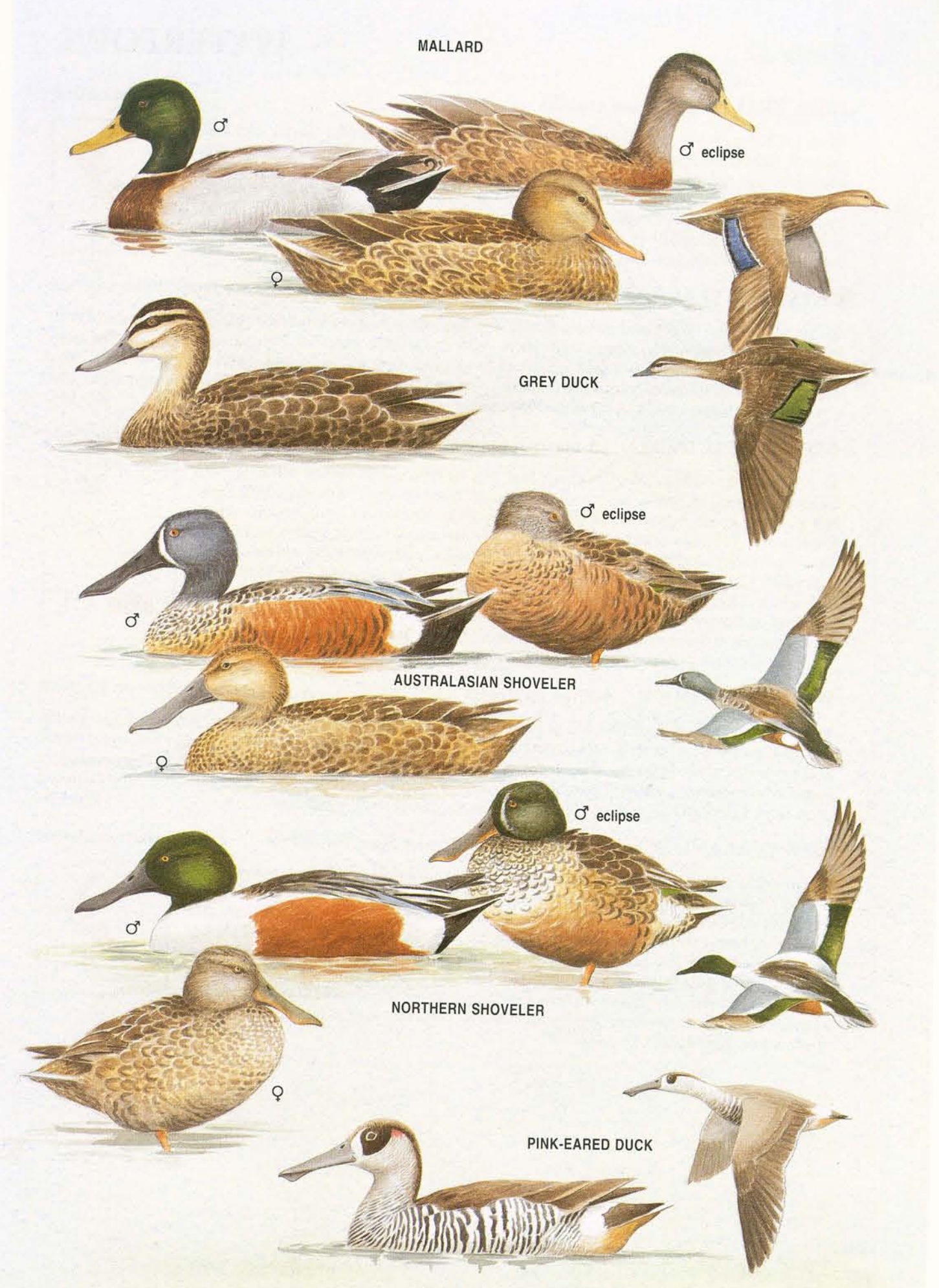
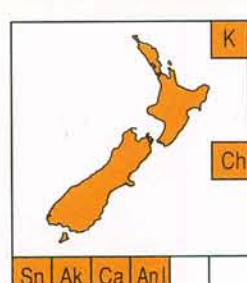


Aquatic birds with a small rounded head, short flattened bill, rounded body, short legs, webbed feet and a waddling gait on land. They fly strongly with neck outstretched. Sexes alike in swans and geese, but male ducks are usually more colourful than females. Lay large clutches. Chicks leave the nest within days but are guarded for several months until they can fly.

**GREY DUCK (Parera) *Anas superciliosa***

Common native

55 cm; ♂ 1100 g, ♀ 1000 g. Like female Mallard but darker with conspicuously striped pale head, grey bill, greenish-brown legs and feet. Green speculum with black borders and thin white band on trailing edge only. Sexes alike. In flight, looks dark with a very pale head and upper neck. Calls like Mallard. Has interbred extensively with the Mallard to produce paler birds with less distinct facial stripes and greyish bills, yellowish-brown legs and feet, and blue speculum. **Habitat:** Pure birds mainly in remote wetlands, including forest lakes and rivers; uncommon in agricultural and urban habitats dominated by Mallards. **Breeding:** Aug–Jan. [Sp 131]



**WATERFOWL**

**Anatidae**

Swans, geese and ducks are found worldwide in freshwater and marine habitats. There are about 160 species, of which 14 (4 endemic, 4 native and 6 introduced) breed or have bred in the wild in the New Zealand region since 1920. A further endemic species (*Mergus australis*) became extinct in the early years of the 1900s, and another 6 species are vagrants to the region.

In New Zealand, most introduced and some native species of waterfowl are legally harvested during a strictly controlled shooting season. Each year, Fish and Game Councils determine the length and timing of the season and the allowable bag for each species, and monitor the licensing of hunters and annual hunting statistics. A voluntary organisation, Ducks Unlimited, works to create and protect wetland habitats suitable for waterfowl and is also involved in captive breeding programmes for some threatened and rare species.

All species have webbed feet for swimming in freshwater rivers and lakes, or in coastal waters. Their bill is modified for filter-feeding; water and food is sucked in at the tip of the bill and expelled through fine comb-like lamellae at the sides, which catch minute seeds and invertebrates. Although most feed in this way, some species mainly graze on aquatic or terrestrial vegetation and pick seeds (e.g. peas or wheat) off the ground, and the mergansers have serrated bills for catching fish.

**Reading** Frith, H.J. 1982. *Waterfowl in Australia*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson. Madge, S. & Burn, H. 1988. *Wildfowl: An Identification Guide to the Ducks, Geese and Swans of the World*. London: Christopher Helm. Johnsgard, P.A. 1978. *Ducks, Geese and Swans of the World*. Lincoln: Univ Nebraska Press. Williams, M. 1981. *The Duckshooter's Bag*. Wellington: Wetland Press.

**131. GREY DUCK *Anas superciliosa***

Plate 31

**Other names:** Parera, Pacific Black Duck  
**Size:** 55 cm; males 1100 g, females 1000 g  
**Geographical variation:** Three subspecies are recognised, but banding studies show that there is some exchange between populations, especially between Australia and New Zealand; *rogersi* breeds in Indonesia, New Guinea and Australia, *pelewensis* on islands of the southwest Pacific, and *superciliosa* in New Zealand. Grey Ducks interbreed extensively with Mallards in New Zealand, and many birds have a hybrid origin.  
**Distribution:** Breed in Australasia from Sumatra through Indonesia to New Guinea and Australia, on many islands in the southwestern Pacific, east to French Polynesia and north to the Caroline Islands, and in the New Zealand region. They are in wetlands throughout New Zealand, including many offshore and outlying islands such as the Kermadec, Chatham, Antipodes, The Snares, Auckland and Campbell Islands. On the mainland, they are most common in Northland, Westland, parts of the Waikato and the eastern Bay of Plenty–Gisborne area.  
 Grey Ducks prefer small lakes, slow-flowing rivers and tidal water surrounded by forest rather than farmland. They have not adapted to the agricultural landscape and are rare on town lakes. Banding studies show that they disperse widely throughout New Zealand; a bird banded in Marlborough was shot in Australia, and a New South Wales bird was shot in Otago. In recent decades, with a marked decline in numbers, they seem to have become more sedentary.  
**Population:** In 1970, there were c. 1.5 million Grey Ducks, but by 1981 they had declined to c. 1.2 million, and the decline has accelerated so that by the 1990s there were fewer than 500,000.  
**Conservation:** Partially protected native; legally harvested in the duck-shooting season, with the take controlled by daily bag limits for licensed hunters. The decline in this species is attributed to a loss of wild habitats, and competition and hybridisation with the Mallard.  
**Breeding:** Pair formation starts in autumn

flocks. By late July, most birds are paired and the males start to defend territories. The nest is a bowl of grass with a lining of down added as incubation proceeds. It is generally away from water (cf. Mallard) and usually under dense vegetation or quite often in a tree hole, fork or clump of *Astelia*, up to 10 m above the ground. The first clutch is usually laid between late August and November, but pairs continue to re-nest to the end of December. They lay 5–10–13 pale greenish or creamy eggs (58 x 41 mm, 60 g) about dawn each day. The male guards the female during laying and for about the first week of incubation, but then leaves her to incubate alone for 26–28 days. The female leads the ducklings to water soon after they hatch. Broods of up to 17 ducklings have been reported, but these were probably from a nest in which more than one female laid.

The young are initially covered in dark brown down with yellow facial markings and underparts, but they quickly develop feathers and fledge at c. 60 days old and disperse widely. About 65% die before they start breeding at 1 year old. Adults live on average just 21 months, but some birds live much longer than this, with the oldest recorded in the wild in New Zealand being at least 20 years old.

**Behaviour:** Grey Ducks are often seen in small flocks outside of the breeding season, but do not remain in family groups once the young have fledged. Males have a soft, high-pitched 'quek', and females the more characteristic loud 'quack quack quack', as in Mallards.  
**Feeding:** Diet is mainly seeds sieved from the water through comb-like lamellae at the sides of the bill, and aquatic vegetation which they get by up-ending or dabbling in shallow water. They sometimes graze grasses along wetland margins. Ducklings and females forming eggs especially take many aquatic or marine invertebrates such as small snails, insect larvae, water beetles and crustacea.  
**Reading:** Balham, R.W. 1952. *Emu* 52: 163–191. Gillespie, G.D. 1985. *Auk* 102: 459–469. Williams, M.J. 1969. *Notornis* 16: 23–32.