Ruddy Shelduck, *Tadorna ferruginea*

**Overview**

Short description of *Tadorna ferruginea*, Ruddy Shelduck

This large duck closely resembles the common shelduck in size and shape but its plumage is mainly reddish-brown. The head is a paler, creamier brown, and the bill and legs are black. In flight, the wings are strikingly black and white, with black flight feathers and white wing coverts above and below. Cape shelduck *T. cana*, which also occurs in GB as a non-native, is very similar but the Cape shelduck has a grey head.

Description of *Tadorna ferruginea*, Ruddy Shelduck status in GB

Ruddy shelduck has a long history of occurring in GB as an escape from captivity but some old records, up to 1946, are officially treated as wild vagrants from the native range. Recent sightings in GB may include small influxes from non-native populations on the near Continent. A few pairs have recently bred in GB, in Norfolk.

Habitat summary: *Tadorna ferruginea*, Ruddy Shelduck

In its native range, this is a species of mainly dry, often mountainous landscapes, where it occurs on lakes and marshes, by rivers or sometimes far from water. Non-native birds occur in more enclosed wetland habitats and sometimes perch in trees or on buildings.

**Overview table**

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<tr>
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<th>Terrestrial and Freshwater</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Species status:</td>
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<td>Status in Scotland:</td>
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<td>Location of first record:</td>
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<td>Date of first record:</td>
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**Invasion history:** *Tadorna ferruginea*, Ruddy Shelduck
Origin
The native range lies in northwest Africa and from Greece and Romania eastwards into the Himalayas, India and central Asia.

First Record
The first known record for GB was in winter 1776, when one was shot in Dorset. It is possible that this bird was a vagrant from the native range. One in Norfolk in 1869 was thought to have been an escape from captivity. By 1889, however, the species had been introduced to many ornamental waters across England. A pinioned pair raised five flying young in York in 1974 but many earlier cases of breeding could easily have gone unrecorded.

Pathway and Method
This attractive species has long been valued as an ornamental species for private estates and public parks. The main pathway into the wild has probably been through successful nesting by pinioned pairs. Patterns of sightings suggest that Britain is visited in most years by non-native birds from elsewhere in western Europe.

Species Status
Up to four pairs have nested in Norfolk in some years since 1996. Aside from its small, mainly resident population, and local escapes, GB apparently receives a variable number of Continental visitors, mainly in late summer. Non-native populations are well established in Switzerland (since 1963), Germany and the Netherlands and nesting also occurs in northern and eastern France. Moult gatherings in the Netherlands, peaking in July, apparently include birds from all these areas. Controversially, it has also been suggested that Dutch and British visitors include some birds from the native range. The species is considered invasive in western Europe.

Ecology & Habitat: Tadorna ferruginea, Ruddy Shelduck

Dispersal Mechanisms
Non-native birds introduced on the Swiss-German border have quickly established a moult migration to the Netherlands. Evidence is strong that birds readily cross the North Sea to GB. There is considerable potential, therefore, for long-distance dispersal of non-native breeding populations within western Europe. Aviculture, with subsequent dispersal of unpinioned young, remains probably the most important dispersal mechanism.

Reproduction
Ruddy shelducks are hole nesters, in the wild choosing mainly animal burrows or crevices among rocks. Non-native pairs have been observed prospecting buildings for suitable cavities and frequently nest in holes in trees. A clutch of 8–12 eggs is laid and incubated by the female for around 28 days.

Known Predators/Herbivores
None known.

Resistant Stages
None known.

Habitat Occupied in GB
Breeding birds occupy park lakes and flooded gravel pits. Non-breeding escapes or continental visitors occupy a wider variety of wetland habitats, including freshwater grazing marshes.

Distribution: Tadorna ferruginea, Ruddy Shelduck
Recent breeding records in Norfolk suggest that a non-native breeding population may be establishing there. Records of non-breeding birds, including escapes from within GB and almost certainly visitors from the near Continent, have occurred very widely.

Impacts: Tadorna ferruginea, Ruddy Shelduck

Environmental Impact
Breeding pairs in Switzerland are reported to have taken over nesting sites used by barn owl, tawny owl and kestrel.

Health and Social Impact
None known.
None known.

References & Links: *Tadorna ferruginea*, Ruddy Shelduck

**Identification**

**Biology, ecology, spread, vectors**


**Management and impact**


**General**