



NYROCA LEUCOPHTHALMOS.



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## White-eyed or Ferruginous Duck.

- Anas nyroca*, Gld. Nov. Comm. Petrop., tom. xiv. p. 403.  
— *ferruginea et africana*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 522.  
— *glaucon*, Pall. Zoog. Rosso.-Asiat., tom. ii. p. 268.  
— *leucophthalmos*, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iv. p. 1009.  
*Nyroca leucophthalmos*, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 121.  
— *leucophthalma*, Bonap. Geog. & Comp. List of Birds of Eur. & N. Amer., p. 58.  
*Aythya nyroca*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 564.  
— *leucophthalmos*, Brehm, Vg. Deutschl., p. 917.  
*Fuligula nyroca*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 201, pl. 55.
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NOTWITHSTANDING the numerous specimens of this trim little diving Duck that are to be found in the public and private collections of Great Britain, it is by no means a common bird with us; and by far the greater number of the examples alluded to have been purchased in our markets, to which they had been sent, with other wild fowl, from Holland. There is no reliable evidence of its having been procured in Scotland, although one is said to have been seen in the Edinburgh market by Sir William Jardine; and Thompson states that it has not been obtained in Ireland. Mr. Rodd does not include it in his 'Ornithology of Cornwall.' There are, however, several recorded instances of its having been killed in Norfolk and Cambridgeshire and other parts of our eastern coasts; even in Western Europe it is much more scarce than in the eastern portions, such as Turkey, Southern Russia, &c.; there, however, it is abundant enough, and in Asia Minor, Persia, and some parts of India. It also frequents the greater part of North Africa. In France, Italy, Portugal and Spain it is not scarce, but is not to be met with every time the sportsman goes out. It is in autumn and winter, and probably in those seasons only, that it is to be found in the western parts of the Continent, the same periods of the year in fact in which it usually occurs with us. On this head, Mr. J. H. Gurney, jun., writes to me thus:—"According to my experience most Nyrocas are got in Leadenhall market in November. I should say it was very rare to see an adult male, and probably never so early as the month I have named; although I have had at least eight of these Ducks, four of which were bought in English markets, I never saw but one; and in none of the foreign markets have I ever seen a really adult bird: but I have bought what is even more interesting—the nestling. I doubt if it be possible to tell young male Nyrocas from young females by the plumage alone. They present every variation of shade. Even females vary very much in plumage, but get lighter as the spring advances."

Although Temminck states that this bird occurs only accidentally and in small numbers in Holland, it is certainly thence that the greater number (both living and dead) are brought to our markets; his statement, therefore, requires some qualification.

The White-eyed Duck may be readily kept in confinement if provided with suitable ponds, such as those in the Gardens of the Zoological Society, where it not only thrives, but, I believe, has bred. It swims and dives with the greatest ease, and often remains for a long time beneath the surface. Except during its migrations, it generally flies at a low elevation, with a somewhat heavy action. The Rev. F. O. Morris states that "its food, consists of the roots, buds, shoots, and seeds of various aquatic plants, insects, small frogs, the fry of fish, but rarely, according to Temminck, of the fish themselves. Its nest is built among the rushes bordering rivers, ponds, and marshes, is usually composed of the same materials, and is well supplied with down from the breast of the female as a lining. The eggs, which are nine or ten in number, are white, slightly tinged with green, and measure about two inches in length by one inch and a half in breadth. The young are taken to the water and provided with food by their mother as soon as hatched."

The following notes respecting this species by more recent writers will probably be regarded with interest.

"Although the White-eyed Duck," says Mr. Stevenson, "has been killed in many instances in Norfolk, it can only be considered a rare visitant, occurring at uncertain intervals, and generally in severe winters or during the succeeding spring months. Of recent examples I may mention the following:—

"An adult male killed at Horsey, near Yarmouth, on the 16th of April 1850, and four examples shot near Yarmouth in the remarkably cold spring of 1855; of these an adult male was killed on the 12th of February, two other birds during the first week in April, and the fourth about the same time. Of the three last, two were also males in perfect plumage. A pair shot at Dorsingham, near Lynn, in March 1868—the



male, on the 20th, and the female on the 21st. An immature male at Hickling, January 17th, 1867, during very severe weather.

"Some years back a Duck of this species was taken in the Hanworth decoy; and one taken in a decoy at Hampstead, near Holt, lived fifteen years in confinement. (See 'Zoologist' for 1851, p. 3116.)"

Mr. Salvin, in his 'Five Months' Birds'-nesting in the Eastern Atlas,' informs us that "this bird also breeds at Zana and Djendeli," and that he was there "more fortunate in obtaining its eggs than those of the other species of Ducks."

The Rev. H. B. Tristram remarks, in his 'Notes on the Ornithology of Northern Africa,' that "the White-eyed Duck seemed tolerably abundant on the Lake Halloula; and one nest rewarded our research."

Dr. Leith Adams, in his 'Notes and Observations on the Birds of Egypt and Nubia,' says the White-eyed seems to be the most common species of Duck, and that he noticed it among the rapids of the Second Cataract.

Mr. S. S. Allen also mentions it as being one of the Ducks which are more or less abundant in Egypt and Nubia, "being found in large flocks on the sand banks in the river or scattered in smaller parties about the inland marshy pools and canals. But the localities beyond all others favoured by them are the large, shallow, brackish lakes surrounded by marshes, which extend at intervals all along the coast from Alexandria to Port Said, the most important being Lakes Marcotis, Etko, Bourlos, and Menzaleh, on which the town of Damietta stands. To the three last of these lakes particularly, immense numbers of Ducks resort, which suffer no perceptible diminution from the efforts of the Arabs of the neighbouring villages, many of whom make their living by snaring and netting them for sale."

In Palestine it would seem to be rare, since the Rev. H. B. Tristram mentions that he only met with one now and then.

Mr. Wright remarks that it is perhaps the commonest Duck which visits the island of Malta, where it arrives in the autumn, winter, and spring.

Messrs. Elwes and Buckley state that it is not uncommon in Turkey, and probably breeds there.

Lord Lilford says that the White-eyed Duck arrives in the Ionian Islands generally in March, in small numbers, and breeds in Epirus and Albania, and that it is occasionally seen there in winter but is far from common at that season.

In western Greece, according to Mr. Simpson, it is less numerous than some other allied species, and keeps to the open water more than the true Ducks.

Captain Irby states that in Oudh and Kumaon it is "extremely numerous in the cold season, and is very good for the table."

Dr. Jerdon says:—"This little Duck is exceedingly common in Northern and Central India, less so in the South. It frequents both tanks and rivers, but prefers grassy tanks, wooded jheels, and rivers. It appears to feed a good deal during the day, and is met with in large parties scattered among the grass or weeds, the birds often rising singly."

Bailly, in his 'Ornithology of Savoy,' informs us that "this charming Duck, which our sportsmen and dealers in game call *Sarcelle*, on account of the small size of its body, seldom comes to our valleys except in spring, March or April. Its appearance in autumn, the season of migration for the other species of the family, is mostly accidental. It usually arrives in couples or small companies, but sometimes singly, among a flight of other species. It is alert and very restless during its stay on our waters; but one sometimes surprises it among thickets of rushes while occupied in searching for food, and it is easily shot as it rises. It is rarely met with in open places. Its flesh has an agreeable taste; and it is often eaten as an 'aliment maigre' on fast-days."

The principal figure in the accompanying Plate is of the size of life.



Gould, John. 1873. "White-eyed or Ferruginous Duck, *Nyroca leucophthalmos* [Pl. 21]." *The birds of Great Britain* 5, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324065>.

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324065>

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