

Anas bahamensis (White-cheeked Pintail)

Family: Anatidae (Ducks and Geese)

Order: Anseriformes (Waterfowl)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. White-cheeked Pintail, *Anas bahamensis*.

[http://zstt.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=16&limitstart=1,
downloaded 15 October 2012]

TRAITS. There are three subspecies of *Anas bahamensis*: *A. b. bahamensis*, *A. b. galapagensis*, and *A. b. rubrirostris* (Kear 2005). Measuring from 16-19 inches in length with a wing span of approximately 23-26 inches, the adult *A. b. bahamensis* has a lightly speckled brown crown which extends to just under the eye, and reaches the nape and rear of the neck (Ogilvie and Young 2002). The eye is a reddish brown colour (Kear 2005). It has distinguishing pure white cheeks, which greatly contrasts with the crown and its dark grey bill with bright red coloured maxilla base (Hilty 2002). Its body is slim, with its upper back having a cinnamon brown colour that is generously spotted with black (Blake 1977). The lower back and rump has feathers of a smutty black colour with cinnamon brown edges. Its tail and wings are long and pointed, with the tail having a pale brown buff and its wings having a smutty black colour with a bright green speculum (Ogilvie and Young 2002). A black band forms a border at the edge of the green which is usually only visible in flight (Hilty 2002). The underside of its wings is a white buff and its feet a dark grey and webbed (Blake 1977). Both male and female *A. b. bahamensis* adults have the same coloured pattern appearance; however the females tend to be slightly smaller than the males and are less brightly coloured (Kear 2005). The young of the species lack the red colouration in the maxilla or bill base and has a slightly shorter bill than the adult. Young white-cheeked pintails also have a much less green speculum and a yellow tinge over their body (Nellis 2001) especially on the underside of their bodies (Kear 2005).

ECOLOGY. Originally found in the Bahamas Islands, the white-cheeked pintail can also be found in wild populations patchily distributed across the Caribbean; being found in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, The Virgin Islands, Suriname, French Guiana, Puerto Rico, and the eastern parts of Cuba (Ogilvie and Young 2002). The subspecies *Anas bahamensis rubrirostris* can be found in Florida and the most northerly parts of South America while the subspecies *Anas bahamensis galapagensis* is found only in the Galapagos Islands (Nellis 2001). They are frequently observed in habitats in and near lakes, estuaries, lagoons, and mangroves in saline waters, feeding on grass seeds, algae, and small insects. They may also be less frequently found inland near freshwater ponds (Blake 1977).

ACTIVITY. *Anas bahamensis* is found year round in most populations, however the breeding ducks in South America usually relocate when not in the mating season, and others may migrate only if the food source or water supply depletes (Nellis 2001). They mate during seasons of heavy rainfall; February to June in the Bahamas, April to July in Puerto Rico and April to November in Trinidad and Tobago (Nellis 2001). The white-cheeked pintails lay between five (5) and twelve (12) eggs (Hilty 2002). The fledging period last up to two (2) months and they breed from as young as one (1) year old, with a lifespan of up to fourteen (14) years (Nellis 2001).

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. Usually found in small flocks of approximately ten (10) to twelve (12) individuals during the year outside of the breeding season, however during the breeding season the breeding ducks tend to pair off while the non-breeding ducks remain in the small flocks or sometimes stay alone (Hilty 2002). The white cheeked pintail, although very rarely can also be seen in flocks of up to one hundred (100) individuals (Kear 2005). Although the white-cheeked pintails usually form small single species flocks, on some rare occasions they also form mixed flocks with birds of other species such as the blue winged teal (Nellis 2001).

FORAGING BEHAVIOUR. Generally surface feeders, the white-cheeked pintails usually forage by dabbling in the shallow waters or sometimes dip their heads into the water to collect food (Nellis 2001). They feed on surrounding flora such as grass seeds, or on algae and small aquatic invertebrates (Hilty 2002). They may also dive into the deeper regions of the water, completely submerging their bodies, as they attempt to retrieve food from the waters (Kear and Johnsgard 1968).

COMMUNICATION. The male of the species (the drake) has a low voice and makes a squeaky whistling sound while the females give a series of low quacks that descending in pitch (Kear 2005). The male white-cheeked pintails display a down-up movement of the head, directed toward either females or males of the species. When directed at the female, it is interpreted as a courtship display, but agonistic when directed toward males as it is then followed by other aggressive behaviours such as chases or fights (Mc Kinney, Sorenson and Hart 1990).

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR. Courtship displays maybe seen throughout the year in the *Anas bahamensis* populations, but the frequency of occurrence will intensify during the mating season of the species (Kear 2005). The female display involves the stiffening their necks to rouse males followed by low quacking (Nellis 2001). A down-up motion of the head and body with pointed tail is executed by the males as they position themselves alongside of the target female then turn

the head to one side followed by the turning of the entire body so that it now faces the target female (Mc Kinney, Sorenson and Hart 1990). The male display is also accompanied by a grunt or whistling vocalization (Mc Kinney, Sorenson and Hart 1990). Since populations usually have more males than females, males must compete, and once a choice is made by the female, both the male and female of the pair display a head pumping action, where the head is repeatedly moved up and down, almost like nodding (Nellis 2001). The pair then leaves the flock for copulation with the female being led away by the male (Nellis 2001). Although *Anas bahamensis* is usually a monogamous species some males do engage in other reproductive strategies such as 'extra pair copulation' where once the female's eggs are fertilized, the male leaves to inseminate another (Sorenson 1994).

JUVENILE BEHAVIOUR. The ducklings of the species, although from different nests, may assemble and form small flocks at the rearing ground. They also move about in the presence of an adult female and ducklings must follow mother to the rearing ground which is usually away from the nesting site (Nellis 2001).

ANTIPREDATOR BEHAVIOUR. The predators of the *Anas bahamensis* include the laughing gull and mongoose, which snatches the eggs of the ducks; the snook and barracuda, which prey upon the ducklings; and peregrine falcons that capture the adult ducks (Nellis 2001). Individuals have been seen diving into the depths of waters to escape predators such as the falcon (Nellis 2001). The nests are usually built concealed in thick growth away from the water to avoid drawing any attention to the eggs by predators.

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Fig. 2. White-cheeked pintail (male) engaging in courtship display, in body and tail up position.

[<http://www.mbrochu.com/oiseauxouest-En.htm> , downloaded 21 October 2012]



Fig. 3. White-cheeked pintail adult female (left) and juvenile (right).

[<http://www.flickr.com/people/putneymark/> , downloaded 15 October 2012]