

GENERAL NOTES

Field notes on the Black-bellied Tree Duck in Dutch Guiana.—In their important study on the Anatidae, Delacour and Mayr (1945. *Wilson Bulletin*, 57:1-55) state that the "Whistling Ducks, *Dendrocygnini*," are among the least known of all the ducks. This prompts me to publish the following notes on the Black-bellied Tree Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis discolor*), which is a common bird in the coastal area of Surinam, Dutch Guiana. Delacour and Mayr state that the *Dendrocygnini* only seldom perch in trees (p. 11), but in my experience this does not hold true for the Black-bellied Tree Duck, at least during the breeding season.

On August 4-5, 1946, I camped with some Hindustani fishermen on one of the lagoons that lie behind the woods bordering the seacoast east of Nieuw Nickerie, and on leaving camp in the early morning of August 5, we flushed several Black-bellied Tree Ducks from the high trees that bordered the lagoon and dotted the small islands all over the water. On the dead branches of one high tree, 5 pairs were resting. At that time I had not read Delacour and Mayr's paper, and I made no special notes on this perching habit of the ducks, which is, moreover, well known to all local fishermen and hunters. From August 16 to 18, 1947, I camped in the same locality; early in the morning of August 17, we paddled all over the lagoon in search of Tree Ducks, and I made careful notes of the numbers of all ducks perched in trees, with the following results: I observed, in all, 46 birds resting in trees as follows: 3, 2, 6, 7, 3, 1, 2, 2, 4, 3, 1, 1, 6, 3, and 2 (each number representing a total of birds seen in one tree); I saw only 2 small groups (one of 2, and one of 4, birds) swimming in the shallow water of the lagoon. The first group of 3 perching birds was in company with a Wood Ibis (*Mycteria americana*); further, we flushed from a group of trees about a dozen Tree Ducks with a pair of Muscovy Ducks (*Cairina moschata*). When flushed from their resting place, all the ducks flew about for some time and then alighted again in trees. All the ducks rested on dead branches high up in tall trees. The perching habit of the Black-bellied Tree Duck is mentioned in Bent (1925. *U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull.* 130:271).

At the time of my observations, the birds must have been breeding, for on August 5, 1946, we found, in a small creek meandering through the woods a pair of Tree Ducks with about a dozen newly hatched young closely packed behind them. The young, with a splash, dived again and again on our approach. These parents showed no "injury feigning," but on August 17, 1947, we observed an adult with about 14 newly hatched young in the shallow water of the lagoon. When our boat surprised them, the adult gave a fine example of "injury feigning," splashing with its wings through the water in front of our boat as if it were crippled, while the young birds dived and dispersed in all directions. (When actually crippled, the adults also dive, hiding in the midst of the vegetation in the water, where they are very difficult to find.)

On the same day, another party of fishermen came into camp with a clutch of 12 fresh eggs that they had found in the grass.

At night during the big rains, in May and June, great flocks of Tree Ducks visit the rice fields, where they are seen only during this time of year (and where they do a lot of damage). On moonlit nights they are much harassed by hunters, who use live decoy birds; the flocks readily respond to the decoys and alight near by. Under these conditions many are shot but many crippled birds are not retrieved. These birds are hunted eagerly all through the year, for their flesh is excellent and there is in this country no closed season. It is no wonder that all the fishermen complain that the "Weeseeweese," as the Black-bellied Tree Duck is called here, after its call-note, has decreased considerably.—FR. HAVERSCHMIDT, 14 *Waterkant*, Paramaribo, Surinam, Dutch Guiana.