

The First Sight Record of the Garganey *Anas querquedula* in Victoria

by PETER S. LANSLEY¹ and CHRIS CHANDLER²

National Parks and Wildlife Division, Department of Conservation and Environment

¹ (Present Address: 27/99 Epsom Road, Ascot Vale, Victoria 3032)

² C/- Bayview Rd, Tankerton, French Island, Victoria 3921

Introduction

The Garganey *Anas querquedula* is a migratory duck which breeds in temperate Europe and Asia, migrating to tropical Africa and Asia for the southern summer as far as southern New Guinea and Australia (Beehler et al. 1986). Blakers et al. (1984) listed it as accidental to Australia, whereas Pizzey (1980) stated that it is probably an annual visitor. It has been recorded on four previous occasions in Victoria (Emison et al. 1987; *RAOU Newsletter* 76, 1988). This paper documents a fifth occurrence, being the first sight record in south-eastern Australia, and summarises the current status of the species in Australia.

The sighting

At c. 1100 h on 17 January 1989 while we were surveying wetland birds at Shepparton sewerage farm (36°20'S, 145°28'E), PSL saw an unusual small duck which he immediately suspected was a Garganey. The bird was then studied by both of us for about 45 minutes while it was swimming and feeding about 100 to 150 m from us. It was on a rock-lined sewage lagoon approximately three metres deep sparsely vegetated on one side with grass. The duck was associating closely with a flock of c. 500 Grey Teal *Anas gibberifrons* and c. 30 Australasian Shoveler *A. platyrhynchos*. Also present on the same lagoon were c. 30 Pink-eared Duck *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* and one Pacific Black Duck *A. superciliosa*. It was flushed twice for short periods, once flying as close as 50 m from us. We used Zeiss Notarem 10x40 binoculars and a Tasco 20x50 spotting scope. The weather was warm, humid, overcast and calm with a few drops of rain.

Field description

As adapted from original field notes of PSL:

A small duck, slightly but noticeably smaller than Grey Teal. General colour brown, a paler and warmer brown than that of a Black Duck. Head pattern similar to Black Duck but less bold, with a dark line extending from the upper mandible through the eye to the ear coverts and another dark line from lower mandible to a position approximately vertically below the eye. These two dark lines were separated by a broader pale buff stripe from bill to ear coverts. There was also a pale buff supercilium above the dark line through the eye. Undertail light brown. Breast warm brown perhaps slightly more rufous than upperside. Seemed to have a spotting effect on the flanks caused by broad pale edges to feathers. Underwing: black leading edge; coverts mainly white, forming a broader white central band behind the black leading edge. Darker (greyish brown?) on trailing edge. Upperwing had a white trailing edge with darker (greyish) central area (not seen as well as the underwing). In flight underparts appeared paler than upperwings, i.e. belly appeared pale. Flight fast and direct; similar to Teal. Behaviour: mainly swimming — quite active, circling and up-ending. Flushed twice, the second time flushing separately from the associated ducks. The bird was not heard calling.

The following characters were noted but not written down at the time of observation. Bill shape, similar to that of Grey Teal. Bill colour was plain (i.e. not bicoloured), probably grey or dull green.

Diagnosis

The bird was identified as a Garganey on the basis of size and the pattern of the underwing and head. Narrow black leading edge and broader white coverts to underwing, small size and the distinctive head as described above, are in combination features unique to female, juvenile and eclipse-plumaged male Garganeys. Our bird was identified as a female or juvenile male Garganey on the basis that the speculum colour was not blue enough for an eclipse-plumaged adult male.

Other small ducks which might be confused with Garganey in their female and juvenile plumages are:

- (1) Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* of the Americas, has a dissimilar upperwing lacking the white trailing edge; also a less well-marked head with little contrast between obscure supercilium and dark stripe through eyes; the species also has a narrow white eye-ring (Madge & Burn 1988) which our bird lacked.
- (2) Green-winged Teal *A. crecca* of Eurasia, is very plain-headed and has a white stripe on the lateral tail coverts and a bicoloured bill, not seen in our bird.
- (3) Juvenile Baikal Teal *A. formosa* of East Asia, as illustrated in Madge & Burn (1988), is somewhat similar but the supercilium is broken above the eye and the head markings are again not nearly as distinct as Garganey. Additionally it has pale lateral tail coverts, a character we did not see.

In relation to the local species, Pizzey (1980) regarded Garganeys as showing a Shoveler-like head pattern. We believe, however, that it more closely resembles the head pattern of a Pacific Black Duck, though not as bold. Confusion between Garganey and Pacific Black Duck is not likely when one considers the different size and wing patterns. Grey Teal and female Chestnut Teal *A. castanea* are slightly larger, have plain heads and not nearly the quantity of white on the underwing coverts as female Garganey. The female Chestnut is also somewhat darker.

All other species can be ruled out by head and wing markings and especially size.

Cramp et al. (1977) stated that the habitat preference of Garganey is for shallow vegetated wetlands, however this preference may not be applicable to birds which are vagrants, such as the Shepparton bird. In any case, there are numerous records from Sanderson and Palmerston sewage ponds in Darwin (J. McKean pers. comm., PSL pers. obs.).

Both observers have had previous field experience with Garganey in eclipse plumage. CC observed thousands in Sri Lanka in December 1984 and PSL saw about five near Darwin in November and December 1984. We are both 100% confident that this bird was a Garganey. The record has been unanimously accepted by the Records Appraisal Committee of the RAOU (Bob Patterson pers. comm., February 1990).

Summary of previous Australian occurrences

The Garganey was first recorded in Australia in October 1881, a specimen taken by C. Hooper at Lake Colac, Victoria (Campbell 1924). Two were subsequently shot together at Lake Connewarre, Victoria in March-April 1896 (Anon. 1899). The third Victorian record was one shot at Lake Buloke on 20 February 1965 (*Bird Observer* 407, 5), and the fourth, a first-year female shot at Meridian Road swamps near Mildura on 3 April 1988, not 9 April 1988 as reported in *RAOU Newsletter* 76, 1988 (Museum of Victoria, Les Christidis pers. comm.). Our bird therefore constitutes the fifth Victorian record, and the first sight record.

Elsewhere in Australia, the bird began being reported in the 1960s, with records near Darwin, N.T. beginning in October 1967 (Crawford 1972). John McKean (pers. comm.) has records for almost every year in the 1970s and 1980s for the Darwin area, and considers the bird to be an annual visitor there and also in the north of Western

Australia. There is one record in the Northern Territory outside the Top End, that of Roberts (1980) at Alice Springs on 25 December 1978.

In Western Australia, the Garganey was first reported at Yanchep in the south-west from 19-31 March 1971 (Congreve 1971). There is a record in the *Atlas of Australian Birds* (Blakers et al. 1984) from the Ashburton River on 25 August 1980, one of the few winter records. It is the Kimberley area which appears most significant for the species in Australia, with a group of at least 24 on the Parry wetlands (Lower Ord River) on 29 March 1988 (Jaensch & Vervest 1988), and other records from the area in the 1980s (Mitchell 1987-1989).

In Queensland it has been recorded in three localities from the south-east (Slater 1970) and also north Queensland (Condon 1975). A recent record is of five near Townsville on 18 February 1988, four staying until 18 March (J. McKean pers. comm.). The bird is evidently less common there than in the north-west of Australia.

The species is also recorded from Christmas Island, an Australian territory in the north Indian Ocean (Stokes et al. 1987).

Several of the recent records throughout Australia are listed by Mitchell (1987-1989). There are no records up to the end of 1989 in New South Wales (D. Hobcroft, G. Holmes pers. comm.), South Australia (J. Cox pers. comm.) or Tasmania (R. Patterson pers. comm.), though it seems inevitable that it will soon be added to the lists of those States.

From the above, it is clear that the Garganey is an annual visitor in small numbers to the north and north-west of Australia and a vagrant south of the tropics. Observers throughout the country should be aware of the possibility of encountering this and other vagrant ducks, particularly between October and May.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following people for their help in preparing this paper and for the useful comments on a draft: Mike Carter, Andrew Corrick, Richard Loyn and John McKean.

References

- Anon. (1899), 'Natural history notes', *Victorian naturalist* **15**, 151.
- Blakers, M., Davies, S.J.J.F. & Reilly, P.N. (1984), *The Atlas of Australian Birds*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.
- Beehler, B.M., Pratt, T.K. & Zimmerman, D.A. (1986), *Birds of New Guinea*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Campbell, A.J. (1924), 'The Garganey Teal *Querquedula querquedula*', *Emu* **24**, 146.
- Condon, H.T. (1975), *Checklist of the Birds of Australia, I. Non-passerines*, RAOU, Melbourne.
- Congreve, P. (1971), 'First record of the Garganey in Western Australia', *West. Aust. Nat.* **12**, 48.
- Cramp, S. (Ed.) et al. (1977), *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: Birds of the Western Palaearctic, vol. 1*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Crawford, D.N. (1972), 'Birds of Darwin area, with some records from other parts of Northern Territory', *Emu* **72**, 131-113.
- Emison, W.B., Beardsell, C.M., Norman, F.I., Loyn, R.H. & Bennett, S.C. (1987), *Atlas of Victorian Birds*, Dept Conservation, Forests & Lands and RAOU, Melbourne.
- Jaensch, R. & Vervest, R. (1988), 'Waterbirds in the Kimberley — Autumn 1988', *RAOU Newsletter* **77**, 1-2.
- Madge, S. & Burn H. (1988), *Wildfowl, An Identification Guide to the Ducks, Geese and Swans of the World*, Christopher Helm, London.
- Mitchell, P. (1987-1989), (Ed.), 'Unusual sighting reports', *Bird Observer* **660**, 2; **674**, 38; **676**, 63; **685**, 26; **687**, 51.
- Pizzey, G. (1980), *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, Collins, Sydney.
- Roberts, G.J. (1980), 'Records of interest from the Alice Springs region', *S. Aust. Ornithol.* **28**, 99-102.
- Slater, P. (1970), *A Field Guide to Australian Birds, Vol. 1, Non Passerines*, Rigby, Adelaide.
- Stokes, T., Merton, D., Hicks, J. & Tranter, J. (1987), 'Additional records of birds from Christmas Island, Indian Ocean', *Aust. Bird Watcher* **12**, 1-7.