A pair of Chestnut Teal – female in foreground, with pale throat, red eye, and overall mottled appearance (Photo: Rob Palazzi)
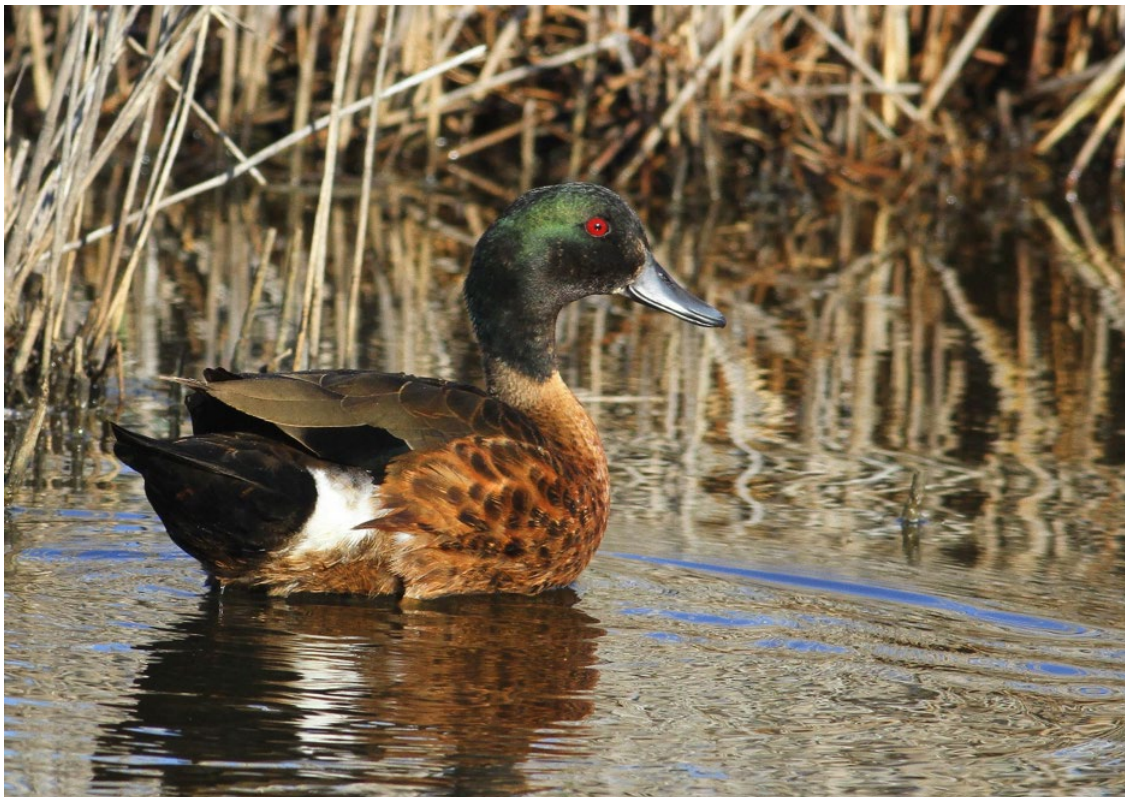
Description

Adult male birds are very distinctive – they have a bright glossy-green head, bright chestnut breast and belly, and a white patch separating the plumages on their belly and tail. Younger non-breeding males have much more muted head and breast/belly colorations and in particular their head lacks any glossiness and it is black or green-black. They can best be differentiated from females by their throat colour (which is dark for young males). Both males and females have red eyes.

Females are comparatively plain birds – having a dull grey-brown plumage which presents to the viewer as having a mottled effect. Their throat is pale. In the field, care must be taken to differentiate a female Chestnut Teal from a male or female Grey Teal. The latter are greyer/paler birds but that is not an easy field ID indicator especially if only one of the two species is present. The throat of Grey Teal (either a male or female) is much whiter than the throat of

a female Chestnut Teal – which is a quite useful ID pointer to work on. Another useful pointer is to check out any other teal in the vicinity – if some of them are adult male Chestnut Teal then there will be some females not far away.
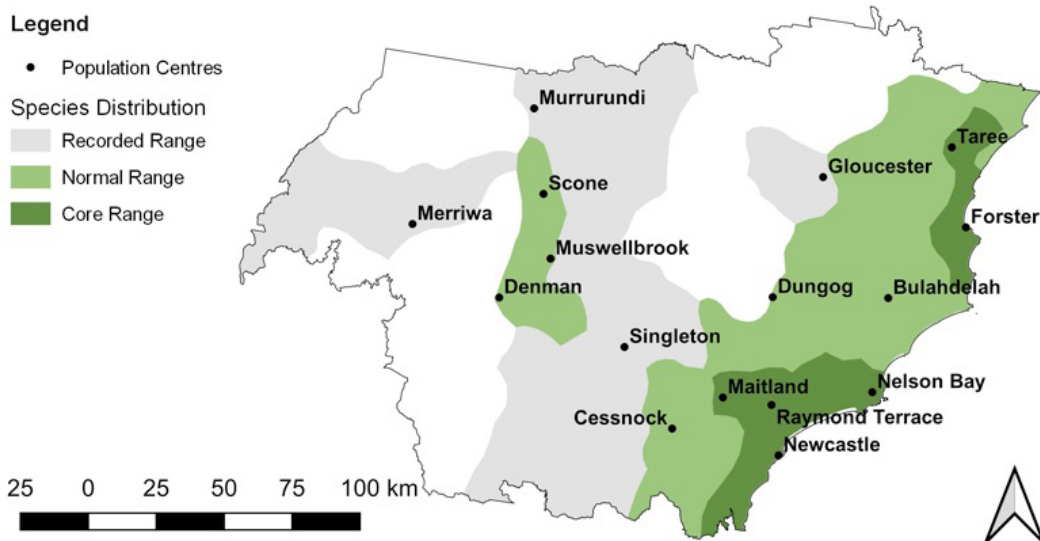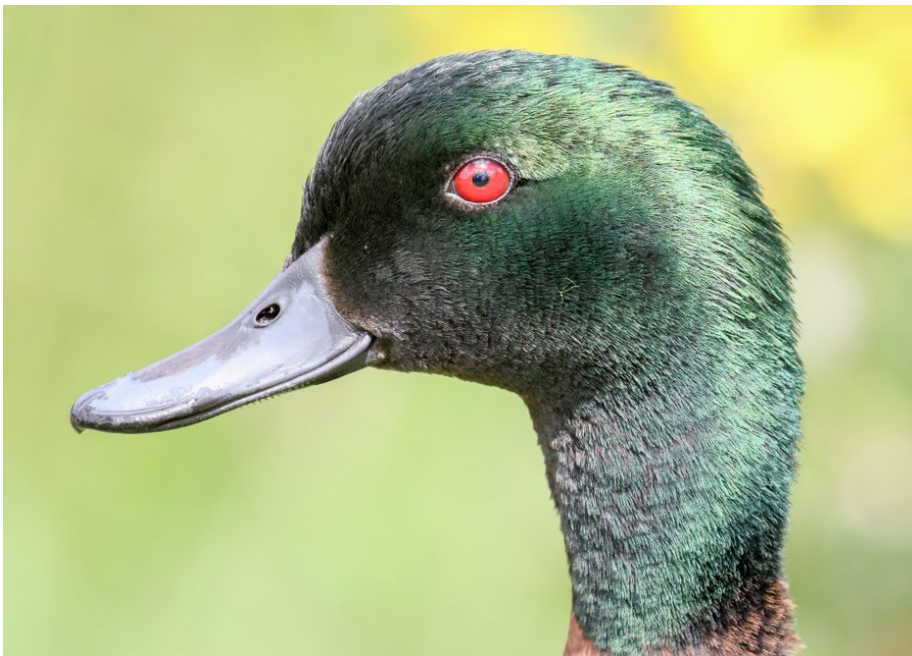

Female Chestnut Teal (photo: Mick Roderick)

Male Chestnut Teal (photo: Jim Smart)

Regional Status

The Chestnut Teal is a common breeding resident of our region, occurring at medium to large bodies of water anywhere. The apparent preference for wetlands closer to the coast probably reflects that these tend to be larger bodies of water; the Chestnut Teal is also a well-known user of brackish and estuarine habitats as well as freshwater ones.

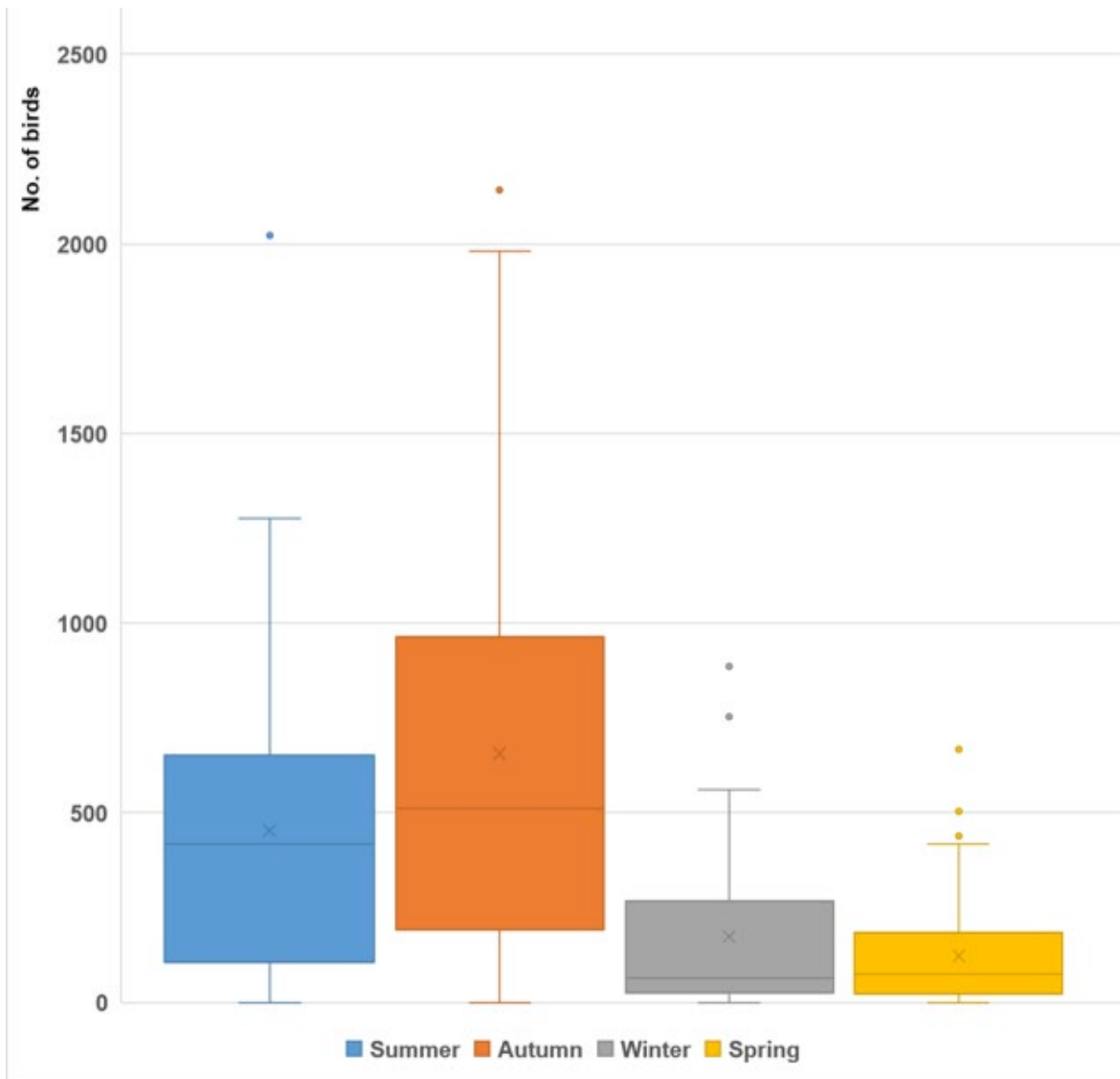Distribution map for Chestnut Teal in the Hunter Region (map prepared by Dan Williams).

Close-up of the head of a male Chestnut Teal (photo: Mick Roderick)

The importance of the Hunter estuary

The Hunter estuary is one of the most important sites in Australia for Chestnut Teal. It is quite common for 1,000 or more birds to be present – which is a significant proportion of the overall population (which has been estimated to

be about 100,000 birds). The highest count of them in the estuary has been of over 3,800 birds!

Their numbers in the estuary are much greater in summer and autumn than winter and spring, and with the numbers peaking in autumn. So, right now is the time when we can expect to find lots of Chestnut Teal around.

Season counts of Chestnut Teal in the Hunter Estuary (data from HBOC surveys)

About the name
Chestnut Teal

Chestnut is descriptive (of the male!). *Teal* derives from the Common Teal of Europe, which is widespread, colourful and distinctive. Many of the smaller members of the genus *Anas* are known now as teal. The first known use of the name in Old English is *teles* – the spelling gradually evolved into the form that we now use.

Anas castanea

The genus name is from the Latin *anas/anatis*, both meaning "duck" while *castanea* is Latin for the chestnut tree and by extension, anything which is chestnut coloured.

Comparing the two teal species. Grey Teal on left, immature male Chestnut Teal on right, beginning to develop its breeding plumage (photo: Rob Palazzi)