

Making identification of grey ducks more certain

In a presentation to the 2016 Birds NZ conference (see abstract *Notornis* 63 (3-4):190) I highlighted the current uncertainty which surrounds identification of grey duck in NZ, and suggested that many birds identified as such might not be so. There is clear evidence, for example, that present-day duck hunters find grey ducks hard to distinguish from female mallards, and many extraneous sightings recorded in the OSNZ *Atlas* and in *e-Bird* suggest that difficulty may be encountered by some OSNZ members as well. It is my intention to re-define plumage and soft-part characters, readily visible in the field, that unequivocally distinguish a grey duck from a mallard (especially females) and from a 1st or 2nd generation hybrids between the 2 species. I seek to do this by reviewing the plumages, and stored information, of hybrids bred in captivity 1967-1972, and by establishing the extent of natural variability (including that related to sex and age) in face pattern, upper wing feather patterns and colours, and bill and leg colour shown by both grey ducks and mallards.

Funding provided by the Birds NZ Research Fund will be used to visit museum collections of *Anas superciliosa* in Australia where specimens will not be contaminated by possible past (or hidden) hybridisation with mallard, and later to evaluate historic grey duck specimens in the main NZ museum collections.

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