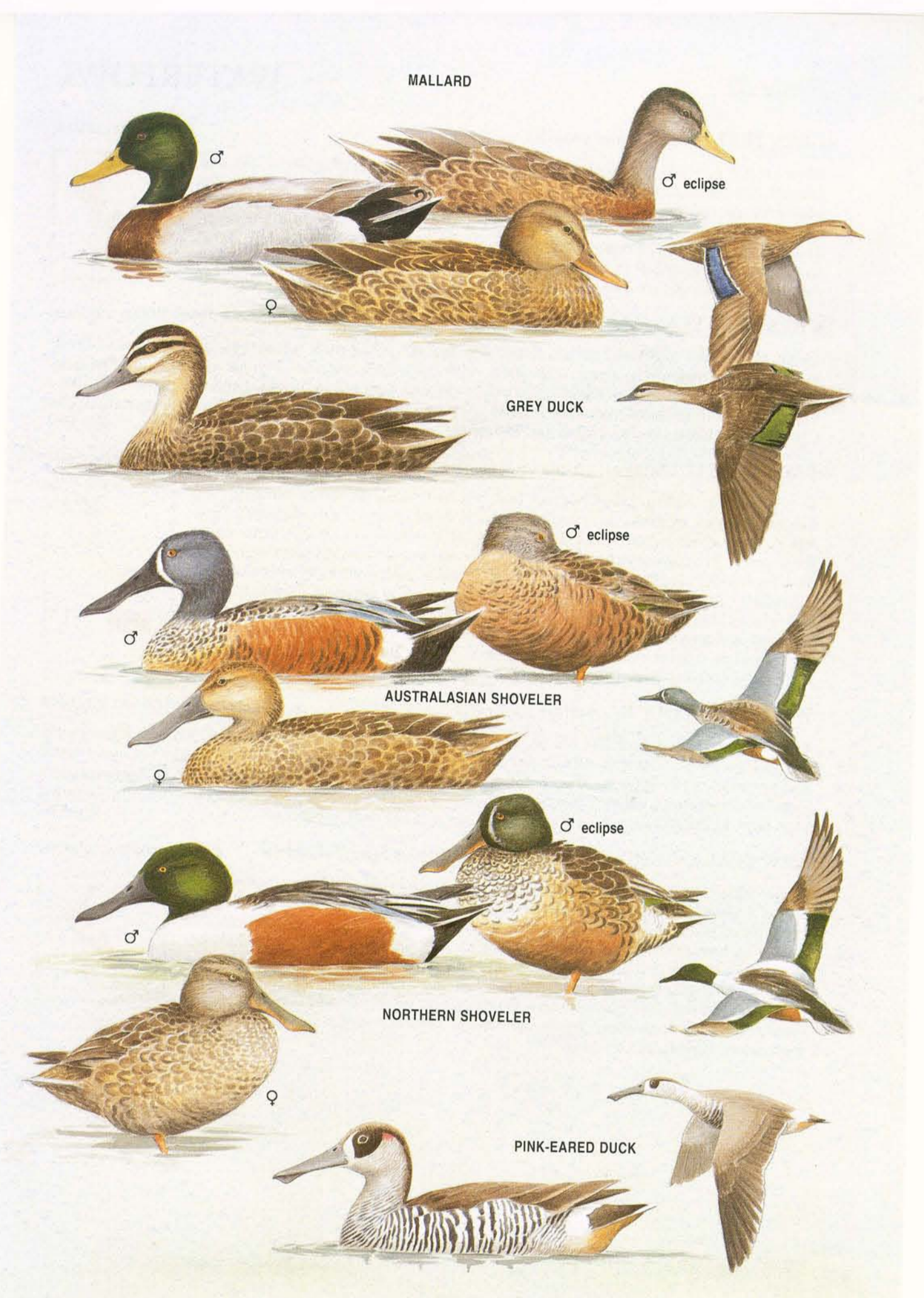


Aquatic birds with a small rounded head, short flattened bill, rounded body, short legs, webbed feet and a waddling gait on land. They fly strongly with neck outstretched. Sexes alike in swans and geese, but male ducks are usually more colourful than females. Lay large clutches. Chicks leave the nest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

**PINK-EARED DUCK** *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* **Rare Australian vagrant**

40 cm, 400 g. Small duck with a large square-ended bill, black flaps at the tip. Back and wings grey-brown, distinctly *striped dark brown and white on lower neck, breast and flanks*; white flank patch extends across rump; undertail yellow-brown. *Large dark patch around eye, contrasting white eye-ring, and small pink patch on ear coverts*. In flight, *white rump contrasts with grey-brown upperwing and back, and dark brown white-tipped tail*. Constant chirruping call on the water and in flight. Feeds by filtering with bill submerged up to eyes. **Habitat:** Lakes. One NZ record: Auckland, June 1990. [Sp 137]



**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.

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.

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.

**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.

**137. PINK-EARED DUCK** *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* **Plate 31**

**Size:** 40 cm, 400 g  
**Distribution:** Breed only in Australia, mainly in the south and especially in the Murray-Darling Basin of inland New South Wales and Victoria. They disperse widely within Australia in response to inland rains and droughts, but are not common on the eastern seaboard and are only a rare visitor to Tasmania. One New Zealand record: an immature bird at Mangere Sewage Ponds (June 1990).

**Feeding:** In Australia, Pink-eared Ducks are mainly on shallow stagnant lakes and on sewage ponds. They feed on invertebrates (especially chironomid larvae) and seeds obtained by sieving food onto comb-like lamellae inside the bill. The distinctive bill flaps are apparently used to feel invertebrates touching the bill.

**Reading:** Eller, G.J. 1991. *Notornis* 38: 109–110.