

General Field Notes

General Field Notes briefly report such items as rare sightings, unusual behaviors, significant nesting records, or summaries of such items.

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-Duck Nest in the Santee Delta-Winyah Bay Area of South Carolina

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The breeding range of the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) has historically been South and Central America, Mexico, southern Arizona and Texas (Palmer 1976). The eastern and northern expansion of the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck along the Atlantic coast of the United States has been observed in recent years. Potential breeding success was reported in southern Florida near West Palm Beach in May 1988 when one adult and an immature were observed (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Nesting was documented in northern Florida in Hamilton County in October, 1997 (Bergstrom 1999). The first accepted record in Georgia was in June 1998 in Clayton County (Bergstrom 1999).

The Black-bellied Whistling-Duck is a relative newcomer to South Carolina. It was considered Provisional II on the 1989 official state list (Post and Gauthreaux 1989). The status was changed to Definitive on the 2003 state list (South Carolina Bird Records Committee 2004). A record from Lee County does appear in 1977, but this was assumed to be an escaped captive individual (Martin 1984). The first documented wild record of Black-bellied Whistling-Duck in South Carolina occurred in 1994 when two individuals were observed and photographed in the ACE Basin at Donnelley Wildlife Management Area (DWMA) (Harrigal et al. 1995). The first documented nesting record in South Carolina also occurred at DWMA when an adult was observed with ducklings in the summer of 2003 and again in 2004 (Harrigal and Cely 2005).

The Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was first observed at the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center (TYWC) in Georgetown County in September 2008 when five individuals were observed feeding in a brackish managed wetland

(Dozier pers. obs.) on Cat Island. Since that time, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks have been observed on numerous occasions on TYWC and numbers appear to be increasing and occurring in every season. In 2009 a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was observed during the count week (December 14–18) of the Christmas Bird Count. The highest number observed occurred in October 2010 when 40 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were feeding in a brackish managed wetland on the South Island portion of the TYWC (Dozier pers. obs.)

On 5 June 2011, Bryan Reece, TYWC Natural Resource Technician, observed three pairs of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in the Lower Hume Pond and Summer Duck Pond. These ponds are adjacent to each other on the Cat Island portion of the TYWC. On 2 July 2011, a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck with 12 ducklings was observed and photographed (Fig. 1) by Dozier in the Lower Hume Pond area of Cat Island (N33.21075°, W79.26611°). This is the northernmost observation of nesting along the east coast and the first record of nesting in the Santee Delta–Winyah Bay region.



Figure 1. Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) with ducklings in the Hume Pond of the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center, Georgetown, SC. Photo taken 2 July 2007.

The Hume Pond is a 17-acre freshwater pond and wetland embedded in a managed complex of brackish former rice fields. The pond contains areas of dense mats of aquatic vegetation such as duckweed (*Lemna sp.*), alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*), and fragrant water lily (*Nymphaea odorata*). A system of vegetated dikes provides areas of dense vegetation adjacent to the water on several sides. The trees surrounding the pond are

primarily sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) and loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*).

Discussions with property owners and managers in the Santee Delta indicate sightings of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks have increased dramatically in the past five years. This apparent increase in population along with numerous areas of potential nesting habitat may indicate a breeding population is developing.

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