

Wild Ducks of South-eastern New South Wales

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Three species of Wild Duck (exclusive of the "Wood Duck," or Maned Goose, also a local species) are common in the Southern Monaro district in any season, but although they may occur in small numbers irrespective of the season, certain Ducks resort to that quarter in numbers, as a rule, only in exceptionally wet years.

The local varieties are the Black (or Grey) Duck, Grey Teal, the handsome Chestnut-breasted Shelduck, or "Mountain Duck"—fast, alas, becoming scarce, owing probably to the depredations of foxes—and the Musk Duck. The Chestnut-breasted Teal occurs occasionally, but is far commoner in the coastal districts below.

Now for the visitors. During one exceptionally wet year I observed on a large surface pool, in company with the three local species first named, Pink-eared Ducks, Shovelers, Whistling Tree-Ducks, and White-eyed Ducks—the latter being known locally as "Red Ducks," while the rare Freckled Duck might be seen at times feeding and flying in company with Grey (Black) Ducks, with which it seemed to be on amicable terms. Shovelers in particular came in enormous flocks, drought-driven, probably, from some less favoured part of Australia.

Out of one flock of Shovelers no less than nine birds fell to a single shot from a long single-barrelled "duck gun," so densely did the birds pack together in some instances. During one exceptionally good season on Monaro, when duck food was plentiful, I observed a very large Duck swimming among a flock of Black Duck of full average size. I shot this bird, which proved to be a Black Duck of extraordinary size.

The Magpie Goose is an occasional but rare visitor to Monaro. The Pink-eared Ducks keep mostly to the lakes and surface pools, being rarely seen on the rivers.

The curious Musk Duck—most retiring in habit—occurs mostly in secluded pools or long, still reaches of the rivers, or in the larger lakes. In the coastal districts immediately below the Monaro highlands, this Duck is becoming rare, owing to the draining of many lagoons and swamps, which in earlier years gave this bird sanctuary. Some years ago, however, in a large swamp near Tilba Tilba, on the South Coast of New South Wales, I observed several pairs of the Musk Duck. The eggs, very rounded in shape, and, I believe, only two in number, were taken occasionally.

The Grey Teal often nested on Monaro, in the shelter of large tussocks on the margins of rivers, a site much exposed to visitation by foxes, which constantly prowl along the banks. One nest discovered by the writer in June contained ten eggs.

pale cream-colour in tint, almost hidden in an envelope or cushion of soft drab-grey down. When the sitting bird was absent in quest of food some down was invariably drawn over a small opening in the cushion, so that the eggs might escape the keen eyes of Crows, Hawks, and other avian enemies. But from the keen-scented fox this device would avail nothing.

Although the Sheldrake still occurs on Monaro, the "Mountain Duck" is growing rarer year by year in that quarter. In former years I have counted thirty or more of these regal birds—the burnished green of their wing coverts flashing in the sun—grouped about springs on the wide, black-soil plains of Monaro. The young, I think, are brought early to the ground from the nesting hollows, and thus become an easy prey of foxes. The "Red Duck," Shoveler, Pink-eared Duck and Whistling Tree-Duck never—so far as I am aware—nest on the Monaro highlands. The "Wood Duck" (Maned Goose), though still common, is not so numerous there as in earlier years. Somewhere about the middle eighties of last century I observed these birds in great flocks on damp green levels about Gelantipy Station, North Gippsland, Victoria, one or more birds, after the habit of Geese, when in flocks, standing sentry on elevated ground near the assemblage of silvery-grey birds. The flocks occurred among timber, and at a considerable distance from any permanent water.

That most destructive and perfectly useless animal, the European fox, is playing havoc annually among the young of wild Ducks, preying also on their eggs and upon the adult birds, which latter are often successfully stalked by this cunning marauder. It is high time, in the opinion of the writer, that a price should be set by the Legislatures of the States upon the scalps of foxes, which may be bracketed with the domestic cat gone wild as being the two most destructive agencies to which many of our most useful insectivorous birds are now exposed.

The Garganey Teal (*Querquedula querquedula*).—A pair of these beautiful birds, kindly lent by Mr. Wm. Shaw, was exhibited by me at the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria in March, 1889. The birds were obtained at Lake Connemara, near Geelong. Subsequently I noticed a similar specimen in the National Museum, Melbourne. In recalling the matter recently to the Curator, Mr. J. A. Kershaw, F.E.S., he was good enough to show me the specimen which is mounted. It was presented by Mr. Chas. Hooper on 3/10/81, and was obtained at Lake Colac. In connection with the preparation of the Check-list, it is interesting to find that three specimens of this wandering species have been collected in a small State like Victoria, the inference being that others must occur occasionally in various parts of Australia.—A. J. CAMPBELL, H.F.A.O.U., Box Hill, Victoria.