

# FIRST DOCUMENTED OBSERVATION OF COMMON TEAL IN ARIZONA

PIERRE DEVICHE ([DEVICHE@ASU.EDU](mailto:DEVICHE@ASU.EDU)), MICHAEL MOORE ([MICHAEL.MOORE@ASU.EDU](mailto:MICHAEL.MOORE@ASU.EDU))

On the morning of 2 March 2008, Phoenix birders Pierre Deviche and Dany Pierard-Deviche discovered and photographed (Figure 1) an adult male teal swimming on Pond 7 of the Gilbert Water Ranch Riparian Preserve in Gilbert, Maricopa County, Arizona. The teal had the plumage characteristics of a typical Eurasian Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca crecca*), also known as Common Teal, Eurasian Teal or Teal. These characteristics included a strong horizontal white scapular stripe, pale lines outlining the green patch on the head, and no trace of a vertical white breast bar. Many male American Green-winged Teal (*A. c. carolinensis*), the form commonly encountered in winter and migration throughout the state, were also present, thus permitting direct comparison. This observation corresponds to the time when Green-winged Teal numbers at the Water Ranch were at a seasonal maximum (M.C. Moore, unpubl. obs. but see data on [www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)). Thus, it is likely that this bird was migrating through with other Green-winged Teal, although it did not directly associate or behaviorally interact with them.

Later in the day the bird was found again by other birders including M. C. Moore, L. Hatcher, and J. Burns. Moore observed the bird through his scope and obtained digiscoped pictures, thus providing further documentation (Figure 2). In addition to the plumage characters that Deviche noted, Moore was able to see the coarser vermiculations of the sides in direct comparison with nearby American Green-winged Teal. The Common Teal swam back and forth repeatedly across about 75 meters of the pond, kept somewhat to itself, and was actively feeding during the entire hour of observation. Despite efforts by Moore and others over the next several days, the bird was not found again.

The only previous sight report of Common Teal in Arizona was of a male at Picacho Reservoir, Pinal County on 18 January 1953 (Johnson, Margolin, and Simpson in Phillips et al. 1964, Monson and Phillips 1981), but this bird was neither photographed nor collected. Therefore, if accepted by the Arizona Bird Committee, the Gilbert observation will constitute the first documented state record of this form.

The taxonomy of birds in the *Anas crecca/carolinensis* complex is unsettled (Livezey 1991). Behavioral, morphological, and molecular genetic studies (Johnson and Sorenson 1999, Sangster et al. 2002) suggest that this complex consists of two species: Green-winged Teal (*A. carolinensis*) and Common Teal (*A. crecca*). Consistent with this view, most countries outside North America grant full species status to Green-winged and Common Teal. However, North American authorities (American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) and American Bird Association (ABA)) currently group these forms in one species (*Anas crecca*) that includes three subspecies (Johnson 1995): Green-winged Teal (*A. c. carolinensis*) in N. America; Common Teal (*A. c. crecca*) in Eurasia; and Aleutian Green-winged Teal (*A. c. nimia*) in the Aleutian Islands (see Webster 2006 for further discussion).



Figure 1: Adult male Common Teal, Gilbert Water Ranch Riparian Preserve in Gilbert, Maricopa Co., Arizona, 2 March 2008. Even on this distant bird, note the conspicuousness of the horizontal lateral stripe and face pattern, and the lack of apparent vertical white breast band. Photos by Pierre Deviche.



Figure 2: Adult male Common Teal, Gilbert Water Ranch Riparian Preserve in Gilbert, Maricopa Co., Arizona, 2 March 2008. Photo by Michael Moore. This picture shows the coarser vermiculations on the sides.



Figure 3: Adult male Green-winged Teal, Gilbert Water Ranch Riparian Preserve in Gilbert, Maricopa Co., Arizona, 10 February 2008. In contrast to the male depicted in Figure 2, this duck shows a conspicuous vertical breast band but no horizontal scapular stripe, and the white face pattern is subdued. Photo by Pierre Deviche.

Given the above taxonomic confusion the question naturally arises: Is Common Teal countable separately from American Green-winged Teal? Most North American birders follow the ABA rules for listing. According to these rules, the answer to the above question depends on the list. For the areas covered by the ABA or the AOU checklists, Common Teal is currently considered a subspecies of Green-winged Teal and is not countable for lists contained within those areas. However, for world lists, the authority for ABA listing is Clements et al. (2007) who consider Common Teal as a separate species. Therefore, a Common Teal seen in North America would not be countable on your ABA area list or your Arizona list, but would be countable on your world list!

Female Green-winged and Common Teal, as well as immature males and males in eclipse of these subspecies, are difficult to separate visually (Cramp et al. 1977, Millington 1998, Sibley 2000), but adult males in alternate plumage normally show conspicuous differences as summarized by Gillson (2004; Figures 1-3):

### White scapular stripe

The inner web of the lower scapular wing feathers in Common Teal is white. In a bird at rest this web forms a bright horizontal white bar that extends laterally from the shoulder to the tail. In contrast, this inner web in Green-winged Teal is brownish gray, and this subspecies, therefore, never displays a horizontal lateral white stripe.

### Vertical white breast bar

Green-winged Teal has a vertical white bar along the side of the breast. This bar is absent in Common Teal.

### Pale facial lines

The bill of Common Teal is outlined by bold pale lines that extend to the forehead. This subspecies also shows a pale line under the eye that continues posteriorly to clearly delineate the ventral border of the green ear patch. These lines in Green-winged Teal are thinner and subdued, creating a less strongly patterned head than that of Common Teal.

### Additional features

head and breast color, body size, and side vermiculations (Cramp et al. 1977, Gillson 2004) - separate Green-winged and Common Teal, but are more subtle than the above characters and, therefore, generally difficult to assess in the field unless birds of the two subspecies are seen concurrently, at close range, and under similar light conditions. Overall, however, based on the above main differences, field observers should have no difficulty separating typical adult male Green-winged and Common Teal in alternate plumage. It is noted that hybrids with intermediate characteristics do occur (Gillson 2004). Hybrids often have both white stripes (usually reduced in size and brightness) but can even have the pattern of an American Green-winged Teal on one side and a Common Teal on the other side. Only adult males showing all the above characteristics and lacking any trace of the vertical breast bar can be safely identified as Common Teal. The Gilbert Water Ranch individual had a conspicuous horizontal white stripe, no trace of a vertical white breast bar, and a strongly marked head pattern (Figures 1 and 2), and thus showed no overt sign of hybrid origin.

Common Teal are rare but somewhat regular along both the North American Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Records away from these coasts are rare and include eastern Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Texas, New Mexico, and Ohio (Edwards 1932, Hamilton et al. 2007, Harris and Gerstenberg 1968, Sibley 2000, Gillson 2004, Barnes 2008, Sturts 2008, Sandy Williams, pers. communication; <http://www.texasbirds.org/tbrc/gwteal.htm>). Comprehensive information on the geographic and temporal occurrences of this subspecies in North America is difficult to obtain. Common Teal was considered a separate species by the AOU until it was lumped with Green-winged Teal in 1973. Because Common and Green-winged Teal are not currently recognized as separate species by U.S. authorities, they are not treated separately by most states' bird committees; exceptions are Oregon (Gillson 2004) and Arizona. However, since this form may someday be considered a separate species again in North America and because identification of males is straightforward, it is worth looking for and should be documented when found. Common Teal is on the Arizona Bird Committee's official review list and the Arizona Bird Committee is always open to evaluating any especially rare forms and out-of-range birds beyond those on the official review list.

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