

FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK IN COMANCHE COUNTY,  
OKLAHOMA

BY JACK D. TYLER

At 1800 on 1 July 1983 (little wind, temperature near 90°F), while visiting the marshy sewage lagoons at Medicine Park in Comanche County, southwestern Oklahoma, I discovered a strange, mid-sized duck sitting low in the water with tail held high that I could not immediately identify. In body size and neck length it resembled a Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*). A light cinnamon color prevailed on its neck, chest, head, and lower sides and the darkness of its back contrasted with the white undertail coverts. A light stripe paralleled the lower margin of the bird's folded wing. From the posterior crown, a dark band extended downward along the hind neck. The duck continuously remained on the water, and I made no effort to flush it. Sometimes it rested in the brush or cattails (*Typha* sp.) along the pond's edge. Other species that were nesting in the dense fringing cattails included the Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*), Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) and American Coot (*Fulica americana*).

After consulting Peter Scott's *A colored key to the wildfowl of the world*



**FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK**

*A lone bird observed 1-16 July, 1983 at the Medicine Park sewage lagoons in Comanche County, Oklahoma. Photographed on 6 July by Kevin Mason.*

(1957, The Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, England, p. 35), I was still perplexed as to the unusual duck's identity. In company with Sue Firman, I saw it again at 1445 on 4 July, but still could not satisfactorily identify it. On 6 July, Kevin Mason and I returned to the pond at 1830 and took several photographs of it as it rested on the water (see cover photo). When we flushed it, we were able, for the first time, to see the duck's rather stout body and dark legs that extended *well past* the tail. A conspicuous white subterminal band on the black tail was diagnostic; it was a Fulvous Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*). After it landed again on the other pond, I (through my telescope) noted several dark, nearly vertical bars on the broad white neck band immediately below its throat, and that the light lateral stripe was actually composed of alternating black and white bars.

I observed the bird again on 8 July, as did Louis E. and Janet M. McGee, but I did not find it on 12 July. However, Vicky Belcher found it there on the 12th. Tracy Hubbard was apparently the last to see it, on 16 July.

*Dendrocygna bicolor* occurs in the Old and the New World and in parts of both North and South America. In North America, it breeds principally in coastal areas of Texas and Louisiana southward to the state of Campeche, Mexico, and also along the Pacific Coast of Mexico northward sporadically to central California (Bellrose, F. C., 1976, Ducks, geese and swans of North America, Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, p. 77). It has been recorded casually as far north as British Columbia, Minnesota, Quebec and New Brunswick (Bellrose, *loc. cit.*).

The provenance of this bird may never be known with certainty. One must always consider the possibility that it was an escape. However, Harty (1962, *Cassinia* 46:10-12) and H. L. Jones (1966, *Chat* 30:4-7), have discussed eruptions of this species along the Gulf and East coasts, and it has recently been recorded inland. For example, two Fulvous Whistling-Ducks appeared at the Ted Shanks Wildlife Management Area, Missouri, from 2-22 June 1981 (Peterjohn, B. G., 1981, *Am. Birds* 35:944), and a flock of 22 that visited Dundee, Illinois, on 18 May 1979 represented the third state record (Kleen, V. M., 1979, *Am. Birds* 33:776). Closer to Oklahoma, one was recorded at the Fort Worth, Texas, Fish Hatchery on 9 November 1979 (Williams, F., 1980, *Am. Birds* 34:176), and during the summer of 1969, Richard Gritman photographed three birds at Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge in the Texas panhandle (pers. comm., K. S. Seyffert). In addition, a pair of Fulvous Whistling-Ducks (possibly escapes) reportedly bred at Elkhart, Kansas, during the summer of 1971 (Williams, F., 1971, *Am. Birds* 25:873). The only other record for Oklahoma is that of a bird observed by R. E. Frank with two drake Green-winged Teal (*Anas carolinensis*) at a farm pond 2 miles east of Norman, in Cleveland County, central Oklahoma, on 3 March 1956 (Sutton, G. M., 1967, *Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 59).