

Blue-winged Teal

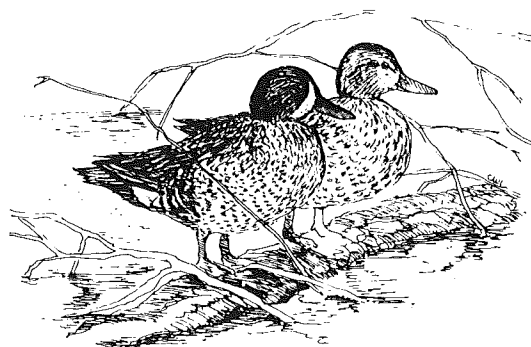
Anas discors

An exclusively North American dabbling duck, the Blue-winged Teal's breeding range extends across the continent, and especially into the prairie regions of the central U.S. and southern Canada. Bent (1923) believed it to be more or less restricted to these prairies, "with only a few scattered pairs left in the eastern and southern portions of its breeding range." Its population has obviously recovered: DeGraaf et al. (1980) called it locally common in the breeding season in the Northeast, and Spear (1976) listed it as a Vermont nesting species. Its preferred breeding habitat in the Northeast is along the marshy edges of freshwater areas.

Sensitive to cold, Blue-wings arrive late and depart early. Spring migration peaks in Vermont from late April to early May; an extreme early arrival date of March 4 was recorded in 1978. Birds start south in August; most have left Vermont by October, although there are occasional sightings in the Lake Champlain area into December (RVB 1975-81). Blue-wings winter from the Chesapeake Bay area south through Central America to Peru.

Pair bonds begin forming in early winter; active courtship continues through spring migration. Much of the courtship occurs in the air, with small groups of drakes flying in close pursuit of a hen. Drakes will chase each other, and aerial combat is frequent (Palmer 1976). On the water, pairs rapidly bow their heads while swimming around each other, often for hours at a time, with interruptions for feeding and resting periods (Kortright 1942). Blue-winged Teals may not return to the same breeding area year after year; Bellrose (1980) calls them "poor homers but great pioneers."

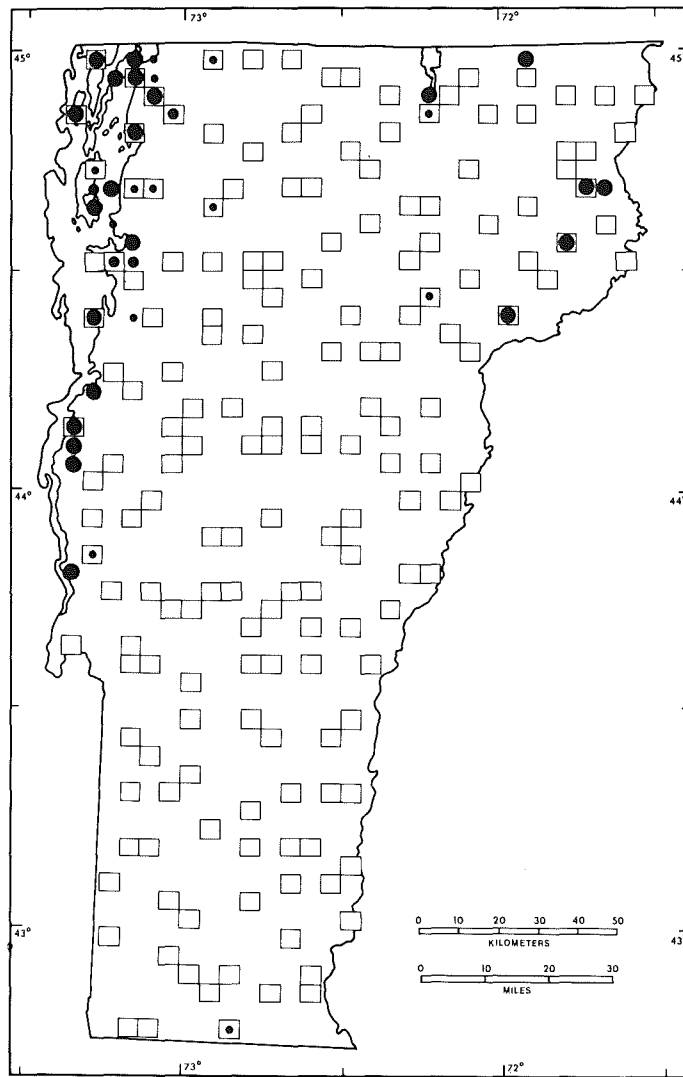
The nest, placed in fairly tall coarse grasses up to 1.6 km (1 mi) from water, is a well-built basketlike structure composed of the dead grass within reach of the hen, and lined with a thick blanket of down (Bellrose



1980). Eggs are dull white or creamy, sometimes pale olive. Clutch size ranges from 6 to 16 eggs, but is typically 8 to 12. Incubation is given as 21 to 27 days, with most authors agreeing that 23 to 24 days is the average. Bull (1974) gave New York egg dates of May 3 to July 4. Vermont Atlas Project workers recorded an egg date of May 31 for a nest containing 11 eggs. As is typical with waterfowl, Blue-wings raise only one brood a year, although the hen will probably reneest if the eggs are destroyed during incubation. The hen leads the young from the nest within 24 hours of hatching. In Vermont, downy young have been reported between June 1 and June 19 (three records).

Blue-winged Teals are surface feeders whose preferred feeding areas are shallow, muddy ponds overgrown with aquatic vegetation, marshes, mudflats, and even flooded fields. Unlike the other dabbling ducks, they usually reach below the surface with their heads and necks or skim the water with their bills rather than tipping up with their feet and tails exposed above the water. Their diet is primarily plant foods: aquatic plants and the seeds of sedges, pondweeds, and grasses; this diet is supplemented with aquatic insects, small mollusks, and worms (Bent 1923; Terres 1980).

Blue-wings were considered abundant in the northeastern portion of their range until about 1880, when they declined drastically (Palmer 1976). In the 1950s a considerable population recovery began among Blue-winged Teals, and Spear (1976) called them



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 21 (12%)

Possible breeding: 9 (42% of total)

Probable breeding: 2 (10% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 10 (48% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	15	48	71.0
Green Mountains	1	2	5.0
North Central	2	11	9.5
Northeast Highlands	2	13	9.5
East Central	1	5	5.0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	0
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

common in Vermont from mid April to late September. Bellrose (1980) referred to the species as the most abundant duck in North America "next to the mallard, the scaups and the pintail."

Although Blue-winged Teals usually conceal their nests extremely well, several of the Atlas Project confirmations were for nests with eggs (NE). The most frequent method of confirmation was observation of a hen with her brood.

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