

Plumage variability in grey ducks.

Murray Williams

As essential background to determining whether grey ducks and their hybrids with mallard can be readily distinguished in the field, I assessed the variability of face and wing pattern and of leg and bill colour (and also differences in bill and wing lengths) in populations of *Anas superciliosa* from Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand. Three face patterns and 4 wing patterns could be readily distinguished and occurred in all populations but in very different frequencies. For example, the most common face pattern in Australia was very rare in New Zealand and uncommon in Pacific Islands. Australian and New Zealand ducks did not share bill colour and pattern and no legs of New Zealand birds displayed yellow/orange hues common to a third of Australian specimens. In addition, bill and wing lengths of Pacific Islands specimens were significantly shorter than all others while wing lengths of specimens from northern Australia were significantly shorter than those from southern Australia and New Zealand. These differences offer emphatic support for historic subspecific differentiation of Pacific Island specimens while the historic, but now discarded, taxonomic distinction between Australian and New Zealand populations based on phenotype deserves reconsideration. They also demonstrate the New Zealand population to have the most variable plumage of the 3 populations.

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