

Eurasian Teal in the Central Valley

Jon R. King, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, 4990 Shoreline Highway, Stinson Beach, CA 94970

On 27 March 2002, Rixon Johnson found a male Eurasian Teal (*Anas [crecca] crecca*) at the Yolo Basin Wildlife Area. At the time this record was thought to represent the first of this taxon for Yolo County; by remaining for five days this bird allowed many observers to see Eurasian Teal in the Central Valley for the first time. This paper summarizes that record, collates all known records of Eurasian Teal for the valley, and briefly discusses taxonomy and identification of Eurasian and Green-winged (*A. [c.] carolinensis*) teal.

YOLO COUNTY RECORDS

The drake found on 27 March was relocated on the same pond and studied there shortly after dawn on 28 March by Steve Abbott, JRK, and Bruce Webb, and was then seen in the same area by many observers through 30 March. On the morning of 31 March the bird had moved slightly to the south, to ponds west of parking lot E. The bird was not reported thereafter. The Eurasian Teal was always associated with flocks of several hundred Green-winged Teal, providing excellent opportunities for comparison.

This Eurasian Teal was quite typical, and separation from Green-winged Teal was straightforward. The following description is based on notes taken by JRK (see also Figure 1). Although similar to drake Green-winged Teal in basic appearance, the Eurasian Teal lacked the white vertical stripes on the breast sides, had a broad white horizontal scapular line between the wings and flanks, much more extensive buff borders to the green head stripe, and tertials with broad blackish shaft streaks and a dusky wash (tertials are largely grayish on Green-winged Teal). The overall plumage was slightly grayer, especially on the breast, and was more coarsely vermiculated on the flanks, than on male Green-winged. Also notable was the large size, estimated to be at least ten percent larger than nearby drake Green-winged Teal. The pattern of the rear flanks and undertail coverts was not clearly different from that of drake Green-winged Teal.

Subsequently, a prior report of a drake Eurasian Teal from the same site, seen by Cindy and Leslie Lieurance on 3 February 2002, came to light when they reported it to the regional editors of *North American Birds*. While the same individual could be involved, it is believed that the two Yolo records may refer to separate birds, as this is a well-watched site, where several experienced observers specifically examined teal looking for Eurasian Teal in the intervening time, and with two other reports from adjacent Sacramento County there were clearly multiple Eurasian Teal in the region at that time. The two observations are being considered as separate records for publication in *North American Birds* (M. Rogers pers. comm.). These are the first two records of Eurasian Teal for Yolo County.

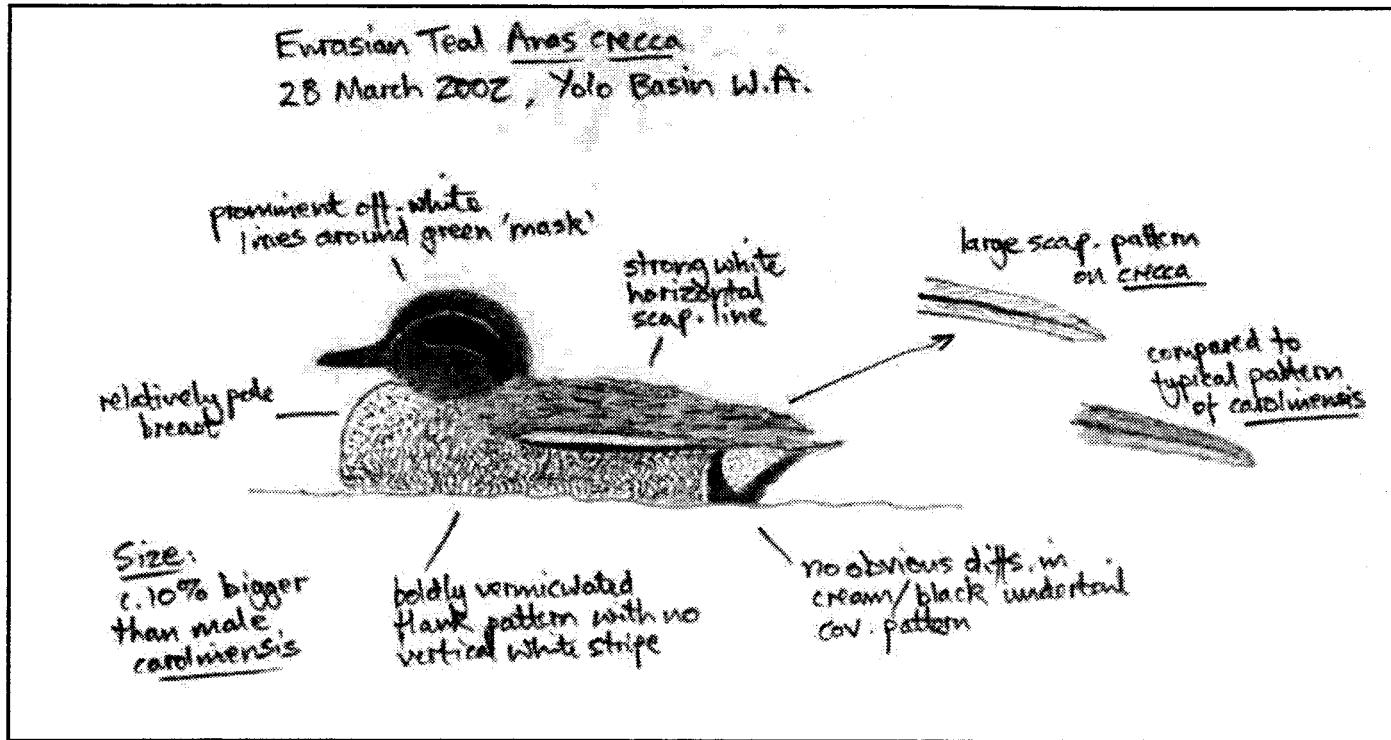


Figure 1. Eurasian Teal (*Anas [crecca] crecca*) at Yolo Basin Wildlife Area, Yolo Co., 28 March 2002.

sketch by Jon R. King

Table 1. Known Central Valley records of Eurasian Teal (*Anas crecca*).

Date(s)	County	Location	Observer(s)
11 December 1982	Butte	Gray Lodge W.A.	B. Deuel
14 February 1987	San Joaquin	Isenberg Crane Preserve, Woodbridge Road	D. Yee et al.
12 March 1988	Butte	Gray Lodge W.A.	D. Schmoldt
7 January 1991	Colusa	Delevan N.W.R.	J. Snowden
22 December 1992	Butte	Gray Lodge W.A.	Peace Valley CBC
4 March 1993	Butte	Evans-Reimer Road, near Gray Lodge W.A. ¹	B. Webb, T. Manolis
2 February 1997	Sacramento	Cosumnes River Preserve (near Tall Forest)	J. Trochet
28 November 1999	Sacramento	Cosumnes River Preserve (Desmond Road)	J. Trochet
25 November 2000	Glenn	Sacramento N.W.R.	W. Oliver et al.
3 February 2002	Yolo	Yolo Basin W.A.	C. & L. Lieurance
24 March 2002	Sacramento	Cosumnes River Preserve (near Tall Forest)	J. Trochet
27-31 March 2002	Yolo	Yolo Basin W.A.	R. Johnson et al.
30 March 2002	Sacramento	Cosumnes River Preserve ² (Orr Ranch)	J. Trochet, T. Ronneberg

¹presumed same individual as 22 December 1992 record (T. Manolis pers. comm.)²possibly same individual as 24 March 2002 record (J. Trochet pers. comm.)

W.A. = Wildlife Area; N.W.R. = National Wildlife Refuge; CBC = Christmas Bird Count.

RECORDS OF EURASIAN TEAL FOR THE CENTRAL VALLEY

Correspondence with many observers yielded 13 reports, probably involving 11 individuals, of drake Eurasian Teal for the Central Valley (Table 1). Very few of these records have ever been independently assessed. As all the records concerned drakes, which are generally easy to separate from male Green-winged Teal, it is assumed that they are probably all accurate, although the possibility that a minority may have involved hybrids that closely resembled Eurasian Teal has not been eliminated. There are possibly additional records from the 1970s and/or the early 1980s from Delevan National Wildlife Refuge, and from the Fresno area in the mid-1980s, but details were not forthcoming (J. Snowden, D. Yee, pers. comms.).

Eurasian Teal records for the Central Valley have occurred between 25 November and 31 March. None are known to have certainly overwintered in the Valley, although the bird at Gray Lodge in 1992-93 may have. Only the March Yolo County record definitely involved the same individual seen on multiple days. There has been a distinct increase in the frequency of Central Valley records of Eurasian Teal since the late 1980s, and a similar increase has been noted elsewhere in western North America (R. Toochin pers. comm.). Whether this represents a genuine increase in the occurrence of this taxon in northern California and elsewhere, greater observer awareness, or a combination of both, is uncertain, although the second of these two factors has undoubtedly contributed to some extent. In addition, some sites that are significant for wintering and migrant teal (e. g., Yolo Basin Wildlife Area and the Cosumnes River Preserve) have only become accessible to birders since the late 1980s, and the coverage that such areas now receive may have also contributed to the increase in Eurasian Teal records.

NOMENCLATURE AND TAXONOMY

Eurasian Teal is sometimes also known as Common Teal. However, the latter name has generally been used for the species-group as a whole, and therefore should be avoided when referring solely to *crecca* (Beaman 1994). The name Eurasian Teal has been used by several references, and accurately describes the typical range of the taxon, and is probably the most appropriate name when considering *crecca* alone. Green-winged Teal is the widely accepted name for *carolinensis*.

Although Eurasian and Green-winged teals were formerly considered separate species, after several decades in which they were generally considered to be subspecies several sources have recently considered the two as separate again. Livezey (1991) provided the primary data for revival of this split, based on detailed study of differences in morphology. Zink et al. (1995) compared mitochondrial DNA of small samples of *crecca* and *carolinensis* and found three distinctive genetic populations, but one of these occurred on both continents, implying frequent mixing of birds between the Palearctic and Nearctic, which given the regular vagrancy by both taxa is unsurprising. The authors concluded that further study was need to determine species limits in these teal, and a split seemed hard to justify on the genetic evidence alone (King 1995). Nevertheless, the evidence for recognizing them as separate phylogenetic species was clearly mounting. Gantlett et al. (1996) first split them for listing purposes in Britain, and the Dutch followed soon thereafter, citing qualitative differences in morphology (Sangster et al. 1998). Rather surprisingly, the normally conservative BOURC (2001) recently concurred with this split, although their reasoning remains unpublished. As a result of these decisions, in Eurasia *crecca* and *carolinensis* are now generally considered as two species.

It is apparently unlikely that Eurasian and Green-winged teals will be

considered as separate species by the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) in the immediate future. The AOU Check-list Committee has twice considered the status of these teal taxa recently, and on both occasions rejected proposals to split them (V. Remsen pers. comm.). These decisions were based on assessment of the available genetic data, and an understanding that differences in voice and display (which could function as isolating mechanisms) are minimal. Further, the zone of apparent hybridization where the two taxa meet in western Alaska was unstudied until very recently. Researchers at the University of Alaska are now studying teal here, and may shed new light on the relationship between *carolinensis* and *crecca* in the near future.

The name *nimia* is applied to the subspecies of Eurasian Teal that is resident in the Aleutians and supposedly characterized by larger size. However, there is some clinal size variation in Eurasian Teal, with the smallest populations in western Europe being similar in size to *carolinensis*, and the largest in eastern Siberia. Published data suggest that Siberian and Aleutian birds are similar in size (Cramp and Simmons 1977, Madge and Burn 1988). Consequently the validity of the form *nimia* is questionable (Madge and Burn 1988, BOURC 2001). The March Yolo bird was certainly large, and was presumably from somewhere in the eastern portion of the range of Eurasian Teal.

IDENTIFICATION AND HYBRIDIZATION

The field separation of drake Eurasian and Green-winged teals is generally straightforward, and the above description of the March Yolo bird includes all the principle field characters. However, hybrids between the taxa occur, and are increasingly reported as observers become familiar with their appearance. Hybrid drakes are probably at least as frequent as pure drake Eurasian Teal in the Central Valley. For example, four presumed drake hybrids were observed at Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento County, in the period 1995-2002 (J. Trochet pers. comm.); three or four Eurasian Teals were at the same site in the same period.

Observations from North America and Europe suggest that the commonest phenotype of drake hybrid shows both the white vertical breast stripes and the horizontal white scapular lines (Gillham and Gillham 2002, JRK pers. obs., J. Trochet pers. comm.). Gillham and Gillham (2002) include a photograph of a known hybrid of this type. Such hybrids can also show asymmetry in the vertical breast stripes, or atypical short or broken vertical stripes (Palmer 1999, Gillham and Gillham 2002). It is unknown whether male hybrids showing both white breast and scapular lines are truly the most frequent phenotype, or whether this is simply the most obvious hybrid type. There appear to be no published records of hybrids lacking both stripes, although they presumably could occur and may be overlooked in the field.

Although the broad white horizontal scapular stripe is a classic Eurasian Teal character, it is typical for a minority of drake Green-winged Teal to show a faint pale horizontal line also. Detailed field study of 390 drake Green-winged

Teal at Yolo Basin Wildlife Area on 21 March 2002 found that 74 (19%) showed a faint but visible narrow off-white horizontal scapular line (JRK pers. obs.). On five birds (1%) the line was quite prominent, but was still much less obvious than the broad and bold white line of drake Eurasian Teal. While it is conceivable that some of these birds may have been hybrids, all resembled Green-winged Teal in every other respect. There have been cases of probable vagrant drake Green-winged Teal in Europe that have been erroneously called hybrids because they showed similar faint, narrow, scapular lines but otherwise resembled typical Green-winged Teal (R. Millington pers. comm.).

In contrast to drakes, the identification of female and juvenile Eurasian Teal from female and juvenile Green-winged Teal is difficult. Although most guides suggest the taxa are inseparable in these plumages, they do differ in several characters (Ogilvie and Young 1998, Millington 1998, Scott 1999), and with detailed study, the combination of these features should allow some females to be separated under excellent viewing conditions. Probably most consistent is the color of the greater covert bar, which is usually predominantly white in Eurasian Teal, but generally cinnamon in Green-winged. Often most obvious in the field is the head pattern, which is fairly indistinct on female Eurasian, but often better defined on Green-winged. The latter tends to show a relatively solid dark cap, paler supercilium, and dark eye-stripe, while on Eurasian there is more pale streaking within the cap, and more dark streaking within the supercilium and on the cheeks, creating a less contrasting pattern. A prominent pale loral spot is often apparent on Green-winged, at times even suggestive of female Blue-winged Teal *A. discors*, but this spot is rarely so obvious on female Eurasian. Female Green-winged Teal often shows more dense dark breast mottling, thus averaging darker breasted than female Eurasian, and as in drakes, female Eurasian Teal averages grayer in overall plumage tone than the more sepia-toned female Green-winged Teal. Size differences between female of different taxa are apparently similar to those for males. Finally, juvenile Eurasian Teal averages more extensive pale (yellow or orange) on the mandible and base of the maxilla than juvenile Green-winged, and although the difference is less obvious in adult females, Green-winged Teal tend to show far less pale on the maxilla, and more often appear wholly dark-billed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Rixon Johnson for quickly disseminating news of his observation, which allowed many birders to study this bird, and for permission to incorporate details of that record herein. The observers listed in Table 1 kindly responded to requests for Eurasian Teal records, and Rick Toochin, Waldo Holt, Michael M. Rogers, and Rob Hansen provided additional information. Van Remsen provided insight into the stance of the AOU Check-list Committee regarding the taxonomy of teal. I greatly enjoyed time spent in the field with Richard Millington, which helped catalyze my thoughts on teal taxonomy and identification. This is PRBO contribution number 831.

LITERATURE CITED

- Beaman, M. 1994. Palearctic Birds. A Checklist of the birds of Europe, North Africa and Asia north of the foothills of the Himalayas. Harrier Publications, Stonyhurst.
- BOURC (British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee). 2001. British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee: 27th Report (October 2000). *Ibis* 143:171-175.
- Cramp, S., and K. E. L. Simmons (eds.) 1977. The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Volume 1. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Gantlett, S., S. Harrap, and R. Millington. 1996. Taxonomic progress. *Birding World* 9:251-252.
- Gillham, E., and B. Gillham. 2002. Hybrid Ducks: the 5th contribution towards an inventory. B. Gillham, Bury St. Edmonds.
- King, J. 1995. DNA: more forthcoming splits? *Birding World* 8:436-437.
- Livezey, B. C. 1991. A phylogenetic analysis and classification of recent dabbling ducks (Tribe Anatini) based on comparative morphology. *Auk* 108: 471-507.
- Madge, S., and H. Burn. 1988. Wildfowl. Helm, Bromley.
- Millington, R. 1998. The Green-winged Teal. *Birding World* 11:430-434.
- Ogilvie, M., and S. Young. 1998. Photographic Handbook of the Wildfowl of the World. New Holland, London.
- Palmer, P. 1999. A hybrid Green-winged Teal? *Birding World* 12:377.
- Sangster, G., C. J. Hazevoet, A. B. van den Berg, and C. S. Roselaar. 1998. Dutch avifaunal list: species concepts, taxonomic instability, and taxonomic changes in 1998. *Dutch Birding* 20:22-32.
- Scott, M. 1999. Identification of female Green-winged Teal. *Birding World* 12:81.
- Zink, R. M., S. Rohwer, A. V. Andreev, and D. L. Dittmann. 1995. Trans-Beringia comparisons of mitochondrial DNA differentiation in birds. *Condor* 97:639-649.