

The Downy Ducklings of the Pink-eared and White-eyed Ducks

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INTRODUCTION

Recently the colour characters of the downy ducklings of the Anatidae have been successfully used by Delacour and Mayr (1945) in their classification of the family. In this classification *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* (Latham) was left as an Aberrant River Duck and it was felt the description of the downy duckling would help to indicate the bird's relationships. The downy duckling of *M. membranaceus* has not been described. In 1952 three downy ducklings one or two days old were taken on Toganmain Station, near Carrathool, N.S.W., and are described here. At the time breeding of the species was very widespread in the area.

The downy duckling of the White-eyed Duck, *Aythya australis* Gould, also, does not seem to have been described. In June 1955 a duckling about two weeks old was collected near Warren, N.S.W., by B. Brown and is described here.

Pink-eared Duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*)

The colour pattern of the duckling of *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* is shown in figure 1.

General colour above light brown with no markings on back. The brown of the back merges into grey on the sides of the throat. Underside of body and throat light grey, almost white, with some mottling of very light brown on flanks and darker towards the breast. Sides of the body are light brown with the exception of a small light grey patch to rear of leg and a grey patch hidden by wing, both due to lack of colour in the tips of the down.

The wing is light brown above with grey-tipped down on the extremity giving a grey tip. The down along the rear of the ulna is also grey tipped, giving a grey band across the wing. Underneath, the down along the humerus, ulna and digits is light grey, and the trailing edge of the down also; there is a brown band separating the two white strips.

The sides and top of the head are brown—darker than the body. The supercilium is light grey. It extends around the sides of the head and the stripes tend to join across the hind neck. There is a small crescent-shaped white patch below the eye. The grey of the throat extends up the side of the dark side of the head and reaches the base of the bill.

The feet and bill are dark leaden-grey, the bill being distinctly spatulate.

The general distribution of colour on the head rather closely follows the head pattern of the adult duck in general conformation.

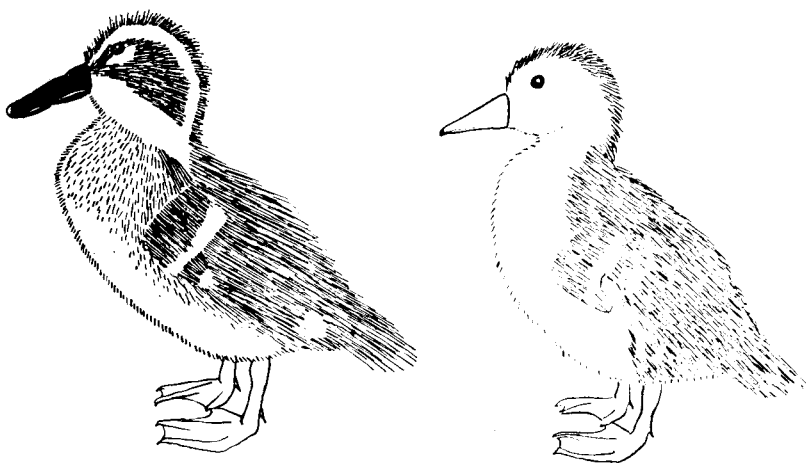


Fig. 1 (left): Downy duckling of Pink-eared Duck

Fig. 2 (right): Downy duckling of White-eyed Duck

White-eyed Duck (*Aythya australis*)

The colour pattern of the duckling of *Aythya australis* is shown in figure 2.

General colour above is light brown suffused with pale yellow with no markings on the back. The brown of the back merges into pale yellow on the breast and underside of abdomen. The pale yellow underside of the abdomen is streaked with brown towards the anus and the underside of the tail is again pure pale yellow. The sides of the body are light brown merging into the pale yellow of the underside. There is a small pale yellow patch immediately behind the wing. The feet, legs and bills are dark leaden-grey. The wing is pale brown with yellow-tipped down giving a pale yellow trailing edge. The front edge of the ulna is also pale yellow making a narrow strip. The underside of the wing is pale yellow, with a tendency to brown towards the trailing edge.

The sides and underside of the head and throat are pale yellow and have no markings. The top of the head and back of the neck are light brown suffused with pale yellow.

The general colour and pattern closely resembles that of the other members of the tribe Aythyini and most closely resembles the downy duckling of *Nyroca valisineria*, as figured by Kortright (1942).

CONCLUSION

The pattern of the duckling of *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* resembles no other duckling found in Australia. Least of all does it resemble the duckling of the shovelers, a group with which *M. membranaceus* has certain similarities in feeding and display. The description of the duckling does not give any direct clue to its relationship within the family.

The pattern of the duckling of *Aythya australis* is typical of the tribe Aythyini; *Nyroca valisineria* and *N. americana* in particular. Both these are included by Delacour and Mayr in group 1 of the tribe. Descriptions of the ducklings of group 2, which includes *A. australis*, are not available for a further comparison to be made.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is indebted to Gene Willsford who accurately drew the duckling in figure 1.

REFERENCES

- Delacour, J. and Mayr, E. (1945). 'The Family Anatidae', *Wilson Bull.* 57, 3-55.
Kortright, F. H. (1942). *The Duck, Geese and Swans of North America*, Wildlife Management Institute, Washington, U.S.A., p. 456.

Stray Feathers

Migratory Flight of Honeyeaters.—At Mallacoota, eastern Victoria, about 7.30 a.m. on May 7, 1955, my attention was drawn to a constant stream of small birds flying in a direct line to the north, and following the coast-line around from the south and west. A careful scrutiny with binoculars showed that the birds were not circling, or approaching from the sea, at least in the vicinity of the township. Many hundreds of thousands of birds were involved, as the flow continued for approximately two hours, reaching its peak about 8 a.m.

Over the township of Mallacoota and the cleared paddocks about Mallacoota House they divided to the shelter of the timber, but nothing interrupted the continuous flight as they streamed through the trees. At the peak the flight was some 50 yards wide, even over the cleared paddocks, and viewed from the house over the tea-tree at the water's edge the birds looked like swarming bees.

It appeared to be a mass migration of honeyeaters, primarily of the White-naped species (*Melithreptus lunatus*), although they were accompanied by a few Yellow-faced (*Meliphaga chrysops*) and Wattle-birds (*Anthochaera carunculata*), but one got the impression that these latter species