

Mandarin Duck

Lach-Mhandarain



Mandarin Ducks originate in China, Japan and Russia but were brought into collections of exotic wildfowl in Britain from at least the late 19th Century. The first naturalised population in Scotland was on the river Tay above Perth and since then breeding has been recorded at several sites across Scotland where the population of wild birds is thought to be about 50 pairs -which may mean that there are up to 250 birds here in the winter. The largest groups seen together number about 30 birds. While most of these are sedentary, they can disperse over quite long distances and there are records of Scottish birds moving between here, The Netherlands and Norway.

The breeding colonies often establish from groups of birds that have escaped from a collection. Several colonies have seemed to increase for a while and have then dwindled away. It may be that they are not quite self-sustaining without human agency. Several local populations have benefited from specially built nest boxes and supplemental feeding. They seem to find a niche in the local habitat –

making regular, seasonal journeys to exploit beechmast and acorn harvests. They appear to be out-competed for nesting sites in trees along the riverbanks by other hole-nesting species and, together with their small numbers, it seems unlikely that they would have an impact on native fauna and flora.

As such brightly coloured and attractive birds, they are immediately noticed as something exotic out in the wild and people often go to great lengths to try and preserve these small, wild populations. It is likely that small colonies of Mandarin Ducks will continue to hang on in suitable localities, supplemented from time to time by escapees from wildfowl collections.

In Chinese, they are known as yuànyàng which means something like “duck and drake” and refers to their place in folklore as a symbol of fidelity.