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First breeding records of the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck for Oklahoma

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The Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) was first recorded in Oklahoma in 1983 and has been observed irregularly since, primarily in northeastern Oklahoma (Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992). On 8 July 1999 we observed the first breeding of this species in Oklahoma. Second and third nestings were seen in September 1999. Nine reports of the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck were made in 1999, including the three nesting records.

On the morning of 8 July 1999, in rural Osage County north of the city of Sand Springs, we were trying to relocate two Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks that had been observed and reported on 4 July 1999 by a visiting



Fig. 1. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) in Kingfisher County, Oklahoma, on 13 September 1999. This nesting represented the second breeding record for Oklahoma. Photograph by Frank Carl.

Texas birder. Unsuccessful at that location, we continued to look more widely and eventually discovered two adult Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in short grass adjacent to a ranch pond in rural Osage County about 11 km north of Sand Springs. After observing the adults for several minutes, one nestling with facemask markings emerged from underneath one of the adults. The adults and nestling walked to the pond to feed. The birds did not appear to be banded. The three birds fed for 15 min before disappearing in the grassy area adjacent to the pond. On the morning of 9 July 1999, Kamp returned to the farm pond and photographed the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck nestling and two adults. The nestling was not seen again after 9 July 1999, and we question whether it survived. Two adults were present on 13 July 1999, and one adult was observed in a tree near the pond on 16 July 1999. No Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were seen in that location after 16 July 1999. The ranch pond is within 3 km of where two adult Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were observed by many birders on 18–22 May 1999. We also observed and photographed these ducks.

In conversation on 8 July 1999, the ranch foreman stated that 8–12 of these “Mexican” ducks arrived in early spring of that year. He had never seen them before. Two stayed at the pond, and later he saw at least three nestlings with the adults. He never saw the nest. He also stated that there were more Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in the early spring and believed some were present at another site in July 1999. On 9 July 1999 Kamp talked with residents at a location about 3 km north of the ranch pond. They stated that two Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks had been coming to their feeders, barnyard, and ponds for several months. No young had been seen. The residents reported having Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in the area previously and produced photographs from May 1997 when two Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks tried unsuccessfully to use a Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) nest box.

A second nesting occurred in Kingfisher County, Oklahoma. On 17 September 1999 we observed and photographed one adult Black-bellied Whistling-Duck with at least eight young in shallow water in a field adjacent to a county road in rural Kingfisher County about 10 km south of the city of Hennessey. The adult and young rapidly disappeared into the taller grass at the edge of the water. We later learned that this nesting was first observed on 11 September 1999 by Jack Witt. The adult and young were photographed on 13 September 1999 by Frank Carl (Fig. 1). On 28 September 1999 Kamp returned to the location. The water level was very low, and no Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were present. We do not know whether this brood survived. Also on 28 September 1999, one adult Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was briefly observed at a marsh less than 0.5 km from the breeding site. There had been several reports of adult Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at that marsh in 1999.

A third nesting occurred in Tulsa County, Oklahoma. On 18 September 1999 Suzie Tramel observed two adult and 12 fledged Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at Swan Lake, an urban 0.6-ha manmade lake in the city of

Tulsa. The ducks were not placed on the lake by the homeowners association that maintains the waterfowl there, and the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks did not nest at this lake (R. Studebaker, pers. comm.). The ducks flew to the lake during the day to feed and sleep. There are several small private ponds in nearby neighborhoods that could have provided appropriate nesting sites for Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. The ducks remained there until at least 30 September 1999. We assume that this brood survived.

Historically, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks nested from the Gulf coast of Texas and the Lower Rio Grande Valley south through Mexico and Central America. Known for wandering, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks probably always strayed into other areas of Texas and into Arizona, Arkansas, California, and New Mexico (Terres 1982). Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks started expanding their range in the mid 1970s, in part due to feeding by humans and an increasing availability of nest boxes, agricultural ponds, and cultivation (Madge and Burn 1988). By 1973, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks had established nesting colonies along the Texas coast as far north as Corpus Christi. By the 1980s, there were reports for much of Texas and in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska. By 1999, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were fairly common residents in central Texas. They are regular nesters in north central Texas, especially in the Dallas-Fort Worth area (Pulich 1988). Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are considered locally common in southwestern Arkansas and northeastern Texas (G. Lasley, pers. comm; M. White, pers. comm.). They were reported in Nebraska in August 1999 (Paddelford 1999) and in Wisconsin in October 1999 (Korducki 1999).

The Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was not listed for Oklahoma by Sutton (1967). It was regarded as a straggler by Baumgartner and Baumgartner (1992), with two records. Arterburn et al. (2000) listed Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks without dates, indicating low and irregular occurrence for Oklahoma. The first record for the Black-bellied Whistling-duck in Oklahoma was on 18 July 1983 in Tulsa County, where two adults, one with a gray metal band, were observed. From American Birds, the Oklahoma Birds Record Committee, the Tulsa Audubon Society, and personal observations, we have identified 19 reports of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in Oklahoma. Ten of the 19 reports were during the 15-year period from 1983–1998; nine of the 19 reports, including the three nesting records, were in 1999. Fourteen of the 19 reports were in northeastern Oklahoma, with nine of these in Tulsa County alone. Five of the 19 reports were in central and northwestern Oklahoma. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks have occurred in Oklahoma from March to October, with sightings most frequent in May through September. There have been no reports of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in winter. No specimens have been collected, and the species was added to the state list on the basis of photographs.

The North American population of the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck has greatly increased since the 1950s. Kaufman (1996) states that Black-bellied Whistling-Duck populations are increasing in the western and west-central United States at 2% or greater per year. Reports in 1999 would suggest that Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are increasing in Oklahoma. The origins of the birds in Oklahoma are unknown. They could be escapees or feral birds, but the relatively recent range expansion in Texas suggests that many of these birds may in fact be wild individuals. With long-term pair bonding and return to natal areas characteristic of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks (Bellrose 1976), we will likely continue to see more Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in Oklahoma (see Heck and Arbour 2001).

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NOTES

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First nesting records of the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck in southeastern Oklahoma.—Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) were first recorded in Oklahoma in 1983 (Baumgartner and Baumgartner, Oklahoma bird life, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1992). In 1999, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks first nested in Oklahoma, with three records of breeding in Osage, Kingfisher, and Tulsa counties (Kamp and Loyd, *Bull. Oklahoma Ornithol. Soc.* 34:13–17, 2001).

On 23 June 2000, we observed two Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks perched on top of a nest box erected for Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*) on the 1560-ha U. S. Forest Service Red Slough Wetland Reserve Project, 10 km south of Haworth, McCurtain Co., southeastern Oklahoma. On 7 July 2000, Robert A. Bastarache (pers. comm.) inspected a nest box adjacent to the one we observed, and saw a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck exit the box that contained 14 eggs. On 19 July and 1 August 2000, the female was incubating 15 eggs, and on 10 August the nest box held 13 nestlings and two unhatched eggs (Bastarache, pers. comm.). No brood was later seen in the immediate vicinity of the nest box, although on 5 September we observed a family of two adults and 13 flightless young in a previously uncensused area of Red Slough 5 km east of the original nest. There were no natural cavities or nest boxes nearby. However, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks will at times nest on the ground when suitable cavities are unavailable (Bolen, E. G., The ecology of the Black-bellied Tree Duck in southern Texas, Ph.D. dissertation, Utah State Univ., 1967), and such nesting may have produced some of the 45 flightless young in four family groups (with eight adults) that we observed in the same part of Red Slough on 12 September 2000. On 1 October 2000, we again saw four family groups with six adults and 41 fully feathered immatures. Our final observation of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at Red Slough in 2000 was of one adult and 16 fully feathered immatures in two family groups on 10 October.—BERLINA A. HECK, 109 Kaye Dr., Broken Bow, OK. 74728 and W. DAVID ARBOUR, 1462 Collin Raye Dr., DeQueen, AR. 71832. Received 25 January 2001, accepted 3 August 2001.