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## Fulvous Whistling-Duck

## *Dendrocygna bicolor*

The Fulvous Whistling-Duck, a subtropical species, is extending its range into the southern United States. Its breeding range early in this century is thought to have been restricted to Mexico, Texas, and California (Bent 1925 in Johnsgard 1975), but it now breeds (or has bred) in a number of states, including Florida.

**Habitat.** Fulvous Whistling-Ducks inhabit shallow freshwater marshes, lakes, and flooded agricultural fields. They are nocturnal feeders and feed almost exclusively on aquatic vegetation, rice, and the seeds of other marsh plants.

Nests are built on the ground in dense vegetation or floating on the water. Very little down is added to the nest, which is built of plant materials. Surrounding plants are often arched over the nest to conceal it from predators (Johnsgard 1975). Because of egg dumping, it is difficult to determine clutch size, but Meanley and Meanley (1959 in Johnsgard 1975) claim that 13 eggs are average. The eggs are white to buffy and are frequently nest stained (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Incubation is performed by both adults and takes 24 to 26 days. Young birds are capable of flight at 55 to 63 days of age (Johnsgard 1975; Ehrlich et al. 1988). One brood is raised per year.

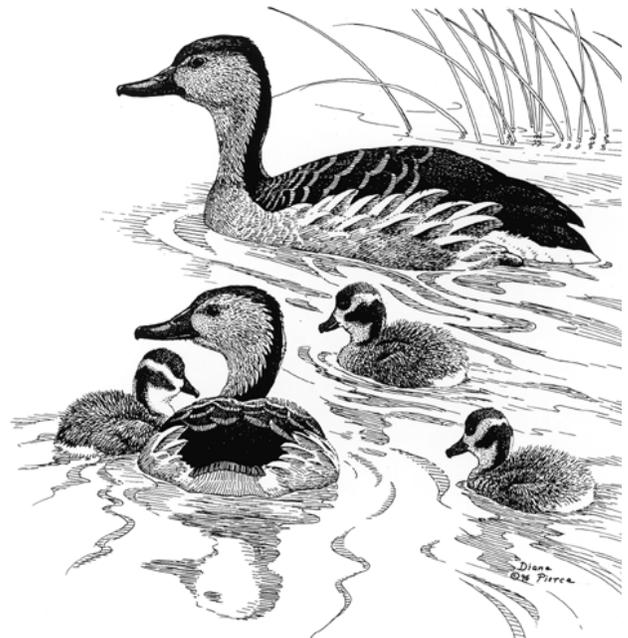


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**Seasonal Occurrence.** This resident species breeds in Florida from March through August.

**Status.** Florida's population of Fulvous Whistling-Ducks is believed to be derived largely from birds from Texas Louisiana that migrated into Florida and remained to breed. Other birds became established after escaping from zoos and waterfowl collections. An "enormous" increase in the number of Fulvous Whistling-Ducks in Florida occurred after they began breeding in the state (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Breeding in Florida was first discovered at Lake Okeechobee in 1965 (Ogden and Stevenson 1965), and by 198 breeding records had been established for Zellwood, Naples, Belle Glade, Key Biscayne (probably escapees from the Crandon Park Zoo), and Longboat Key (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Colonization in Florida by breeding birds and subsequent population increases coincided with increases in rice production in the Everglades Agricultural Area (Turnbull et al. 1989). During the Atlas project, breeding was confirmed at Zellwood, Orlando Kissimmee, Lake Placid, and many areas in western Palm Beach County. Palm Beach County is the stronghold of the species in Florida. Twenty-thousand birds were estimated in the state in 1985 (Stevenson and Anderson 1994), and the majority of these were found in Lake Okeechobee marshes, Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and the agricultural areas near Belle Glade. Flocks of more than 6,000 birds have been observed on Lake Okeechobee and the St. Johns River in February and March, which would appear to represent a minimum population size during most years (Turnbull et al. 1989). Approximately 2,500 birds were counted at Belle Glac on 7 May 1989 (Williams and Smith in Langridge 1989), and 5,300 birds were counted near there on 29 July 1984 (Paul Sykes in Paul 1984).

Because they are highly migratory, even during the breeding season, only confirmed breeding records of the Fulvous Whistling-Duck are shown on the Atlas map.

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