

ANSERIFORMES

(Waterfowl)

Dabblers



Family ANATIDAE (Dabbling Ducks)

Blue-Winged Teal (Anas Discors)



Pompano Beach, FL



Pompano Beach, FL

Measurements:

Length: 15.5" Wing Span: 23"

Average Weight: 1.1 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size, slender; **blue wing coverts**, **green speculum**, black bill; yellow legs; (m) dark head and bill separated by **crescent white patch**; (f) overall brown body; pale facial patch joined to whitish throat; white line over dark eyebrow

Notes:

common; in wetland habitats throughout NA (except southwest and Arctic regions); migrates in winter to coastal southern US from CA to NC, south to northern SA; feeds mainly on plants, seeds, some molluscs, and aquatic insects

Mojave presence: rare; winter range



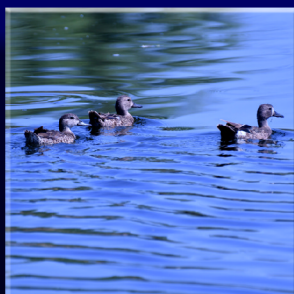
Pompano Beach, FL



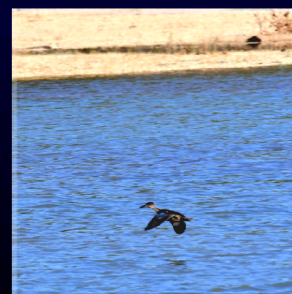
Pompano Beach, NV

Comments:

"Blues" are very rare visitors to the Mojave. One occasional destination is the **Bird Viewing Preserve** in Henderson, Nevada. I spotted these birds in July of 2021. The male at left seemed rather proud escorting two females; the female to the right appeared to be sitting on water while taking in a few rays.



The **Overton Wildlife Management Area** is another favorite wintering location. Large flocks of mixed species arrive dutifully every fall, such as this one (left) in October of 2020 that included **Redheads**. One lovely lady (right) didn't seem content with just any old landing spot.



Family ANATIDAE (Dabbling Ducks) Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*)



LV Municipal GC; LV, NV



Floyd Lamb SP; LV, NV



LV Municipal GC; LV, NV



Bird Viewing Preserve; NV

Measurements:

Length: 16" Wing Span: 22"

Average Weight: 1.2 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; pale blue coverts (seen in flight); (m) cinnamon head and body; brown back; blackish bill; red eyes; (f) mottled brown body; lighter brown head; gray bill; brown eyes;

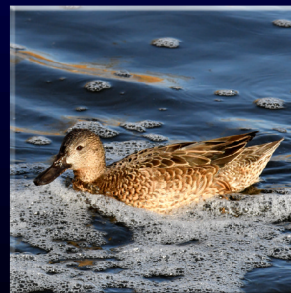
Notes:

common locally throughout western US, extending into parts of CAN, MEX, and SA; often found--and hybridizes--with Blue-Winged Teal; feeds on plants, molluscs, and aquatic insects

Mojave presence: summer range; some year-round

Comments:

This group of cinnamons seemed to be particularly fond of swimming and noshing in a steady stream of inflow into Pond #1 at the Bird Viewing Preserve in Henderson, NV, on a perfect and warm winter day in January, 2021. While Northern Shovelers dominated the still water in most of the ponds in the park, one churning spot was claimed by this group of cinnys. They were, however, willing to share with an occasional American Coot or Pied-Billed Grebe that ventured to join in the fun.



Family ANATIDAE (Dabbling Ducks)

Northern Shoveler (*Anas/Spatula clypeata*)



Measurements:

Length: 19" Wing Span: 30"

Average Weight: 1.3 lbs

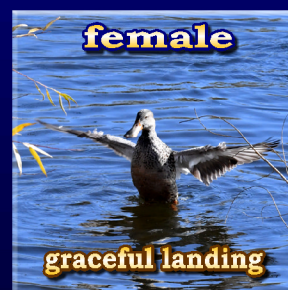
Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; large, broad, **spatulate bill**; blue forewing patch; green speculum; (**breeding m**) dark **iridescent head**, white breast, rufous flanks and belly; blackish bill; yellow eyes; (**f**) mottled brown body, gray bill tinged with drab orange; dark eyes

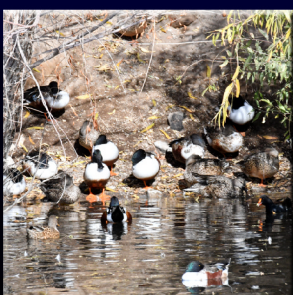
Notes:

common in wetlands across most of NA and Asia, also parts of Africa, nw SA; often large flocks in breeding season; feeds on invertebrates, aquatic plants, plankton, seeds; non-breeding (eclipse) male looks much like female, but with pale white crescent on face

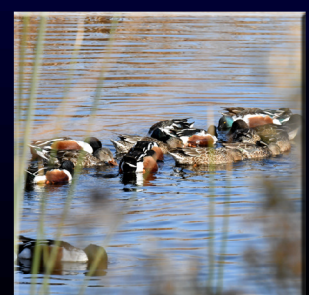
Mojave presence: winter range



Comments:



All of these birds were photographed at the **Bird Viewing Preserve** in Henderson, NV. Shovelers often congregate in large flocks during the winter breeding season. As a result, shoreline real estate can come at quite a premium. An interesting display of cooperation is demonstrated by the birds to the right; swimming rapidly in a circle creates a vortex that sucks food to the surface for all the participants to share...or perhaps they're just playing ring-around-the-rosie!



Family ANATIDAE (Dabbling Ducks)

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)



male

Desert Rose GC; LV, NV



male

curly tail feather

Desert Pines GC; LV, NV



Measurements:

Length: 20-26" Wing Span: 32-39"

Average Weight: 2.6 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; iridescent purple to **blue speculum** bordered with white; **(m) iridescent green head**, white collar; yellow bill; **curled tail feathers**; **(f)** overall mottled brown, with paler cheeks, throat, neck; orange-with-black bill; dark eyeline

Notes:

very common throughout the northern hemisphere; feeds on aquatic plants, seeds, crustaceans; hybridization very common; main ancestor of domesticated ducks

Mojave presence: winter range; some year-round

Comments:

Life abounds in spring in the Mojave Desert, including flowers, insects, reptiles, mammals, and of course, birds. These adorable yellowish chicks made their debut in April, "Class of '21."

Mallards have no morals when it comes to getting frisky with just about any duck in the neighborhood! This promiscuity is enabled by a great variability in their genetic code, which allows for significant interbreeding capability. Consequently, just about any mallard-looking bird (especially those seen in urban parks) is quite likely to be a hybrid. These can usually be readily recognised by the wide variety of plumage colors and patterns that vary conspicuously from pure specimens, such as the examples shown here.



female

Hoover Dam; LMNRA



female

blue speculum

Hoover Dam; LMNRA



black body

female

Lorenzi Park; LV, NV



fashionable top knot

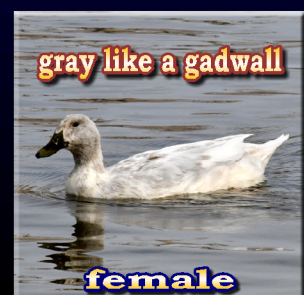
female

Lorenzi Park; LV, NV



male

Lorenzi Park; LV, NV



gray like a gadwall

female

Floyd Lamb SP; LV, NV

Family ANATIDAE (Dabbling Ducks)

American Pekin (*Anas platyrhynchos domesticus*)



LV Municipal GC; LV, NV



Lorenzi Park; Las Vegas, NV

Measurements:

Length: 21" Wing Span: 35"

Average Weight: (m) 10 lbs (f) 9 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; both genders present all-white bodies; (m) yellow bills, **curled tail** (drake) feather; (f) slightly smaller in size; some have blackish bills

Notes:

cosmopolitan; gregarious; found world-wide in urban parks, farms, etc.; feeds on aquatic plants, seeds, grains, etc.

Mojave presence: feral; year-round in urban areas



LV Municipal GC; LV, NV



Lorenzi Park; Las Vegas, NV

Comments:

It's probably safe to assume that everyone recognizes this very familiar duck seen in city parks everywhere; it's probably also safe to assume that relatively few realize this bird's true **Mallard** ancestry, selectively bred for various traits, including its white plumage.

Domesticated in China some 3000 years ago as a source of meat and eggs, today's "Pekin Ducks" in the US are decendents of 4 birds that survived shipment from Peking (now Beijing), China, to New York City in 1873. Various breeds are now found world wide as pets and feral populations in urban habitats

Family ANATIDAE (Dabbling Ducks)

American Widgeon (*Anas/Mareca americana*)



male

Desert Pines GC; LV, NV



female

Bear's Best GC; LV, NV

Measurements:

Length: 20" Wing Span: 32"

Average Weight: 1.5 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; pale blue bill with black tip; (breeding m) iridescent green mask around eyes and neck, white crown down to base of bill; non-breeding (eclipse) male looks very similar to the female; (f) overall brownish plumage

Notes:

common in wetlands throughout NA, migrates to northern SA in winter, vagrant in Europe; often mixes with other ducks; feeds mainly on aquatic plants, some pasture grasses

Mojave presence: winter range



non-breeding:

underwings
gray with
white

white belly; rusty flanks

Overton WMA; Clark Co., NV



non-breeding:

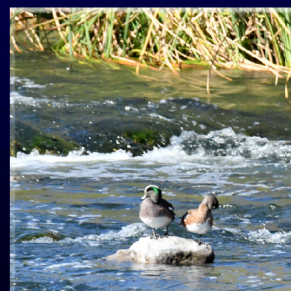
dark gray
upper body

bright white wing patch

Overton WMA; Clark Co., NV

Comments:

As usual, spring arrives early in the desert, and these widgeons at the Clark County Wetlands Park in Las Vegas, NV, in March of 2021 were certainly enjoying the nice weather along with Coots, Mallards, Gadwalls, Ring Necks, Cormorants, and even Softshell Spiny Turtles that scrambled out of the water to bask in the warming sun.



Family ANATIDAE (Dabbling Ducks)

Gadwall (*Anas/Mareca strepera*)

Measurements:

Length: 20" Wing Span: 33"

Average Weight: (m) 2.3 lbs (f) 1.8 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; gray to brown body, brownish head; **white speculum**; black bill; steep forehead; **(m)** gray body, **black rump**; chestnut wings; **(f)** mottled brown overall; orange edge to dark bill

Notes:

relatively common; inhabits wetlands throughout most of NA (wintering in Mexico), and Europe east to Pacific coast of n Asia (wintering in nw coastal and ne Africa, Middle East, through India and China); size, shape, and appearance very similar to hybrid mallards; dabbles for aquatic plants, insects, molluscs, etc.;

Mojave presence: winter range

Comments:

Gadwalls often congregate with other species that enjoy the same habitat, including **Ring-Necked Ducks**, **American Coots**, **White-Crested Cormorants**, **Mallards**, and more. Although their overall gray appearance distinguishes them from the other birds, they could easily be overlooked or mistaken for mallard hybrids. One way to easily pick them out is to observe their dabbling habit. They completely upend themselves in shallow water and paddle to hold their position for some time while searching for and savoring any delicacies to be found. While doing so, the male's characteristic black rump is ignobly presented for observation. The couple below found the Las Vegas Wash in the **Clark County Wetlands Park** to be an inviting locale to demonstrate their technique! They generally took turns, with one acting as guard, while the other satisfied itself, but occasionally the takings were too good to wait upon etiquette!



Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



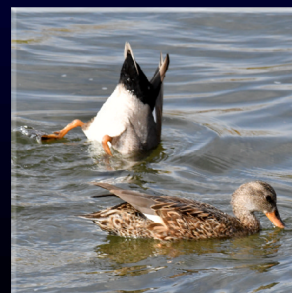
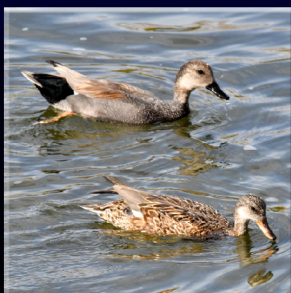
Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



Family ANATIDAE

(Dabbling Ducks)

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)



Measurements:

Length: 27" Wing Span: 34"

Average Weight: (m) 2 lbs (f) 1.5 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; long neck; **long central feather on wedge-shaped tail**; long, narrow wings; dark eyes; gray legs and feet; **(breeding m)** gray upperbody and flanks, bright white underbody and neck; back of neck gray; **brown head**; black undertail coverts; black bill with blue-gray sides; green speculum (non-breeding male similar to female); **(f)** mottled brown overall; paler brown head and face; darker bill; shorter tail feather; brown speculum

Notes:

common; a northern hemisphere species found in open wetlands, spending summers throughout n NA, Asia (north of Himalayas), and Scandinavia, wintering to the south as far as near the equator; dabbles for aquatic plants and small invertebrates

Mojave presence: winter range (uncommon)

Comments:

Compared to many other waterfowl, this pintail is much less common in the Mojave region. While gregarious in large flocks elsewhere, here they are often sparsely intermixed with congregations of other duck species, and though striking in appearance (**A**, **B**), are easily overlooked (**C**), such as at the **Overton Wildlife Management Area** in Overton, NV, during a visit in October, 2020. A few couples are regulars at the **Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve** (**D**) in Dec, 2021, and occasionally others will be spotted at Lake Mead and a few urban parks in Las Vegas. Otherwise, the best chance of seeing these striking ducks is at the **Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge** in southern Nevada.



Family ANATIDAE (Dabbling Ducks) Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)



Floyd Lamb SP; LV, NV

Measurements:

Length: 18.5" Wing Span: 30"

Average Weight: 1.3 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; intricate plumage patterns; crested heads; (m) **multicolored iridescent plumage**; red eyes; red-and-white bill; (f) mottled gray brown; **bold white eyering**; dark eyes



Bird Viewing Preserve; NV



Bird Viewing Preserve; NV

Notes:

uncommon; native to wooded wetlands (ponds, swamps, marshes, streams, etc.) of NA, mainly eastern US into south-central Canada, Pacific coast, wintering in TX and parts of Mexico; perches and nests in trees (atypical duck behavior); rarely mingles with other waterfowl; dabbles for seeds, nuts, berries, and insects

Mojave presence: rare

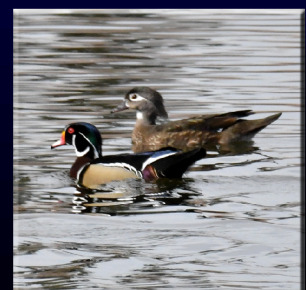
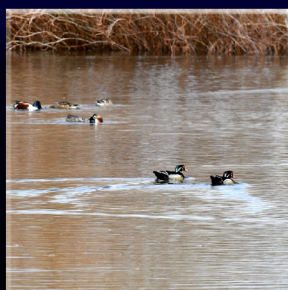


Floyd Lamb SP; LV, NV



Notes:

"Woodies" are generally shy and wary, and don't generally mingle with their pond neighbors. These beautiful birds prefer to spend most of their time hidden in dense reeds or other vegetation close to the shoreline (above left and right). This is rather inconvenient for bird admirers since the ducks' reticent nature makes them difficult to spot, much less photograph. However, they will make an appearance when they feel particularly safe in familiar surroundings, such as at the **Bird Viewing Preserve** in Henderson, Nevada, where hunting is not allowed. Thus, they'll take an occasional paddle to more open water to check out the local scene, such as these adventurers (bottom left and right).



Family ANATIDAE (Dabbling Ducks)

Muscovy (*Cairina moschata*)



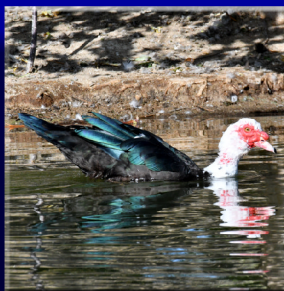
male

Pompano Beach, FL



female

Pompano Beach, FL



Lorenzi Park; Las Vegas, NV



Lorenzi Park; Las Vegas, NV

Measurements:

Length: 29" Wing Span: 57"

Average Weight: (m) 13 lbs (f) 6 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; feral and domestics have prominent **knobby red face**; variable plummage; (**wild m**) black with white wing patches, dark red knob on base of bill, bare red skin on face, short crest on nape; (**wild f**) similar to male, but much smaller, has feathered face, and lacks knob

Notes:

mainly tropical birds native from Mexico to SA; feral populations established in South Florida, Louisiana, parts of Texas, etc.; very successful, gregarious, and approachable; feeds on plants, small fish and reptiles, insects, etc.; photos depict ferals

Mojave presence: rare

Notes:

These rather odd-looking birds are quite docile and friendly, especially those that live close to human habitations, as most are feral domestic breeds. They are not particularly wary, and will waddle adorably as they approach for a free handout (usually bread or popcorn, which is not particularly good for them), even bringing their chicks along for education and an easy meal (below left). While very common residents nearly everywhere in South Florida, they are rather in the Mojave, restricted to a few urban parks, such as Lorenzi and Sunset parks in Las Vegas.



Bringing the kids over for a little visit...

how adorable!



Getting busy seems like a risky proposition..

but all is well for the loving couple!

