

## Occurrence and first breeding of Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* in Flanders (Belgium)

*Spanoghe Geert, Vermeersch Glenn & Anselin Anny*

*Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO)*

The first sighting of the exotic Ruddy Duck in Flanders dates from 1979. Sightings became regular since. The records presumably involved both local escapes as well as migrants from the feral population in the United Kingdom. In 2008 a first breeding attempt of this species was confirmed in Flanders. At least two pairs bred successfully, raising 3 and 4 chicks, in the Antwerp harbour area on the Leftbank of the river Schelde (Beveren). A third pair was seen with 5 newly fledged chicks but they apparently did not survive afterwards. These breeding records seem to be the origin of a feral population in Flanders. In an international context Belgium agreed to prevent the Ruddy Duck from reaching a feral population. This agreement was reached between 15 European countries in order to protect the Iberian population of the White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*. This species has severely suffered from competition and hybridisation with feral Ruddy Ducks reaching the Iberian peninsula. The prosecution of feral species is a matter of the Community Governments in Belgium. The Flemish Agency for Nature and Forest, advised by INBO, is now investigating which steps should be taken in order to cull these Ruddy Ducks.