

Ruddy duck

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Native to: North America and western South America

Habitat: Lowland wetlands with lush emergent vegetation and areas of open water

A small, compact duck with broad, short wings and narrow, stiff tail erect. The males are easily recognised by their distinctive blue bill, often chestnut held body and white face. The females are a dull brown colour, with a cream coloured face intersected by a dark horizontal line.

Introduced into wildfowl collections in the UK in the 1950s and natural dispersal into Northern Ireland has led to an estimated 25 - 30 pairs with a wintering population of around seventy to seventy five birds. Due to a going eradication programme their numbers may be significantly lower.

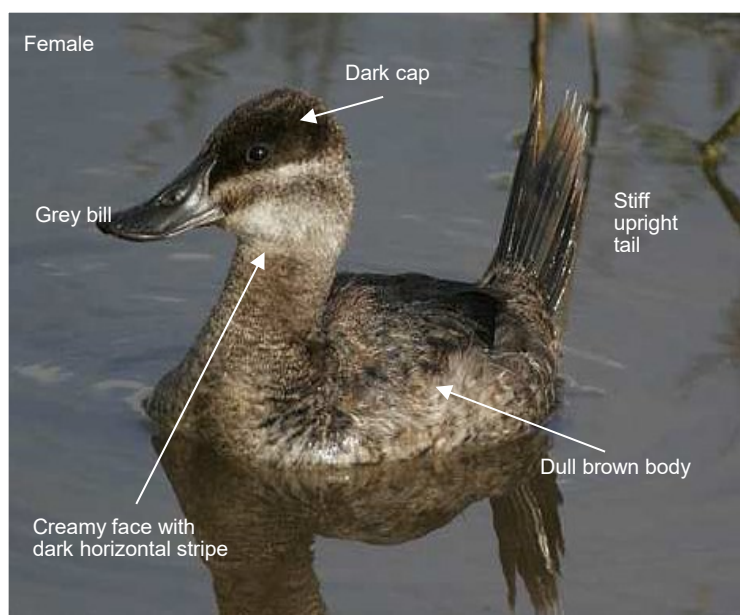
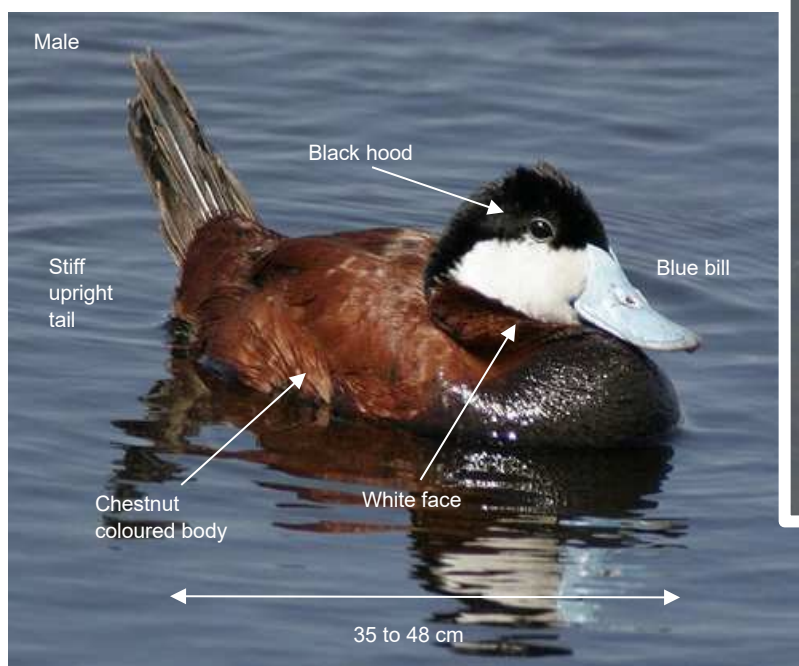
The ruddy duck is a serious threat to populations of white-headed duck (classified as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature) in Europe through hybridisation. Eradication is being carried out in the UK to ensure the continued survival of the white-headed duck in Europe.

Under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is offence to intentionally keep; breed; transport to, from or within Northern Ireland, use or exchange Ruddy duck; or to release it into the environment.



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Key ID Features



Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Identification throughout the year

Ruddy duck are resident throughout the year in the UK. The plumage of females remains the same throughout the year. Between autumn and early spring the male's bill turns grey and its body colour becomes dull brown, however its white face remains. During the breeding season male ruddy duck are likely to be in the vicinity of any females and can be used to help identification, however, outside the breeding season individuals can occur on their own.

Field Signs

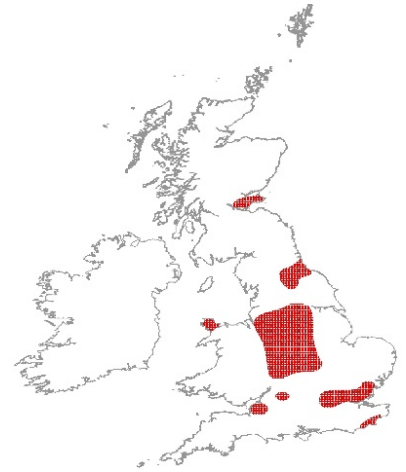
The following field signs are shared by many species of duck and should not be used for the purpose of specific identification as ruddy duck.

- Call - Generally silent.
- Nest - In thick vegetation on water, creating a platform of reed or rush stems and leaves.
- Eggs - 6-10 in clutch, dull or creamy white. Breeding period mid-April to July.

Distribution

Populations in GB have led to natural dispersal to Northern Ireland

Source: GB Non-native species secretariat



Similar Species

In the UK, male ruddy duck are unlikely to be confused with any other species. However, female ruddy duck are similar to females of a number of other duck species. The majority of female ducks are generally brown and are distinguished by a combination of size, body shape and subtle plumage characteristics.

Tufted Duck

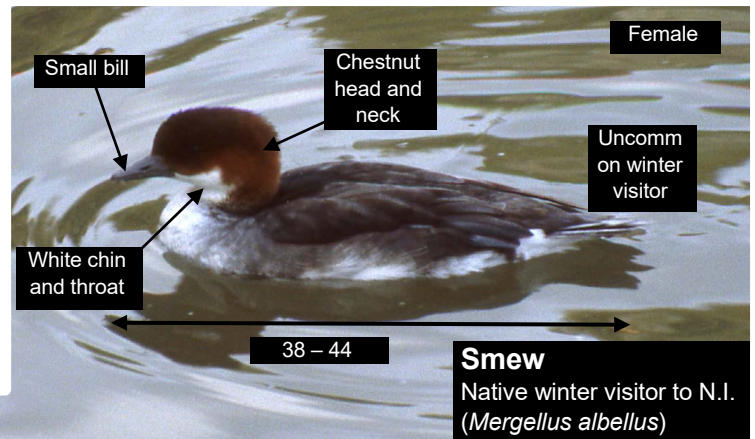
Native resident in N.I.
(*Aythya fuligula*)

Female

Brown head and body

Darker wings, paler breast and sides

40 – 47 cm



Female

Small bill

Chestnut head and neck

White chin and throat

Uncomm on winter visitor

38 – 44

Smew

Native winter visitor to N.I.
(*Mergellus albellus*)

Common Scoter

Native resident and winter visitor to N.I.
(*Melanitta nigra*)

Female

Dark cap, paler face

Unlikely to be confused with ruddy duck as usually found on coastal waters

Brown body

Large bulbous bill with some yellow

44 – 45 cm

References and further reading:

Lever, C (2005) "Naturalised Birds of the World" T & A D Poyser

Mullarney, K, Svensson, L, Zetterstrom, D and Grant, PJ (2001) "Bird Guide" HarperCollins
Snow, DW and Perrins, CM (1998) "The Birds of the Western Palearctic". Oxford University Press

Photos from: Len Blumin, Robin Ward, Lynn Watson.

Adapted for Northern Ireland
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