

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING DUCKS AT YAZOO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, MISSISSIPPI

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Two Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) were observed at the Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge, Washington County, Mississippi from 16-23 July 1996 and photographed 17 July 1996. I first observed the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks on 16 July at approximately 10:00 as they were flying over several ponds designated for wader and shorebird management on the west side of the refuge. I followed the birds to where they landed and observed them foraging and preening in one of the management ponds.

At approximately 19:00 on 16 July, I returned to the area with Michael Taquino, a field technician and student at Mississippi State University working on a project involving avian communities and bottomland hardwood restoration efforts. We observed the pair of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks fly between two ponds. The two ducks appeared to be closely associated, possibly indicating a long-term pair bond between the them.

On 17 July, at approximately 19:30, I returned to the management ponds and photographed the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks as they foraged. I returned again on 23 July at approximately 19:00 with Michael Taquino and Tim Nuttle and observed the pair foraging and preening. This was the last sighting of the pair until our field season ended approximately two weeks later. I routinely stopped by these ponds to observe the birds present and I am confident the ducks were not present before mid-July or after 23 July.

The wildlife biologist for the Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge, David Linden, was notified that the birds were present. One previous record of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks occurring at the refuge exists. Three individuals observed a pair of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at Yazoo NWR on 8-10 May 1985 (Hodges 1985). John Fulton photographed the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, which were the first confirmed record of the species in Mississippi (Hodges 1985). The only other record

of this species is one duck observed by seven individuals near Arkabutla Lake, Tate County, from 20-25 May 1989 (Schiefer 1990).

The occurrence of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in Mississippi is unusual due to its typical distribution in the United States, usually breeding only in southernmost Texas and rarely venturing outside their breeding range (Bellrose 1980, Richard Kaminski, personal communication). Although this species is often considered nonmigratory, several band recoveries have been made as far east as Pecan Island, Louisiana (Bolen 1967). Thus, the occurrence of this species in western Mississippi is well out of its normal range. No major weather events occurred in the week leading up to the sighting of the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, therefore, this sighting may be an example of post-breeding dispersal.

One nesting record outside of Texas exists for this species. In 1978, a pair nested at Reelfoot Lake, Tennessee (AOU 1983). Although I do not feel that this pair of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks attempted nesting at Yazoo NWR, the possibility of this species nesting in Mississippi does exist and should not be discounted.

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