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SIGHTING OF MASKED DUCK DUCKLINGS IN FLORIDA

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The Masked Duck (*Oxyura dominica*) is a tropical resident of northern South America, Middle America, Greater Antilles, Lesser Antilles, and the Gulf Coast of Texas (A.O.U. 1993:97). From 1955 to the mid-1980s the bird has been regularly seen in Florida especially at Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge (LNWR) and the Keys (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992:46; Kale and Maehr 1990:53) Nesting has been suspected, but not proven.

On 11 February 1977 at 1130 I was birding on the marsh trail at LNWR and chanced upon a group of Masked Ducks. There was a bright-rusty male with black face and bright-blue bill, a brown female with a two-stripped cheek, and four small brownish ducklings with a dark horizontal streak on the pale cheek. The ducklings were about the size of the traditional Easter chick.

I first observed the group in a grassy weedy pond alongside the trail when I was with 8 m of them. When they saw me approach, they did not dive nor fly; rather they quietly slipped out-of-sight into the nearby aquatic vegetation.

It is likely that the ducklings had hatched in the heavily vegetated shallow pond where they were feeding when I found them. Many acres of suitable nesting and feeding areas lay within the surrounding dikes.

There is no reported eclipse plumage for *Oxyura dominica* (Kortright 1962:372; Palmer 1976:519). The Masked Duck drake is thought to lose his brilliant color during the postnuptial molt in autumn, as does the Ruddy (*Oxyura jamaicensis*). This explains why the male exhibited the breeding plumage and bright soft parts.

The presence of flightless young is evidence of the first verified nesting for the Masked Duck in Florida.

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