

## *Anas crecca* (Green-winged Teal)

Family: Anatidae (Ducks and Geese)

Order: Anseriformes (Waterfowl)

Class: Aves (Birds)



**Fig. 1.** Green-winged teal, *Anas crecca*.

[[http://www.chesapeakebay.net/fieldguide/critter/green\\_winged\\_tea](http://www.chesapeakebay.net/fieldguide/critter/green_winged_tea), downloaded 15 November 2014]

**TRAITS.** An average green-winged teal weighs around 300-340g but some can weigh a maximum of 510g (Johnsgard, 1978). They are small ducks with a body length up to 35cm. These ducks are agile and very quick in their flight. The green-winged teal male has a chestnut round head with a green patch continuing to its neck. The male has a buff breast with brown spots and the sides of the tail have thick yellow lines surrounded by black. The wing is brownish-grey with iridescent green patches on each side of the wing outlined with a white stripe (Merne, 1974). The female has brown plumage over her body with her upper wings containing patches of green and black feathers, and a white belly. The neck and head is paler than the rest of her body (Fig. 1). They show sexual dimorphism where the male and female looks different because the male green-winged teal is more brightly coloured than the female.

**ECOLOGY.** The green-winged teal is migratory which means that these ducks move from the nesting habitats in one area to their non-nesting habitats in another area. These ducks are found in North America, Asia and Europe but are rare in the West Indies. In North America they breed from

Alaska to northern New Mexico, and in the winters they would go to the southern United States. These ducks are rare winter visitors to Trinidad and Tobago, where are found in mangroves swamps, mudflats, marsh and coast areas. In the breeding season they occupy diverse habitats where they can get an abundance in food from the open waters. They are found in shallow ponds, marshes and sometimes muddy estuaries (Johnsgard, 1978). They feed on stems, leaves, seeds, pond weeds, insects, molluscs and crustaceans. These ducks dabble during the day and evening to find their food in the water. The diet of the duck contains more and larger invertebrates than other ducks such as the mallard. The invertebrates are found in the water column and at the water surface. They nest on the shore where the female tries to hide the nest because it is easily accessed by predators (Johnsgard, 1978).

**SOCIAL ORGANIZATION.** Green-winged teal travel in pairs or in small groups with the male duck behind the female and young. They normally dabble together reaching submerged vegetation and they stay more to the edge of the pond finding a spot to forage. This species prefers to stay at smaller ponds where they can be in small groups and forage for food. The adult males usually migrate before the adult females and their young, but these travel further than the male. After migrating the ducks would have matured and around early September the ducks display an activity called the grunt whistle towards each other. Eventually 90% of the female ducks become paired (Johnsgard, 1978). They are also found in company of the blue-winged teal and both ducks fly rapidly.

**ACTIVITY.** In aquatic environments feeding for these ducks was the greatest around September to October. During migration they prefer shallow waters where they can feed on floating vegetation and insects. The green-winged teal consumes food in the morning and evening when they take flights to search for food. These birds usually depart from their resting area in the morning for about 45 min before the sunrise and in the evening for 25 min after sunset to forage. Green-winged teal may be small but they can fly really fast reaching more than 45 km per hour. The ducks are very agile on their wings which allows them to take off vertically from the water or land. They normally fly with a rapid twisting motion as they migrate.

**FORAGING BEHAVIOUR.** Green-winged teal mostly forage by dabbling and they sometimes use head-dipping. Dabbling ducks are easily noticeable because their bodies are not fully submerged in the water when feeding. They usually tip their heads underneath the water with their tails sticking out. The diet of these ducks are related to their taxonomic composition rather than prey size. These ducks feeds mostly on seeds, leaves, stems, pond weed, plankton and they occasionally feed on insects, molluscs and crustaceans. The small invertebrates can be found along the mud flats where a variety of organisms are available to the ducks (Johnsgard, 1978). Hence the teal prefer to feed on mudflats and shallow waters where it is easy for them to access food.

**SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR.** The green-winged teal live in flocks and they are the species with the largest dabbling groups of the waterfowl. When several males are gathered the courtship starts displaying drinking first then mock-preening (Bolen, 1994). When the courtship gets stronger preliminary shaking occurs where the males would pull out their heads towards the shoulders, ruffling their features and quickly elevating their bodies on the surface of the water. The preliminary shaking attracts the female ducks increasing the intensity of the courtship, and the grunt whistle takes place (Bolen, 1994). This display is directed to one particular female duck who

then gives the male full attention. The male lowers his bill into the water and shakes it from side to side. Its body is upwards with the bill still facing downwards extending it into the water. A loud noise is then emitted sounding like a whistle then it is followed by a deep grunt before the body is arched fully. The duck's head straightens up and he settles into the water and when the bill touches the water he pitches a stream of water droplets to the direction of the female duck (Bolen, 1994).

**COMMUNICATION.** These ducks use three important calls; the social contact call, the decrescendo call and the incitement call (Michels, 2003). The contact call is what the female uses to keep her family close together while feeding. This call is a very slow and soft quack that works effectively to keep them from drifting apart. The decrescendo call is used as a way to broadcast the willingness to bond with a female or vice versa. This sound is loud but becomes quiet when the duck runs out of air. The decrescendo call can also be used in a general way to communicate when the ducks are not in their mating season. The incitement call is used when the ducks are arguing and the female duck communicates with her mate to warn another male duck to leave her alone or they will attack each other (Michels, 2003). Overall the males usually have a soft musical call while the female has a subdued quack which they use to communicate.

**JUVENILE BEHAVIOUR.** Eggs are usually laid in May or June on a nest built on the dry ground near the habitat. The breeding habitat consists of a dense cover and can be found near grassy forested areas surrounded by water marshes. The female alone would build her nest, which is located on shallow hollows in the ground which consists of grasses, shrubs, mosses, leaves and twigs. There is a long nesting season where both parents would take care of the eggs. The female becomes very secretive and hides the nest extremely well. Before the incubation period the male leaves and migrates to special moulting areas. When the eggs hatch after an incubation period of 21-23 days the female becomes protective over her ducklings. The tiny ducklings grow very fast and by 35 days they learn quickly how to swim, walk, and forage for themselves. The mother stays with them until they can manage by themselves then she migrates to moulting areas.

**ANTIPREDATOR BEHAVIOUR.** The predation risk of these ducks are high since they forage in shallow waters. Predators usually scrounge around the nesting areas to steal the eggs from the nest. Many raccoons and skunks take the opportunity to go after the eggs while the parents aggressively warn off others. In the water the green-winged teal dives under water to escape predators, then they fly away as quickly as possible.

#### REFERENCES

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Michels, T.R. (2003). *Understanding Duck communications, Duck and Goose Addict's Manual*, USA

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