

RECENT RECORDS OF THE BLACK BRANT (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) IN NAYARIT, MÉXICO

Registros recientes del ganso de collar (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) en Nayarit, México

RESUMEN: Presentamos el segundo y tercer registro en 25 años del Ganso de collar (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) en Nayarit, México. El 24 de enero de 2010 observamos y fotografiamos tres especímenes juveniles del ganso en una granja camaronícola ubicada en la vecindad de San Blás. Uno de ellos (macho) fue marcado el verano anterior en el NW de Alaska. El 14 de diciembre de 2010 se observaron dos juveniles en Laguna Las Garzas, al norte de Nayarit.

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Thirty three species of ducks and geese that breed in Alaska, Canada and northern USA migrate south during the winter (Howell & Webb, 1995). The Black Brant (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) breeds in the Western Arctic and migrates through the Pacific; over 74% of their population (136,200 birds) winters in the NW of Mexico, and the rest along the North-American coast, from Alaska to Mexico (Reed *et al.*, 1998). This species is cataloged by the Mexican government as threatened in the Norma Oficial Mexicana 059-ECOL-2001 (2002).

Before the 1960's, the Mexican coasts were used little by the Black Brant. Since this period the population has changed its winter distribution, which originally covered the Queen Charlotte Island in the British Columbia to California, including southern coastal lagoons. This change in the wintering areas can be attributed to the modification of the west coast of USA and to the consequent reduction of the sea grass (*Zostera marina*) beds, their main food supply during the winter (Reed *et al.*, 1998). Between 1997 and 2007, during a mid-winter aerial census a wintering population of 14,300 birds was reported in the coasts of Sonora and northern Sinaloa, as well as an additional 85,000 birds for the Pacific coast of Baja California (Mallek & Conant, 2007).

In the NW of Mexico, most of the brants winter in Bahía San Quintín (Baja California), and in the

Guerrero Negro-Ojo de Liebre lagoon-complex, in Laguna San Ignacio, and in Bahía Magdalena (Baja California Sur), as well as in Canal Infiernillo, Sonora (Mallek & Conant, 2007). Nonetheless, some individuals have been observed in more southern sites, as the La Paz lagoon (Llinas, 1998); also there is a 1985 record for Nayarit (Howell & Webb, 1995). Since then no specimens of Black Brant have been registered in the coasts of Nayarit.

Recently, we made two observations of *B. bernicla nigricans* in Nayarit. The first observation included three juvenile individuals (Fig. 1) feeding in a shrimp farm alongside San Blas port (21° 32' 53.72" N and 105° 16' 17.68" W), 25 km from the coast. These individuals were recorded in January 24, 2010 between 7:00 and 10:00 h. The brants were observed feeding on *Salicornia* spp. and filamentous algae (Fig 1A), and later standing next to a flock of Black Skimmers (*Rynchops niger*). One Black brant (a juvenile male) carried a black ring with a white inscription with the code "84♥" (Fig. 1B). The bird was tagged when it was a chick by D. Ward (USGS, Alaska Science Center, Anchorage, Alaska) during the summer of 2009 in NW Alaska.

The second observation included two juvenile birds in Laguna Las Garzas (22° 26' 34.12" N; 105° 34' 44.22" W) in December 14, 2010 between 14:00 and 15:00 h; the zone was located 12 km from the coast. The birds were observed feeding in the intertidal zone in the company of other waterfowls (*Anas acuta* and *A. clypeata*). Laguna Las Garzas is a shallow wetland showing a slight tide slope. It is located in the north of Nayarit, some mangrove spots (*Avicennia germinans* and *Rhizophora mangle*) and salt marsh vegetation (dominated by *Salicornia* spp.) are observed in its shoreline.

Regularly, the search and colonization of new sites comes from the juvenile or immature individuals, since they possess a large dispersion grade, which lowers the competence in the sites used by adult birds (Emlen, 1973). In a similar manner, this has been recorded in other waterfowl species in which the juveniles trend to migrate larger distances than the adults (Hepp & Hines, 1991); both arguments agree with the present observations. Migrating waterfowls can modify their wintering areas, depending on the environmental factors, basically temperature and pluvial precipitation (Hepp & Hines, 1991). Also, wind patterns affect the migration distances of the Black Brant. In summary, the winter distribution patterns are the result of the interaction between diverse factors (Nolan & Katterson, 1990), which are little studied in Mexico.

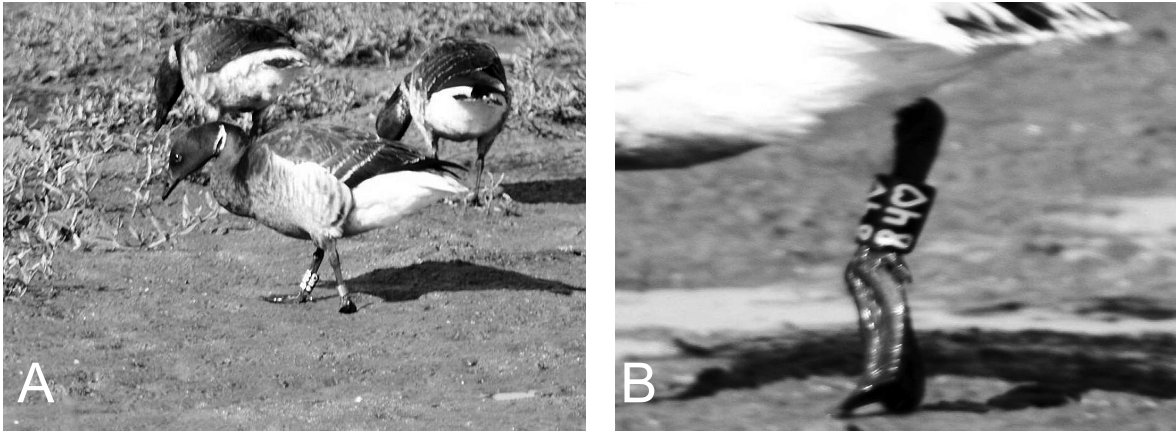


Figure 1. A) Black Brants observed in San Blas, Nayarit. The bird from the first plane is tagged with a metallic ring in the left leg and with a plastic ring in the right leg; B) Zoom of the plastic ring.

These observations suggest that the Nayarit coast is used by small groups of wintering Black Brants. This could signify an added value in conservation for the zone, due to the protection status of the Black Brant in Mexico.

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