

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck                      Record Number: 82-AC  
8 May 1977    Classification: A-P  
Zirbel Slough, Cerro Gordo Co., IA  
Ken Reynolds, DeWaine Jackson  
Barratt 1977, IBL 65:83

REFERENCES

Barratt, B. 1977. Black-bellied Whistling Duck, a new speices for Iowa. IBL 47:104-106.  
Reynolds, K., and D. Jackson. 1977. A rare visit from the cornfield duck. Iowa Conservationist  
October 1977: 17 [not reviewed, includes photo]  
Photograph: IBL 27:105 (P-0169)  
Musgrove and Musgrove 1977  
Records Committee: IBL 64:69, 65:83

LETTERS [not reviewed]

George E. Crossley to Kenneth Formanek, July 24, 1977  
Bob Barratt to Peter C. Petersen, August 2, 1977

PHOTOGRAPH

Ken Reynolds, P-0169 (IBL 47:105)

VOTE at meeting on 8 May 1982: 5-I-P, 2-IV  
[possible escapee]

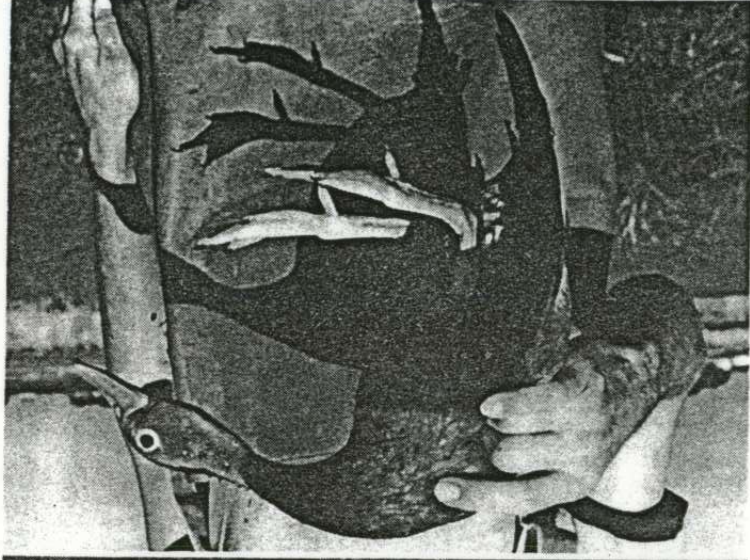
REVOTE (at meeting, 14 Aug 1994): 7 A-P

82-AC

Black-bellied Whistling Duck

Musgrove, J. W. and Musgrove, M. R. 1977. Waterfowl in Iowa 5th ed.  
State Conservation Commission, Des Moines. p 111

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING DUCK, *Dendrocygna autumnalis autumnalis* (LINNAEUS). (Formerly black-bellied tree duck.) An adult female was trapped May 8, 1977, at Zirbel Slough in Cerro Gordo County by Ken Reynolds and DeWaine Jackson, employees of the State Conservation Commission. It was photographed and released. This bird breeds from the extreme southern coast of Texas southward and along both coasts of Mexico and Central America; those breeding in Texas migrate southward to winter.



Black-bellied Whistling Duck

Photos by Ken Reynolds, Iowa Conservation Commission

enough hayfields, \*Grasshopper Sparrows were also plentiful, but cultivation is encroaching on them. Two \*Henslow's Sparrows were seen on June 23 near Decorah (DK), one at Cresco on July 11 (JS), and up to 6 at Hayden Prairie in mid-July (JF,JS). There is no obvious pattern to abundance of \*Vesper Sparrows, monitored carefully because of their newly acquired Blue List status: "common" reduced in the northeast (JS), uncommon on the WRF (RS), sparse near Des Moines (WB), and not seen around Iowa City (NH). Only small numbers of Lark Sparrows were reported. An adult male Harris' Sparrow in full spring plumage was observed at Smith Slough, Clay Co., June 9-15 (JD,TN,MR), way south of its normal summer range. Swamp Sparrows bred in good numbers in northern marshes (Sweet, Cardinal, Union Slough) (DK,JS).

Contributors. Jim Bednarz, Ames; Gladys Black, Pleasantville; Woodward Brown, Des Moines; Gene Burns, Jamaica; George Crossley, Dubuque; Rich Decoster, Iowa City; James Dinsmore, Ames; Joan Fowler, Rochester, Minn.; Ronnie George, Chariton; Nicholas Halm, Iowa City; Douglas Hart, Lester; Darwin Koenig, Decorah; Dean Mosman, Elkhart; Mike Newton, Iowa City; Tom Nigus, Ames; Helen Osmundson, Iowa City; Peter Petersen, Davenport; Mark Ross Silcock, Mavern; Tom Shires, Iowa City; Dean Stauffer, Ames; Jon Stravers, Pella. N.S. HALM, R No. 6, IOWA CITY, IA. 52240.

Field Reports editor's note to contributors. Since the June issue was published too late to be available to contributors to this report, I wish to reiterate my requests made in it. I would also like to encourage you to turn in your reports as soon after the end of the fall period (November 30) as possible. I am operating against stringent deadlines set by both IBL and Am. Birds, and if I am forced to wait for late reports, as I was this time (all may not even be in yet), the quality of the product will suffer because of the haste. Consider that the above report was written between 6 p.m. August 8 and 10:30 a.m. August 9!

## GENERAL NOTES



Black-bellied Whistling Duck, a new species for Iowa - Early this summer two employees of the Iowa Conservation Commission captured, photographed and re-leased a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis autumnalis*) while assisting with a waterfowl research project at Zirbel Slough, a county-owned marsh area in Cerro Gordo county about five miles south of Clear Lake, Iowa. The employees, Ken Reynolds and De Waine Jackson, captured the bird in a baited trap used to capture Mallards for marking and study in the research project. It was an adult female and was taken on the morning of May 8, 1977. The bird was photographed, but was not banded since bands were not readily available and they did not want to hold it in captivity.



## A Rare Visit From The

# CORNFIELD DUCK

by Kenneth Reynolds  
and DeWaine Jackson

**I**N MEXICO it is known by the natives as "*patos maizal*" or the "*cornfield duck*." In the United States, one may hear it called the black-bellied tree duck or black-bellied whistling duck. Regardless of which name you choose, one thing is certain, this waterfowl species is a very interesting and beautiful bird.

The geographical distribution of the black-bellied whistling duck is relatively restricted. The northern race of this species commonly breeds from southern coastal Texas through coastal Mexico and Central America. A southern race is known to breed from Panama south into northern Argentina. Despite this limited range, at least one female member of the species decided to leave the sunny south this spring and pay a visit to Iowa.

The black-bellied whistling duck in question was captured at Zirbel Slough in Cerro Gordo County on May 8, 1977. The authors were conducting a research project on the mallard duck and discovered the "cornfield duck" in one of the traps being utilized for the capture of drake mallards. After consultation with Mr. Richard Bishop (state waterfowl biologist) and Dr. James Dinsmore (ornithologist at Iowa State University) it was determined that this was the first recorded observation of this species in Iowa.



The black-bellied whistling duck ordinarily nests in tree cavities much like the wood duck. Occasionally nests will be found on the ground, often at a considerable distance from water. The number of eggs per nest averages about 13 and they look very much like eggs of domestic poultry. Both the male and female aid in incubation which is a very unusual practice among waterfowl. Incubation lasts approximately 28 days and once hatched, both parents remain with the brood for at least 6 months.

The diet of the black-bellied whistling duck is primarily one of grain. According to one author, in its normal southern range, large flocks can be seen feeding in the sorghum stubble or in cattle feed lots consuming scattered grain. Perhaps this bird's favorite food is corn and it can often be seen perching on the stalks in order to reach the ears of corn. It is because of this feeding behavior, that the bird receives its Mexican name "*patos maizal*" the "*cornfield duck*."

As Iowa is nicknamed the tall corn state, it seems only fitting that we should have been paid a visit by the *cornfield duck*. Perhaps, in the future, another will come our way and provide someone else with a look at a truly beautiful bird. □

### Furs Purchased from Iowa Trappers and Hunters as reported by Iowa Fur Buyers during the 1976-77 Season \*

SPECIES	NUMBER PURCHASED	PERCENT CHANGE FROM 1975-76	AVG. PRICE PER PELT	TOTAL VALUE
Muskrat	252,754	- 35	\$ 4.31	\$1,089,369.74
Mink	15,956	- 13	14.06	224,341.36
Raccoon	264,819	- 9	22.51	5,961,075.69
Beaver	7,773	+ 51	11.60	90,166.80
Red Fox	22,699	+ 43	46.33	1,051,644.67
Gray Fox	1,795	+ 14	26.17	46,975.15
Coyote	12,226	+ 29	33.34	407,614.84
Opossum	36,493	+ 38	1.59	58,023.87
Spotted Skunk (Civet) **	46	- 57	2.00	92.00
Striped Skunk	5,441	+ 181	1.66	9,032.06
Badger	2,136	+ 69	17.71	37,828.56
Weasel **	4	- 92	1.00	4.00
<b>TOTAL PELTS</b>	<b>622,142</b>	<b>- 18</b>	<b>TOTAL VALUE</b>	<b>\$8,976,168.74</b>

\* 202 of 217 licensed fur dealers reporting.

\*\* Season on spotted skunk (civet) and weasel was closed during the 1976-77 season.



Close examination of the specimen by Reynolds and Jackson (both are trained biologists) indicated that the bird was undoubtedly wild and not an escapee from a game breed center. Neither the feathers nor the feet showed any indication that the bird had ever been confined. It appeared to be fully as wild as the native species with which it was associated. There are no known game breeders in the area who have this species in their collections. I am satisfied that it was a wild bird and a new species for the state. BOB BARRATT, Wildlife Superintendent, Iowa Conservation Commission, 300 4th Street, Des Moines.

Field Reports Editor's comment. On the basis of the information in the above note and the accompanying illustrations, the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was accepted by the I.O.U. Checklist Committee and added in proof to the official Iowa Checklist (I. B. L. XLVII:32, 1977). Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are in Ryan's Category IV ("abundant in collections") (Birding 3:159-60, 1972), which form "the overwhelming majority of releases and (or) escapes", and for which, in Ryan's opinion, "validity of records (is) nearly impossible to verify or discredit". N.H.

Nest of Northern Harrier on Williams Prairie, Johnson Co. -- On June 18, two ladies photographing wildflowers on Williams Prairie came upon a raptor nest flying away from it. They notified Mike Newton, who next day organized and led a posse consisting of the Calvin Knights, Carol Newton, Rich Decoster and me to locate the nest. The Knights arrived on the scene early, and told us they had seen a Northern Harrier nearby. We did not appreciate the portent of this sighting. Because of vague descriptions of the nest site, we combed the 20 acres of the prairie for an hour in vain. Finally, Bernie Knight suggested that we explore the northwest corner, where the nest was not supposed to be. Sure enough, Rich shortly found the nest with three downy young, one dwarfing the other two (see photo, taken by the author with a camera borrowed from Fred Kent). Having agreed that the nest of a Long-eared Owl would not be on the ground in tall grass, we waited for "Short-eared Owls" to materialize. Instead, we now noted two Northern Harriers, and the female moved closer and closer. We became gradually convinced that the discoverers of the nest had misidentified Northern Harriers as owls, even though the female failed to alight near the nest to claim it as her own, and the male never even approached it. None of us had first-hand experience with baby harriers vs. owls, or we would have noticed right away that the largest nesting's eyes were definitely not facing forward, as they do in owls of all ages (photo). Consultation of Bent, Roberts' The Birds of Minnesota and Burton's Owls of the World confirmed the diagnosis that the chicks we had found were those of hawks, not owls. a) Baby Short-eared Owls have down-covered tarso-metatarsals and toes. The bare legs and toes of the largest nestling are visible in the picture. b) The ceres of young Short-eared Owls are covered with down. The photo clearly shows the bare ceres of our birds. c) In all hawks but the Osprey, the nostrils open on the cere (see the chick to the left). In all owls other than the Burrowing Owl, the nostrils open along the junction of the cere and the bill.

On June 23, the Knights returned to the nest site and found that the biggest nestling had sprouted tail feathers and was strong enough to walk, but the small one looked frail. Subsequently, Cal Knight flushed the mother from the nest. When they went out again in early July the young were gone. N. S. HALMI, Route 6, Iowa City.



Young Northern Harriers  
Photo by N. S. Halmi

Egyptian Goose Associates with Canada Geese in Northwestern Iowa -- An Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*) was sighted 8 May 1977 on Cunningham Slough in Emmet County. This obvious escapee was identified as a male from its hoarse, husky voice that resembles breathing or hissing. This bird is a shieldgoose that is a member of the tribe Tadornini. The Egyptian Goose is fairly large with a pale gray head and neck and with a reddish cinnamon band on the hind neck. Chestnut patches occur around the eyes and a chestnut ring is around the lower neck. The mantle is a rusty gray with the abdomen being much paler. Wing coverts are white, the secondaries are a metallic green, and the primary feathers are black. The tail and rump are black. The soft parts are pink (Delacour 1973. The Waterfowl of the World, in Vol. 1: 235-238).



NE

# A Rare Visit From The

# CORNFIELD DUCK

by Kenneth Reynolds and DeWaine Jackson

**I**N MEXICO it is known by the natives as "patos maizal" or the "cornfield duck." In the United States, one may hear it called the black-bellied tree duck or black-bellied whistling duck. Regardless of which name you choose, one thing is certain, this waterfowl species is a very interesting and beautiful bird.

The geographical distribution of the black-bellied whistling duck is relatively restricted. The northern race of this species commonly breeds from southern coastal Texas through coastal Mexico and Central America. A southern race is known to breed from Panama south into northern Argentina. Despite this limited range, at least one female member of the species decided to leave the sunny south this spring and pay a visit to Iowa.

The black-bellied whistling duck in question was captured at Zirbel Slough in Cerro Gordo County on May 8, 1977. The authors were conducting a research project on the mallard duck and discovered the "cornfield duck" in one of the traps being utilized for the capture of drake mallards. After consultation with Mr. Richard Bishop (state waterfowl biologist) and Dr. James Dinsmore (ornithologist at Iowa State University) it was determined that this was the first recorded observation of this species in Iowa.



The black-bellied whistling duck ordinarily nests in tree cavities much like the wood duck. Occasionally nests will be found on the ground, often at a considerable distance from water. The number of eggs per nest averages about 13 and they look very much like eggs of domestic poultry. Both the male and female aid in incubation which is a very unusual practice among waterfowl. Incubation lasts approximately 28 days and once hatched, both parents remain with the brood for at least 6 months.

The diet of the black-bellied whistling duck is primarily one of grain. According to one author, in its normal southern range, large flocks can be seen feeding in the sorghum stubble or in cattle feed lots consuming scattered grain. Perhaps this bird's favorite food is corn and it can often be seen perching on the stalks in order to reach the ears of corn. It is because of this feeding behavior, that the bird receives its Mexican name "patos maizal" the "cornfield duck."

As Iowa is nicknamed the tall corn state, it seems only fitting that we should have been paid a visit by the *cornfield duck*. Perhaps, in the future, another will come our way and provide someone else with a look at a truly beautiful bird. □

## Furs Purchased from Iowa Trappers and Hunters as reported by Iowa Fur Buyers during the 1976-77 Season \*

SPECIES	NUMBER PURCHASED	PERCENT CHANGE FROM 1975-76	AVG. PRICE PER PELT	TOTAL VALUE
Muskrat	252,754	- 35	\$ 4.31	\$1,089,369.74
Mink	15,956	- 13	14.06	224,341.36
Raccoon	264,819	- 9	22.51	5,961,075.69
Beaver	7,773	+ 51	11.60	90,166.80
Red Fox	22,699	+ 43	46.33	1,051,644.67
Gray Fox	1,795	+ 14	26.17	46,975.15
Coyote	12,226	+ 29	33.34	407,614.84
Opossum	36,493	+ 38	1.59	58,023.87
Spotted Skunk (Civet) **	46	- 57	2.00	92.00
Striped Skunk	5,441	+ 181	1.66	9,032.06
Badger	2,136	+ 69	17.71	37,828.56
Weasel **	4	- 92	1.00	4.00
<b>TOTAL PELTS</b>	<b>622,142</b>	<b>- 18</b>	<b>TOTAL VALUE</b>	<b>\$8,976,168.74</b>

\* 202 of 217 licensed fur dealers reporting.  
\*\* Season on spotted skunk (civet) and weasel was closed during the 1976-77 season.

July 25, 1977

Mr. Kenneth Formanek  
State Conservation Commission  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Dear Mr. Formanek:

We are disturbed because we have heard inadvertently that a new bird species was found in Iowa this Spring, namely, the Black-bellied Whistling (Tree) Duck, and was trapped, banded, and photographed by the Iowa Conservation Commission.

Due to a lack of communication, this record has not been reported to anyone within the Iowa Ornithologists Union whereby an official recording and listing could be included in the ornithological literature such as Iowa Bird Life, published by the Iowa Ornithologists Union, or in American Birds, published by the National Audubon Society. We understand that documentation is selfishly being held by the Iowa Conservation Commission but will be incorporated in the new edition of the Musgroves's Book.

Following prodigious research of the literature, the Iowa Ornithologists Union has just edited and sent to press a new edition of our official checklist of Birds of Iowa. This record could have been included had there been any cooperation between the Conservation Commission and our organization. It would normally be assumed that both organizations are of the same mind and should be working together.

However late, we would appreciate receiving detailed documentation for your record on the Black-bellied Whistling (Tree)



Back to include date and exact location of trapping, condition, notation of banding, photographs, etc. Recipients of this information should be:

Peter C. Petersen  
 Editor, Iowa Bird Life  
 235 Mc Clellan Blvd.  
 Davenport, Ia. 52803

For American Birds Regional Field Reports:

Dr. N. S. Halmi  
 College of Medicine  
 University of Iowa  
 Iowa City, Ia. 52242

We thank you for the above, and trust that in the spirit of cooperation you will alert the members of your organization to the existence of the Iowa Ornithologists Union and suggest more communication in the future.

Sincerely,

*George E. Crossley*  
 President

Iowa Ornithologists Union

c.c.: Fred A. Friewert  
 Director  
 State Conservation Commission

c.c.: Peter C. Petersen

c. c. : N. S. Halmi, M. D.



82-AC

COMMISSIONERS

THOMAS A. BATES, Chairman—Bellevue  
JOHN C. BROPHY—Lansing  
JOHN G. LINK—Burlington  
CAROLYN T. LUMBARD—Des Moines  
MARIAN PIKE—Whiting  
HERBERT T. REED—Winterset  
JOHN C. THOMPSON—Forest City



FRED A. PRIEWERT, Director  
300 Fourth Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50319  
515/281-5145

An EQUAL OPPORTUNITY Agency

August 2, 1977

Mr. Peter C. Petersen, Editor  
Iowa Bird Life  
235 McClellan Blvd.  
Davenport, Iowa 52803

Dear Mr. Petersen:


Early this summer two employees of the Conservation Commission captured, photographed and released a black-bellied whistling duck (Dendrocygna autumnalis autumnalis) while assisting with a waterfowl research project at Zirbel Slough, a county-owned marsh area in Cerro Gordo county about five miles south of Clear Lake, Iowa. The employees, Ken Reynolds and De Wayne Jackson, captured the bird in a baited trap used to capture mallards for marking and study in the research project. It was an adult female and was taken on the morning of May 8, 1977. The bird was photographed, but was not banded since bands were not readily available and they did not want to hold it in captivity.

First Iowa record!

Close examination of the specimen by Reynolds and Jackson (both are trained biologists) indicated that the bird was undoubtedly wild and not an escapee from a game breeder. Neither the feathers nor the feet showed any indication that the bird had ever been confined. It appeared to be fully as wild as the native species with which it was associating. There are no known game breeders in the area who have this species in their collections. I am satisfied that it was a wild bird and a new species for the state.

President Crosley recently wrote Ken Formanek of this department, with a copy to Director Priewert, stating that "documentation is selfishly being held by the Iowa Conservation Commission but will be incorporated in the new edition of the Musgrove's Book." Nothing could be further from the truth. We were able to get the information to Jack Musgrove so that it can be mentioned in the new edition of "Waterfowl in Iowa". We also plan a short item in a forthcoming issue of the "Conservationist". At no time, however, have we tried to withhold this information. Musgrove advised Woody Brown of the sighting, and Woody in turn called me and asked that I write up the information and send it to you for inclusion in "Iowa Bird Life". I told him I would be glad to do this and asked about a time table. He said that if you got the information by mid-August it would be satisfactory.

did OK without trying. should have been in Spring season report!

Woody visited M., and he casually mentioned this  
Outdoor IOWA  a place to enjoy

I hope that the date above will be satisfactory. I am enclosing several black and white prints from the color slides taken by the observers. Color prints have been furnished to the State Museum for their permanent files and documentation.

If you need further information, please let me know.

Sincerely yours,



Bob Barratt  
Wildlife Supt.

cc: N. S. Halmi, M.D.  
George E. Crossley



*abstracted from Barnard's letter by Peter*

*82-AC*

Field Reports Editor's comment. On the basis of the information in the above note and the accompanying illustrations, the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was accepted by the I.O.U. Checklist Committee and added in proof to the official Iowa Checklist (I.B.L. XLVII:32, 1977). Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are in Ryan's Category IV ("abundant in collections") (Birding 3:159-60, 1972), which form "the overwhelming majority of releases and/or escapes", and for which, in Ryan's opinion, "validity of records [is] nearly impossible to verify or discredit". N.H.