NOTES ON THE BLACK DUCK

By Peter Scott

The chances of the Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) shot in Ireland on 5th February 1954 having escaped from captivity may be regarded as negligible. Very few are kept in waterfowl collections, and although they have been bred at Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, the young have always been permanently pinioned; no record can be traced of any offspring of these birds having been allowed to fly or of any other source of full-winged Black Ducks in Europe.

The Black Duck breeds in north-eastern North America from Labrador south to N. Carolina and west to the Great Lakes. Its breeding-range takes in James Bay at the southern end of Hudson's Bay.

After the breeding-season many move further north and further west greatly extending the range of the species, but at the limit of the southward migration the Black Ducks are concentrated into a much smaller area bounded by the east coast from Nova Scotia to Florida, the Gulf Coast and the lower half of the Mississippi basin. There is some evidence that the range has recently been extending westward.

The Black Duck is held to be a distinct species from the Mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*) because the breeding-ranges of the two forms overlap, and although hybridization between the two has been frequently recorded, no large hybrid population has developed. Nevertheless, the two must be very closely related and the Black Duck may be regarded as the representative of the Mallard in eastern North America. It has been stated that the arrival of Mallards in the Black Ducks' area may be comparatively recent and partly assisted by man.

Supposed local races have been separated in the past, but these are not now generally accepted, the differences being attributed to different sex and age groups, and to individual variation. (The Florida, and Mexican Ducks are now regarded as subspecies of *platyrhynchos*—*A. p. fulvigula* and *A. p. diazi*.)

Over its range the Black Duck is the most sought-after of the sporting ducks. Its extreme wariness is proverbial. It is rather rarely found in large flocks, but is very widely spread on both fresh water and on the coast. Although its food is mostly vegetable, some birds have been found with stomachs containing nothing but animal matter—amphipods and molluscs.

It is common in parks in many cities in the eastern United States—including New York—and is also found round many harbours. Like the Mallard it soon becomes tame when not persecuted.

REFERENCES
