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## NOTES

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### FIRST NESTING RECORD OF BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

TOM PALMER

2599 8th St. NW, Apt. 1, Winter Haven, FL 33881

The Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) has been recorded in central Florida since at least 1973 (F. Montalbano and G. Williams in Edscom 1977). In recent years there have been frequent sightings, including: an apparently injured adult observed in May 1986 near Wauchula in Hardee County (J. Maddox, pers. comm.); two adults observed 11 July 1989 at IMC Fertilizer Inc.'s Clear Springs Mine near Bartow in Polk County (Feiertag and King in Renken 1989); and a small flock seen at Agricor's Fort Green Mine in Polk County in the summer of 1990 (C. Geanangel, pers. comm.). The only other locations in Florida where this species is currently found are Sarasota County and Palm Beach County (C. W. Biggs, pers. comm.).

On 8 September 1990 at approximately 0730 EDT, Larry McCandless, Jim Sampson, and I visited a clay settling pond just west of CF Industries' Hardee complex in Section 6, Range 24E, Township 35S in northern Hardee County. Shortly after we arrived at the pond, we saw two adult Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and 12 ducklings (Fig. 1). The young birds were feathered and about three-fourths adult size. They followed the adults during the time we saw them. As we approached the birds, they swam to cover in vegetation (predominantly *Typha* sp.) at the edge of the pond. When we reached the area where the birds were thought to have gone, one adult flew up and repeatedly circled overhead. No attempt was made to locate the nest and we left without seeing the ducklings again that day. The adult pair and the brood of young had previously been seen on 31 August by McCandless and Sampson. The ducks were seen again about a week later by Sampson, who was able to photograph them.

Although the birds appeared to be wild (i.e. they were difficult to approach, lived in an area where there is relatively little human activity, and survived without human assistance), their origin is unknown. Stevenson (1968) noted that presumably escaped birds of this species were breeding more than 20 years ago in Dade County and were seen during breeding season in Broward County. All of the sightings of this species in Florida have occurred since that time. This species has been seen as far north as Zellwood in Orange County (B. Payne in Ogden 1975, J. Hintermeister and J. Horner in Edscom in 1978, P. Sykes in Paul 1986), sometimes in association with the Fulvous Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*), which was becoming established in the state during that period. It is possible that the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks that are being observed in central Florida today



Figure 1. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks seen in Hardee County.

are the feral descendants of the South Florida birds that were noted by Stevenson and later discussed by Owre (1973). However, there is nothing in the literature to suggest that there was any effort to keep track of the movement of those birds through banding or some other means, so it may be impossible to confirm this connection.

Lyn Atherton (pers. comm.) suggested another possibility in connection with the sudden appearance beginning in 1981 (Atherton and Atherton 1983) of a flock of as many as 35 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in Sarasota County, about 40-50 km southwest of the most recent records. She suggested that there may have been a trans-Gulf movement from Mexico or Texas that coincided with a northward range expansion during the previous decade noted by Emmanuel (1982). A mass movement of a related species, the Fulvous Whistling Duck, from Texas to Florida has been described by Oberholser (1974), though the circumstances under which that movement occurred were related to human-caused changes in their breeding habitat and food supply.

Although it was once considered a rare visitor to Texas from Mexico and Central America (Kortright 1942), the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck is now a well-established breeder there (Bolen 1962) and has bred as far north as Arizona (D. Clarke in Monson 1950). By 1990, it had also nested in Louisiana (S. Emmons, pers. comm.).

Additionally, Bolen (1971) notes that this species typically mates for life and returns to the same nesting site. Based on these observations, additional breeding records for this species should be expected in central Florida. Furthermore, it appears that this species is becoming better established within its existing range in Florida and could expand to other parts of the state.

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tries' property. Color photographs of the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks have been deposited in the archives of the Florida Ornithological Society at the Florida Museum of Natural History (File no. FOS 94).

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## ST. MARKS CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 1976

HENRY M. STEVENSON<sup>1</sup> AND NOEL O. WAMER<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Tall Timbers Research Station, Route 1, Box 678, Tallahassee, FL 32312*

<sup>2</sup>*502 East Georgia Street, Tallahassee, FL 32303*

In order to preserve the continuity of the annual Christmas Bird Counts at St. Augustine, Florida, R. W. Loftin (1990, *Fla. Field Nat.* 18: 56-57) submitted for publication that count for 1988, previously unpublished. Christmas Bird Counts at St. Marks, Wakulla Co., Florida, have been conducted annually from 1939 ("St. Marks Migratory Bird Refuge") to 1990. This 52-year record was flawed by the enigmatic failure of the 1976 count to appear in *American Birds*. Unfortunately, some details of this count are presently unavailable, but enough data are at hand to warrant publication. The format used here is similar to that used in *American Birds*.

St. Marks, FL, 28 Dec. 1976. Center of circle 1 mile WSW of St. Marks (30°08 N, 84°13 W). Before daylight to after dark. Temp. 38°-55° F. Wind WSW, 0-15 mph. Water open. Mostly cloudy (weather data from Tallahassee Weather Station). Observers in 8 parties; 102.5 party-hours.

Com. Loon 43; Pied-billed Grebe 176; Horned Grebe 98; Am. White Pelican 54; Double-crested Cormorant 537; Anhinga 22; Am. Bittern 1; Great Blue Heron 47; Great Egret 129; Snowy Egret 119; Little Blue Heron 67; Tricolored Heron 44; Green-backed Heron 5; Black-crowned Night-Heron 16; Yellow-crowned Night-Heron 3; White Ibis 294; Glossy Ibis 4; Canada Goose 126; Wood Duck 177; Green-winged Teal 51; Am. Black Duck 9;