

# Sexual dimorphism in Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*

H. G. Young<sup>1</sup> & R. McCann<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Les Augrés Manor, Trinity,  
Jersey JE3 5BP, UK. Glyn.Young@durrell.org

<sup>2</sup>The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire GL2 7BT, UK.

The sexes of Hottentot Teal have generally been considered similar. However, examination of the birds' flanks allows accurate sexing even from a distance.

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Sexes of the African/Malagasy Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota* have generally been described as similar, the female considered a duller version of the male (eg Scott 1957; Brown *et al.* 1982; Madge & Burn 1988; Maclean 1993; del Hoyo *et al.* 1992; Sinclair & Hockey 1996; Morris & Hawkins 1998; Borrow & Demey, 2001). Delacour (1956) makes no mention of sexual differences, yet illustrates adults of both. However, it has been common practice to illustrate only one adult, giving a further impression that sexes resemble one another and are difficult to distinguish in the field.

Few attempts have been made to describe any obvious plumage differ-

ences between adult Hottentot Teal. Clark (1965, 1971) and Bell (1997) however, noted that males have metallic green secondary feathers. Brown *et al.* (1982) and Bell (1997) further noted buff longitudinal stripes (the shaft-streak) on the longer scapulars. Males may have a glossier cap and more defined cheek patch.

Close examination of a small captive population of Hottentot Teal at Jersey Zoo (The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust) has shown that sexes can in fact be quite easily differentiated by examination of the birds' flanks. Male Hottentot Teal have fine, buff, unspotted flanks with vermiculation on the feathers of the rear flank,

towards the tail (**Figure 1**). There are plain buff feathers mid-flank that are much larger than the equivalent feathers of the female. Normally, during rest, or when swimming, these feathers produce a prominent clear pale patch, overlapping upwards onto the folded wing. Females have dull flanks with small feathers throughout, the spots of the breast diminishing in number towards the tail.

Juveniles of both sexes appear alike in their first plumage. However, the plain and vermiculated feathers of the male develop approximately 16 weeks after hatching. Males in their first year can still be differentiated from adults as the plain flank feathers are smaller than those of adults. Throughout their first year, females are more heavily spotted along the flanks towards the tail than older birds.

The following published photographs of otherwise unsexed adult Hottentot Teal can be correctly identified by examination of the flank feathers:

- Soothill & Whitehead (1978), page 177. Male.
- Todd (1979) plate 8.62, page 191. Female.
- del Hoyo *et al.* (1992), page 546. Male in foreground with female behind.
- Johnsgard (1992), page 97. Male in foreground with two females.
- Todd (1996) page 345. Male.
- Morris & Hawkins (1998), plate 52, page 87. Male.
- Ogilvie & Young (1998), plate 1, page 125. Male. Plate 3, page 125. Male on left.



Figure 1.

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