

Domesticated geese and ducks—and allied species

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DESCRIPTION/ABSTRACT

This paper describes the two species of domesticated geese and the two species of domesticated ducks. I also provide a checklist and brief notes concerning related, duck-like waterfowl present in Indonesia, including grebes and boobies.

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Throughout the world, there are two species of domesticated geese, and two species of domesticated ducks. Here is how to quickly and easily identify these four species, though with one caveat: in recent years hybrid species (of the two goose species, and of the two duck species) have been developed, which can blur the otherwise clear distinction.

In general, domesticated geese and ducks have been bred for their ‘plump rumps,’ which make them less able (barely able) to fly, and of course for overall larger size and greater egg-laying ability. They also tend to have a more erect posture than their wild cousins. That people have often bred for entirely white plumage also has a practical, though superficial, aspect: birds with white plumage look the best when dressed (feathers removed), as any remaining down feathers tend to be less visible.

Whilst white plumage may be considered ‘prototypical’ in some people’s minds, in fact domesticated geese and ducks come in a wide variety of plumage colors, which are often distinctive for the particular breeds. Because of the introductory nature of this article, I mention breeds only in passing. If you are interested in a particular breed or breeds, you will have to dig deeper on your own. Even if different breeds are not distinguished locally where you work, nonetheless it would probably not be out of place to mention in an indigenous language dictionary which colors of plumage predominate in a particular area.

In order to round out the picture—as well as to head off potential confusion—I also mention swans and other species of the order Anseriformes (duck-like waterfowl) which are found in Indonesia—in all, only about twenty species, and even fewer outside of Papua. Although classed in an entirely different order more closely related to pelicans, boobies also come up for discussion because they are conceptually related to geese in Indonesian folk classification.

For Indonesian common names I have relied primarily on “Daftar nama burung di Indonesia” on the Wikipedia Indonesia website. Unfortunately, there are still some gaps in my knowledge in this area. For whether a species is present or not in Indonesia, I have primarily consulted Lepage (2008). In both cases, however, I have also brought in a small amount of information from secondary sources.

Domesticated geese

1. *angsa* = Chinese goose = ANSER CYGNOIDES Linnaeus 1758

In the wild, ANSER CYGNOIDES is known as the swan goose. Their original range was in Mongolia and nearby areas of China and Russia, but the swan goose is now endangered in the wild. There are two domesticated breeds which have been derived from this species, known respectively as the Chinese goose and the African goose.¹ All domesticated Chinese and African geese have a characteristic knob at the base of the bill near their forehead (this knob is not present in the wild species), for which they are also sometimes called ‘snouted geese.’



Chinese goose
Photo by Deanna Epps

The Chinese goose was ‘the goose’ throughout Indonesia up through the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century. Although *angsa* (from Sanskrit *hamsa* ‘goose, swan, flamingo’) is the usual term, *gangs* appears to be a less common but exact synonym. Another term for geese, *soang*, is used in parts of Java.



European goose
Photo by David Mead

2. *angsa* = European goose = ANSER ANSER Linnaeus 1758

Unlike in eastern Asia, where the swan goose was domesticated, in Europe, Africa and western Asia it was instead the greylag goose ANSER ANSER which was domesticated, and has since given rise to nearly thirty recognized breeds. Some breeds are entirely grey (like the wild goose), some are grey with distinctive white patches, while other breeds are entirely white. European geese lack the large knob on the forehead which characterizes Chinese geese, although hybrids may exhibit every degree of variation between the two species.

Domesticated ducks

3. *bebek manila, itik manila, surati, serati, mentok, entok* = Muscovy duck, Barbary duck = CAIRINA MOSCHATA Linnaeus 1758

The Muscovy duck is a New World species which had already been domesticated by certain American Indians prior to the arrival of Europeans. Although variable in color, Muscovy ducks are highly



Muscovy duck
Photo by David Mead

¹ Or perhaps better said, only two breeds are recognized in the West. In China, over twenty breeds are recognized.

recognizable because of the bright red, warty crest around their eyes and above the beak. Also the drakes (males) have a dry hissing call. Muscovy ducks swim less than other ducks because of their relatively underdeveloped oil glands. They are prized for their meat, which is considered leaner and more tender than that of the mallard-derived breeds (see below).

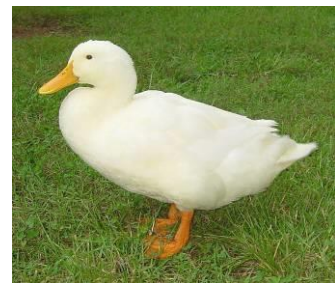
The name *bebek manila* suggests this duck may have been introduced to Asia by the Spanish via the Philippines, but the history is not clear. The name *surati* is thought to be derived from Surat (former spellings: Surate, Souratte), the name of a city on the Arabian Sea in eastern India, and once the principle port of the sixteenth to mid-nineteenth century Islamic Mughal empire.

Southern Sumatra is home to a wild species, the white-winged wood duck (*CAIRINA SCUTULATA* Müller 1842), which bears a superficial resemblance to the Muscovy duck. In Indonesia this species is known as *mentok rimba*.²

4. *bebek, itik* = domesticated duck = *ANAS PLATYRHYNCHOS* Linnaeus 1758

Apart from the Muscovy duck described above, all other breeds of domesticated ducks are derived from the mallard, *ANAS PLATYRHYNCHOS*, a species which in the wild presently breeds from North America to Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand (and has also been introduced into Indonesia).

The American Poultry Association recognizes twenty-one breeds of domesticated duck which have descended from the mallard. The Pekin breed (pronounced PEEK-in, in rural southern U.S. also PICK-uhn, in both cases a corruption of Peking) is the prototypical white duck, but colors can also range from mottled to tawny brown to even black. Some, such as the Bali duck, are crested. Sudardjat (2003:12, 47) lists fifteen breeds occurring in Indonesia, of which the Jawa, Alabio, Tegal, Mojosari, Maros, Bali, Magelang and Kisaran are the most important in terms of number of individuals bred. The last-mentioned, the Kisaran breed, is a cross between the mallard and Muscovy types, and the offspring are usually infertile.



Common domesticated duck
Photo by Deanna Epps

As for the two Indonesian terms *bebek* and *itik*, *bebek* is the more common term, used throughout most of Java and eastern Indonesia, and is probably onomatopoeic in origin (from the ducks' *wek, wek, wek* call). The term *itik*—for which Blust (2002:114) has reconstructed Proto-Western Malayo-Polynesian **itik* 'duck, *ANAS* spp.' as the ancestral form—is used more in Sumatra, Singapore, Malaysia and parts of Borneo.

² The white-winged wood duck is an endangered species, whose former range also included western Java. Recent work suggests that it should be placed in its own genus as *ASARCORNIS SCUTULATA*. This duck also falls under the broader category of *itik liar*, see under 5.

Wild species of order Anseriformes

5. *itik liar* = k.o. dabbling duck = ANAS spp. Linnaeus 1758
 = k.o. diving duck = AYTHYA spp. Boie 1822

In addition to the domesticated duck, other ANAS species occur wild in Indonesia (some only as occasional migrants)—and in Indonesian apparently always go by the name *itik*, never *bebek*. Consult a local birding guide to determine which species may be found in your area.

<i>itik benjut</i>	Sunda teal, Indonesian teal	A. GIBBERIFRONS Müller 1842
<i>itik kelabu</i>	grey teal	A. GRACILIS Buller 1869)
<i>itik alis, itik gunung</i>	Pacific black duck	A. SUPERCILIOSA Gmelin 1789
<i>itik perak</i>	silver teal	A. VERSICOLOR Vieillot 1816
??	falcated teal	A. FALCATA Georgi 1775
<i>itik paruh sudu</i>	Australasian shoveler	A. RHYNCHOTIS Latham 1802
<i>itik paruh sudu</i>	northern shoveler	A. CLYPEATA Linnaeus 1758
<i>itik ekor peniti</i> ³	northern pintail	A. ACUTA Linnaeus 1758
<i>itik alis putih</i>	garganey, garganey teal	A. QUERQUEDULA Linnaeus 1758
<i>itik bungalan</i> ⁴	Eurasian wigeon	A. PENELOPE Linnaeus 1758

Salvadori's teal, or Salvadori's duck, SALVADORINA WAIGUENSIS Rothschild & Hartert 1894, native to New Guinea and now considered threatened, was once placed under genus ANAS, but was later moved to its own genus.

In addition, ducks of genus AYTHYA also fall under the general category of *itik*, although these are diving ducks (they feed mainly by diving for their food, rather than by dabbling).⁵ Two species occur in Indonesia. The tufted duck is a northern species which winters in southern Asia, including Indonesia. The white-eyed duck is native to Australia but may disperse to New Guinea in times of drought.

<i>itik rumbai</i>	tufted duck	A. FULIGULA Linnaeus 1758
<i>itik mata putih</i>	white-eyed duck, hardhead	A. AUSTRALIS Eyton 1838

6. *belibis, meliwis* = whistling duck, whistling teal, tree duck = DENDROCYGNA spp. Swainson 1837

While some sources identify the *belibis* as a 'wild mallard,' this is incorrect; the Indonesian term *belibis* properly refers to whistling ducks (genus DENDROCYGNA). As the

³ Also *itik ekor runcing*.

⁴ Also *itik penelope*.

⁵ Another difference I have read about—but never confirmed by personal observation—is that when taking flight, dabbling ducks can take off directly into the air, while diving ducks, with legs set further back on the body, require a few 'steps' across the surface of the water before taking wing.

name implies, whistling ducks have distinct, whistling calls. Another distinction from ANAS species is that among whistling ducks, males and females of a species exhibit no difference in plumage. There are eight living species of whistling ducks worldwide, of which at least four occur in Indonesia (D. EYTONI only in Papua).

<i>belibis kecil/batu</i>	lesser whistling duck	D. JAVANICA Horsfield 1821
<i>belibis kembang</i>	wandering whistling duck	D. ARCUATA Horsfield 1824
<i>belibis totol/tutul</i>	spotted whistling duck	D. GUTTATA Schlegel 1866
<i>belibis rumbai</i>	plumed whistling duck	D. EYTONI Eyton 1838

7. *angsa kerdil* = pygmy goose = NETTAPUS spp.

So-called pygmy geese are the smallest of all duck-like waterfowl. There are only three species worldwide, of which two occur in Indonesia. The cotton pygmy goose is found at freshwater lakes, flooded paddy fields, etc. throughout Indonesia. Adults are less than a foot in length, and can become somewhat tame (“inured to the presence of humans”) if left unmolested. The green pygmy goose is found only in southern New Guinea and northern Australia.

<i>angsa kerdil kapas</i>	cotton pygmy goose	N. COROMANDELIANUS Gmelin 1789
<i>angsa kerdil hijau</i>	green pygmy goose	N. PULCHELLUS Gould 1842

8. *umukia raja* = radjah shelduck, white-headed shelduck = TADORNA RADJAH Lesson 1828

The radjah shelduck inhabits New Guinea and tropical northern Australia. Although usually considered a coastal bird, it also ranges inland along wide rivers that have nice stony beaches. The birds have white bodies and black wings, with the black plumage extending as a distinctive black ‘collar’ around the neck.

9. *angsa boiga* = magpie goose = ANSERANAS SEMIPALMATA Latham 1798

Like the green pygmy goose and the radjah shelduck, the magpie goose is found only in northern Australia and New Guinea. It has black and white plumage and yellow feet.

10. *angsa undan* = swan = CYGNUS spp.

There are six or seven living species of swan. Most northern hemisphere species of swan have pure white plumage, but some southern hemisphere species are white and black, while one Australian species is almost entirely black. Apart from this black swan or *angsa hitam*, CYGNUS ATRATUS Latham 1790, which rarely or accidentally shows up in eastern Indonesia, swans are non-native to Indonesia.⁶ Doubtless, however, swans were known in the Malay language from the lore of India, where swans were important in mythology. The

⁶ The Dutch are said to have brought black swans to Batavia (Neill 1973:134), and I have even seen a pair of black swans at a pond in Matthews, North Carolina!

term *angsa undan*, referring to swans, should not be confused with *burung undan*, referring to pelicans.

Grebes

Grebes are a kind of diving bird. Although they are duck-like in appearance, they are order Podicipediformes, in reference to their feet which are positioned far back on the body (from Latin *podex* ‘rump’ + *pes* ‘foot’). They are poor at walking, and usually also reluctant to fly, preferring to dive when threatened, resurfacing several feet away.

11. *titihan* = grebe = TACHYPAPTUS spp.

Two species of grebes are found regularly in Indonesia, both belonging to genus TACHYPAPTUS.⁷

<i>titihan australia</i>	Australasian grebe	T. NOVAEHOLLANDIAE Stephens 1826
<i>titihan telaga</i>	little grebe	T. RUFICOLLIS Pallas 1764

T. NOVAEHOLLANDIAE occurs in Australia, New Guinea and nearby island groups. In the northwest its range extends as far as the Sangir Archipelago, and westward following the islands of Nusa Tenggara as far as Java, but it does not occur on mainland Sulawesi.

T. RUFICOLLIS is distributed from Europe and Africa to New Guinea. Mlíkovský (2010) recently split this species into T. TRICOLOR (Sulawesi and eastward) and T. RUFICOLLIS (elsewhere), but not all researchers have accepted his conclusions.

Boobies

The reason I mention boobies in this guide, but omit similar species such as pelicans (*burung undan*) and cormorants (*pecuk*), is that in an Indonesian folk classification boobies appear to be conceptually related to geese.

12. *angsa batu* = booby = SULA spp.

Boobies, order Pelicaniformes, a kind of sea bird nesting on rocky islands, go by the general name of *angsa batu* in Indonesian (sometime the name *angsa laut* is also encountered). Four species are found in Indonesia—though some only as migrants.

<i>angsa batu kaki merah</i>	red-footed booby	S. SULA Linnaeus 1766
<i>angsa batu coklat</i>	brown booby	S. LEUCOGASTER Boddaert 1783
<i>angsa batu topeng</i>	masked booby	S. DACTYLATRA Lesson 1831
<i>angsa batu aboti</i>	Abbott’s booby	PAPASULA ABBOTTI Ridgeway 1893 ⁸

⁷ The generic epithet is blended from Greek *tachy* ‘quick, rapid’ and *baptus* ‘dip, emerge.’

⁸ Formerly classified as SULA ABBOTTI.

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