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A BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK SPECIMEN FROM NEBRASKA: A FIRST STATE RECORD

INTRODUCTION

On 29 October 1989 John Andersen of Ong, Nebraska, shot and killed an adult male Black-bellied Whistling-Duck while duck hunting at Hansen Waterfowl Production Area, 3 miles north and 1 mile west of Ong, Clay Co., Nebraska (T6N R5W Section 35). Andersen's brother-in-law, Stewart Porterfield of Lincoln, was present at the time and tentatively identified the specimen but returned to their vehicle to get a bird book for reference (Porterfield, pers. comm. 2 November 1989). Mr. Porterfield took the frozen, intact duck specimen to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission office in Lincoln where it was recommended that the specimen be deposited at the University of Nebraska State Museum (UNSM).

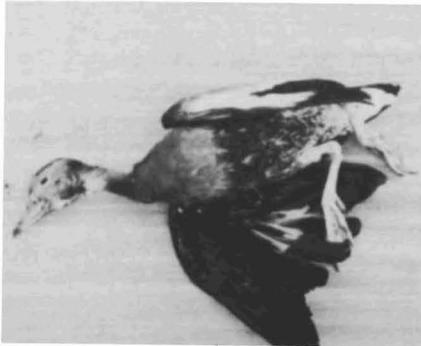
The frozen specimen was delivered and donated to UNSM (Accession Z-1989-55) by Mr. Porterfield on 2 November 1989. The specimen was prepared as a standard study skin and partial skeleton by the author on 7 November 1989 and catalogued into Division of Zoology's collections as UNSM ZM-16079.

Dendrocygna autumnalis (Linnaeus), the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, is not on the official list of birds in Nebraska (N.O.U.R.C., 1988, 1989) and was not listed as even hypothetical in a critically evaluated list of Nebraska birds (Bray et al., 1986). However, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, whose normal range is from southern Arizona and southern Texas south to southern Brazil and Argentina, have wandered north, including to Kansas, Iowa, and Michigan (A.O.U., 1983). There are three records of this species in Kansas (Thompson & Ely, 1989) and a recent sighting in Minnesota that is under consideration of the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union Records Committee

(Tveten, 1989). A written description and photographs of UNSM ZM-16079 have been submitted to the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee for consideration.

PLUMAGE DESCRIPTION

Bill and feet a bright reddish-orange. Throat pale gray or off-white grading to a medium gray on the cheeks, lores, auriculars, and narrow band above the eyes. Narrow ring of white feathers around the eyes with white trailing off behind the eye for less than 1 cm. Forehead an olive-gray grading to a russet on the crown to a dark brownish-black on the back of the crown then extending as a narrow, russet-brown strip down the back of the neck. Gray of cheeks extending down sides of neck. Lower neck, breast, back a russet color. Russet on breast grading into a lighter russet-tan on lower breast.



Russet on back is darker than on breast grading into a russet-brown on the scapulars. Belly is black with white speckling gradually showing more white toward the under tail coverts which are mostly white with only a spot or two of black. Belly and flanks are separated from the breast by a sharp line. Flanks, tail, and upper tail coverts are black. Primaries and secondaries are black distally and white proximally. Outer edge of primaries is black. Greater wing coverts are off-white and lesser wing coverts are grayish white forming a large, whitish wing patch when the wing is extended.

MEASUREMENTS

Measurements: Total length = 492 mm, tail length = 73 mm, wing span = 783 mm, wing chord = 234 mm, tarsus length = 60 mm, culmen length = 48 mm, and weight = 836.5 grams. Moderate to heavy visceral and subcutaneous fat.

Sex: Male with left testis measuring 8.0 x 3.5 mm and right testis measuring 8.5 x 3.0 mm.

WILD STATUS

The possibility exists that this specimen had escaped from captivity and thus is not truly a "wild" bird suitable for record as Nebraska's first occurrence of this species. No evidence could be found that this individual was anything but a wild bird that wandered from the south. No bands, tags, or tattoos of any kind were found on the bird and none were reported removed by Mr. Andersen or Mr. Porterfield prior to the specimen's arrival at UNSM. The specimen had not been toe-clipped and no feathers were clipped. The specimen was reported by Mr. Porterfield to be "very wary" and "did not decoy well." The stomach contained seeds that compared favorably to that of *Polygonum bicornis*, a locally common smartweed (pers. comm. Margaret Bolick, Curator of Botany, UNSM, 8 November 1989). Fat levels indicate the bird was healthy. Two pellet sizes were found in the specimen and Mr. Andersen reported to have killed the bird with one shot indicating that the specimen had been shot previously and survived.

CORRECTIONS TO THE PUBLIC RECORD

On 16 November 1989 the *Lincoln Journal* newspaper ran Gary Svoboda's "Outdoors" column on page 31 with a story about this specimen from information supplied by Mr. Porterfield. Several errors were made in this article. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is quoted as saying that this is the most northern record of this species in North America; it is not. There is a recently published photograph of this species in Minnesota (Tveten, 1989).

Mr. Porterfield is quoted, "They [The Museum] did a parasite study, and found some that are found only way down south." No parasite check was ever made of this specimen and none would have been made because the specimen was frozen and thawed at least twice. This freeze-thaw scenario severely fractures delicate parasites, making them nearly useless for study. Mr. Porterfield also said that the author agreed to display this bird at the Museum. It is the policy of the Division of Zoology never to make such an agreement. This specimen likely will never be displayed. This specimen will remain protected in the Division of Zoology, Systematics and Research Collections, UNSM.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank Mr. Andersen and Mr. Porterfield for having the foresight to carefully save the specimen and for asking Nebraska Game and Parks Commission what to do with it. I am grateful to the staff at Nebraska Game and Parks Commission who recommended the specimen be brought to the attention of the University of Nebraska State Museum. Thanks go to Mary Liz Jameson of the State Museum and Dr. R. G. Cortelyou who examined this manuscript and made many helpful suggestions.

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