

# Comb Duck

*Sarkidiornis sylvicola*

Bird

## Scientific Name

*Sarkidionis sylvicola*

## Other Names

Knobed-billed duck, Black-backed Goose

## Range

South America including Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela

## Habitat

Savanna woodlands with lagoons and wetlands

## Description

A heavily built large, goose-like duck with blue-black back and tail feathers, a white chest and neck, and a black and white spotted head. On top of the males' beak is a large, fleshy, dark grey growth or 'comb' that becomes more apparent in the breeding season.

Females are smaller than males and lighter in color.

## Average Size

Length: 22 – 30 in.

Weight: 2.5 – 6lbs.

## Lifespan

In the wild: Estimated at 10 years

In captivity: 15 years

## Diet

In the wild: Aquatic vegetation, seeds, fish and invertebrates

In captivity: Prepared waerfowl diet and aquatic vegetation

## Incubation

28 – 30 days

## Sexual Maturity

One year of age

## Fledging Period

10 weeks

## Clutch Size

6 – 20 eggs

## Predators

Birds of prey, small carnivores and humans

## Population Status

Vulnerable



## Behavior

Comb Ducks are most commonly seen alone or in small groups, but can sometimes gather in large flocks of 30 to 40 during drier parts of the year. They associate well with other waterfowl species and roost in mixed-species flocks near slow moving waterways. These ducks are primarily sedentary, with only seasonal movement due to water availability in the dry season. Like most ducks, they are diurnal (active in the daytime) and spend the majority of their daylight hours searching for food by skimming the water with their sieve-like bill picking up all kinds of plants and invertebrates.

## Reproduction and Breeding

This species' breeding period is variable, but it usually coincides with the rainy season. Courtship rituals tend to be complex and consist of males swimming around the females with necks outstretched, wing lifting, displaying and increased vocalizations. In some areas, Comb Ducks are monogamous while in others, males may hold small harems of two to four females which they defend against other males.

Females make their nests close to water, either in large tree cavities or in the abandoned nests of other birds 20 to 30 feet off the ground. While the nest is usually in a tree cavity, it may also be a rough structure built from twigs and coarse grass that is lined with grass, leaves and feathers. Because they are a species of tree duck, several females may lay their eggs in one nest (nest dumping). The female incubates the eggs by herself and within a day or two of hatching, calls the ducklings out of the nest to the water or soft grass below. The young are precocial (able to survive on their own) but they remain near the female for protection until they learn to fly.

## Conservation

Although this species is considered stable in most of its range, wild populations have decreased in the past decade. The main threats to the Comb Duck include habitat destruction, overhunting and the use of poison against foraging wildfowl in rice fields. This species is also susceptible to avian influenza and is potentially threatened by future outbreaks of this virus. The Comb Duck is listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), meaning international trade should be carefully monitored and controlled. This species also receives some protection under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), which aims to conserve migratory species throughout their range and lists species that would benefit from international co-operation.

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**Amazing Fact**

The comb on the beak of the male enlarges during breeding season.

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