

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

BLUE-WINGED TEAL

Anas discors

Family: ANATIDAE

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

B082

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The blue-winged teal is a rare to uncommon winter resident and migrant September to April throughout lowlands of southern California, the Central Valley, and coastal areas north at least to Marin Co. In southern California, more numerous during spring and fall migration than during winter, when most of population is along the coast. Uncommon March to August in northeastern California, where it breeds regularly in very small numbers. Also has bred in the Central Valley, Del Norte Co., and at least once in Ventura Co. In California, feeds in lacustrine and estuarine habitats and fresh and saline emergent wetlands, and nests in herbaceous and agricultural fields. Status in late summer is unclear, because males are in eclipse plumage and are almost impossible to distinguish from cinnamon teal (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats seeds and vegetative parts of aquatic plants, as well as invertebrates, including mollusks, insects, and a few crustaceans. About 25-30% of the nonbreeding diet is animal matter. During the nesting season, animal foods are predominant in the diet (Swanson and Bartonek 1970, Swanson et al. 1974). Forages in shallow water, especially in areas with floating or submerged plants, and on mud flats. Tips up and gleans from water surface, subsurface, and muddy bottoms or shores.

Cover: Rests on mudflats, rocks, stumps, or fallen trees beside or above the water. Flightless, molting adults escape by swimming to open water (Palmer 1976). No information on roosting habitat.

Reproduction: Nests in California only in small numbers. Nest is on ground, typically on a dry site away from water, usually concealed by a lush growth of grasses or forbs. Uses hayfields, but many nests are destroyed by mowing. Nesting success is fairly good on lightly grazed, but not on heavily grazed, fields (Palmer 1976). Nest may be near water, or up to 1.6 km (1 mi) away, but averages about 38 m (125 ft) away. Best nesting habitat consists of many small, permanent ponds, well interspersed among grassy uplands (Drewien and Springer 1969). Many pairs nested on artificial islands in Alberta (Giroux 1981).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Prefers to nest in lush, grassy fields near shallow-water feeding areas.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Active yearlong; diurnal, except migrates mostly at night.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Winters in Mexico, Central and South America, and

California. Migrates to breeding grounds in northwestern U.S. and in Canada. A few remain to breed in northeastern California, but most are absent from May to August.

Home Range: One male in Canada had a breeding home range of over 100 ha (250 ac) (Dzubin 1955). Eleven breeding home ranges in South Dakota averaged 26 ha (65 ac), varying up to 157 ha (389 ac). In Manitoba, 41 breeding home ranges averaged 6.9 ha (17 ac).

Territory: No true territory, apparently, but the drake defends his mate from other blue-wings that approach too closely (Dzubin 1955, McHenry 1971, Palmer 1976).

Reproduction: In California, eggs or young have been found in June and July (Cogswell 1977). Pair formation begins in winter and continues on breeding grounds. Monogamous, solitary nester, but the nests tend to be clustered, and occasionally are as close as 9 m (30 ft). Clutch usually 9-13, averaging about 11. Single-brooded. Incubation 23-24 days. The precocial young, tended by the female only, first fly at about 42 days, and become independent at that time. Breed first the following year (Palmer 1976).

Niche: Nests sometimes parasitized by ring-necked pheasants (Bennett 1938). About half of the nest failures in various studies summarized by Bellrose (1976) were caused by mammals, especially striped and spotted skunks, but also including ground squirrels, foxes, coyotes, minks, weasels, raccoons, and badgers. Other failures were caused by crows, magpies, farm activities, and flooding. Habitat destruction has reduced the breeding population in the U. S. and in Canada.

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