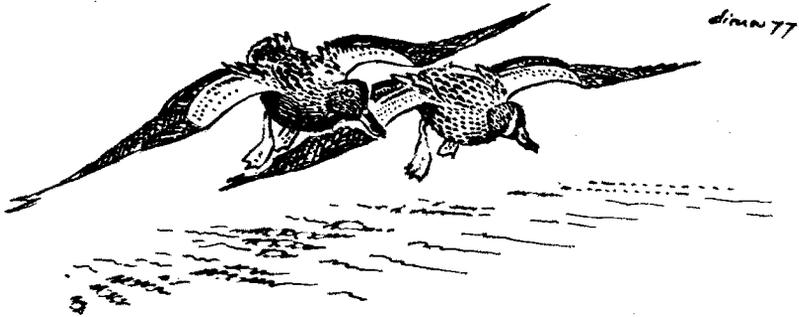


Distinguishing Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teals

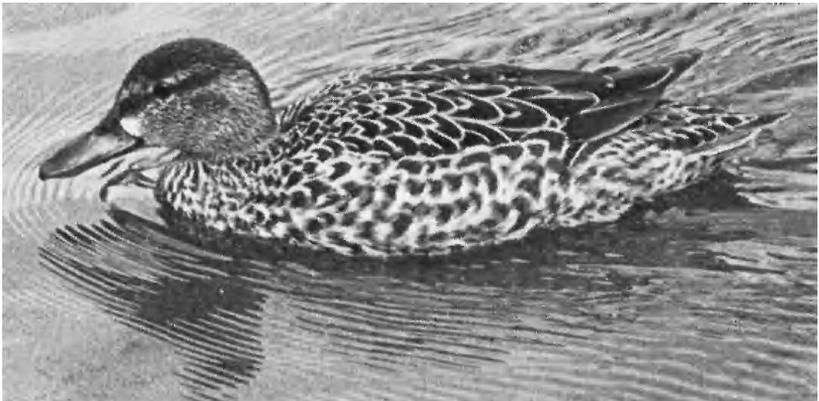
D. I. M. Wallace and M. A. Ogilvie



The Blue-winged Teal has been recorded with increasing frequency on this side of the Atlantic. The main confusion species is the Cinnamon Teal, which not infrequently escapes from wildfowl collections

Records of Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* in Britain and Ireland are increasing. Of a grand total of 55 up to 1976, 32 have occurred since 1966. Males in full plumage are quite distinctive, but several recent observations have featured eclipse drakes, ducks or immatures. In such cases, there is a real danger of confusion with similarly-plumaged Cinnamon Teal *A. cyanoptera*, which, like some Blue-winged, may escape from captivity. The following notes try to provide a guard against this risk.

70. Female Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*, Slimbridge, Gloucester, May 1977. Note distinct head pattern, whitish loreal spot contrasting with dark bill base, and dark crown and eyestripe contrasting with paler supercilium and cheeks (*Kelvin Portman*)



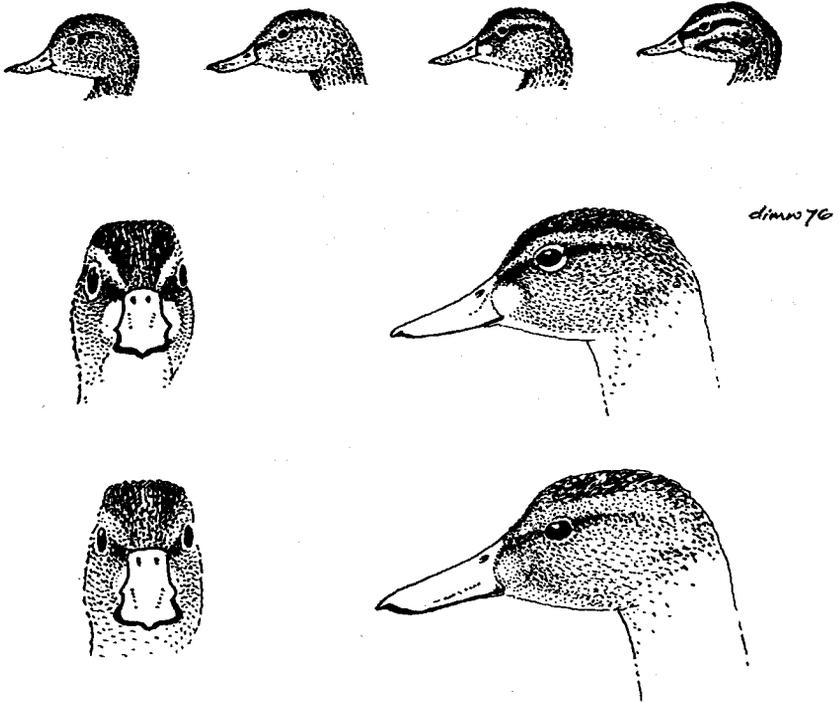


Fig. 1. Head patterns and bill shapes of teals. Top, from left to right, Teal *Anas crecca*, Cinnamon Teal *A. cyanoptera*, Blue-winged Teal *A. discors* and Garganey *A. querquedula* last with strongest facial pattern. Middle, Blue-winged Teal. Bottom, Cinnamon Teal. Note, particularly, more spatulate bill, dull loreal spot and less contrasting head pattern of Cinnamon

71. Female Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera*, Slimbridge, May 1977. Note long, spatulate bill and relatively uniform head pattern (*Kelvin Portman*)



General character, size and structure

Both species are obviously teals, closely resembling Teal *A. crecca* and Garganey *A. querquedula* in action and behaviour. Their slightly greater bulk shows best on water or land, when their silhouettes are also subtly different: both tend to carry their heads and rather heavy bills farther forward. The Cinnamon's posture, when combined with its longer, broader bill (and redder plumage tones), can strongly recall Shoveler *A. clypeata*; Blue-winged, on the other hand, prompts thoughts of Garganey, although its head and bill shape may also recall Shoveler at times.

Table 1. Bare part and plumage comparisons between Blue-winged *Anas discors* and Cinnamon Teals *A. cyanoptera*

	Blue-winged	Cinnamon
Eye colour	Drake: iris brown	Drake: iris yellowish or reddish
Head pattern	Strong, recalling Garganey, with quite large, obvious, whitish (or light buff) loreal spots, contrasting with dark bill base, similarly coloured throat, and clear contrast between dark crown and eyestripe and pale supercilium and cheeks; most obvious in eclipse drake, least in immature duck	Basically as Blue-winged but less distinct, recalling Teal, with pale yellowish loreal spots, throat obscured by fine spots, and contrast between dark and pale areas much reduced, and giving more uniform pattern
Body pattern	Plumage distinctly zoned: <i>back</i> dark with obvious pale fringes to feathers, <i>broad gorget</i> of dark regular spots contrasting with pale throat and foreneck, <i>lower chest and fore flanks</i> with broad, soft spots, <i>rear flanks</i> boldly patterned with dark centres and strikingly pale crescentic margins; eclipse drake shows greatest contrast	Basically as Blue-winged, but more uniform, with less contrast between throat, foreneck and gorget; and rest of body, especially underparts, rather more coarsely and less evenly marked
Plumage tone	Typically rather dark and cold, duller than Teal; greyish-brown in immature and duck, but warmer brown on underparts of eclipse drake (beware rust staining)	Typically warm and rich, recalling Shoveler; reddish-brown strongest in eclipse drake

The Cinnamon averages larger in all customary measurements and looks bulkier when alongside Blue-winged, but the only field character of any real use when they are apart is the bill. Most Cinnamon have bills that are 10% longer than those of Blue-winged (and some drake Cinnamon have bills 20% longer than most drake Blue-winged). Whereas most Cinnamon have bills that increase in width from base to tip, with slightly longer flaps on the sides of the upper mandible, yielding an almost spatulate profile (Johnsgard 1975), those of Blue-winged lack this relatively broad tip and show a more even width.



72. Male and female Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*, Slimbridge, May 1977. Note, particularly, female's more contrasted head pattern and shorter and less spatulate bill compared with Cinnamon Teal *A. cyanoptera* in plate 73 (Kelvin Portman)



73. Female Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera*, Slimbridge, May 1977. Note relatively uniform head pattern (cf plate 72), but very long, spatulate bill (Kelvin Portman)

Plumage

Both species show blue forewings in all plumages, the colour tone being like that of Shoveler and, thus, bluer than Garganey. Adult drakes in breeding plumage are easy to distinguish: Blue-winged has a white crescent on the front of its blue-grey head and densely spotted, dull buff chest and flanks, while Cinnamon has its head and underbody wholly cinnamon-red. In other plumages, the differences between the two species are slight, but they do exist; the most constant are shown in table 1.

The important bill and head pattern characters are illustrated in fig 1. We have found no evidence that there is any difference in the underwing patterns of the two species.

Voice

Ducks of both species give similar quiet quacks, but adult drakes utter a different sound, that of Blue-winged being a 'sibilant, high-pitched "seep seep"' (Godfrey 1966) or a 'weak, whistling "tsee"' (Johnsgard 1975) and that of Cinnamon a 'low rattling chatter' (Godfrey 1966), again recalling Shoveler (Johnsgard 1975).

Acknowledgements

This paper originates in part from the comments by D. G. Bell on a past record of Blue-winged Teal and meets the request of the Rarities Committee for a clarification of the differences between the two species.

Summary

The separation of Blue-winged *Anas discors* and Cinnamon Teals *A. cyanoptera* in eclipse, female and immature plumages is difficult, but, in good observing conditions, typical birds may be differentiated by bill shape and length, eye colour (drakes only), head pattern and plumage tone. A few individuals may defy even the most acute observer, but most should be identifiable using these characters.

References

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