



Fulvous Whistling-Ducks at Belleville -

Escapees or Wild?

Story and Photos by Dennis Oehmke



On 18 November 1993 I drove to an apartment complex near Belleville, St. Clair County where a pair of Fulvous Whistling-Ducks (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) had been reported. David Bohlen had seen the pair and said they were very tame and therefore were probably escapees. When I arrived I wondered if wild ducks would come into an area so close to two apartment buildings. However, only a few hundred yards away and adjacent to the apartment complex was a cemetery with a much larger pond. It appeared to have the potential of attracting wild ducks.

I seized the opportunity to photograph this extremely unusual waterfowl species. After watching the whistling-ducks for approximately two hours I noticed neither bird was banded and both could readily fly.

The ducks kept to themselves but occasionally would flock with Mallards and to my surprise, a Wood Duck. Immediately, I wondered if the Wood Duck was wild and was attracted to this area? Could the whistling-ducks have been wild?

The scenario reminded me of a similar situation at Washington Park in Springfield, Illinois. Occasionally a wild duck (American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, or Wood Duck, for example) appears at the park. The wild birds are wary at first, but some individuals later become tame and allow

close approach. When the birds become tame, do they become possible escapees? Should I take the Gray Jays I hand fed in Colorado off my life list because they were tame and thus possible escapees?

The Fulvous Whistling-Duck sighting remains a dilemma until someone can provide more information.

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