

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.

## 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.

## ADDENDUM

Since 1996, the following 11 species were accepted by the Rare Birds Committee of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand as having been reliably recorded for the first time in the New Zealand region. All appeared as single vagrants or stragglers, and none of the species has settled to breed.

### NORTHERN PINTAIL *Anas acuta*

**Size:** 60 cm, excluding 10 cm tail streamers in adult male; 800 g

**Description:** Large slender duck with long slim neck and long pointed tail. Breeding male distinctive with chocolate brown head and neck, except for a white streak down the side of the nape from eye level; lower neck, flanks and upperparts pale grey-brown, breast, underparts and conspicuous patch on thigh, white. Long thin central pair of tail feathers project 10 cm beyond rest of tail. Bill pale grey marked black, legs and feet grey, speculum green. Eclipse male, female and

juvenile are brown with pale buff edges to feathers on body and finely streaked buff on neck and head. Bill, legs and feet grey with black webs, speculum brown.

**Distribution:** Breed in the Arctic from northern Scandinavia to Siberia, and in Alaska and northern Canada. They migrate south to winter mainly between 40°N and the equator, but some overshoot to reach Australia, New Guinea, Micronesia and Polynesia. One New Zealand record: a male in breeding plumage at Farewell Spit, October 1997.

**Reading:** Petyt, C. 1999. *Notornis* 46: 298–299.