

WHISTLING DUCKS (TREE DUCKS)

INFORMATION SHEET

It is recommended that as well as reading this leaflet you also read the BWA information leaflet "Starting To keep Wildfowl". This covers details of enclosure, fencing and general husbandry requirements.

NAME

Whistling Ducks, otherwise known as Tree Ducks, are not really tree ducks at all. They do not perch a great deal and only rarely nest in tree holes. They are much less arboreal than the Perching Ducks for instance. The name Whistling Duck is far more appropriate and descriptive, as all the species in the tribe use a unique, very un-ducklike whistle. Their strange calls range from distinctive high-pitched shrill sounds to clear or squeaky whistles.



Whistling Ducklings

RANGE

Most of the Whistling Ducks are tropical or semitropical in distribution in both the Old and New Worlds. They live in the warmer lowland areas of their range. The more tropical species do not need to migrate.

APPEARANCE

The males and females look very similar to each other and also have similar vocal calls and displays. They all have broad rounded wings, large feet, fairly long necks and legs and look rather more like small swans or geese than ducks. However, they differ from the swans and geese and from all the other wildfowl, in the colouring of their ducklings. The downy young tend to be strongly patterned, with a characteristic light stripe that extends under the eyes and back around the nape, without any gaps. This contrasting colour pattern is particularly apparent on the duckling of the Red-billed Whistling Duck.

The adults range in size from the Cuban Whistling Duck, which weighs over two pounds, down to the Javan Whistling Duck, which weighs less than one pound.

REQUIREMENTS

Whistling Ducks are not as commonly kept as Dabbling or Diving Ducks. Fulvous, Red-billed and White-faced are fairly popular in mixed collections, where they will feed on the same wheat and breeder pellet mix.

Probably the best species to start with is the Fulvous as they are much hardier than the others. This can be a particular problem with some Whistling Ducks as they may suffer from frostbite during the winter. However, with a sheltered pond and if possible, an actual shelter, the White-faced and Red-billed species will be quite happy.

Another fairly hardy species is the Cuban, but being a little bit bigger than the other species they can be rather quarrelsome.

BEHAVIOUR

The pair bonds of Whistling Ducks are very strong so they usually spend most of their time together and can often be seen carefully and tenderly preening each other.

The White-faced Whistling Duck seems to be the most highly social and engages in this mutual nibbling even more than the other species of the Whistling Duck. This friendship between pairs is particularly obvious when they are separated as they tend to call loudly to each other until reunited. They can also be stimulated to whistle in response to an imitation of their own call, especially if they cannot see where it is coming from!

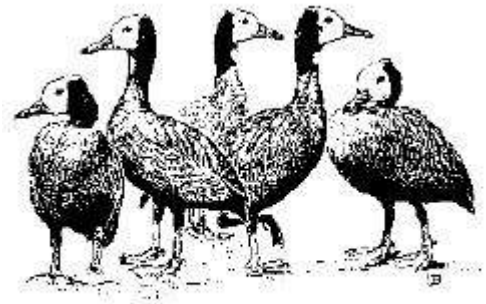
When frightened they sometimes stand absolutely still and quiet with their long necks stretched up as high as they will go.

They are all vegetarians. They either upend or dive for food, which they can do remarkably well, or sometimes they graze.

NESTING

In a collection they are prepared to use a variety of different nest sites in ground cover, hollow logs, nest boxes, or sometimes even up in trees. The nest is not heavily lined with down as are other waterfowl nests.

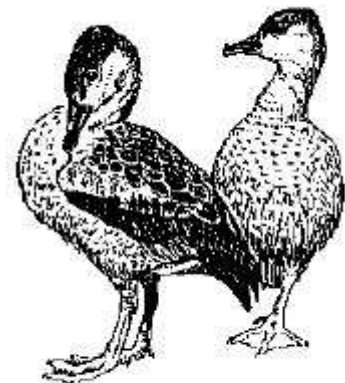
They lay large clutches of eggs, perhaps 10 to 15 eggs. The eggs are white and take about 28-31 days to hatch. Both sexes take part in incubating their eggs and rearing the youngsters. So if they are left to rear their own young then they will be far safer separated from the rest of the collection and away from vermin in a covered run. As the adults tend to be so tame this penning does not put them under any undue stress.



White-faced Whistling Ducks

LIST OF THE TRIBE DENDROCYGNINI (WHISTLING DUCKS OR TREE DUCKS):

- Spotted Whistling Duck - *Dendrocygna guttata*
- Plumed or Eyton's Whistling Duck - *Dendrocygna eytoni*
- East Indian Wandering Whistling Duck - *Dendrocygna arcuata arcuata*
- Australian Wandering Whistling Duck - *Dendrocygna arcuata australis*
- Lesser Wandering Whistling Duck - *Dendrocygna arcuata pygmaea*
- Fulvous Whistling Duck – *Dendrocygna bicolor*
- Black-billed or Cuban Whistling Duck - *Dendrocygna arborea*
- Lesser or Indian or Javan Whistling Duck - *Dendrocygna javanica*
- White-faced Whistling Duck - *Dendrocygna viduata*
- Northern Red-billed Whistling Duck - *Dendrocygna autumnalis autumnalis*
- Southern Red-billed Whistling Duck - *Dendrocygna autumnalis discolor*



Wandering Whistling Ducks

This leaflet is only a brief introduction and the successful husbandry of all livestock depends on being well informed about them. The BWA Bookshop sells a number of specialist publications which cover all aspects of keeping both Wildfowl and Domestic Waterfowl. All new keepers are strongly advised to obtain a book appropriate to their interest.