

A Record of Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*) from Chiang Saen

On 31 March 1991, I was birding by bike in the Chiang Saen area (Chiang Rai Province). After having visited some paddyfields (which proved to be very productive, with Pied Harriers *Circus melanoleucos* and Chestnut-eared Buntings *Emberiza fucata* showing very well), I decide to take a look at the other side of town, and follow the river Mae Khong, as I had done the day before. On reaching the northern tip of a large island in the river, approx. 3 km north of the town, I noticed that one more duck further was present on the exposed sandbar, compared to the day before. Scrutinising the group with 10 x 40 binoculars, I recognised the 5 Ruddy Shelducks *Tadoma ferruginea* and 12 Spot-billed Ducks *Anas poecilorhyncha* which I had first seen the day before, but the additional duck differed somewhat in a more upright stance, with the large head held backwards. Because of the distance (approx. 500 m), I quickly prepared my tripod and 15–45 x 60 telescope to obtain better views. Using these, I could easily identify the bird as a male Mandarin Duck, *Aix galericulata*, and made the following description:

Upperparts (back and mantle) mostly brown without gloss. Flight feathers blackish with some greenish-blue iridescence. Primaries edged whitish. No orange 'wing-sails' were present. Uppertail dark, probably blackish.

Underparts: lower breast and belly white, extra-obvious because of the upright stance. Flanks orangey-buff, with small whitish triangular spot at rear. Breast dark brown with 2 conspicuous white vertical lines near (contrasting) border with flanks. Undertail coverts white.

Head large with long fluffy crest. Crown dark to end of crest, with greenish gloss, all the way sharply demarcated from very broad white supercilium. Supercilium tapered posteriorly. Eye exactly on the lower border of the supercilium. Lower cheeks and neck-side with long fluffy orange feathers, becoming more solidly orange towards bill (where more grading into supercilium). Loes suffuse light orange. Bill rosy but not very strikingly so. Feet yellowish orange. The bird was not seen in flight.

The bird was very wary: as fisherman's boats were passing, it was often the first of the ducks to start walking away from the disturbance.

The description only fits a male Mandarin Duck: no other duck species combines a dark crown with a long, tapering, white supercilium, a shaggy crest, orange fluffy-feathered cheeks and a rosy bill. There could however, be some discussion about the bird's age: the apparent absence of wing sails formed by the expanded middle tertial feather and the upperparts, which were without gloss, would suggest the bird was in first winter plumage (CRAMP & SIMMONS, 1977).

The Mandarin Duck breeds in Amurland and north-east China and winters mainly in China, south of the Yangtze River. The larger Japanese population may be mainly resident. Vagrants have occurred in northeast India, Burma and Hong Kong (CRAMP & SIMMONS, 1977, MADGE & BURN, 1988). Even though the species is often kept in captivity, the likelihood is that this bird was a genuine vagrant.

This sighting constitutes the second record of Mandarin Duck for Thailand. The first one was seen at Ban Lung Tua, Bang Rakham district, Phitsanuloke Province in January 1983 (P.D. Round, pers. comm.)

REFERENCES

- CRAMP, S. and K.E.L. SIMMONS. 1977. *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- MADGE, S. and H. BURN. 1988. *Wildfowl: an Identification Guide to Ducks, Geese, Swans of the World*. Christopher Helm, London.

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