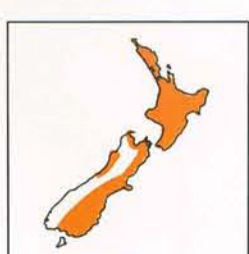


Aquatic birds with a small rounded head, short flattened bill, rounded body, short legs, webbed feet and a waddling gait on land. They fly strongly with neck outstretched. Sexes alike in swans and geese, but male ducks are usually more colourful than females. Lay large clutches. Chicks leave the nest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

GREY TEAL (Tete) *Anas gracilis*

Common native

43 cm; ♂ 525 g, ♀ 425 g. Delicate light grey-brown duck with pale grey cheeks, chin and foreneck. Silhouette rounded, including head. Sits high and upright on the water. Bill blue-grey; eye red. Sexes alike. Juvenile paler, eye brown. In flight, speculum black with a green sheen, a narrow white bar behind, and a prominent white triangle in front; underwing white in the centre. Wingbeats very fast. Feeds by filtering on water surface or dredging bill in soft mud. **Habitat:** Lowland lakes and lagoons, and estuaries. **Breeding:** Jun–Feb.



[Sp 132]



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.

132. GREY TEAL *Anas gracilis*

Plate 32

Other name: Tete
Size: 43 cm; males 525 g, females 425 g
Distribution: Breed only in Australia and New Zealand, and are vagrants to Indonesia, New Guinea, the Solomons and New Caledonia. In New Zealand, they were rare and local until about the 1950s, but several natural irruptions from Australia (notably in 1957 when a drought followed a year with excellent inland breeding) and the provision of nest boxes has led to a dramatic increase in numbers and range of the species. They are now common in shallow coastal lakes and lagoons with good margins of swamp and willows, in South Auckland and northern Waikato, Hawke's Bay, Manawatu, Wairarapa and the eastern South Island from Marlborough to Southland. They are also in moderate numbers on the Rotorua lakes and along the eastern foothills of the Southern Alps. After breeding, they often gather at estuaries to feed on exposed mudflats. They have been recorded on some offshore islands but not from outliers, except Chatham Island (1951). Banding studies show that, although some Grey Teal are sedentary, many are highly mobile and disperse widely in New Zealand. A bird banded in southern Australia was shot in the Waikato in 1957.
Population: In the early 1970s, there were estimated to be fewer than 20,000 birds, but by 2005 the population had risen to well over 50,000.
Conservation: Protected native. Each year, even though a moderate number are shot accidentally during the duck-shooting season, the population has grown strongly.
Breeding: Pairs remain together all year, but most join large flocks for the late summer moult and then remain in flocks until July.

In Australia, breeding is closely linked to rainfall, but in New Zealand it is more seasonal although still related to water levels. Laying is mostly in June–September, but replacement clutches can be laid through to January. The nest is a bowl of grass with a lining of down added as incubation proceeds. It is generally close to water and usually in a tree hole, nest box or among dense vegetation, e.g. *Carex secta*.
 They lay 5–7–9 creamy eggs (50 x 36 mm), laid about dawn each day. The male guards the female during laying and incubation. The female incubates for 25–31 days. The pair leads the ducklings to water soon after they hatch. They are initially covered in dark grey-brown down with off-white facial markings and underparts, but quickly develop feathers and fledge at c. 55 days old and then disperse widely. About 68% die before they start breeding at 1 year old. Adults live on average about 3 years, but some birds live much longer; the oldest recorded in the wild in New Zealand being over 9 years old, but a bird in Australia lived at least 21 years.
Behaviour: Normally seen in small flocks of 10–50 birds, but flocks of 1000+ are recorded in autumn at Lake Wairarapa and Bromley Sewage Ponds (Christchurch). Birds in flocks chatter almost constantly. Males give a loud, short whistle, and females a rapid 'cuck-cuck-cuck' call.
Feeding: Diet is mainly seeds of aquatic plants and invertebrates such as water beetles and larvae of midges, caddisflies and mosquitoes, obtained by dabbling in shallow water or by dredging exposed lakeside or estuarine mudflats and filtering out the food.
Reading: Mills, J.A. 1976. *NZ J Zool* 3: 261–267.