

General Field Notes

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First North Carolina Record of the Masked Duck

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On the afternoon of 20 February 1982, we observed a Masked Duck (*Oxyura dominica*) from a canoe on Lake Ellis in Craven County, N.C. The following morning we returned by canoe to the same area with John O. Fussell III and after a short search located the bird. Fussell concurred in our identification and secured several color photographs of the duck. This sighting and supporting photographs (see front cover) constitute the first recorded occurrence of the Masked Duck in the Carolinas.

The bird was first observed as it swam out of a clump of emergent vegetation and into open water. Field marks were not discernible due to the intense glare of the sun off the surface of the water. It had the silhouette of a Ruddy Duck (*O. jamaicensis*) and possibly would have been passed up as such had it not taken flight by leaping straight up out of the water. This triggered our curiosity because Ruddy Ducks characteristically "run" across the surface of the water when taking flight. Twenty minutes later we relocated the duck and identified it as a Masked Duck in female or winter-male plumage.

After relocating the bird, we observed it from as close as 10 m as it swam and dove near emergent vegetation. Two dark facial stripes distinguished this duck from the similar female Ruddy Duck, which has a single facial stripe. One stripe extended from the top of the bill through the eye and the other from the base of the bill across the cheek. A superciliary stripe and the cheeks and throat were buffy. The warm buffy coloration of the face and throat was noticeably different from the dingy white cheeks and throat of a winter female Ruddy Duck. When we returned the following morning we flushed the bird, and it revealed white wing patches in the outer secondaries. It is noteworthy that, when flushed, it again sprang straight up out of the water. This behavior is well documented and is possibly an adaptation to the duck's preferred habitat of extensively vegetated marshes that limit the opportunities for a running takeoff on open water.

The duck showed a definite preference for an area of shallow water bordering a dense stand of cypress (*Taxodium* sp.) and Water Willow (*Decodon verticillatus*) heavily draped with Spanish Moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*). The shallow water was densely vegetated with emergents such as Jointed Spike-

rush (*Eleocharis equisetifoides*), Maiden Cane (*Panicum hemitomon*), and white Water-lily (*Nymphae odorata*) and with submerged Bog Moss (*Mayaca aubletii*) and Sphagnum Moss (*Sphagnum* sp.). The bird swam and dove, grebe-like, along the margins of the emergent vegetation. When approached, it would dive or swim into the emergent vegetation or stand of trees. On one occasion it emerged from a dive with only its head above water in an apparent attempt to escape detection. At no time was the Masked Duck observed to associate with nearby American Coots (*Fulica americana*), Ring-necked Ducks (*Aythya collaris*), Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*), or American Black Ducks (*Anas rubripes*).

The bird was last observed on 25 February. It was not located during an extensive search of the area on 7 March.

The normal range of the Masked Duck extends from the Gulf coast of Mexico and Central America and the West Indies south to northern Argentina. This species is considered rare and local even within its normal range. The preferred habitat consists of marshes and swamps where the water surface is extensively covered with emergent and floating vegetation. In the United States, the Masked Duck occurs irregularly in southern Texas with the first definite nesting occurring there in 1967. There are several records from southern Florida and single records from nine other scattered states (Alabama, Georgia, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Vermont, and Wisconsin). These records are summarized by Palmer (Handbook of North American Birds, Vol. 3, p. 523-525).

As with all extralimital sightings of waterfowl, one must contend with the possibility of escapes. Recent literature reveals that the Masked Duck has never been bred or maintained in captivity. This, coupled with previous extralimital records, indicates that the Masked Duck observed and photographed in Craven County, N.C., was most likely wild and not an escape.

Lake Ellis is a privately owned inholding within the Croatan National Forest. The authors thank Ellis Simon and Manley Fuller for giving us the opportunity to explore the area.

First Nesting of the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in South Carolina

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On 6 July 1982, I found two adult Scissor-tailed Flycatchers (*Muscivora forficata*) at Youngs Community in upper Laurens County on the piedmont of South Carolina. One of them was on a nest when I arrived at 1100. The other bird was on a telephone line nearby.

The birds were first observed by Niles Osborne approximately 3½ weeks prior to my visit. They had begun to build the nest then. He reported the sighting to Mary Riddle, who identified the birds and notified me. The nest was built in a lone Willow Oak (*Quercus phellos*), in a fork at the end of a drooping branch. It was 15 feet above the ground, constructed of plant stems, dried grass, and some thistledown. The nest was well hidden by the oak leaves around it. The nest tree was between two buildings, a community center and