

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** ABNJB01040

**Data Sensitivity:** No

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Dendrocygna autumnalis*

**COMMON NAME:** Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Black-bellied Tree Duck, Red-billed Whistling Duck.

**SYNONYMS:** *Anas autumnalis*

**FAMILY:** *Anatidae*

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** Linnaeus, Syst. Nat., ed. 10, vol. 1, 1758, p. 127.

**TYPE LOCALITY:** America = West Indies.

**TYPE SPECIMEN:**

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** Belongs to subfamily Dendrocygnae, which consists of 8 distinct species. Two subspecies recognized; *D. a. autumnalis*, and *D. a. fulgens*. All North and Central American populations (i.e. Arizona) are the later.

**DESCRIPTION:** Medium sized duck measuring 47.0-50.7cm (18.5-20.0 in) total length and weighing 652-1,020g (39.8-62.2oz). Has long almost goose like neck. Adults are monomorphic in size and plumage. Both sexes have pinkish legs and a pink to reddish bill, along with a brown-gray head with white eye-ring, and a narrow dark stripe from crown down behind neck. Base of primary feathers is white forming a conspicuous white patch on wing. Back is cinnamon-brown; breast and lower neck area is chestnut. Belly is black. Spotted around vent. Immature birds resemble adults but duller and predominantly grayish brown below with gray bill and purple-gray feet.

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** Distinguishable from all other whistling ducks by its red bill, pink feet, and white wing-patch. Has a long swan like neck. The lesser, middle, greater and primary coverts of the wings on the Black bellied whistling duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) are white, while the lesser and middle coverts of the wings on the Fulvous whistling duck (*D. bicolor*) are cinnamon; remainder dusky black. In the Fulvous whistling duck, the body and neck are longer than the Black bellied, and the coloration is a light cinnamon with a dark back. The bill of the Fulvous whistling duck is bluish black, and the long legs are bluish gray.

**ILLUSTRATIONS:** Color photo (James, 2000)

**TOTAL RANGE:** Along both coasts of Central America from Nicaragua north into central Texas on the east coast, and from Panama north into southeastern Arizona on the west coast. Both escaped and naturally occurring populations in central and south Florida. Has occurred casually in se California, s Baja, s New Mexico, w Texas, central United States and along the East coast of the United States. A rare visitor to the West Indies islands. Also from Panama into South America; to the west of the Andes south to nw Peru and east of the Andes (excluding Amozonia) into s Brazil, Paraguay, and n Argentina.

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Southeast Arizona from Santa Cruz and Cochise counties northwest to Pinal and Maricopa Counties (including the Phoenix area). This includes the Santa Cruz, San Pedro, and Sulphur Springs valleys.

### **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** Only populations in extreme northern limits (including Arizona) considered migratory. Migration appears to occur in large flocks usually at night. Very noisy. Flies in lines or groups (not in characteristic “wedges”). Slow wingbeat; flight appears lumbered. Adept walker, adapted well to perching and climbing. Establish life long pair bonds but will re-pair after loss of mate. Highly gregarious. Call is a high pitched four note whistle.

**REPRODUCTION:** Mostly, cavity nesters but will use ground. Will also use nest boxes. Does not line nest with down. Both sexes participate in site selection. Eggs laid on debris occurring in cavity. Average size of cavity opening is 17.8-31.8 cm (7-12.5 in). Average nest heights are 270.7 cm (106.6 in) over water and 162.5 cm (64.0 in) over land. Average number of eggs laid ranges from 9-18. Incubation lasts about 28 days. Male and female alternate incubation task. Young leave nest as early as 1-2 days, and fledge in 56-63 days. Breeding season in Arizona appears to be from mid April to mid October. Generally only one brood per season.

**FOOD HABITS:** Mostly herbivore, utilizing shallow water habitats along shorelines and in agricultural fields to glean vegetation and seeds. Mostly nocturnal feeder. Some insects and mollusks taken. May utilize agricultural fields for feeding.

**HABITAT:** Estuarine/lacustrine/riparian/terrestrial. Found along rivers, ponds, stock tanks, marshes, and swamps. Uses natural cavities in live or dead trees for nesting. Prefer thickets such as those of willow, mesquite or cactus; also will use ground. Ground nests are usually situated with overstory. Sites are usually near freshwater pond or lakes. Uses wetland areas with dense stands of emergent vegetation for feeding.

**ELEVATION:** In Arizona, 985-4,200 ft (300-1280 m), from AGFD, HDMS unpublished records (2002). To sea level outside of Arizona.

**PLANT COMMUNITY:**

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Currently extant in Arizona.

## **SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

### **ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:**

#### **STATE STATUS:**

2 (AZGFD, AWCS 2022)  
[1C (AGFD SWAP 2012)]  
[WSC (AGFD, WSCA 1996 in prep)]  
[Candidate (AGFD, TNW 1988)]

#### **OTHER STATUS:**

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Decline likely due to drainage and clearing of wetland communities and the use of herbicides to control submergent and emergent aquatic vegetation. Species will suffer from continued loss of riparian habitat and increased use of waterways for recreational activities.

#### **PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:**

#### **SUGGESTED PROJECTS:**

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** City of Gilbert; TNC Patagonia-Sonoita Creek; Private.

## **SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION**

### **REFERENCES:**

- Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD). 1988. Threatened native wildlife in Arizona. Arizona Game and Fish Department Publication. Phoenix, Arizona. p. 18.
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- James, J.D., and J.E. Thompson. 2001. Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*). In: A. Poole and F. Gill, editors. The Birds of North America, No. 578. The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
- National Geographic Society. 1999. Field guide to the birds of North America. Third Edition. National Geographic, Washington, D.C. pp. 408-409.
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Terres, J.K., 1980. Encyclopedia of North American Birds, first edition. The Audubon Society, Alfred A Knopf Inc.

**MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:****ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

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