

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.

FERAL GOOSE *Anser anser*

Common European introduction

80 cm, 3 kg. The familiar domestic goose of farms and parks, often feral. Males are all white, females white with brown on wings and thighs. Juveniles all grey-brown. Bill, legs and feet orange-pink. Usually graze away from water. **Habitat:** Lakes, estuaries and farmland. [Sp 125]



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.

125. FERAL GOOSE *Anser anser*

Plate 29

Other names: Greylag Goose, Domestic Goose

Size: 80 cm, 3 kg

Distribution: Natural range of the wild ancestor of this bird is the wetlands and farmland of Eurasia, from Iceland to China. Greylag Geese have been domesticated for centuries and were brought to New Zealand with the early European settlers. In many parts of the country, they have become truly feral, and numerous others live in a semi-feral state at city parks and on farms.

Population: No information available. Flocks of 50+ birds have been recorded at many sites,

including most large lakes and in pastoral farmland.

Breeding: Not studied in New Zealand. In Europe, their usual clutch is of 4–6 creamy-white eggs (85 x 58 mm). They often nest in dense colonies, with nests a few metres apart in reedbeds or in thick grass under willows.

Behaviour: In New Zealand, Feral Geese are usually seen in flocks at lakes, at estuaries or on pastoral farmland. They make loud honks both on the ground and in flight.

Feeding: Graze on grass, clover and weeds, usually away from water.