

## = Ruddy shelduck =

The ruddy shelduck ( *Tadorna ferruginea* ), known in India as the Brahminy duck , is a member of the family Anatidae . It is a distinctive waterfowl , 58 to 70 cm ( 23 to 28 in ) in length with a wingspan of 110 to 135 cm ( 43 to 53 in ) . It has orange @-@ brown body plumage with a paler head , while the tail and the flight feathers in the wings are black , contrasting with the white wing @-@ coverts . It is a migratory bird , wintering in the Indian subcontinent and breeding in southeastern Europe and central Asia , though there are small resident populations in North Africa . It has a loud honking call .

The ruddy shelduck mostly inhabits inland water @-@ bodies such as lakes , reservoirs and rivers . The male and female form a lasting pair bond and the nest may be well away from water , in a crevice or hole in a cliff , tree or similar site . A clutch of about eight eggs is laid and is incubated solely by the female for about four weeks . The young are cared for by both parents and fledge about eight weeks after hatching .

In central and eastern Asia , populations are steady or rising , but in Europe they are generally in decline . Altogether , the birds have a wide range and large total population , and the International Union for Conservation of Nature has assessed their conservation status as being of " least concern " .

## = Taxonomy =

The ruddy shelduck ( *Tadorna ferruginea* ) is a member of the shelduck genus *Tadorna* ; in the wildfowl family Anatidae . The bird was first described in 1764 by the German zoologist and botanist Peter Simon Pallas who named it *Anas ferruginea* , but later it was transferred to the genus *Tadorna* with the other shelducks . Some authorities place it in the genus *Casarca* along with the South African shelduck ( *T. cana* ) , the Australian shelduck ( *T. tadornoides* ) and the Paradise shelduck ( *T. variegata* ) . Phylogenetic analysis shows that it is most closely related to the South African shelduck . In captivity , the ruddy shelduck has been known to hybridise with several other members of *Tadorna* , with several members of the dabbling duck genus *Anas* , and with the Egyptian goose ( *Alopochen aegyptiaca* ) . No subspecies are recognised .

The genus name *Tadorna* comes from the French " *tadorne* " , the common shelduck , and may originally derive from a Celtic word meaning " pied waterfowl " . The English name " shelduck " dates from around 1700 and means the same . The species name *ferruginea* is Latin for " rusty " and refers to the colour of the plumage .

## = Description =

The ruddy shelduck grows to a length of 58 to 70 cm ( 23 to 28 in ) and has a 110 ? 135 cm ( 43 ? 53 in ) wingspan . The male has orange @-@ brown body plumage and a paler , orange @-@ brown head and neck , separated from the body by a narrow black collar . The rump , flight feathers , tail @-@ coverts and tail feathers are black and there are iridescent green speculum feathers on the inner surfaces of the wings . Both upper and lower wing @-@ coverts are white , this feature being particularly noticeable in flight but hardly visible when the bird is at rest . The bill is black and the legs are dark grey . The female is similar but has a rather pale , whitish head and neck and lacks the black collar , and in both sexes , the colouring is variable and fades as the feathers age . The birds moult at the end of the breeding season and the male loses the black collar , but a further partial moult between December and April restores it . Juveniles are similar to the female but are a darker shade of brown .

The call is a series of loud , nasal honking notes , it being possible to discern the difference between those produced by the male and the female . The calls are made both on the ground and in the air , and the sounds are variable according to the circumstances in which they are uttered .

## = Distribution and habitat =

There are very small resident populations of this species in north west Africa and Ethiopia , but the main breeding area of the bird is from southeast Europe across central Asia to Lake Baikal , Mongolia , and western China . Eastern populations are mostly migratory , wintering in the Indian subcontinent . This species has colonised the island of Fuerteventura in the Canary Islands , first breeding there in 1994 , and reaching a population of almost fifty pairs by 2008 . The ruddy shelduck is a common winter visitor in India where it arrives by October and departs by April . Its typical breeding habitat is large wetlands and rivers with mud flats and shingle banks , and it is found in large numbers on lakes and reservoirs . It breeds in high altitude lakes and swamps in Jammu and Kashmir . Outside the breeding season it prefers lowland streams , sluggish rivers , ponds , flooded grassland , marshes and brackish lagoons .

Although becoming quite rare in southeast Europe and southern Spain , the ruddy shelduck is still common across much of its Asian range . It may be this population which gives rise to vagrants as far west as Iceland , Great Britain and Ireland . However , since the European population is declining , it is likely that most occurrences in western Europe in recent decades are escapes or feral birds . Although this bird is observed in the wild from time to time in eastern North America , no evidence has been found that this is a genuine case of vagrancy .

This shelduck mostly frequents open locations on inland bodies of water such as lakes , reservoirs and rivers . It is seldom seen in forested areas but does occur in brackish water and saline lagoons . Though more common in the lowlands , it also inhabits higher altitudes and in central Asia is one of the few waterbirds , along with the bar-headed goose ( *Anser indicus* ) , to be found on lakes at 5 000 m ( 16 400 ft ) .

#### == Behaviour ==

The ruddy shelduck is a mainly nocturnal bird . It is omnivorous and feeds on grasses , the young shoots of plants , grain and water plants as well as both aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates . On land it grazes on the foliage , in the water it dabbles in the shallows , and at greater depths , it upends , but it does not dive .

The ruddy shelduck is usually found in pairs or small groups and rarely forms large flocks . However , moulting and wintering gatherings on chosen lakes or slow rivers can be very large . Gatherings of over four thousand birds have been recorded on the Koshi Barrage and in the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve in Nepal , and over ten thousand at Lake Gölü in Turkey .

The birds arrive at their main breeding locations in central Asia in March and April . There is a strong pair bond between the male and female and it is thought they pair for life . In their breeding quarters , the birds are very aggressive towards their own kind and towards other species . The female in particular approaches intruders with head lowered and neck outstretched , uttering anger calls . If the intruder stands its ground , the female returns to the male and runs round him , inciting him to attack . He may or may not do so . Mating takes place on the water after a brief courtship ritual involving neck stretching , head dipping and tail raising . The nesting site is often far away from water in a hole in a tree or ruined building , a crevice in a cliff , among sand dunes or in an animal burrow . The nest is constructed by the female using feathers and down and some grasses .

A clutch of about eight eggs ( range six to twelve ) is laid between late April and early June . These have a dull gloss and are creamy white , averaging 68 by 47 mm ( 2 68 by 1 85 in ) . Incubation is done by the female while the male stands in attendance nearby . The eggs hatch after about twenty eight days and both parents care for the young , which fledge in a further fifty five days . After breeding the adults moult , losing the power of flight for about a month while they do so . Before moulting they move to large water bodies where they can more easily avoid predation while they are flightless . The family may stay together as a group for some time ; the autumn migration starts around September and the young may mature in their second year . North African birds breed about five weeks earlier , and their breeding success is greater in wet summers .

= = Status = =

Buddhists regard the ruddy shelduck as sacred and this gives the birds some protection in central and eastern Asia , where the population is thought to be steady or even rising . The Pembo Black @-@ necked Crane Reserve in Tibet is an important wintering area for ruddy ducks , and here they receive protection . In Europe on the other hand , populations are generally declining as wetlands are drained and the birds are hunted . However , they are less vulnerable than some other waterfowl because of their adaptability to new habitats such as reservoirs .

The ruddy shelduck has a very wide range and an estimated total population size of 170 @,@ 000 to 225 @,@ 000 individuals . The overall population trend is unclear as some local populations are increasing while others are decreasing . The bird does not appear to meet the higher criteria necessary to be considered threatened , and the International Union for Conservation of Nature assesses that its conservation status is of " least concern " . It is one of the species to which the Agreement on the Conservation of African @-@ Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds ( AEWA ) applies .