

Yellow-eyed Penguin habitat.

The number of Stewart Island Shags on the island has declined since Sansom's visit in 1955.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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WYNSTON COOPER, *Department of Conservation, Box 743, Invercargill*



SHORT NOTE

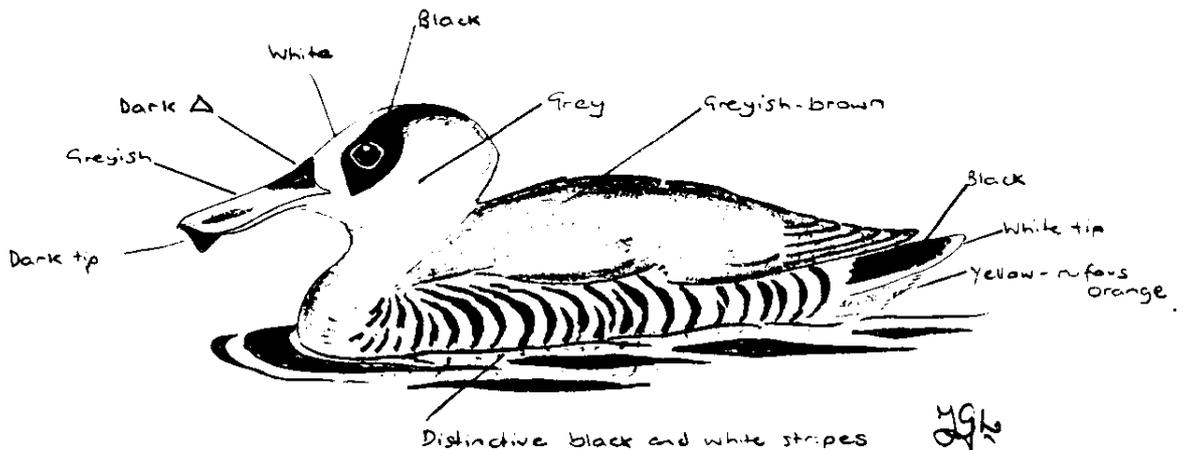
Pink-eared Duck at Mangere

Full tide in Manukau Harbour on 7 June 1990 being about 10 a.m., we decided to drive round the four ponds of the AMDB on what has become a more or less routine bird survey. There was little wind, the sky was overcast and there were periods of light drizzle. Visibility generally was poor.

On pond No. 4, which is the 'cleanest' of the ponds, the spraying of weeds on the larger islet and other engineering operations had been causing some disturbance among the thousands of ducks, mainly Mallard, Grey Teal and Shoveler, and to the waders which habitually use this large open water and its two islets as a refuge. In a quiet corner we had quickly found a pair of Shoveler with a few dozen Mallard; but soon we were examining a small duck with a very distinctive silhouette and puzzling over its identity. It was dwarfed by the Mallard and markedly smaller than the Shovelers. The group was about 120 metres distant. In the dull light, with field glasses alone, its bill seemed disproportionately large, even monstrous, on so small a body. Hence the suggestion in jest that it was a hybrid between a Grey Teal and a Shoveler; but it lacked the elegant lines and curves of a Grey Teal; and a little later we were scanning a flock of more than 400 of these over the sea-wall on the tide in the lee of Puketutu Island.

Two telescopes revealed more details of the plumage of the 'loner'. The face was whitish and the neck greyish. There was a dark patch around the eye extending down to the cheek. But most striking were the black and white near-vertical bars on the flank. They extended forward to the base of the neck. The vent was buffish or pale yellow. We surmised that the bird was not in full breeding plumage. None of us saw the small 'pink ears' which give this unique species its vernacular name. In good clear light, identification would have been easy.

GJE was the first to realise that this small duck with its unique jizz and bizarre pattern of plumage could only be the Australian Pink-eared Duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*). This was confirmed when independently we were able to consult our own libraries.



Two questions spring to mind. (1) Are there any Pink-eared Ducks in private collections of waterfowl in New Zealand, from which our bird may have escaped? None is held in the Auckland Zoo. (2) Is it a genuine vagrant from Australia, where the species is nomadic, preferring stagnant water and not disdaining sewage farms? According to the *Atlas of Australian Birds* (1984), the longest recorded movement is 486 km. A Tasman crossing is four times longer.

It is worth mentioning that *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* has already appeared on the New Zealand list as a subfossil, since bones from Pyramid Valley swamp, Canterbury, were attributed to this species by R.A. Falla (*Rec. Cant. Mus.* 1941 4: 352). These subfossil bones have been re-examined by Storrs L. Olson, who found that they are bigger and robuster than those of typical *membranaceus*. Accordingly the extinct Pink-eared Duck of New Zealand has been renamed *M. scarletti*, in honour of Ron Scarlett's many contributions to archaeornithology (*Emu* 77: 132–135).

On the bleak afternoon of 12 June T.G. Lovegrove accompanied GJE and RBS to Mangere and spent an hour watching the stranger, which was quickly noticed when it made a short, low flight. Again it preferred the company of Mallard, although hundreds of Shoveler and Grey Teal were nearby in flocks, which tended to keep to themselves. TGL braved the chilly weather to make the accompanying sketch on the spot.

When the winter census of Manukau shorebirds took place on 24 June, the Pink-eared Duck was still present in the same corner of pond No. 4 and in good light was most satisfactorily seen by several members of OSNZ.

G.J. ELLER, 12 Rochdale Ave., Glendowie, Auckland, 5;
 C.M. HASLETT, 47 Ranui Road, Remuera, Auckland, 5;
 R.B. SIBSON, 580 Remuera Road, Auckland, 5