartridges may be a fire risk.
Alternative food	Food placed far from crop. Shooting/scaring continues at crop so birds move to decoy where no disturbance. Fauna note no. 13. Decoy feeding – providing alternative food to birds to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.	Less expensive than other methods. Untested on ducks.	Alternative food must be available during the damage season or birds could shift back to the protected crop.
Repellents	Fauna note no. 2. Scaring and repelling birds to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.	Promising research.	Restrictions apply for some products.
Poisoning and trapping	Illegal under the <i>Wildlife Conservation Act 1950</i> .		Crop contamination threatens markets. Other species may be affected.

Further reading

- Fauna note no. 9. Destruction of birds to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.
- Fauna note no. 26. Australian shelduck. DEC, Western Australia.

References

Bomford, M. and Sinclair, R. (2002) Australian research on bird pests: impact, management and future directions. *Emu* 102: 29-45.

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Curtin, A.L. and Kingsford, R.T. (1997) *An analysis of the problem of ducks on rice in New South Wales*. National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW, Final Research Report.

Blakers, M., Davies, S.J.J.F. and Reilly, P.N. (1984) *The Atlas of Australian Birds*. RAOU and Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

Further information

Contact your local DEC office.

See the department's website for the latest information:

www.dec.wa.gov.au.

Last updated 25 June 2009

Further Information

Contact your local office of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

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