

General Field Notes

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General Field Notes briefly report such items as rare sightings, unusual behaviors, or significant nesting records; or summaries of such items. Submit manuscripts to the appropriate state editor.

First, second, or third sightings of species in either state must be submitted to the appropriate Bird Records Committee prior to publication in The Chat.

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks Nest in South Carolina

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Until fairly recently the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) was considered accidental (one record, a specimen in 1977; Martin 1984) in South Carolina and classified as Provisional II (considered introduced by man or escaped from captivity, but not yet established) on the official state list (Post and Gauthreaux 1989). It was not until 1994 that a second record was documented, that of two ducks seen together, and photographed, at the Donnelley Wildlife Management Area (DWMA), Colleton County, on 30 July 1994 (Harrigal et al. 1995).

Since then an increasing number of sightings have come from lower coastal areas of South Carolina to the extent that the species is now classified as Definitive (considered established in the state) on the 2003 state list (South Carolina Bird Records Committee 2004).

* General Field Notes authored by a GFN editor are edited by the editor of *The Chat*.

In the summer of 2003, Harrigal observed a pair of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks with a brood of ducklings at DWMA. On 23 July 2004, Greg Hudson, DWMA Area Manager, saw a pair of whistling-ducks there with a brood of ten. These sightings constitute the first documented nesting records in the wild in South Carolina.

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks have been expanding their U.S. breeding range, centered in southern Texas, during the twentieth century (James and Thompson 2001). The first confirmed evidence of breeding in Florida was in 1990, and birds have recently nested as far north as Arkansas (James and Thompson 2001). Although the origin of some whistling-duck populations may have been from escapees (Florida) or in some cases from deliberate release programs, such as in Louisiana, most birds currently in Florida are considered to have originated from wild stock (James and Thompson 2001).

That the species has increased noticeably in the lower Colleton County area since first being found in 1994 is supported by the fact that Harrigal knows of an estimated 125–150 whistling-ducks on private land near Donnelly Wildlife Management Area (Fig. 1). Although considered migratory in the northern portions of its range (James and Thompson 2001), some birds, as documented by Harrigal, may be staying year round in South Carolina. Also, during the winter they have shown up in hunters' bags in Colleton County.

It remains to be seen if Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks will continue expanding northward along the Atlantic coast. Only two records had been documented within North Carolina as of 2000 (Lee 2000), and as of 2002 the species was not recognized by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee (2002).



Figure 1. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*), part of an estimated 125–150 birds on private lands, Colleton County, SC. Photo taken May 2004 by Dean Harrigal.

Nesting and brood habitat for Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks is described by James and Thompson (2001) as shallow freshwater lakes and ponds, often with emergent vegetation such as cattail (*Typha* spp.) and water lilies (*Castalia* spp.). Although they will nest on the ground, they are considered

to be primarily cavity nesters, using both natural cavities and nest boxes (James and Thompson 2001). Harrigal has seen no evidence to date of their using Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) boxes in South Carolina. However, it appears that the numerous coastal waterfowl impoundments and managed wetlands, along with thousands of Wood Duck boxes, could provide abundant habitat for the species to flourish in South Carolina.

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Nesting Evidence of Ovenbirds in the Coastal Plain of South Carolina

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From 2001 to 2004 I heard 4–6 Ovenbirds (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) singing every year on Weymouth Plantation, 8 miles NE of Georgetown in Georgetown County, South Carolina. On 4 June 2003, I searched for breeding activity on a pine/oak ridge next to a cypress swamp. A pair of Ovenbirds was feeding fledglings that were at least 20–30 days old (see Van Horn and Donovan 1994 for aging criteria). On this same day about 400 m away a male was singing and its mate was foraging in leaf litter. The female fed a 7–10 day old fledgling that was too young to fly more than 1 meter.

At Weymouth on 11 April 2004 I observed a female Ovenbird building a nest. Two weeks later I returned and photographed the nest. Although the