

Nomonyx dominicus (Masked Duck)

Family: Anatidae (Ducks and Geese)

Order: Anseriformes (Waterfowl)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Masked duck, *Nomonyx dominicus*.

[<http://www.liveanimalslist.com/birds/masked-duck.php>, downloaded 21 February 2017]

TRAITS. *Nomonyx dominicus*, commonly known as the masked duck, is a small, chunky, diving duck with a long stiff tail (Wikipedia, 2016) that is held vertically when in agonistic (conflict) situations. Total length is 136-138mm in males and 132-139mm in females (Eitniear, 2014). The female duck (Fig.1) has a brown/buff body with crescent-shaped black spots, a black crown on top of the head, black eyes with white eyebrows. There are two black stripes across its face, one through the eyes and the other is below the eyes (Rodner et al., 2000). The wing is 133mm long with a white patch, the tail is short, fan-shaped and pointed, often held at right angles to the body. The bill is dark brown and legs and feet are greyish-brown. The males are mostly a rufous (reddish) brown, with pale blue bill (Fig. 2) (Ffrench, 2012).

DISTRIBUTION. Widespread in South America (Fig. 3), the masked duck can also be found in the West Indies (Caribbean), Mexico and occasionally in the USA (Eitniear, 2014).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Found mainly in rice fields, freshwater swamps, mangrove swamps, fresh, brackish or saline ponds, at the margins or on small islands surrounded by thick vegetation. *Nomonyx dominicus* is a species of duck that usually goes unnoticed. They stay hidden

between heavy vegetation, with their bodies submerged in water and heads sticking out. When threatened, they dive instead of flying. At night, these ducks fly to their feeding grounds, then back to their resting grounds before sunrise (Haynes-Sutton et al., 2010).

FOOD AND FEEDING. *Nomonyx dominicus* are typical vegetarians that mostly feed on aquatic plants such as seeds, stems, leaves, and roots; aquatic insects as well as small crustaceans (Eitniear, 2014). During the non-breeding season they feed on wild millet, seeds and vegetative portions of waterlilies, sedge, dodder and sawgrass. Breeding adults preferably feed on crustaceans and aquatic insects. These ducks particularly feed in open water areas 2-7m deep, by diving and by dabbling (Baldassarre and Sheaffer, 2014).

REPRODUCTION. Reproduction of *Nomonyx dominicus* occurs throughout the year in different locations. For instance, in Venezuela breeding takes place between June and October, whilst in the West Indies it occurs from November to May. Nesting occurs in shallow waters with swamp vegetation. Nests are constructed by females in the shape of a woven bowl in thick vegetation (Fig. 4), constructed of reeds, aquatic plants and with a thin lining of down (Bouglouan, 2017). About 3-6 eggs are produced by the females, creamy white in colour. More than one female may lay in the same nest. Incubation takes about 4 weeks and is carried out by the females who spend 93% of daylight hours on the nest, while the males stay nearby (Eitniear, 2014). Soon after hatching the ducklings leave the nest with the mother duck or both parents. Within 45 days they develop large enough feathers for flight (Bouglouan, 2017).

BEHAVIOUR. The masked duck can be described as reclusive, confiding and inconspicuous (Hilty, 2010). They usually occur in pairs, in colonies of up to 20 or more that may also include ruddy ducks. They swim rather low in water with only their head and neck above the surface, and often stay hidden between reeds, marsh vegetation and water lilies. Although, they escape by hiding in tall vegetation, they also dive or swim (Wikipedia, 2017). They fly well (Fig. 5) with fast-beating wings, then rear up and dive down into water covered in thick vegetation, with heavy splashes (Hilty, 2010). During courtship the male floats with its stiff tail sticking up above the water and lowers its blue bill into its chest while issuing soft calls of “oo-oo-oo”. The female stays still with her brown bill raised and neck extended (Bouglouan, 2017).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. *Nomonyx dominicus* is listed as Least Concern because it covers a very large range (estimated globally at 8,400,00 km²). Although the population trend of these ducks seems to be decreasing, it is not fast enough to be Vulnerable. The decline in population is due to over-hunting and human pressure (IUCN, 2016).

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Fig. 2. Male masked duck.

[<https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/masduc/introduction>, downloaded 10 March 2017]

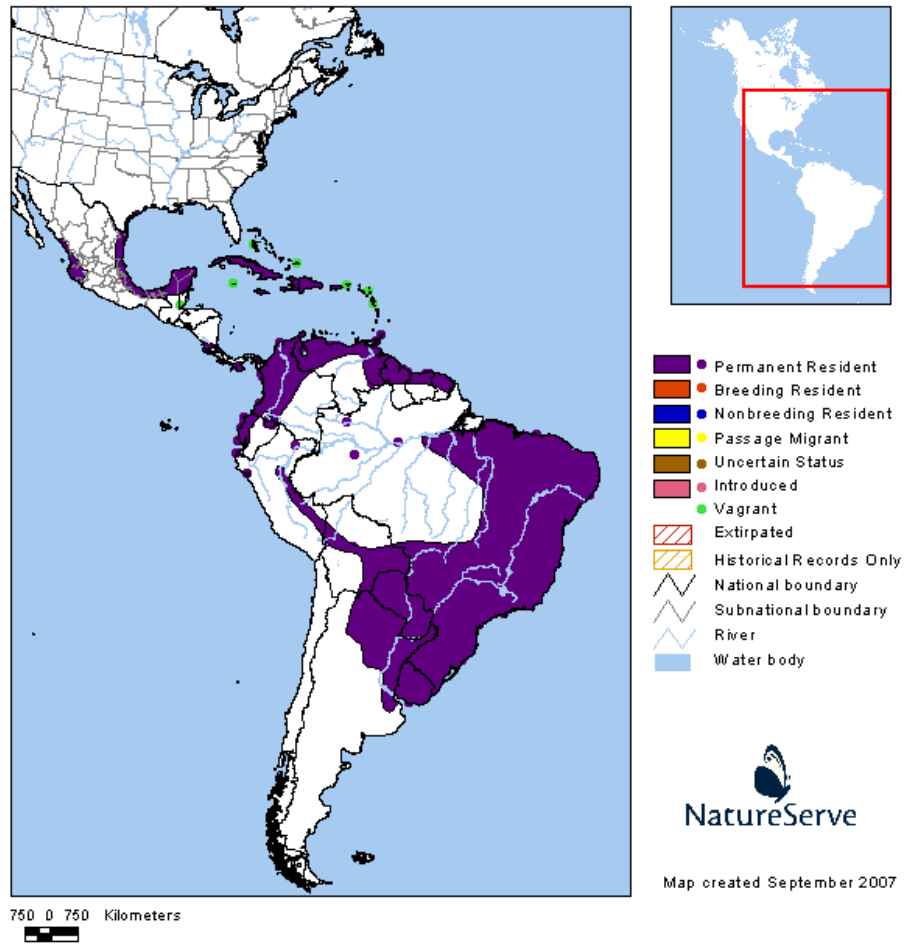


Fig. 3. Masked duck geographic distribution.

[http://www.birdphotos.com/photos/v?q=gallery&g2_view=xebug.ShowTree&g2_code=RangeMap&g2_species=Masked%20Duck, downloaded 7 March 2017]



Fig. 4. Female masked duck on nest.

[<http://www.oiseaux-birds.com/card-masked-duck.html>, downloaded 10 March 2017]

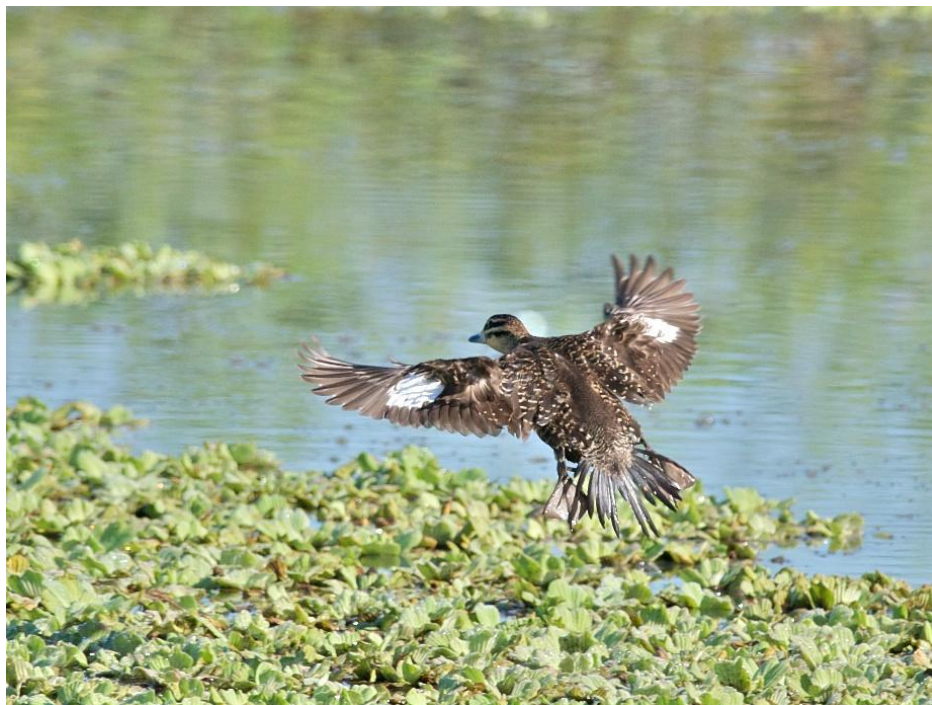


Fig. 5. Masked duck (with white wing patches) taking off.

[<http://www.hbw.com/ibc/species/52933/gallery>, downloaded 10 March 2017]