

# American Green-winged Teal

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Anas crecca carolinensis*. From the Latin *anas*, meaning “duck,” and the Swedish name for teal, *kricka*. The Latinized word *carolinensis* refers to where this bird was first collected and described in North America.

**DESCRIPTION:** With wings about 7 inches long, this is the smallest of Arizona’s ducks. About the size of a pigeon, adults measure about 14 inches from end of tail to tip of bill.

In breeding plumage in late fall, the male’s chestnut-red head and the green stripe through its eye are striking. Females are less colorful than males. They have a brownish, mottled appearance with a white spot at the base of the bill and a white ring around the eye. When not in breeding plumage, males look similar to females.

Like all dabbling ducks (surface feeders), green-winged teal have a series of iridescent green feathers (called a speculum) at the base of each wing which is visible in flight. When flying, they are easily distinguished from other ducks by their rapid wing beats, small size and disorganized, darting flight.

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**DISTRIBUTION:** Green-winged teal are migratory and can be found throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico and Central America, depending on the time

of year. Typically, green-wings nest and raise young from Alaska to northern Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Labrador in Canada and in the central states of Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Some green-wings also nest in southern Colorado,



central California and Utah. A few nests have been confirmed in extreme northeastern Arizona at higher elevations.

Green-wings are one of the earlier migrants into Arizona each year, showing up in August and September. Although some continue south to Mexico and Central America, many remain in the state all winter until they begin migrating north in February or March. In Arizona, green-winged teal can be found almost statewide throughout the winter, wherever water and food are available.

**HABITAT:** As dabbling ducks, green-wings prefer shallow, food-rich water. They are particularly fond of mud flats and shallow, marshy areas that provide seeds from nutgrasses, millet and smartweed, as well as small snails and insects. Ephemeral wetlands (those that fill up with water in fall

and go dry in late summer) are particularly productive and attract large numbers of migrating green-wings (and other dabbling ducks).

**BIOLOGY:** Green-wings begin breeding at 1 year old. Males begin courting females in February; by March, most birds are paired. They construct a nest in grassy upland areas near water. Hens lay five to 16 eggs (the average is eight). Drakes leave early in the three-week hatching period, and hens raise the chicks.

When chicks hatch, the hen leads them to water. Chicks can fly in about 34 days.

Adult green-wings undergo periodic molts to replace old feathers with new. This duck’s wing-molt typically occurs in early July to August, leaving the birds flightless until new feathers grow in.

**STATUS:** In 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s breeding population survey estimated there were 2.6 million green-winged teal in North America. This is 20 percent greater than in 2005 and almost 40 percent above the long-term average.

**MANAGEMENT NEEDS:** Because green-winged teal migrate north in early spring to breed, they need good winter wetland habitat to begin the migration in good condition. These small ducks need plenty of energy for migration. They also need adequate habitat for the numerous stopovers necessary to reach northern breeding areas. 🦆

■ Mike Rabe has worked for the Arizona Game and Fish Department for 11 years and has managed the migratory game bird program for the past three years.

ILLUSTRATION BY ZACKERY ZDINAK