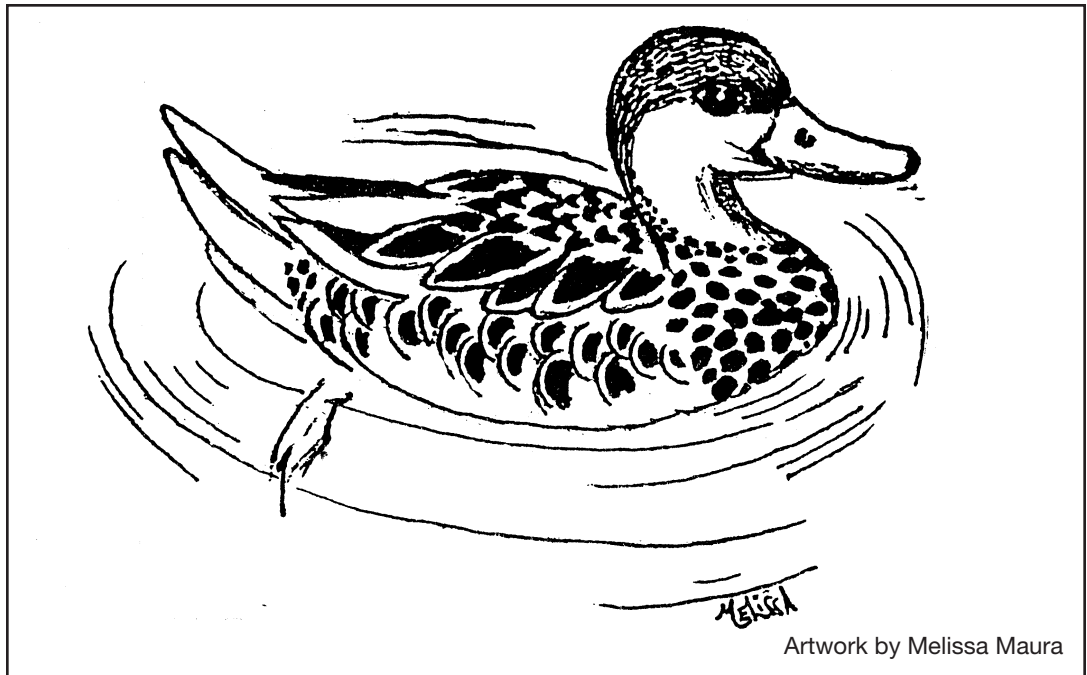




Endangered Species of The Bahamas



Artwork by Melissa Maura

WHITE-CHEEKED PINTAIL

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Anas bahamensis bahamensis

COMMON NAMES

Bahama Pintail, Bahama Duck, Bahama Teal, White Jaws, White Cheeked Pintail, White Faced Duck

DESCRIPTION

The White cheeked Pintail is often described as being a very pretty duck. The crown and back of the head are a dark mottled brown with cheeks, chin and upper foreneck a pure white. The bill is a dark bluish gray with a brilliant red spot at the base. The body plumage is medium brown with black spotting and pointed fawn-colored tail. The eyes are red to red brown and the legs and feet are dark grey. The females are similar to the males, but are slightly smaller, have slightly paler plumage, and a slightly less colorful bill spot (orange-red).

DIET

White-Cheeked Pintails eat both animals and plants. Much of the animal life they eat are invertebrates. Some of the animals Pintails eat are shorefly larvae, brine shrimp, water boatmen, scuds, aquatic nematodes and midge larvae. Foods are seived from the pond or lake bottom by "dabbling" "tipping up" or feeding with the head-under posture in shallow water. Pintails also eat seeds of wigeon grass, foxtail grass, panic grass, and wild millet.

REPRODUCTION

Social courtship may occur year round, but is most frequent and intense during winter and early spring. Typically, 2-10 males surround 1-4 females on the water and perform Burps and Down-ups-the major courtship displays. Pair courtship displays include Head Pumping, Belly Preening, Preening Behind the Wing and Mutual Drinking. Most Bahama Pintails are monogamous (choosing one partner for the breeding season) and some pairs stay together year-round and for more than one year. Mate White-Cheeked

Pintails become extremely aggressive during the breeding season, establishing territories and evicting intruders with chases, "swim-offs" and fights. The males escort and defend their mates and territories during the early part of the nesting season, but usually abandon them in late incubation and move to a safe area for the wing molt (shedding of feathers). Males may occasionally escort their mate and brood, but females provide parental care for the young. Nesting on off shore cays is common in the West Indies. On New Providence, males defend territories on the Paradise Island ponds while females nest on Salt Cay, returning to their mates territory to feed and preen during incubation recesses. Nests are located on the ground and concealed underneath low vegetation. The nest bowl is scraped out of leaf litter or sand covering the limestone rock and is well lined with dead leaves and down. Ducks nesting in mangrove areas placed grass among the mangrove roots. The female lays a clutch of 6-10 smooth, buff colored eggs and incubates the eggs for 25-26 days. Females nesting on the offshore cays lead their day old ducklings across the ocean back to the island with pond habitat. Young birds fly when they are 45-60 days old.

An extended breeding season occurs in the winter and spring in the northern Bahama Islands, but nesting is more irregular and may occur year round (depending on rainfall) in more southerly parts of the species range.

HABITAT AND RANGE

The White-Cheeked Pintail occupies shallow, fresh, brackish and salt water ponds and lagoons, mangrove swamps and marshes, tidal creeks and estuaries. In Great Abaco, Bahamas they are found in the "Marls" an expansive shallow tidewater region dotted with mangrove-covered clayey flats and small ponds surrounded by tall dense mangrove vegetation. In Cuba they make extensive use of Rice Plantations. The White-Cheeked Pintail can be found on most of the islands in the West Indies (including the Bahama Islands, Greater Antilles (Cuba, Hispaniola & Puerto Rico) Lesser Antilles and Netherland Antilles) and northern South America (Colombia, Venezuela, Guianas and northern Brazil).

STATUS

The *Bahamensis* subspecies are formerly abundant throughout the West Indies archipelago but is now rare or uncommon on most of the islands with the exception of Cuba, where numbers have now increased due to the advent of rice farming in the 1960's. The Bahama Pintail is fully protected from hunting in the Bahamas by the Wild Birds Protection Act.

THREATS

Population declines of the Bahama Pintail have been caused by excessive hunting and poaching and nest predation by introduced rats, mongoose, raccoons, feral cats, feral pigs and land crabs. Birds are common locally only on certain islands that have extensive areas of inaccessible duck habitat (Abaco, Andros, & Great Inagua) or that have wild bird reserves (e.g. Paradise Island). Loss of habitat is also a concern as coastal areas, ponds and large expanses of mangrove swamp are destroyed for use by expanding human populations.

INTERESTING FACTS

- Bahama Pintails undergo wing molt from May-August and remain out of sight much of the time. This secretive behavior may account for its reported "disappearance" or decline in numbers during some seasons.
- Male Bahama Pintails will often submerge themselves and swim "submarine style" into the territory of neighboring pair in order to surprise and copulate with the unreceptive females on this territory. The female's mate will defend her from such "extra pair" copulation attempts and try to chase away the intruding male.
- A few male White-Cheeked Pintails are able to pair with two females for the breeding season instead of the usual one. The polygynous males are "super males"; very aggressive individuals that are capable of guarding two mates.



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