

Incidentally among the 'Literature Cited' there is no mention of the *Handbook of British Birds* 1938, Witherby, Jourdain, Ticehurst and Tucker; where (Vol. 1. p. 44) under Soft Parts much the same information is supplied; viz. "Bill in summer lemon-yellow; male with french gray base, female with base flesh pink or clouded with grey . . . Iris, male dark-brown; female brown with narrow inner or outer ring of lighter colour, white, cream or pale yellow, but certainly sometimes uniform brown." The deep orange edging in the iris of some female Canterbury Starlings is worth noting. Is it a seasonal or a local character?

It is unfortunate that a laborious piece of research has been marred in places by an inept use of words.

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#### BROWN TEAL ON KAWAU ISLAND

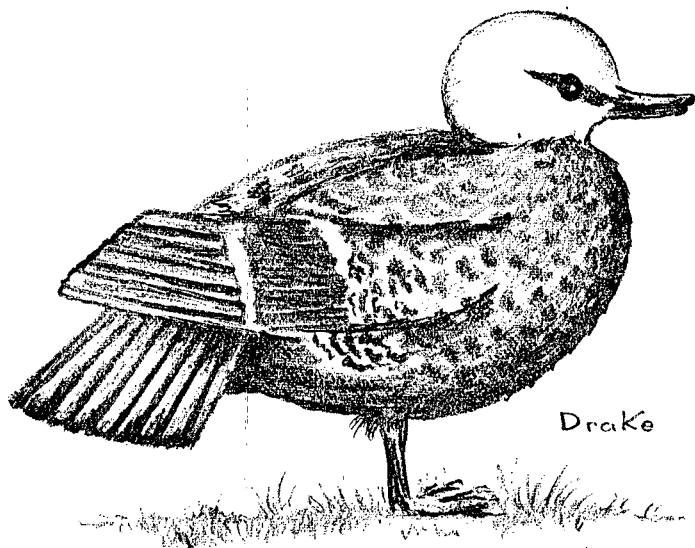
At Hokimai Bay, Kawau Island, on the property of Mr F. R. Cometti, a tidal inlet was dammed in 1964 to produce an artificial lake of about an acre in area. A high tide comes to within one foot of the top of the dam on the seaward side. The far end of the lake drifts into clumps of rushes which become very dense, and a small stream flows down the entire valley about a quarter of a mile long, through a bog area now thick with cabbage trees and arum lilies. The lake through which the stream finally flows, is heavily stocked with golden carp and water lilies which cover about one quarter of the surface area.

On 10 July 1973, a drake Brown Teal (*Anas chlorotis*), with two smaller ducks, arrived on the lake. The drake was easily distinguished because he was part albino. His entire head and neck were white. Otherwise he was as described by Oliver (*N.Z. Birds*, page 413).

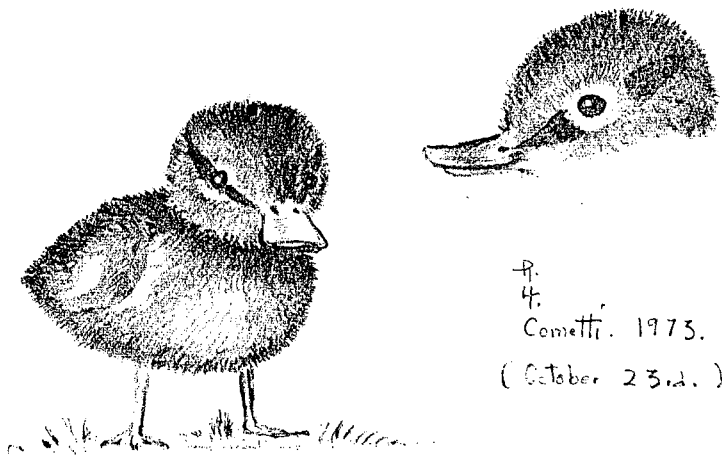
By 24 July there was much activity from the drake and one duck. The other duck by this time had disappeared. This activity was obviously mating display. The drake appeared to hold the duck's head completely under the water, with great splashings and a flurry of wings. During this nuptial display the birds swam swiftly in tight circles, skimmed along the surface for short distances, and independently swam completely submerged for distances estimated at twenty feet.

On 29 August the duck was seen at night feeding on the large lawn bordering the house side of the lake. Both birds arrived early in the morning through the rushes at the head of the lake, and fed at the lawn's edge and amongst the water lilies. They did not seem to be bothered by the many carp which inhabited that area of the lake, nor were they interested in the many young fish which swam about.

Throughout September the drake was sighted alone each morning feeding at the lake edge, or sunning himself on the lawn where he would invariably tuck his head under his wing, lift one leg, and go to sleep. He seemed quite tame, unafraid of both dogs and people, and one could easily approach to within three feet.



Drake



P.  
4.  
Cometti. 1973.

(October 23rd.)

Duckling (approximately 4 weeks)

On 8 October the drake appeared proudly from the rushes, followed by the duck and five ducklings. The ducklings were dark brown to black and none showed obvious signs of albinism. Two had slightly lighter patches of down around the neck and head, but neither of these two ducklings survived. All could be approached quite closely.

Both drake and duck kept the ducklings under close surveillance. They checked constantly with soft whistles and chortling. Although these birds have a wide repertoire of sounds and calls, they make no sound resembling a 'quack.' The commonest sound between the adult birds is a soft 'wort, wort.' I pitched these two sounds on a piano, and found the first 'wort' pitched at F sharp above middle C, and the second 'wort' a semitone below, two sounds in quick succession.

By 9 November, three ducklings had disappeared. On Kawau Island there are wild cats, rats, stoats and weasels.

As the ducklings grew, a fawn to yellow ochre colour appeared on the breast, face and in front and behind each wing. This appeared to leave a dark diagonal area from either side of the bill, slanting upwards to blend into the dark sepia behind the neck and head. The eye was thus set in the middle of this dark ellipse.

By January the two young birds were immature adults and appeared more and more on the lake with the drake. By early February he appeared to attack the young birds in turn in order to make them take off from the water to land several feet away. These 'training flights' increased in distance day by day. The drake, although at all times protective and solicitous, seemed quite vicious in his determination that the young birds would keep up the training schedule he had set them. At this time it was almost impossible to distinguish the young birds from the female parent, so similar were the markings. Often they would appear in pairs, and by the end of February it was realised that the two young birds had departed.

In April the drake also departed, and by the end of June, his mate likewise.

On 30 July 1974, two further Brown Teal arrived on the lake. However, we strongly suspected they were the two young birds from the previous season. The drake had the chestnut 'blush' on his breast, but did not appear to have the whitish marking on his throat as described by Oliver.

No mating or mating display was observed in the weeks after arrival, but the duck disappeared leaving the drake to make the lake and surrounding lawn his very own territory. This he did with a vengeance. About this time, Pukekos appeared in the valley, and when one tried to enter the lake the drake flew at it whistling quite noisily and chased it away. If an unsuspecting Red-billed Gull landed for a quick wash the drake chased it away also, often following it in flight across the dam to land in the sea water, rest for a while and fly back again. The Australian Welcome Swallow, now common in the area, the Magpie which stalked the lawn each morning, the White-

faced Heron and the Tui were all pursued in this manner by the game little drake.

On 20 October, sad to say, the duck reappeared without any ducklings. At no time have we been able to locate the nesting sites.

On all adult birds the metallic green band on the speculum is bright and pronounced. The tail feathers are long, and when viewed directly behind whilst the bird is on the ground, the tail is quite a magnificent fan shape spread wide and evenly. The birds have often been seen on the lawn at night, but rarely have they been seen in the afternoon.

At the time of writing (November 1974), this pair of Teal is living contentedly on the lake.

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#### A PIGEON AMONG THE SHAGS

On 8 April 1974 we watched a Kereru (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) behaving in an unusual way at Mangere Airport. Blank shots had been fired to scare away scores of White-faced Herons (*Ardea novaehollandiae*) which a very big tide had driven off their normal feeding grounds so that they were resting in flocks around the fringes of the airfield. The shots startled c. 30 Little Shags (*Phalacrocorax brevirostris*) which had been fishing a large pool of impounded sea-water. As the Little Shags flew in the direction of Ihumatao Point, they were joined by a Native Pigeon which, also startled by the shots, flew out from one of the many tall shelterbelts. Pigeon and Shags flew on a wide circuit and when after a mile or two the Shags headed back for the pond, the Pigeon stayed with them, came down to surface level, hovered and appeared to settle on the water, riding high like a skua. Fortunately the water was calm. The Pigeon rose, circled and briefly settled again, clearly puzzled and slow to realise that water was not its element nor were shags its proper company. It appeared to have been mesmerized by the Shags, and its reasoning may have been "if these fellow-fliers can settle here, why can't I?"

Just then some passing S.I. Pied Oystercatchers (*H. o. finschi*) caught its attention and perhaps saved its life. For a short distance it flew with them before breaking away and making its way back to the trees.

During this curious episode of which we had an unimpeded view, we were standing on a stop-bank beside the impounded sea-water. The attempted landings on the water took place at a distance of about 100 metres. Since the Native Pigeon is a very rare bird on the