

*Oxyura leucocephala* White-headed Duck

**Field characters.** 43–48 cm, of which body and tail (8–10 cm) nearly three-quarters; wing-span 62–70 cm. Medium-sized, short-necked and dumpy stiff-tailed duck, with broad, swollen bill, large and prominent head, and relatively long and graduated, stiffly projecting tail often characteristically cocked; ♂ has blue bill, largely white head, black neck, and grey and reddish body. Sexes dissimilar and with clear seasonal differences in ♂; juveniles resemble ♀, but young ♂ slightly different.

**ADULT MALE.** Bright blue bill, conspicuously swollen at base. Black crown patch, and otherwise all-white head and nape. Black neck shading into chestnut breast and grey and red-brown upperparts. Silvery-white lower breast and belly mottled with grey, black-brown wings and grey-brown tail. Legs bluish-grey with dusky webs. **MALE ECLIPSE.** More black on crown, sometimes extending right down nape and with occasional spots of black on the white cheeks. Rest of plumage paler and greyer with more prominent fine barring. Bill slate-grey. **ADULT FEMALE.** Blue-grey bill; dark brown head and nape, except for buff-white chin, throat, lower cheeks, and narrow line below eye; grey-brown neck and red-brown upper breast. Rest of plumage much as summer ♂, but more grey-brown with stronger barring on upperparts, breast, and flanks. **FEMALE NON-BREEDING.** Similar, but with slate-grey bill and dusky grey-brown plumage, rather than grey and red-brown. **JUVENILE.** Somewhat variable, but like duller and paler winter ♀; young ♂ said to be redder on back (Delacour 1959).

Adult ♂ unmistakable, but in eclipse might be confused with eclipse ♂ Ruddy Duck *O. jamaicensis*, when distinguished by swollen base to bill, larger-looking head and, even in individuals whose black cap extends down nape, by more extensive white extending above eyes and across forehead. ♀♀ of these species much more similar but, apart from smaller size, ♀ *O. jamaicensis* lacks swollen base to bill and usually has less well-defined cheek stripe, though this variable in both.

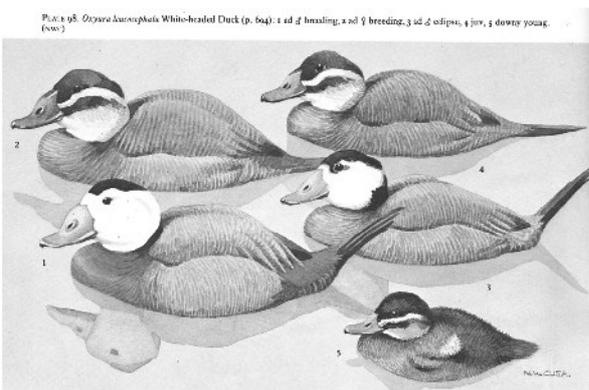


FIG. 4-8. *Oxyura leucocephala* White-headed Duck (p. 644): 1 ad ♂ breeding, 2 ad ♀ breeding, 3 ad ♂ eclipse, 4 juv. ♂ downy young (cont.)

**Bare parts.** **ADULT MALE.** Iris bright yellow to orange-yellow. Bill in breeding plumage bright sky blue, in eclipse slaty. Foot reddish or plumbeous grey, webs and joints black. **ADULT FEMALE.** Iris light yellow. Bill dark leaden. Foot leaden grey, tinged red on tarsus and toes. **DOWNY YOUNG.** Iris brown. **JUVENILE.** Iris pale grey, light-brown, or yellow-brown. Bill light leaden. Foot pale cinnamon. (Dementiev and Gladkov 1952; Bauer and Glutz 1969; Ali and Ripley 1968.)

**Plumages.** **ADULT MALE BREEDING.** Head mostly white; crown, narrow ring round eye, and collar round upper neck black; in some, nape and lower chin also black. Lower neck, chest, and upper mantle deep chestnut-red, sometimes tinged violet. Lower mantle, scapulars, and flanks cinnamon-pink, yellow-grey when worn. Upperparts finely speckled and vermiculated grey-brown; feathers of chest and flanks finely barred black subterminally. Back and rump grey-brown, barred grey or buff, upper tail-coverts deep copper-chestnut. Feathers of belly, vent, and under tail-coverts grey-brown, tipped yellow-ochre. Tail black or dark brown. Primaries and inner webs of secondaries and inner tertials grey-brown, rest of upperwing similar, but finely speckled or vermiculated buff or pale grey. Underwing pale grey, suffused white on larger coverts; axillaries white. **ADULT FEMALE BREEDING.** Forehead, crown, hindneck, and sides of head dark brown, feathers marked chestnut subterminally. Narrow streak from base of bill below eye to occiput off-white, speckled dark brown. Sides of neck and throat grey-brown, barred pale grey or buff; chin white. Lower neck, chest, mantle, scapulars, flanks, and upper tail-coverts deep chestnut-red, feathers subterminally barred sooty-black; lower scapulars paler, yellow or grey-brown. Back and rump grey-brown, barred grey or buff. Breast, belly, and vent ochre, mottled grey-brown on belly and barred on vent and under tail. Wing and tail as adult ♂. **ADULT MALE NON-BREEDING (Eclipse).** As breeding (including white sides of head), but sides and front of neck pale grey, barred dark grey, instead of black collar. Black of crown more extensive, sometimes contiguous with black hindneck and eye-ring; occasionally, black spot behind ear-coverts. Chest orange-yellow, mantle and scapulars cinnamon to buff, more heavily vermiculated black, upper tail-coverts chestnut; underparts more heavily spotted grey-brown. **ADULT FEMALE NON-BREEDING.** As breeding, but dark brown replaces deep chestnut; streak below eye and sides of neck often whiter. **DOWNY YOUNG.** Head and neck dark brown, distinct buff-white streak from base of bill under eye to ear; chin, throat, and sides of neck pale grey. Chest, upperparts, and flanks dark brown, mantle and centre of chest greyer; indistinct grey-brown spot on side of back behind wing. Belly and vent white. Down of tail well developed, with long, stiff shafts. **JUVENILE.** As adult ♀, but without chestnut tinge, except a little on barred upper tail-coverts. Mantle and scapulars dark grey-brown, finely vermiculated and speckled pink-cinnamon. Head and hindneck browner, white line below eye broader and paler. Chin, upper throat, and sides of upper neck pale grey; lower neck mottled pale grey and sooty. Feathers of chest yellow-brown, those of breast, belly, and vent grey-brown, edged buff. Under tail-coverts white. Shafts of tail feathers bare and broadened near tip (down still adhering in late summer). Sexes difficult to distinguish but ♂ with rusty cinnamon cast on chest and ♀ more uniform pattern on head and neck (Dementiev and Gladkov 1952). **FIRST IMMATURE NON-BREEDING AND BREEDING.** Not described. Probably gradually change from juvenile into immature non-breeding (resembling adult ♀ non-breeding), in winter, and then into breeding in spring. Some ♂♂ with almost completely black head, recorded locally in east of range, perhaps rare black-headed morph of adult ♂. (♂♂ of closely related *O. maccoa* and *O. australis* always black-headed.) (Dementiev and Gladkov 1952; Savage 1965; C. S. Roselaar.)

**Moult.** **ADULT POST-BREEDING.** Body and tail August–September; tail-feathers almost simultaneous. **ADULT PRE-BREEDING.** Body and tail April–May. Time of wing moult not precisely known. Possibly both sexes replace flight-feathers simultaneously July–August when young growing; at least some ♂♂ in wing moult December–January (no data on ♀♀ available), showing new-grown wings February, or flightless January (Dementiev and Gladkov 1952). In related *O. maccoa* and *O. jamaicensis*, ♂ and ♀ moult wing twice a year while in *O. australis* ♂ seems to moult twice, ♀ once (Palmer 1972). **POST-JUVENILE.** Not described. Timing of 1st pre-breeding moult apparently as in adult.