

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,

Jim Butler

PACIFIC BLACK DUCK

THE vegetarian Pacific Black Duck (60cm) in the wild dabbles in shallow water to feed on underwater plants. It has no adaptations to reduce its buoyancy so despite its best efforts it can only immerse half of its body. It feeds by plunging its head into the water which tips its rear-end vertically up and its exposed legs and feet thrash the surface to counteract the buoyancy. When it stops the downward force it pops back onto the surface like a cork.

Most ducks feed early and late in the day and loaf for the remainder. They are usually seen in pairs and readily mix with other ducks. In the wild these ducks are very wary of humans. However, ducks in urban ponds become quite tame and modify their foraging methods. Ducks feeding on bread in urban settings are, on average, only 0.25m apart (2.5m in wild) and foraging is mainly by snatching and lunging on the surface.

Pacific Black Ducks are the most common duck species in Australia, found throughout the country, and in surrounding Pacific nations. Most Australian streams, lagoons, lakes and swamps have visits from



Pacific Black Ducks. A banded Black Duck lived for 15.5yrs but in the wild the lifespan is probably three to four years. The photo shows the iridescent speculum in the duck's wing, an area of specially constructed feathers, with the colours changing depending on the viewing angle; at this angle it looks blue but at another angle it can look green or turquoise.

Mating in Pacific Black Ducks is triggered by the availability of sufficient food and water. Courtship consists of preening, bobbing and wing-flapping initiated by the female who, after copulation, alone completes most of the breeding process. The number of ducklings produced is typically eight to ten, but their mortality rate is high.

Watch this majestic bird
Regards

~ Jim

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Image: Female Pacific Black Duck with Ducklings by Ed Frazer at Brookfield