

Gadwall

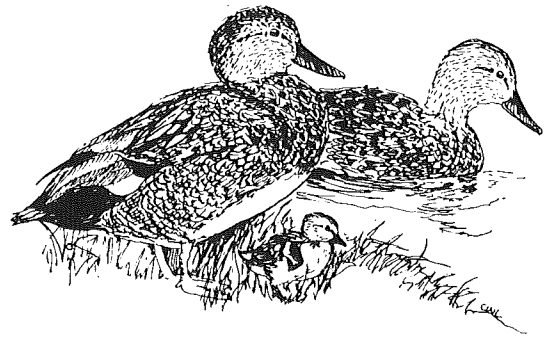
Anas strepera

The Gadwall occurs primarily as a migrant in Vermont, and is among the least common of our regularly occurring dabbling ducks. Only the Northern Shoveler is reported in fewer numbers each year. Nonetheless, the species has established a recent foothold as a regular breeding bird in the northern Champlain Lowlands.

The Gadwall inhabits temperate, lowland regions which are largely unforested and flat. Being dabblers, Gadwalls prefer shallow, eutrophic waters, especially in marshes. Nests are placed on the ground, usually in thick, often thorny, vegetation. Dry sites are preferred over wetter locations, and the species prefers island nesting sites. Vermeer (1968) found the Gadwall and Lesser Scaup the most common nesters of several species of ducks nesting among gulls and terns on islands in Alberta. He postulated that where there were Larid species not dangerous to ducklings, nesting among gulls and terns might be beneficial. The Gadwall's habit of nesting among Larids is also noted by Cramp and Simmons (1977). Two of the known nesting areas for the Gadwall on Lake Champlain are in large gull colonies (the Four Brothers and Young islands).

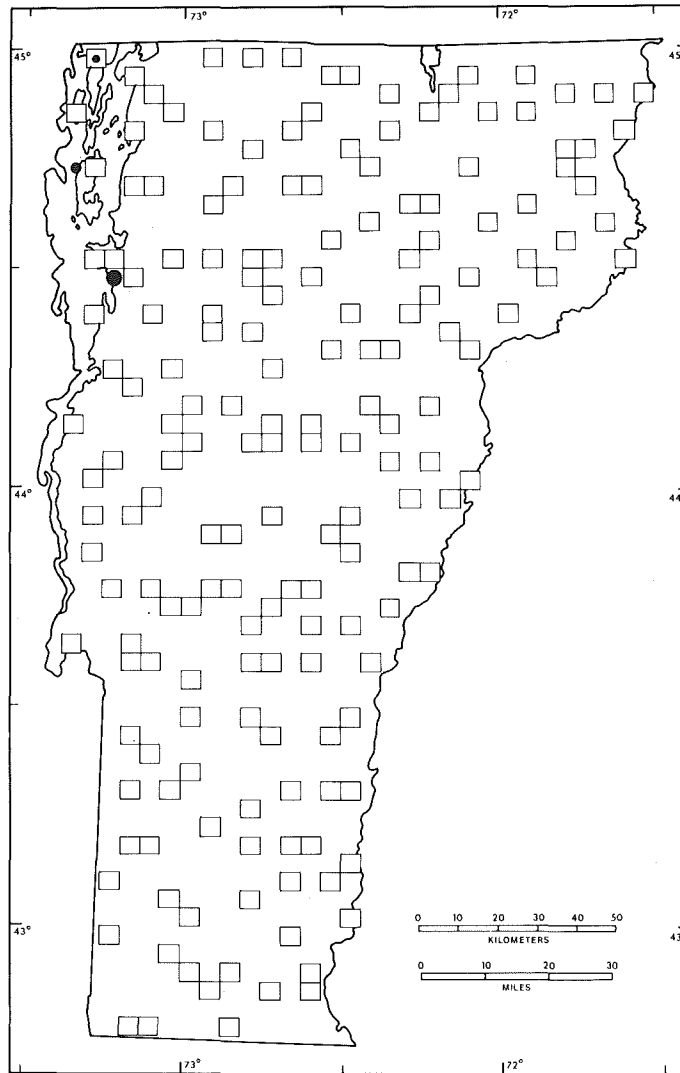
Sharrock (1976) noted that because Gadwall nests are situated on relatively dry ground close to water, their nests are easier to locate than nests of other ducks. Nonetheless, the first Gadwall nest for Lake Champlain was not located until 1983. All other reported confirmations of breeding on Lake Champlain were of broods sighted with the hen.

The spring arrival of the Gadwall in Vermont ranges from late March to mid April, with peak numbers in late April. The autumn migration commences in September and is most evident in mid to late October. The Gadwall is a late-breeding duck, nesting about a month after its arrival on the breeding grounds. Nesting is apparently delayed by the species' requirement for fairly tall,



dense vegetation at the nest site. The single Vermont nest date is June 1, and broods have been seen from mid to late July; in nearby Quebec, laying occurs in late May and early June and hatching takes place in the first half of July (Cantin et al. 1976). The nest, built in a hollow in the ground, is lined with materials from the immediate vicinity, and down from the hen's breast is added during incubation. The eggs are creamy white, and number from 6 to 13. Bellrose (1980) summarized data from 2,445 clutches and concluded that the average clutch size was 10.04 eggs. Oring (1969) found an average incubation period of 24 days with an incubator and 25.7 days with hens. The young leave the nest within 24 hours after hatching. Hens generally lead their broods a considerable distance from the nest site to suitable waters that are surrounded with sufficient cover for the ducklings to hide in while feeding.

Early in this century the Gadwall was a scarce migrant in New England (Forbush 1925). The Gadwall first bred on the East Coast in 1939 and since has spread to more than thirty localities on the Atlantic seaboard, generally in coastal national wildlife refuges and state wildlife management areas (Henny and Holgerson 1973). A population in Concord, Massachusetts was apparently fostered by the introduction of flightless juveniles from Manitoba (Borden and Hochbaum 1980). The species has recently become established in the St. Lawrence River valley of Quebec and is increasing rapidly, suggesting a source for Lake Champlain nesters (Cantin et al. 1976); recent stocking



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 1 (0.6%)

- Possible breeding: 1 (100% of total)
- Probable breeding: 0 (0% of total)
- Confirmed breeding: 0 (0% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	1	3	100
Green Mountains	0	0	0
North Central	0	0	0
Northeast Highlands	0	0	0
East Central	0	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	0
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

in New York State has doubtless contributed to the Champlain population. The first nesting on Lake Champlain was recorded in 1977 when a brood was located in the vicinity of the Four Brothers Islands, Essex County, New York (Carleton 1980).

The Gadwall was first confirmed breeding in Vermont in 1980 when a brood of downy young was observed on the Burlington waterfront (ASR, B. and O. Eastman); the species has bred there in most subsequent years. The species has been seen in some numbers and has been flushed from possible nest sites on Young Island, Grand Isle County, and was finally confirmed there

on June 1, 1983 when a nest containing 11 eggs was found (BVR, R. M. Lavallee, S. B. Laughlin, A. L. Gosnell). It is too early in the Gadwall's colonization of Vermont to speculate on the species' fate or impact, but considering the species' recent history in the St. Lawrence River valley and along the Atlantic coast, it may increase during the next decade.

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