



# BLUE-WINGED TEAL

ANSERIFORMES

Family: Anatidae

Genus: *Anas*

Species: *discors*



**Range:** across most of North America

**Habitat:** marshes, lakes, ponds, pools, and shallow streams with dense emergent vegetation, winter in brackish or saline water

**Niche:** Aquatic, diurnal, omnivorous

**Wild diet:** mainly aquatic plants (seeds, roots, vegetative parts), some molluscs and aquatic insects

**Zoo diet:**

**Life Span:** (Wild)  
(Captivity)

**Sexual dimorphism:** see photos

**Location in SF Zoo:** South American Tropical Rainforest and Aviary

---

## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

---

The blue-winged teal is a small dabbling duck of North America. It has a rounded head and the bill is on the large side. They have short legs and a flatten skin bearing bill with a nail at the tip of the maxilla. Lamellae line the edges of the maxilla and mandible. They have webbing connecting three toes, but their elevated hind toe is a simple nail without a lob or flap. Males have a 'penis' they are adapted for copulation on the water only.

The adult male has a greyish blue head with a white facial crescent, a light brown body with a white patch near the rear and a black tail. The adult female is mottled brown, and has a whitish area at base of bill. Both sexes have sky-blue wing coverts, a green speculum, and yellow legs. Wings come to a point with waterproof feathers covering a layer of down beneath. They have two molts per year and a third molt in their first year.

**Weight:** 13 oz

**Length:** 16 inches

**Wingspan:** 23 inches

---

## STATUS & CONSERVATION

---

Listed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List. Blue-winged Teal are the second most abundant duck in North America, behind the Mallard. Their numbers fluctuate between about 2.8 million and 7.4 million birds, mainly as a response to water conditions, with drought causing populations to fall. Blue-winged Teal are vulnerable to wetland loss or degradation, pesticide contamination, and consumption of lead shot where it is still used.

---

## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

---

The call of the male is a short whistle; the female's call is a soft quack. Like many ducks, Blue-winged Teal have a range of exaggerated motions that they use as displays. Often male will make these displays while oriented to the side of the female he is courting. They include pumping the head up and down, dipping the head under water rapidly, and tipping up or dabbling in the water. Females may respond by "inciting": lowering her head, pointing her bill at the male, and then raising her head.

Blue-winged Teal are long distance migrants, with some birds heading all the way to South America for the winter. Therefore, they are generally the first ducks south in the fall and the last ones north in the spring. They are fast and agile flyers and are often seen in small flocks, twisting and turning as a single unit.

Blue-winged Teal feed by dabbling; pairs and small groups dabble on the surface and also head dip in shallow water but rarely up-end to reach submerged vegetation. They are often around the edges of ponds under vegetation, choosing a concealed spot to forage or rest. They are flightless during their late summer molt, and they spend this time in prairie potholes or large marshes.

---

## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

---

Blue-winged teal breed primarily in the northern prairies and parklands of central North America. Pair bonds typically dissolve during incubation, and adults form new pair bonds with different mates in the winter or spring. Many males court the same female until she chooses a mate.

The female builds the nest by scraping with her feet to make a circular depression. She then lines it with dried grasses picked from around the nest, adding down and breast feathers. Vegetation conceals most nests on all sides and from above. The finished nest is about 8 inches across, with an inside diameter of about 6 inches and 2 inches deep.

Young leave nest within 24 hours after hatching and find their own food. Females tend to chicks for first few weeks, but broods of young often left alone before they are old enough to fly.

Incubation: 21 – 27 days	Sexual Maturity: 1 year
# of eggs: 8 – 11	Fledging: 35 – 44 days

---

## MISCELLANEOUS

---

Sometimes listed as *Spatula discors*. The genus *Spatula* is the "blue-winged" group, also including the shovelers. The blue-winged teal is not a teal in the strict sense.

### Sources:

Handbook of the Birds of the World Vol I © 1992, Lynx Edicions  
<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/factsheet/22680229>  
[http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Blue-winged\\_Teal/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Blue-winged_Teal/id)  
<http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22680229/0>  
<http://www.ducks.org/hunting/waterfowl-id/blue-winged-teal#ad-image-0>  
<http://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/blue-winged-teal>  
[http://birdweb.org/birdweb/bird/blue-winged\\_teal](http://birdweb.org/birdweb/bird/blue-winged_teal)

Created 7/15