

THE GENUS *Nettapus*: THE PIGMY GEESE

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There are two species of Pigmy Geese in Australia, the White-quilled, *Nettapus coromandelianus*, and the Green, *N. pulchellus*.

Very little information has been published about these interesting and charming little geese, and as I have had some experience with them since I came to Queensland it may be of interest to your readers to hear of my observations, which have been made in the vicinity of Ayr, North Queensland.

The Green Pigmy Goose is a fairly common bird to the keen observer in this district, but, being fairly quiet and frequenting, as they do, the patches of water lilies that grow on most of the swamps and lagoons around these parts, the birds are difficult to locate and hard to see. They are definitely not wary and once located can be closely observed. The Green Pigmy Goose is easily distinguished from the White-quilled Goose. The green colour of the former species is a very dark green which, at a distance, particularly when the bird is in flight, appears almost black. The bird seems black and white. The White-quilled is a much lighter colored bird, mostly white and grey, showing little black.

The females of both species are not so definitely marked as the males. The calls of the two species differ considerably; the Green Goose has a call note very like that of the Grey Teal, whereas its cogener's call resembles "car car carwark" uttered several times in quick succession. Usually the calls are given whilst the birds are on the wing.

I have seen the Green Goose with young on many occasions. The clutch of young is usually from five to seven. The female is hard to flush when she is with her young, while the male is very conspicuous: he will fly from one end of the swamp to the other, usually in a straight line and calling all the time.

When mating or looking for a nesting site, the birds are very interesting. The male always takes the lead when seeking a place for a nest. This has been noticed on at least two occasions. The first time, on 17/3/49, when standing motionless in about 2 feet of open water in a swamp and

watching a pair of Green Geese, I saw them come swimming towards me; they passed within 6 feet of me towards a gumtree about 20 feet away. The male flew up into the tree and alighted on a small branch some 2 inches in diameter. Shortly afterwards the female followed, and then entered a hollow about 25 feet up; she remained in the hollow for a few seconds, then flew down to the water. She repeated this performance several times, but the male made no attempt to enter the hollow. I watched the pair for about half an hour, and they were never more than 15 yards from me.

The second occasion was about a week later. I was at the edge of a swamp watching a pair of Green Geese which were about 20 yards out in the water, when the male flew into a tree above me; shortly afterwards the female joined him. The male then flew to another tree; the female followed and then made several attempts to enter a poor looking hollow, each time failing to gain an entrance. She then returned to sit on a limb near her mate. The male then flew to another tree; the female followed and actively examined hollows in the tree. The male seemed to have no interest whatever in any of the hollows. The female appeared to depend on the male for leadership. They seemed to select one hollow about 30 feet up and remained close at hand for several days. I did not see the female enter the hollow at any time, so about a fortnight later I inspected the hollow. It contained a large opossum.

On April 12, 1949, after watching a pair I could not decide if they were breeding or not, so climbed to a likely-looking hollow about 25 feet from the water. The entrance to the hollow was about 7 inches in diameter, widening out to about 18 inches diameter at the bottom. The depth was about 2 feet, truly a perfect nesting site. There were nine eggs covered with down. The largest egg measured $1\frac{1}{8}$ x $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches, and the smallest $1\frac{3}{8}$ x $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The eggs are creamy white in color and the surface of the shell is very smooth.

The White-quilled Goose is not as numerous

as the Green Goose, but it can usually be found at any time of the year on the deeper swamps in this district. Both species of Pigmy Geese can often be seen together on the deeper waters, but I have never seen the White-quilled on the shallow swamps with, say, 2 to 4 feet of water, whereas the Green appears to prefer shallow waters.

On April 10, 1949, I was watching a pair of White-quilled Geese when one of them flew to a hollow several times, each time remaining at the mouth of the hollow for several seconds before returning to the water. The hollow was about 15 feet up in a Gum, and about 20 yards from the edge of the swamp. I did not climb to the hollow at the time nor was I able to return to the spot at a later date, so cannot say if the birds nested there.