

White Mandarin Duck At Trimpley BRETT WESTWOOD



White Mandarin duck

John Bingham

On December 6th 2010 I noticed a white bird among a feral flock of 120 or so Mandarins (*Aix galericulata*) loafing at the edge of the River Severn just below Trimpley reservoirs. It appeared to be a female or immature male Mandarin, lacking the adult male's characteristic "sails". Its bill was pink and its feet were orange. Although viewing conditions - freezing fog - weren't ideal, it appeared to have a dark eye, rather than the pink eye one would expect of a complete albino. A few days later John Bingham was able to take some photographs of the bird and he commented that it was probably likely to have some form of leucistic pigmentation. Neither John nor I had seen this form of Mandarin in the wild before, so we posted a request in BBC Wildlife magazine and received this response from Hein van Grouw, Curator of the Bird Group at the Natural History Museum's Department of Zoology in Tring.

He told us that these "white" birds aren't rare in captivity and that the apparently white pigmentation is also known as "blond" by bird-fanciers and by geneticists

as "ino" or sex-linked imperfect albinism. It's recessive within inheritance and causes an incomplete synthesis of the melanin pigments resulting in a very bleached, but not white, plumage. It's a widespread mutation among captive mandarins and as feral populations came originally from captive birds, and newly-escaped birds bring in their genes to established feral flocks from time to time, it is likely that the gene is also present in most feral populations.



White Mandarin with white Mallard

John Bingham

We don't know if this bird has recently escaped from a collection or has been born in the wild. Either way, it will be interesting to see if it survives the winter and goes on to pair and breed in the Forest. A white Mandarin should be obvious if anyone sees it and we'd be delighted to hear of any sightings during the breeding season.

NOTE

Paper on colour aberrations by Hein van Grouw was in Dutch Birding 28 (2006); 79-89.

Letter in Birdwatch magazine January 2010 p.18



Group of Mandarin Duck, River Severn near Trimpley

John Bingham