

BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee

Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission to document a major rare bird in Australia. Its use is NOT mandatory. Please attach and/or include all relevant information including any digital images. Please Email the completed form/submission to the BARC Chair, Tony Palliser tonyp@bigpond.net.au

BARC considers submissions that include a minimum of the submitter's name(s), the bird species claimed and the location and date(s) of the record. However, more information and evidence will usually be required for BARC to accept a record. So, please submit as much detailed information about the bird as possible.

If you choose not to use this form please make sure all relevant information requested in this form is included in your submission. However, it is our preference that you fully complete sections "A" and "B", or follow their headings, so that BARC has some continuity between all submissions.

Section A: Submitter details	
Your name(s) Joint submissions are fine	Angus McNab Danny Rogers
Your email, phone or address	

Section B: Record details	
Common and scientific names Include subspecies if relevant	Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>)
Site location (with GPS if possible)	<p>Western Treatment Plant: A very large complex of sewage treatment and conservation ponds between Melbourne and Geelong.</p> <p>The January 2019 sightings were mainly in T Section pond 2 (-38.045° S, 144.506° E), occasionally in adjacent ponds after disturbance. Although initially created as a sewage pond, it now receives recycled water and hasn't treated sewage since the early 2000's.</p> <p>The October 2019 sightings were in the Lake Borrie Complex of the Western Treatment Plant, about 7 km away. It seen several times in Borrie Pond 30 (-38.016° S, 144.576° E) and at least once on the adjacent Borrie Pond 25.</p> <p>We don't know where the bird was between January and October. In theory it is possible that the bird remained hidden at the WTP through that period – it is a very large sewage farm, and many of the ponds are inaccessible to birdwatchers (they can only be visited by Melbourne Water staff or contractors with work permits). However, the bird (a rather distinctive one!) was not found during duck counts over the entire WTP in mid-winter – the ducks get a fair bit of scrutiny in these surveys (e.g. we regularly pick up the odd Chestnut-Teal/Black Duck hybrid, birds that are overlooked by most birders). Most duck species at the WTP show strong seasonal changes in abundance, and numbers in winter are low. We think it's likely the bird left the treatment plant; it might even have migrated successfully to the northern hemisphere and back.</p>
Date(s) and time(s) of record (First and last date of occurrence if known)	<p>First observation - January 3rd, 2019</p> <p>Angus first observation – January 16th, 2019. Seen by Danny on 3rd and 19th Jan 2019.</p> <p>Last observation (before disappearing for 9 months) – January 24th, 2019</p> <p>Angus re-observation date – October 20th, 2019. Seen by Danny on 26th October 2019.</p>

	It is unclear where the duck was between the last January sighting and the October sighting.
How many individuals were there?	One. There is actually no concrete proof that the same individual was seen in January and October 2019. However the plumage succession was consistent with what would be expected in a single individual, and the chances of Australia's first two Tufted Ducks turning up at the Western Treatment Plant in the same year seem astronomically small.
What was the distance to the bird(s)?	I cannot comment on the original distance of the bird when first spotted but has been seen by at least 100+ birders (some suggestions of 500). Most observations were between 100-200 m, with the bird swimming to the centre or far side of the pond when observers were present (along with the other ducks on the same pond. Some observers, (including Angus) watched the bird at distances of 50-100m
Habitat description	<p>The January sightings were mostly in T Section pond 2, a 300 x 200 m pond about 1.5 m deep. This pond has more abundant submerged vegetation than most ponds of the WTP, and has long been known as one of the best ponds for Eurasian Coot (regular summer counts of ~2000 birds, out of the ~20,000 Coot that occur in summer over the ~180 ponds of the WTP). It foraged and often roosted on the water in this pond, and occasionally climbed onto an unvegetated bank between Pond 2 and the adjacent Pond 1 to roost. It took off with surrounding ducks when flushed by birds of prey and sometimes landed on adjacent ponds.</p> <p>The October sightings were in Lake Borrie Pond 30 and 25, about 7 km away. These ponds are also about 1.5 m deep; pond 25 is about 200 x 400 m; pond 30 is about 1.4 km long, and mostly about 150 m wide. In the October sightings the bird was usually in loose association with Hardhead, another species which forages among or on submerged aquatic vegetation.</p>
Sighting conditions (e.g. weather, visibility, light conditions)	During the initial two weeks of observations weather varied from hot to average, including days of total fire ban. The bird was seen in ideal weather conditions on multiple days, could be picked up with binocular views, and studied at leisure with tripod-mounted telescopes.
How confident are you in the identification (as a %) and why?	100%
Did you find and/or identify the bird initially? Who else recorded the bird and do they agree with the identification?	<p>The bird was initially discovered by Michael Dougherty (from the USA). Who has said "No magic to the story, really. Realizing that I had driven down a dead end road, I figured I would do the right thing and scan the ducks. Tufted Ducks are rare but regular in the Northeastern US, so it was immediately obvious what it was."</p> <p>The bird was subsequently seen by hundreds of birdwatchers, and many hundred more must have seen images of the bird pasted on Facebook. I don't believe there is any doubt as to the identification of the species by anyone who has researched the identity of the duck.</p>
What experience have you had with this species?	Angus McNab hadn't seen the bird previously, but is very familiar with all of Australia's regular ducks; he has some experience with North American Ducks where there are a number of similar species. Danny Rogers has seen plenty of Tufted Ducks in Europe and South Korea, and regularly conducts the duck counts at the Western Treatment Plant.
Has this species been seen at this location before? When?	<p>No, it would be the first record of the species in Australia, the species usually occurs in occurs in Asia, Europe and northern America. The following is taken from notes from Rohan Clarke and Dan Ashdown who researched records of Tufted Duck</p> <p>Regional Tufted Duck records</p> <p>Did some snooping and the nearest previous record of a Tufted Duck was Guy Dutson's male near Tokua, New Britain some ~3800 km north of the Western Treatment Plant. Depending on your definition of Australasia this is therefore either the first for the region (if you exclude New Guinea from Australasia) or the third (if you include New</p>

	<p>Guinea).</p> <p>Summary of records as follows: Near Tokua, New Britain, 1998 – Guy Dutson (~3,800 km from WTP)</p> <p>Papua province, West Papua Sep 2018 - Johannes Hohenegger (~4000 km from WTP) [Added as an EDIT after Dan Ashdown located the record - see below]</p> <p>Talau/Karakelang Island, Nov 2012 – James Eaton et al. (~5000 km from WTP)</p> <p>Karakelang Island, Nov 2014 - Hanom Bashari & Rob Martin (~5000 km from WTP)</p> <p>Sabah, Malaysian Borneo – Quite a few records now (J. Eaton pers. comm)</p> <p>In the Pacific they “are winter visitors to the Hawaiian Islands, with records rather equally distributed between the north-western and south-eastern Islands. Records also occur from throughout Micronesia E to the Marshall Is (Clapp 1990), and possibly Wake Atoll (Rauzon et al. 2008)” from Pyle & Pyle (2017).</p> <p>Papua Province, Lake Sentani (28/9/18), ~4000 km N of WTP.</p>
<p>Have photographs of the bird or discussion of it occurred on the internet? (Please provide the site name, a summary, electronic link, etc.)</p>	<p>Yes, https://www.facebook.com/groups/718576241555767/permalink/1999467923466586/</p> <p>Important sections of this discussion have been included throughout this document (the vast majority of the discussion are irrelevant)</p>
<p>Do you permit BARC to display your images etc. electronically (credited with your name)</p>	<p>Yes</p>

You may choose to delete or ignore this page, but please include as much of the requested information in your submission as possible, especially Sections C and E.

Section C: Supporting evidence

Please include evidence that supports the identification, such as photographs, video, call recordings, etc. Digital images can be pasted into this document below, at the end, or provided separately. Digital video and sound recordings can be sent separately to this form. Label photos etc or insert captions to make note of relevant features they show.

The bird was photographed by many observers, and there are lots of images posted on Facebook. The photographs shown here were mainly taken by Angus McNabb, but a few additional images, taken from Facebook, have been included to show interesting plumage details.



Photo: Janine Radmeyer, 5th Jan 2019. Note the brownish cast to the upperparts, short and brown-toned tertials, and rather wispy (but full-length) crest; short extent of white on rear-flanks, suggesting the feathers are not full length and therefore retained from juvenile plumage; faint dark smudges on top of culmen.



Photo: Adrian Boyle, 14th Jan 2019. Broad white wing-bar running through secondaries and inner primaries, fading out on outer primaries.



Photo: Angus McNab, 16th Jan 2019. The brown smudges on the flanks became a little more obvious as January progressed. This image also shows traces of dark grey speckling on the culmen.



Photo: Angus McNab, 16th Jan 2019.



Photo: Angus McNab, Oct 20th – note the notably cleaner white flanks later in the year, compared with photos from January; the feathers are longer, indicating that juvenile plumage has been replaced. Also note blacker upperparts and tertials, thicker crest, cleaner grey culmen.

Section D: Description of the bird(s)

Please provide a description of the bird(s) including all identification features recorded. Provide all possible details that might corroborate the identification.

Plumage

On first glance, black with white flanks and belly and bright yellow eye; diagnostic black drooped crest; pale grey bill with small black bill nail; in flight a broad white wing-bar ran through all the secondaries and inner primaries. In early January the best views in direct sunlight showed uneven shades of black on the plumage: the head and breast were deep glossy black, with faint purplish iridescence on the head; the black of the foreneck and upperparts showed a browner tinge. On the basis of observations on 3rd January Danny Rogers

	<p>noted the following on Facebook:</p> <p>“I think it's a first year male in late pre-formative moult (about 7 months old), rather than an adult male. It was a fair way off so I couldn't make out much feather detail, but the following features make me think it's not a full adult:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a brownish cast to the upperparts suggesting some retained juv feathers; • a few small light grey-brown smudges on the belly suggesting some retained juv feathers • the extent of white on the rear-flanks was quite short, suggesting the rear-flank feathers are not full-length • the tertials looked a bit short and brown-toned; • the 'tuft', while full length, seemed a bit thin and scraggly • I thought there were traces of darker grey patches on the light grey bill (on the culmen in front of the nostrils)” <p>Later in January the brown tinges of the upperparts, while still present, were not so obvious, suggesting that pre-formative body moult was still in progress; dark smudges on the flanks may also have become a little more obvious.</p> <p>When relocated in October, the bird had moulted into full adult plumage, with the glossy black upperparts, head, breast and undertail coverts showing no brown tinges; the flanks and belly were pure white; the crest was thick and neat, and the bill was pale grey, with a whiter smudge on the culmen just inside the black bill nail; there were no traces of darker grey speckling on the culmen.</p>
Bare parts	<p>Bright yellow iris. Bill pale grey with small black bill nail; in January there were was some dark grey speckling on the culmen; in October this dark grey speckling had been lost, and the grey-white patch near the bill tip (between the bill nail and the culmen) was broader, a little paler and more striking.</p>
Moult details	<p>Not in flight feather moult, and the bird could fly as strongly as all the surrounding Hardhead. The bird was in the latish stages of preformative body moult (i.e. moult from juvenile to first winter plumage) during the January observations: Danny’s interpretation is that most feathers of the head and underparts were formative (first winter), while a mixture of juvenile and formative plumage was still present in the foreneck, scapulars, and undertail coverts; the mantle, tertial rear flanks and undertail coverts were largely retained juvenile feathering. The remiges were also retained juvenile plumage (this would explain the dusky sullyng on the wing bar on the outer primaries).</p> <p>The timing of preformative moult in the WTP bird was typical of Tufted Ducks, which complete can be aged on juvenile remnants well into their first boreal winter and complete there preformative moult in February-March (Reeber 2015).</p> <p>By October the bird was in full adult plumage with no active moult. It was in the plumage usually referred to as ‘breeding plumage’, though in recent works (e.g. Reeber 2015, Wildfowl of Europe, Asia and North America; Helm) it is recognised that this actually represents the basic plumage of ducks, with the alternate plumage being the so-called ‘eclipse’ plumage, largely held in the short period when flight feather moult renders ducks flightless.</p>
Structure and ‘jizz’	<p>A small, stocky ‘cute-looking duck’ with short body, large head, distinct drooped crest (‘tuft’) and slightly up-scooped bill. Larger than adjacent Grey and Chestnut Teal, smaller than adjacent Hardheads. The crest emerged from the rear-crown and drooped over the nape; it was slightly shorter than the bill. Sometimes the crest was flattened against the nape and barely visible, especially when the bird surfaced after diving, but more often the crest was clearly separated from the nape. In January the crest was rather thin and scruffy (Richard Loyn’s description as ‘wispy’ seemed very apt); in October the crest was noticeably thicker and neater.</p>
Calls	<p>I did not hear the bird call, I have not heard or read about anyone hearing the bird call</p>
Behaviours	<p>No images or discussions have shown that anyone was able to get very close to the bird.</p>

	Usually seen swimming on the surface, but when foraging it often dived beneath the surface, resurfacing in 10-20 seconds. It was often swimming amongst Hardheads, Australian Shelducks, Australian Shovelers, and Eurasian Coots, all of them species that forage on submerged aquatic vegetation at the WTP. It appeared to remain a considerable distance from the edge of the ponds and was at least once seen 'roosting/standing' in shallow sections of the centre of T-section pond 7 where it could not be reached or disturbed. It was also seen climbing onto a bare earth bank adjacent to T-Section Pond 2 where it roosted with Shelducks, Coot and Hardhead.
Age, sex and/or taxonomy	Aged and sexed on plumage characters as a first year male in late pre-formative moult (about 7 months old) when seen in January. It was therefore hatched in 2018. Approximately 7 months old when seen in January 2019 and about 17-18 months old when seen in October 2019. The bird must have been a different individual to the one recorded in Papua Province, Lake Sentani on 28 Sep 2018, as the West Papuan individual showed contrasty black and white plumage and a clean white flank at a time when the WTP bird would have only been ~3 months old and would therefore have been in juvenile plumage.

Section E: Confusion species

Please indicate other species that the bird(s) might be confused with and how they can be eliminated

Australian Ducks - All lack the golden eye.

Hardhead – Brown plumage not black, white eye (male), brown eye (female), neither have yellow, neither sex have a white flank or head crest.

Blue-billed Duck – brown plumage and blue bill (male), dark brown almost black plumage (female), both sexes have short spined tail and lack the yellow eye, head crest and white flanks

Musk Duck – Large leathery flap under bill (male), both sexes have dark brown-black plumage with fine venations. Neither sex has the yellow eyes, white flanks or head crest.

New Zealand Ducks

New Zealand Scaup – Both males and females are brown-black without the white flanks. Both sexes have a yellow eye, however, the New Zealand Scaup is smaller and lacks the head crest. Whilst this may seem out of range, these birds are commonly kept in Victoria and other regions of Australia and captive animals means there is the potential for escapees (as seen in Tasmania) and hence there is the possibility of confusion.

None of the above ducks have a tuft on the back of the head or clean white flanks

The bird was most probably a natural, overshooting migrant. Tufted Ducks are long-distance migrants, breeding in high northern latitudes and migrating as far south as tropical or near-tropical areas in East Africa, the Indian Subcontinent and South East Asia. There have been vagrant records from New Guinea and New Britain, and some twitchers (notably Rohan Clarke) had speculated that the species might get to Australia one day. The moult schedule of the bird (late preformative moult in January) was consistent with a first year bird that had hatched in the northern hemisphere and migrated to the non-breeding grounds.

Discussions on the likelihood of this bird being an escaped pet have been brief, as legally Tufted Duck cannot be kept in Australia. Jeff Davies Stated early in the discussion “No need to question captive origin. As Rohan Clarke mentioned, similar migratory distribution to Garganey and Common Teal, so been expected for a while.” Although the species is migratory it is a long way south and there are few records south of the Equator.

Subsequently, Angus has been informed that there are in fact Tufted ducks kept in the Melbourne area and due to the illegality of this it is unlikely anyone who has lost a duck is going to come forward and admit to the loss of an illegal animal due to fear or the consequences of keeping illegal wildlife, and the high likelihood that they keep other illegal wildlife. Therefore, there may be a little lingering some doubt as to the validity of this being considered as an overshooting migrant. It is however noteworthy that there was no physical evidence of captive origin (no bands, unclipped wings) and the moult schedule of the WTP bird was consistent with a northern hemisphere origin. For a captive origin to be possible, the bird would have needed to be captured in its first year overseas, before illegally imported to Australia, not having its juvenile primaries clipped and then escaping. Such a sequence of events seems highly improbable.

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Section F: References and aids	
Did you use books, journal articles or on-line sites or pages to help you prepare this submission? Which ones?	Australian Bird Guide
Would you like to acknowledge the assistance of others in the identification process or preparation of this submission?	All those who contributed to discussions on Facebook.