

# Identification tips for blue-winged teal

Even though green-winged teal and cinnamon teal (rarely found in Iowa) are legal birds during the special September teal season, it is the blue-winged teal that will be most abundant and is the primary target of this season.

For those new to waterfowl hunting and those in need of improved “on the wing” ID skills, for this season you should focus on positive ID of blue-winged teal.

Single or pairs of ducks flying overhead don't give a clear view of the shoulder color and are most likely non-teal waterfowl – these shots should be avoided.



Photo by Guy Zenner

Blue-winged teal are fast fliers. Like little rockets they swerve and dart and often land in the decoys before you have a chance to shoulder your shotgun. If they bypass your decoy spread there is a good chance they may make another pass after circling the wetland on a rollercoaster ride of the



Photo by Lowell Washburn

wind. During migration they often are in large flocks of 10 or more birds. The flocks move in unison like a school of minnows or a flight of black birds over the marsh. Their body shape is in-between the long slender sleekness of the hen pintail and the short blocky head up flight of the wood duck. In their dull summer plumage the most visible color

will be the slate blue flash of the shoulder patch of the wing. When ducks of this nature make that final approach within shotgun range, before you make the decision to pull the trigger look first:

1. Does it have a sky/slate/light blue shoulder patch? Only the blue-winged teal and the northern shoveler have this color on the wing.
2. Does it have a small regular shaped bill or is it the long, sloping, spoon shaped bill of the northern shoveler?

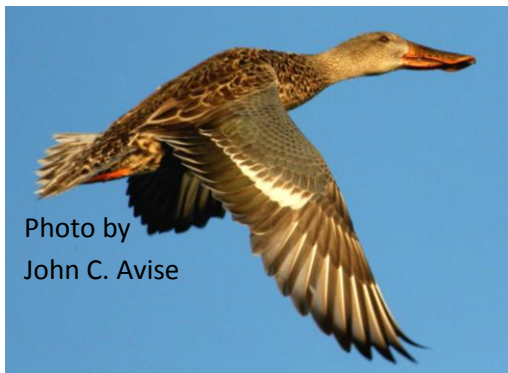


Photo by  
John C. Avise

**Northern Shoveler**

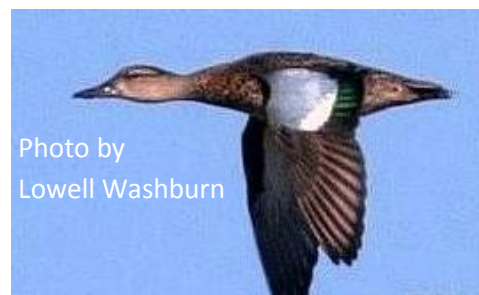


Photo by  
Lowell Washburn

**Blue-winged Teal**

While northern shoveler numbers will be small in Iowa during the early weeks of September some will be around. So before you shoot make sure that it has a blue shoulder patch and lacks the large spoon shaped bill.

**And if in doubt....Don't shoot...Wait for that second pass and a better look.**