



**Natural Heritage
& Endangered Species
Program**

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

**Blue-winged Teal
*Anas discors***

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Blue-winged Teal is among the smallest ducks in North America, with males weighing an average of one pound and females 0.8 pounds. The most distinguishing feature in flight is the large gray/blue patch on the wing of both sexes, a feature shared with Cinnamon Teal and Northern Shovelers. Female Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal are nearly indistinguishable in body plumage. Cinnamon Teal, however, are a western species rarely encountered in New England. Male Blue-winged Teal have a distinct white crescent on the face, making it easily recognizable. Overall, both sexes have brown-plumaged bodies.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: The Blue-winged Teal has two populations. One is west of the Appalachian Mountains, with particularly high populations in the prairie pothole country of the U.S. and Canada, extending to California and Alaska. The other population nests along the Atlantic seaboard from New Brunswick to North Carolina. An early migrant, the Blue-winged Teal begins moving through Massachusetts by late August and is largely absent from the state by late October. The Blue-winged Teal winters along the southern Atlantic and Gulf coasts south to central Peru and Argentina. Overall, the Blue-winged Teal is one of the most abundant waterfowl species in North America.

The Blue-winged Teal was likely never common as a nesting bird in Massachusetts. It was reported as breeding regularly but locally at various sites across the state in the early 1900s, a status it maintained into the 1970s, most prominently in northeastern Massachusetts, but with some evidence of breeding in the southeastern and central parts of the state. However, by the second Massachusetts Audubon Breeding Bird Atlas in the early 2000s, the species had disappeared from 15 blocks, including all of southeastern Massachusetts. A similar decline was noted in other regions of the northeastern U.S., though populations in the prairies remained high.



Photo by Hans Steiglitz

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: The Blue-winged Teal nests in shallow and deep freshwater marshes and the upper reaches of salt marshes. It frequents the same areas outside the nesting season, as well as grassy upland sites. Nests in the Concord area have been located on tussocks in shallow marshes.

THREATS: The cause for the decline in nesting Blue-winged Teal in the northeast is poorly understood but follows a trend for other nesting waterfowl species on the periphery of their ranges. Fall migrant populations appear little changed over the past 40 years, although annual changes in numbers are not unusual.

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A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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