

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*



Folk Name: Fall Teal

Status: Migrant, Winter Visitor

Abundance: Uncommon

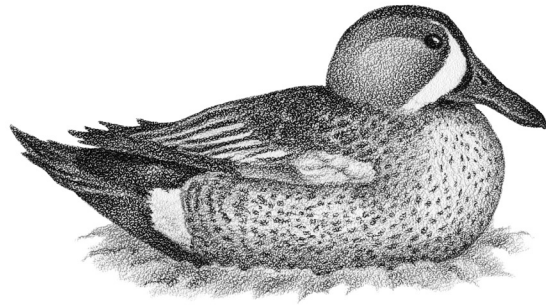
Habitat: Shallow lakes, ponds, mudflats

The Blue-winged Teal gets its name from the Carolina-blue wing coverts on the leading edge of the wing. This dabbling duck is usually found foraging in shallow ponds throughout the region. It is one of our earliest waterfowl migrants, arriving here as early as August, but most move through quickly to spend the winter further south. Blue-winged Teal have long been prized by local duck hunters. They fly in small tight flocks that can reach speeds of up to 50 mph.

The challenge of hunting this wary prey was shared by one hunter in *The Charlotte News* in 1905:

Teal leave the water with astonishing smartness, and if the shooting is in any bush the gunner is likely to be reminded of the thunderous grouse, by the way those brown bantams, the blue-wings, slip out of reach of his sudden storm of lead. And how they can go when they discover what their danger is! I have stood in the cat tails by a pond of evenings when the teal were coming to roost and have seen them burst into a speed, upon detecting me, that required a twenty-foot swinging lead to stop at forty yards. They are handsome birds, too, these teal, and gross is the man that can chuck them in his shooting coat without a glance of admiration at the trim lines of them.

The Blue-winged Teal is primarily a migrant in our region. Our earliest fall arrival date is 3 August in 1963, when one was found on Lake Tillery in Stanly-Montgomery County. Mark Oliver found a flock of about 100 Blue-winged Teal, the largest recorded in this region, at Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge on September 29, 1997. One late spring departure date is 9 May, reported in 1939 by J.J. Murray, founder of the Virginia Ornithological Society. He spied a male Blue-winged Teal on a small rain



pond in Cabarrus County, off Davidson-Concord Road, "some ten miles out of Davidson." A second late departure date is a teal sighted on May 16, 2016, in Gaston County reported by Lee Weber.

Mid-winter sightings are much less common than those in migration. We have at least 17 records of Blue-winged Teal found on different Christmas Bird Counts in the region and a handful of other winter sightings. David Wright found a female in midwinter at Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge on January 14, 1990. There is one record of a Blue-winged Teal found lingering in the summer. A drake was photographed at Riverbend Park in Catawba County from June 26 through July 6, 2015.



A flock of Blue-winged Teal at Lake Norman. (Jeff Lemons)