



Duck Specialist Group Ageing & Sexing Guide

White-faced Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna viduata*

Introduction

This account summarises current knowledge on the ageing and sexing of White-faced Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna viduata*, primarily using information from the African population. Data are from published sources, birds captured in northern Nigeria in February 2010, and the captive collection at WWT Slimbridge. It forms one of a series of ageing and sexing accounts being developed by the Duck Specialist Group and is available online at www.ducksg.org/resources. Comments and additional information on this account are welcomed from anyone able to augment it – contact the DSG via the website.

Summary of key ageing criteria

Criterion	Adult	Juvenile/immature
Head	Distinct division between black and white on crown.	Juvenile has predominantly black/brown face; immature in late winter has just small wedge of black on crown.
Belly and undertail coverts	Uniform black.	Juvenile barred black and white; immature varies from blotchy black and barred to more uniform brownish-black.
Greater coverts	Large and square, little or no abrasion, metallic blue.	Small, tapered and worn from mid-winter, bluish-grey.

Ageing

General description (Brown *et al.* 1982)

Adult has front part of head from behind eyes, chin and throat white (though often stained yellow or orange). Rest of head and upper neck black; black line bisects white chin. Lower neck, chest and upper breast rich chestnut. Underparts from lower breast to tail black. Sides of breast and flanks white (washed ochre) and boldly barred black. Lower back, rump, uppertail coverts and tail black. Back olive-brown, feathers edged buff-brown. Scapulars grey-brown. Lesser wing coverts dark chestnut, rest of wing feathers bluish-grey to black. Bill black with bluish-grey transverse subterminal bar on upper mandible. Legs and feet bluish-grey. Eyes brown. *Juvenile/Immature* lacks white face and black head and belly for first three months, after which replaced by adult characteristics. Feathering remains duller than adult and white face sometimes not so distinct. Wing feathers retained, showing increasing signs of wear until renewed at 12-15 months.

In late winter, three key characteristics should be examined to determine the age of the bird: i) crown, ii) belly and undertail coverts, iii) greater and median coverts.

Crown

Adult shows clear demarcation between the black and white on head (Fig.1). Juveniles fledge with brownish-grey face and head, this being replaced during the course of the first winter (Fig.2), initially on the lower face and later on the crown. By about 7-8 months old the birds are superficially similar to adults with just varying amounts of black remaining on the crown (Fig.3).



Figure 1. Crown of adult White-faced Whistling-duck in February, northern Nigeria, showing sharp demarcation between black and white feathering, and clean white crown. Note: the brown forehead is not plumage colouration, it is staining picked up whilst foraging.



Figure 2. Crown and head of two captive juvenile White-faced Whistling-ducks, aged 4-5 months old, WWT Slimbridge.



Figure 3. Crowns of immature White-faced Whistling-ducks in February, northern Nigeria, showing range of black feathering: a) heavily marked; b) lightly marked. These birds are probably approximately 7-8 months old. Note: the brown forehead is not plumage colouration, it is staining picked up whilst foraging.

Belly and undertail coverts

The belly of adult White-faced Whistling-duck is uniform black from the lower breast to the undertail coverts (Fig.4). These feathers are individually uniform black including the bases normally not visible. Juveniles show black and white barred belly feathers which are gradually replaced during the first winter with dark brown-blackish feathers, such that in late winter this may range from blotchy with extensive white barred feathers (Fig.5a) to almost uniform dark brown-blackish (Fig.5c).



Figure 4. Belly of adult White-faced Whistling-duck, northern Nigeria, February 2010.



Figure 5. Belly markings of immature White-faced Whistling-ducks, showing range of extent of black plumage from a) mottled to b) light and c) dark. Northern Nigeria, February 2010.

Greater and median coverts

During the non-breeding season the greater and median coverts of adult White-faced Whistling-ducks are fresh and unworn, relatively square in shape, and metallic blue in colour (Fig.5). In contrast, juveniles show tapered and brownish-grey (Fig.6) or bluish-grey (Fig.5) coverts, though these are replaced during the first winter such that by February a high proportion (not measured but from sample of 52 birds was approx. 50%) have replaced their median coverts and are in active greater covert moult. One probable immature bird from this same sample had completely replaced all its median and greater coverts, thus resembling an adult.

At this time (late winter), immature greater coverts are also extensively abraded, often markedly, and may show fault bars. Fig.5 shows heavily worn juvenile outer GC (yellow arrow) and new adult type inner GC (red arrow).

Figure 5. Wing of immature White-faced Whistling-duck in February, northern Nigeria, showing heavily worn juvenile outer GC (yellow arrow) and new adult type inner GC (red arrow).

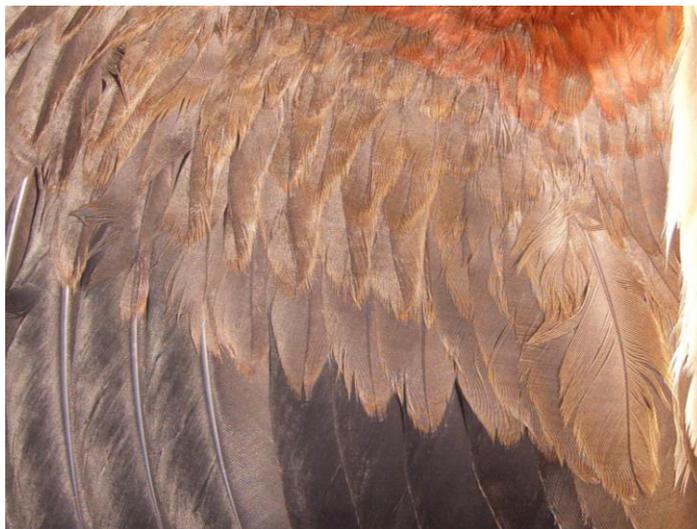
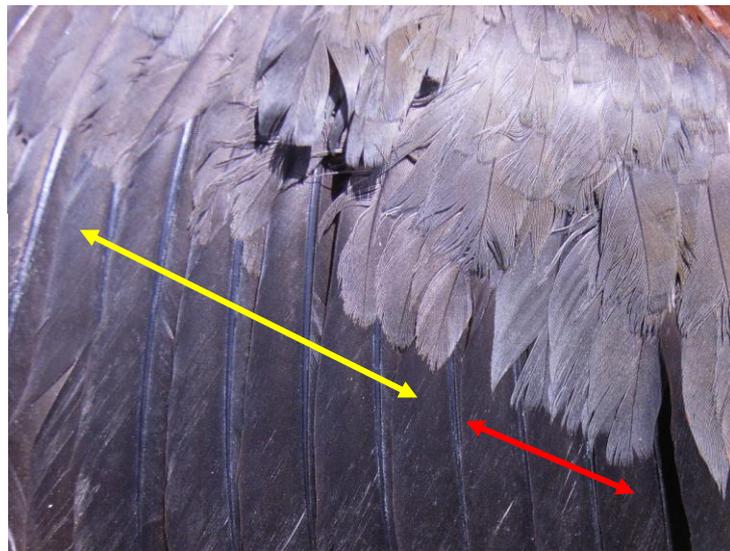


Figure 6. Wing of captive juvenile White-faced Whistling-duck, aged 4-5 months old, WWT Slimbridge, showing brownish and tapered greater and median coverts.

Sexing

No plumage differences between male and female have been described. Cloacal sexing is possible at all ages.



Moult

Adults undergo complete body and wing moult post-breeding and are flightless for 18-25 days. One body moult annually (Petrie 1998).

Measurements

Biometric	Male (n) ¹	Male (n) ²	Female (n) ¹	Female (n) ²
Wing (mm)	216 – 222 (6)	215 – 240 (30)	221 – 225 (6)	205 – 237 (37)
Skull (mm)		89.5 – 97.7 (30)		86.2 – 96.9 (37)
Culmen (mm)	47 – 49 (6)		45 – 49 (6)	
Tarsus (mm)	48 – 55 (6)	59.6 – 69.4 (30)	52 – 55.5 (6)	58.3 – 67.7 (37)
Weight (g)	Mean 637 (12)	520 – 710; mean 607 (30)	Mean 614 (15)	540 – 670; mean 598 (37)

¹ Data from Brown *et al.* (1982).

² Data from north Nigeria, February 2010 (unpublished APLORI data). Tarsus method: long.

References

Brown, L.H., E.K. Urban & K. Newman. 1982. *The Birds of Africa. Volume 1*. Academic Press, London.

Petrie, S.A. 1998. Molt patterns of nonbreeding White-faced Whistling-Ducks in South Africa. *The Auk* 115: 774-780.

This version drafted April 2010 by Richard Hearn Richard.Hearn@wwt.org.uk