

## A General Anthology of Works relating to the Hook Billed Duck.

Compiled by Jonathan M. Thompson 2010.

*Ornithologiae*, 1676. Francis Willughby 1676, Latin text, later englishised by John Ray.

John Ray's 1678 edition of *Francis Willughby's ORNITHOLOGY* states:

### §. II

#### *The hooked-bill'd Duck.*

In shape of body and outward lineaments it is very like the common tame *Duck*; differs chiefly in the Bill, which is broad, something longer than the common Ducks, and bending moderately downward. The Head also is lesser and slenderer than the common Ducks. It is said to be a better layer.

The engraving shown on **TAB LXXV.** is titled “ *Anas rostro adunco The Hook-bill'd Duck* ”.

The same image appears in both editions & as given in Rudolph's articles, as supplied by JMT (1982).

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*A General treatise of husbandry, gardening.* 1726. Richard Bradley mentions keeping the “Hook Bill'd sort” as laying early & producing early ducklings.

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Eleazar Albin's *Natural History of Birds*, 1734. Says:

The *Duck* of this Kind was very like the common *Duck*, excepting the Bill, which was hooked. These *Ducks* are better layers than any of the other, either wild or tame.

Separate Illustrations of both male & female. Seems to follow Willoughby.

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In 1734 Johann Leonhard Frisch published the first of his series of volumes with the collective title *Vorstellung der Vögel in Teutschland* . Presents a coloured engraving of a pure white Hook-billed duck (female) with the caption reading:- “ Die krummschnabliche Haus Ente *Anas domestica curvi rostra*



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In 1750, William Ellis published his *The Country Housewife's Family Companion*, and covers the various sorts of poultry known to him at that time. In the section on Ducks, he mentions "the crook-bill" as being the sort preferred by some people.

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Thomas Hale in his *A Compleat Body of Husbandry* 1756, says:

. ,and there is a breed that have the Beak more turning up at its End : they are found upon experience to be better layers.

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Linnaeus, Carolus. 1758. *Systema naturae* gives" *Anas adunca*."

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John Latham 1785, *A GENERAL SYNOPSIS OF BIRDS* lists two types of duck with bent bills and suggests it was well known to the English and the Germans, and that the White-bibbed /-breasted Black variety was, more or less; then thought to be confined to the Dutch.

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J. M. Bechstein, *Gemeinnüßige Naturgeschichte Deutschlands*, 1791, states hook-billed ducks are common & known for their egg & meat production in the German area of Thüringen; most being white in colour, or light fawn, and a few presenting also a crest on the head.

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The 1806 edition of *A General System of Nature* by Linne with additions by William Turton M.D., states the birds are larger than the wild Mallard & inhabit Holland.

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*An Introductory discourse* – 1815, De Witt Clinton , LL.D.:

A variety of the *anas boschas*, or common duck, with a hooked bill, is kept in Germany, almost to the exclusion of the common sort.

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Edward Donovan issued his *A Natural History of British Birds* in ten volumes between 1794 and 1819. Volume nine contains the aquatic birds arranged in systematic order following Linnaeus. Plate 218 presents a Hook-billed duck very much like those already described by earlier authors.

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Hook Bills were certainly in the collection of the Zoological Society of London in 1831. Re: *REPORTS OF THE AUDITORS OF THE ACCOUNTS OF THE ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY FOR THE YEAR 1830, AND OF THE COUNCIL*.

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*The Book of Nature* , Association of Scientific Gentlemen; 1834. Image of White Hook Bill.

FIG. 4. *Hook-billed Duck. Anas Curvirostra*, LINN.

Apparently distinct from the wild duck, than which it is rather larger ; its beak is similar, but bent downwards ; irides fulvous ; the prevailing colour of the plumage is deep black, with the quills and under parts dull ; the head, neck, and rump are slightly tinged with shining gray ; on the throat is an oval white spot ; the five outer quills are white ; the rest black ; the exterior secondary quill is margined with white at its tip on the outer edge ; but the outer margins in general have a blue-black gloss, and form a speculum of that colour on the wing ; the tail as in the wild duck, with the four middle feathers recurved.

Described by Pallas: its native country is unknown.

Same descr. As Albin!!



1834. Original plate in Chamber's Cyclopaedia, dated 1807.

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The Reverend Leonard Jenyns, M.A., follows Linne's " *Anas adunca* " and cites Lathan and Donovan in *A Manual of British Vertabrate Animals*, 1835; stating:

"Not uncommon in the domestic state."

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Edward Blyth, writing in the *Magazine of Natural History*, 1835; says:

The crested varieties of domestic geese and ducks, and the hook-billed variety of the latter, are, however, in all probability, *true varieties*, and what are called "lob-eared" rabbits may be either a "*true variety*", or a *breed*.

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The second edition of Peter Boswell's *The Poultry Yard* 1840, states:

"Among the varieties may be noted the Curve-billed Duck, which is larger than the wild duck, remarkable for its turned up bill, colour is entirely black, though waved with green over the head, neck and rump. "

This Author's description is almost, but not exactly, the same as that given for Turton's (1806) *Anas Curvirostro*, and following Latham's "Curve-billed Duck".

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Rev. E. S. Dixon, *Ornamental & Domestic Poultry*, 1848,

There is also the White hook-billed Duck, with a bill monstrously curved downwards, not *upwards*, as some writers have it, but roman-nosed ducks in short, with features like Cruikshank's Jews, of a most grotesque and ludicrous appearance. . Then added to the 1853 edition: But Hook-billed Ducks are nothing new. Albin, in 1738, published coloured figures of both sexes, which look much as if they had a right to claim the rank of a species. The lines of small white specks on the head, as he describes them, are remarkable. The bill has some resemblance in its curvature to that of the Flamingo. He says, "These Ducks are better layers than any of the other, either wild or tame."

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J. J. Nolan in *Domestic Fowl and Game Birds* 1850, says:

**THE DUTCH HOOK-BILLED DUCK**

Is sometimes coloured, and frequently white, and occasionally found of either, or both colours, with top-knot. They are said to be more prolific than the ordinary kinds. In a collection of water-fowl, they are kept more for the purpose of variety than utility, as they are smaller than our improved breeds. The beak has a considerable curve downwards.

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*The Poultry Book* 1853, Wingfield & Johnson:-

"*The Hook-billed Duck* . . .

The bill is of large size, and turned downwards; the plumage usually white, with a large top-knot; but coloured specimens are not unfrequent. Holland is the source from which our importations of these birds are commonly derived ; and Messrs. Bates assure us that they pair like wild Ducks, and manifest disinclination to associate with other Ducks, amongst a variety of which they had been kept by those gentlemen.

We are not aware of ever having tasted one; but we are told that they possess qualities for the table, in addition to the recommendation of being both hardy and good layers. "

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C. A. Buhle in Naumann's *Die Vögel Deutschlands und ihre Eier* 1860.

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**ROW-BILL DUCKS.**

*Beetons Book of Pets* 1861

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C. A. Darwin, *The Variation of Plants and Animals under Domestication*, 1868:  
BREED 2. *Hook-billed Duck*.—This bird presents an extraordinary appearance from the downward curvature of the beak. The head is often tufted. The common colour is white, but some are coloured like wild ducks. It is an ancient breed, having been noticed in 1676.<sup>3</sup> It shows its prolonged domestication by almost incessantly laying eggs, like the fowls which are called everlasting layers.<sup>4</sup>

3=Willughby 4=Albin

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Harrison Weir in *Our Poultry* 1902, refers to:-

THE BOW-BILLED OR HOOK-BILLED DUCK

This is said to have been of Indian origin, but those to be found in the fancy duck collection as far back as 1837 to 1840 were imported from Holland. The first that I remember seeing were on the lake at the Surrey Zoological Gardens about that period; they were of the ordinary colours, mostly being white or splashed with red, yellow, and brown or grey. The carriage was somewhat upright, and the necks and bodies long and narrow, they being in no way more desirable, except as a curiosity, than the common duck.

Years after some far better birds were shown at Birmingham. These were white with clear orange-yellow bills, shanks and feet, and differing from the foregoing by having a top-knot towards the back of the skull. On enquiry of the owner I was told they were active foragers and prolific layers. They were not large, being, when full grown, about six pounds.

Of these I made a sketch, considering them, from a naturalist's point of view, interesting.

They are described by Willughby in his "Ornithology," Book III., page 381, 1678, under the name of hook-billed duck, and \*"as very like the common duck, from which it differs chiefly in the bill, which is broad, something longer than the common duck's, and bending moderately downwards, the head is also lesser and slenderer . . . it is said to be a better layer." "

\*For this last quote, the inverted commas should start *after*, and *not* before, the word 'as'. Ashton (2001) gives Weir's quote, and not as set out in Willughby. E Ashton also persistently gives "*Ornithologie*" for '*Ornithology*'; another reason to believe this author had not had sight of the original work.

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Bruno Dürigen, *DIE GEFLÜGELZUCHT*, 1906:

Is widespread throughout Europe and in Thuringia particularly because where it has gardens ponds and is because of its tasty meat (especially from the white variety) and good eggs it is kept in large herds.\*

With the beginning of the 1880's it completely disappeared, recently [1906] it emerged again in Holland and an example was seen again in the Berlin Zoological Gardens, usually showing a small crest on the head.

Regarding the colouring one breeds multi-coloured (wild-duck-coloured) and white, latter striking winners and now probably without exception. Some, in former times, carried a crest. Only esteemed because of their important egg yield and succulent meat, they last only their peculiar appearance were kept half. (Trans JMT)

\*However, this reference is in Bechstein 1791.

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Edward Brown, *Report on the Poultry Industry in the Netherlands*, 1921:

It may be noted that ducks are kept mainly for their eggs and not the flesh. At Landsmeer, as referred to in Section VIII, the birds vary somewhat. Many are of wild plumage, indicating recent domestication, especially as they are small in size of body. Some, however, are black in body, with a white throat, such as are to be met with in Belgium and Denmark. Upon one of the duck farms at the place named were birds which I do not remember to have seen before. These had mallard plumage, but carried a very long bill which curved downwards, the upper and lower mandibles being alike in this respect. The effect was very peculiar. They were said to come from one farm only, and were thought to be wonderful layers. As they were kept separate, some credence may be given to this statement.

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The Hook Bill is mentioned & photo of some Black White-bibbed birds appears in a 1930's poultry paper – to be found!

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Jean Delacour in *The Waterfowl of the World*, 1964, volume four, in describing domestic waterfowl produces the name “ Polish Duck,” and says (p. 165) :- “ An old breed, perhaps vanished today, medium-sized, white or coloured, in which the bill is arched downwards. ”

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Kenneth Broekman, of the Dutch Domestic Waterfowl Association, writing in BWA's *Waterfowl Spring 1987*, on “Ornithophilia ”, a Dutch show held at Utrecht, Holland, says:

Also seen at this show is the hooked bill duck: a hooked bill created so that hunters could distinguish it from others and refrain from shooting it. Before the war hook bills were kept by the hundreds of thousands in the province of North Holland. Unfortunately, word was spread that paratyphus was passed through duck eggs, the water became polluted, and five years ago we only had 30 hooked bills left. Through the efforts of the Dutch Domestic Waterfowl Association it is back again in its full glory. Actually, it was a Dutch method of keeping ducks that did not cost anything . . . this particular duck went in the morning to the rivers and canals to find food and returned home before dark to spend the night and to lay eggs.

There is a photograph of what appear to be a trio of hook-bills, all showing a white breast mark upon wild coloured plumage.

Ashton (2001) cites both the article above, and Schmidt (1989), who has possibly quoted Buhle out of Dürigen (it is actually in Bechstein 1791) without having site of original documentation.

Recently ( 2004) Carl Donner sold a pair of Hook Bills to the Ashtons. They lost the drake. Donner offered to replace it, but they did not accept his offer, preferring to ‘out-cross’ - “to improve vigour.” . . .

