

# *Tadorna ferruginea*



**Common name:** Ruddy Shelduck, Brahmini Duck

**Local names:** Muru, Maroo, Nguru (Ladakhi), Surkhab (Hindi/Urdu), Chakwachakwi (Hindi)

**Classification:**

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Anseriformes

Family: Anatidae

Genus: *Tadorna*

Species: *ferruginea*

**Profile:**

The genus name *Tadorna* has Celtic roots and means “pied waterfowl”. This is essentially the same as the English common name “shelduck”. In India, the species is commonly known as Brahmini duck. Held sacred in Buddhist scriptures, the Brahmini Duck is a distinctive bird having rusty brown plumage with prominent metallic-green speculum and white wing coverts. The head is pale, turning almost white near the face. It has black tail, beak, legs and primaries. The wings have white feathers that are inconspicuous when the bird is resting, but become visible once it is in flight. In flight it looks heavy, more like a goose than a duck. The sexes are similar but the males have a dark ring like collar at the bottom of their neck that becomes prominent during breeding season. It has a body length of 58-70 cm with a wingspan of 110-135 cm. The males (1.2-1.6 kg) are slightly bigger and heavier than the females (1-1.5 kg). Juveniles have dull brown colouration. The species is ecologically significant because it is one of the few omnivorous links in the fragile wetland ecosystem.

**Lifespan:** 8-10 years

**Distribution:** The species has a large range with an estimated global extent of occurrence of about 1,000,000-10,000,000 km<sup>2</sup> (IUCN). It is generally distributed from eastern Europe to eastern Asia. A migratory species, it winters in North Africa, Central Europe and southern Asia. Small resident populations occur in northwest Africa and Ethiopia. Vagrants are found in several European countries. The species generally prefer freshwater wetlands and grassland habitats for their breeding ground. They breed in higher altitudes in the summers, and visit the warmer south in winters. A few pairs or small flocks are regular visitors to the alpine lakes of the Himalayas in Arunachal Pradesh in May and they are among the last to depart of the migratory birds, staying till early November.

**Population:** 170,000-220,000 individuals (Wetlands International 2002) (Figures are for wild population only)

**Behaviour:** Ruddy shelducks are good swimmers and swim with their head erect and the anterior part of their body very low on the water but with the posterior part held high. They are usually found in pairs during the breeding season, although they may also form small nesting groups. Very rarely do they congregate in large flocks. The birds arrive at their breeding sites by late March. They breed in tree holes, shallow depressions like burrows or holes in the ground, located near water bodies but also sometimes far from the water source. The eggs are creamy-white in colour. The female alone incubates the egg. Adults undergo complete moult post-breeding and are rendered flightless for around four weeks during mid-July to September. Ruddy shelducks are mainly nocturnal and extremely territorial. They become very vocal when disturbed and are known to get quite aggressive towards other birds. Their call is a loud nasal honking.

**Diet:** These birds are omnivorous feeders, feeding on grains, shoots, tubers, aquatic plants, insects, crustaceans, aquatic molluscs, small fish, amphibian spawn, and even frogs and small reptiles. In case of lack of their usual food, the birds readily resort to feeding on garbage.

- **Reproduction:** Breeding season: May-July; Incubation Period: 28-30 days; Clutch Size: 8-12 eggs; Fledging period: 55 days; Sexual Maturity: 2 years

**Current status:**

- **Status:**
  1. IUCN 2008: Least Concern
  2. CITES 2008: Not listed
- **Threats:**
  1. Hunting for commercial as well as recreational purposes (stuffed Brahmini duck showpieces fetch a very high price in the international market)
  2. Loss and degradation of inland wetlands due to extraction of subterranean water for irrigation.
  3. Widespread drainage of shallow marshes and lakes.
  4. Urban development.
  5. Pollution
  6. Introduction of exotic fish species.
  7. Hybridization of the species.
  8. The species is susceptible to H5N1 strain of avian influenza virus.
- **Conservation practices:**
  1. The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (also known as CMS or Bonn Convention) has listed the Ruddy Shelduck in Appendix II.
  2. It is one of the species to which the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) applies.
  3. In the "Ascania Nova" nature reserve of southern Ukraine, the species has been successfully restored by conservation actions like regular feeding, creating artificial nests, providing continuous access to water by breaking the ice on the ponds, and also by raising broods using conspecific foster parents.