

Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture November 12th, 2009.
Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

There is a proposal before the AOU to split the **Western Scrub-Jay** again. There is considerable genetic distance between the population at the Pacific coast and the population of the western Great Basin ("Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay", "interior" in Sibley). There was a featured photo article in *Western Birds* a couple of years ago that discussed these populations: <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/wb/v32n03/p0186-p0188.pdf>

Brown Pelicans used to breed in the Monterey Bay area, now breed only further south, mostly in Mexico.

In CA they are on the endangered species list because the breeding colonies on the US shorelines collapsed. Joe doubts if the species ever was in danger of extinction. He always felt it an embarrassment to have this endangered species and go out and see big flocks of them. They are doing very well now.

They nest on the ground. They are colonial. They have an altricial breeding strategy, the babies require a lot of care and feeding. The adults are basically fishing out the near waters to the islands on which they nest. Anchovy is one of their favorite foods. They also feed on sardines and other migratory fish.

After breeding there is not enough food left and they disperse into the various currents to the north and to the south, following the fish. Some migrate south, some migrate north. Height of the nesting season is Dec – Feb; we see them up here in the summer time; they are not nesting here. They are coastal, but they do get into the bay. They are quite mobile, somewhat nomadic, following the food supplies.

You can tell how well the nesting season has been by looking at ratios of young to adults. Brown birds with white bellies are hatching year birds.

In the Bay Area the numbers tend to draw down as it gets towards December. In some years the bird has been hard to find on CBCs, but in the last few years there have been more.

For a long time there have been big concentrations in midwinter in the Monterey Bay area. The adult birds are showing signs of breeding. They have the bright red engorged gular patch and bright colors around their eyes. (The gular pouch of the west coast subspecies is bright red, on east coast birds it is greenish gray.) This means that they have the breeding hormones. But they are not breeding, they are just sitting around there. Joe does not know why that is. Maybe the traditional nesting grounds are full, which would suggest that the birds are doing pretty well. Joe is not sure why they do not nest in Monterey again. Competition from cormorants?

The Brown Pelican has an advantage in that it is a very long lived bird. As long as they don't get contaminated with lots of poison their normal life span is about 30 years, might be even longer than that. They have been raising a lot of chicks which you know from looking around here.

In Florida you can see them perched in trees.

Northern Shoveler

OCCURRENCE

Pretty widespread around the world, mainly western NA and Eurasia.

Scarce in Australia. Other species of shovelers replace it in the southern hemisphere.

Reasonably long distance migrant.

Rare in the eastern US. Does not breed there.

Breeds in the prairie potholes and western Canada all the way up into Alaska.

Winters into parts of Georgia and Florida, but not a particularly common bird in most of the eastern US.

Essentially a winter visitor to CA, mostly in shallow waters and estuaries.

Lots of Shovelers in the Bay Area in the wintertime.

Many in places like the south end of SF Bay, in Palo Alto Baylands both in the salt marshes and in the brackish marshes. Probably one of the greatest concentrations at a freshwater impoundment next to a sewer facility in Redwood Shores, at the end of Radio Road, which is one of the most productive birdwatching areas in San Mateo County. (Northern CA's first Gull-billed Tern was there for a couple of days this May. Hooded Mergansers, Blue-winged Teal can be seen there.)

Other places with enormous amounts of shovelers include the shallows of managed wildlife areas in the Central Valley, some of the sewer ponds as those just east of Antioch (where Black Rails breed), Grizzly Islands has tons.

Hunters call them spoon-bills or spoonies. Do not use those terms!

FIELD MARKS

Relatively large size.

Peculiar shape:

Very short, thick neck (about the same thickness as the head).

Very spatulate bill with oversized laminations ("teeth") around the edge of the bill.

The upper mandible laps down over the lower mandible towards the tip of the bill, sort of forming flaps on the sides, the tip of the lower mandible is encased by the upper mandible.

Relatively small head compared to the bill.

Do not often dip. They tend to forage in areas that have food near the surface, including floating duck weed. They also forage on insects that swim near the surface of the water, such as mosquito larvae. They use their bills as filters, almost like the baleen of a whale.

Relatively short, orange legs.

Upper wing coverts gray-blue.

Greenish speculum bordered in front by white.

Same pattern as Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teals, to which the Northern Shoveler probably is closely related.

Basic (Bright) Plumage Male

Green iridescence on the head.

Yellow eye.

Black bill.

White area on the flanks.

Elongated scapulars black with white fringes.

White chest, which is pretty unusual for any of our surface feeding ducks, most of them have a dark shield or chest.

Deep chestnut sides which extend and connect around over the belly, in most ducks the belly is pale.

In flight they show a white collar around the breast and the chestnut brown belly (may appear black).

Alternate (Eclipse) and Juvenal Plumage Male

Many times these birds show trace of a white crescent at the base of the bill, somewhat similar to the face patch on the Blue-winged Teal, when they molt into basic (bright) plumage in the fall. Those are not hybrids!

The juvenal plumage can be retained into Oct, Nov.

Female

Overall brown coloration.

Tends to have orange along the cutting edge of the bill, top of the bill rather muddy gray.

Face fairly plain with a little dark line through the eye.

Pretty neat pattern of light brown and buff crescent shaped markings on the scapulars and back.

A white area along the side of the tail similar to Green-winged Teal, but on the tail feathers, not the undertail coverts.

Blue-winged Teal

OCCURRENCE

Abundant throughout the eastern part of NA, replaced in the far west by the Cinnamon Teal.

One of the most common ducks in the gulf states in the wintertime.

Range fairly far into the west, up into Washington, Oregon.

Are suspected to breed in the northeastern part of CA.

Appear to be increasing in the west, but their status in the far west remains rather unclear since female-aspect birds are almost identical to Cinnamon Teal.

FIELD MARKS

A little smaller than the Northern Shoveler and more normally proportioned.

Greater secondary coverts white.

Median and lesser secondary coverts powder blue - gray-blue.

Speculum green in males, just dark in females.

(Same pattern as on Cinnamon Teal and Northern Shoveler.)

Yellow legs and feet.

Basic (Bright) Plumage Male

White crescent at the front of the face that extends well above the eye.

Dark slate-blue head.

Tan color with little black leopard spots all over it on the sides and breast, a very fine pattern of little polka dots, helps identify sleeping birds when the head is not visible.

White flank patch.

Black scapulars with buffy fringes.

Female

Almost identical to female Cinnamon Teal.

Paler on the head than a Cinnamon Teal.

Often has a pale spot near the base of the bill.

Tends to have a better defined eye line than Cinnamon Teal, partly because the brown color of the face is relatively paler, if the Cinnamon Teal has an eye line it does not contrast quite the way it does on the Blue-winged Teal.

It does not have the whitish streak on the lateral undertail coverts just underneath the sides of the tail that the Green-winged Teal has. Green-winged Teal has dark feet, Blue-winged Teal yellow.

Cinnamon Teal**OCCURRENCE**

Western NA, do not normally occur in the eastern US.

You have a much better chance of finding a Blue-winged Teal in the west than of finding a Cinnamon Teal in the east because of their migration routes. They tend to migrate into Mexico, winter a little bit in CA, tend not to show up in the east.

They are kept in captivity since they are quite snappy birds. They escape from captivity. This makes it unclear how many records there really are in the Eastern US.

Fairly common although local in the Bay Area, mostly in the springtime, they seem to peak in April. They are mostly migrants coming through the Bay Area but breed in a few places.

Cinnamon Teal and Blue-winged Teal migrate in eclipse plumage in the fall, mostly in August and September. They mostly migrate through the Bay Area, some may winter in small numbers. Most of them go all the way to Mexico or to southern CA.

They acquire their bright plumage after they migrate. That is why we have so few Blue-winged Teal records in the fall, people miss them. We know very little about the relative numbers of Cinnamon and Blue-winged teal in fall migration. We are looking for rare warblers and shorebirds then, people don't like to stand hours and hours sorting through female-aspect ducks. Blue-winged Teal is a hard one to pick out, partly because of the individual variation.

FIELD MARKS

Bill pretty big, seems sometimes almost Shoveler-like, has a fairly broad tip.

Yellowish feet like the Blue-winged Teal. (Green-winged Teal has gray feet and legs.)

Greater secondary coverts white.

Median and lesser secondary coverts powder blue - gray-blue.

Speculum green in males, just dark in females.

(Same pattern as on Blue-winged Teal and Northern Shoveler)

Tail a little bit longer than on Blue-winged Teal.

Bird slightly larger than Blue-winged Teal.

Basic (Bright) Plumage Male

One of the most striking NA ducks.

Cinnamon head, neck and underparts.

Red eyes.

Gold trim to the scapulars.

Female

There is a lot of individual variation, you have to use a combination of characters. Tends to have a more uniform colored head, often a warmer brown color, a little darker than Blue-winged Teal.

A lot of brown flecking about the whole head, the head does not look contrastingly pale compared to either the eye line or the crown. This more blended look is classic of Cinnamon Teal.

Eye kind of isolated, less distinct eye line and darker face compared to Blue-winged Teal. Some pale at the base of the bill on one of the slides. This is otherwise a character pointing to female Blue-winged Teal. Some Cinnamon Teal may show it.

Tends to have a dark belly while female Blue-winged tends to have a pale belly.

Does not have the whitish streak on the lateral undertail coverts just underneath the sides of the tail like Green-winged Teal. Green-winged Teal has dark feet, Cinnamon Teal yellow.

Hybrid Cinnamon Teal x Blue-winged Teal

They do hybridize. Sibley illustrates a bright male hybrid.

Much of the body cinnamon in color, suffused with spots.

A trace of the white flank patch.

On the head the cinnamon color is a little paler where the white patch would be on Blue-winged Teal.

Garganey**OCCURRENCE**

Replaces the Cinnamon Teal and the Blue-winged Teal ecologically in Eurasia.

Winters in enormous numbers in India for example.

Some individuals show up in Alaska and apparently migrate south with Blue-winged Teal, they tend to associate with them.

Only a handful of records in CA mainly of migrating birds rather than of birds that overstay the winter.

Quite a few records from Mexico, it is a fairly long distance migrant.

FIELD MARKS

Upper wing coverts in males paler blue than on Blue-winged Teal, the females do not have blue upper wing coverts, they are just gray-brown.

Bill moderately large.

Forehead rather flat, sloping to the bill (Green-winged Teal has a steeper forehead, more rounded head and more petite looking bill).

Basic (Bright) Plumage Male

Gray body.

Dark rusty head.

Big crescent shaped patch starting above the eye and heading back laterally along the sides of the crown.

Red eye.

Female

Quite a challenge to identify.

Key field marks are the contrasting white fringes to the tertials, not found on any of the other similar species.

Does not have the whitish streak on the lateral undertail coverts just underneath the sides of the tail like Green-winged Teal.

Pale head with a dark line that extends through the eye.

Usually a secondary stripe extends from the back of the bill, curves upward and then down along the side of the face underneath the eye, sort of like on female Ruddy Duck.

A secondary stripe like that is quite common in Green-winged Teal also!

The dark eye line comes to the eye from both sides and wraps around the eye both above and below, the entire eye is encased in dark. In Blue-winged or Green-winged Teal the eye line seldom if ever looks like that. Instead the line is thin and does not encompass the eye.

Dark eye.

A pale spot right by the base of the bill.

Bill gray without orange.

Joe has linked from his class website to two pictures of **claimed Garganey**. The birds have a double face stripe, which is why people thought they were Garganeys. But they also have a pale flank stripe at the base of the tail, they are Green-winged Teal. A Garganey should also have a pure gray bill, without any orange at the base.