

The Occurrence of *Nettion* Species in New Zealand.

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CONSIDERABLE confusion has occurred in the records of the occurrence of the genus *Nettion* in New Zealand, and it is time that the matter was rectified. Practically every author writing on New Zealand birds has added to the confusion rather than elucidating it. The trouble has occurred with *Nettion castaneum* and *N. gibberifrons*.

I take it that the following differentiation of the species is correct (*Birds of Australia*, Lucas and Le Souef, 1911, pp. 148-9):—

Nettion castaneum (Chestnut-breasted Teal)—Male: Head and neck dark glossy green, etc., etc. Female: Brown, etc. etc. (no green on head). Larger.

Nettion gibberifrons (Grey Teal)—Both sexes alike, or almost so (and resembling the female of *N. castaneum*). Smaller.

Sir W. Buller (*Manual of the Birds of N.Z.*, 1882, p. 68) records *Querquedula gibberifrons* (Little Teal) from both islands, and his description of the species agrees with *Nettion gibberifrons*, as above. He adds a footnote that Professor Hutton thinks this is *Anas castanea*, Eyton.

In the Supplement to the *Birds of N.Z.* (1905, Vol. II., p. 10) Sir Walter Buller includes *Nettion castaneum* (Australian Teal) on the list of N.Z. birds. But in this case he was only guessing, as two birds procured at Nelson were never examined by him or any competent ornithologist. He merely states: "From the imperfect account furnished, the only species to which I can refer them is the Australian Teal . . ." This record cannot be allowed.

At the same time, Buller quotes that there is a female of this species (*N. castaneum*) from N.Z. in the British Museum (*Catalogue of Birds*, Vol. XXVII., p. 254). As this bird is a female the identification may not be correct. Again, Buller mentions *N. gibberifrons*, the Wood-Teal (Supp. II., p. 10) and recalls his first acquaintance with this bird.

Hutton and Drummond, in *Animals of N.Z.* (1909, p. 327) record *Nettion castaneum* (Grey Teal) as breeding in the North Island. Their description indicates no difference between male and female birds, and states "sides of the head brownish white."

Now follows Mathews' and Iredale's *Reference List of the Birds of N.Z.* (*Ibis*, 1913, p. 408) wherein *Nettion castaneum* (Eyton) (Australian Teal) is recorded as an "accidental visitor, few occurrences, extralimital." Here *Nettion castaneum* and *N. gibberifrons* (Buller, Supp., Vol. II., p. 10) are regarded as synonyms.

Mathews and Iredale add a note and state:—"We have been unable to satisfy ourselves of the occurrence of *N. gibberifrons* Muller, either in Australia or New Zealand. The only New Zealand specimens available undoubtedly belong to the present species." Here, be it noted, they regard Buller's two references as being to one and the

same species, but *N. castaneum* and *N. gibberifrons* are regarded as distinct species.

In 1920, there follows Mathews' and Iredale's *Name List of the Birds of N.Z.* (*Austral Avian Record*, Vol. IV., pp. 49-64.) Unfortunately, here the matter is made chaotic. They enumerate both *Virago gibberifrons* (Müller, 1842, *Anas*) Grey Teal, and *Virago castanea* (Eyton, 1838, *Mareca*) Green-headed Teal. But note the vernacular names!

In October, 1925, I drew the attention of Mr. W. R. B. Oliver, of the Dominion Museum, Wellington, to a specimen labelled in that museum *Virago castaneum* (Grey Teal) Wairarapa Lake. Mr. Oliver replied that "the specimen is a female, but males have been taken from the same locality and they are identical in colouration with the females. The species, therefore, is *Gibberifrons* and not *Castaneum*." He added that the bird is apparently established in New Zealand, as Mr. O'Connor (an authority on N.Z. birds) states that it breeds somewhere near Wairarapa Lake.

From the chaos created in the past, I can find no valid record of the occurrence in New Zealand of *Nettion castaneum*. That species must therefore be omitted from the New Zealand list. Mr. Oliver agrees with me in the matter. The species entitled to be included in the N.Z. list is *Virago gibberifrons* (Müller, 1842, *Anas*) Grey Teal

Protection of Australian Birds.

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THANKS are due to Mr. A. H. E. Mattingley for his summing-up in the January *Emu* of the case for the protection of birds.

Most of us desire to ensure the preservation of our useful and characteristic native animals; though, unfortunately, some of us may disagree from others as to the right course to pursue to secure this. Some are apt to take offence from "straight talk," and though all ornithologists should be united in the endeavour to protect our useful and interesting birds, we now apparently only agree to differ. So an actual scheme for the preservation of Australian birds remains in abeyance.

Is it not time that we realized our responsibilities and set to work to try to save our fast disappearing fauna? It is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all. After carefully reviewing the position, I am sure that if all our energies are expended upon sanctuaries, we will reap the best result. It is not much use making reserves close to the cities and expecting birds that have long ago been driven out before the increased human population, to return to such reserves. We have destroyed the feeding-grounds of the birds and we cannot give them suitable conditions. There is a far better prospect of saving the birds if we see to it that in all new country opened up there is an extensive area set apart as a sanctuary for birds.

As a matter of cold fact, the opening-up of country for settlement re-