

JR FACT FILE



FRECKLED DUCK

Stictonetta naevos



AT A GLANCE

Size:

From 48cm to 50cm long, weighs around 910g.

Diet:

Wetland plants such as grasses and sedges as well as algae, seeds, and small invertebrates.

Habitat:

Freshwater wetlands and creeks with dense cover. Most commonly found in inland south-eastern and south-western Australia but can sometimes be found in other areas throughout Australia. At risk of habitat loss due to land clearing.

Life Span:

Life expectancy can be as low as two years due to common threats.

Common Threats:

The Freckled Duck is one of the world's rarest waterbirds. The numbers of these ducks have declined to an estimated 20,000 birds in the wild, although this number changes seasonally with breeding.

It has been estimated that the wild population could reduce by up to

20% over the next 15 years, as a result of the ongoing loss of their wetland breeding grounds, which are being continually drained and modified for development and agricultural purposes.

The recent prolonged drought has also negatively impacted on the habitat of the Freckled Duck, limiting replenishment of the wetlands.

Although they are protected, they are sometimes shot by hunters who mistake them for game birds.

What is a Freckled Duck?

As the name suggests they are covered with light spots that look like freckles. The freckles can be difficult to see from a distance (the duck simply looks 'dark' in colour) so the best way to recognise a Freckled Duck is from its large and peaked crowd head (think 'egg-head'). Its bill is distinctively narrow and turned up slightly at the end.

Freckled Ducks are very shy and fly low and often circle around wetlands before leaving, even when frightened. Despite being fully protected, this makes them an easy target for hunters. They have a distinctive 'hunchback' posture while

flying, with their head held low and a fast wing beat. Compared to other ducks, the Freckled Duck turns slowly and can look clumsy as it lands.

Where Does a Freckled Duck Live?

The Freckled Duck is most commonly found in inland southeast Australia as well as the southwest of Western Australia. They prefer freshwater swamps and creeks that have areas of dense vegetation to hide in. During dry periods when wetlands and swamps dry up, the Freckled Duck moves to other locations in search of water.

What Does a Freckled Duck Eat?

Being so shy, the Freckled Duck likes to feed in the cover of dawn or dusk and even at night. It eats a variety of swamp/wetland plants including sedges and grasses, algae as well as small invertebrates. It may also move to feed in open water after breeding or during periods of drought.

A Freckled Duck's Family Life:

The Freckled Duck commonly breeds from September to December in large temporary swamps created by

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FASCINATING FACTS:

- THE FRECKLED DUCK IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S RAREST WATERBIRDS.
- DURING THE BREEDING SEASON, THE MALE FRECKLED DUCK HAS A BRIGHT RED PATCH AT THE BASE OF HIS BILL.

flooding in the Bulloo and Lake Eyre basins and the Murray Darling System.

Nests are hidden at the water's edge in dense vegetation and are made of twigs and lined with a cosy layer of feathers. Between five and fourteen eggs are incubated by the mother for 28 days. Chirping can be heard from the eggs a few days before they are due to hatch.

Like all ducks, Freckled Duck chicks hatch with a covering of down (soft feathers) and with their eyes open. They learn to walk and swim within a few hours and will forage close to their mother. She keeps watch for danger as they forage and sometimes helps her chicks find food.

At one to two years old, they reach sexual maturity. During the breeding season, the male Freckled Duck has a bright red patch at the base of his bill. The courtship display involves a forwards head-thrust from the male with soft buzzing quacks followed by a good 'tail wag'. The female responds by raising her head with a throaty kind of quack... then the whole process begins again!

Where to see a Freckled Duck in Victoria?

The Serendip Sanctuary west of Melbourne is a great area to see the Freckled Duck. A wetland environment has been developed in the park to encourage breeding and to provide the public with the opportunity to view and learn about one of the rarest duck species in Australia.

Want to Know More?

www.dse.vic.gov.au
(search: Freckled Duck)