

[From Winter 2001]

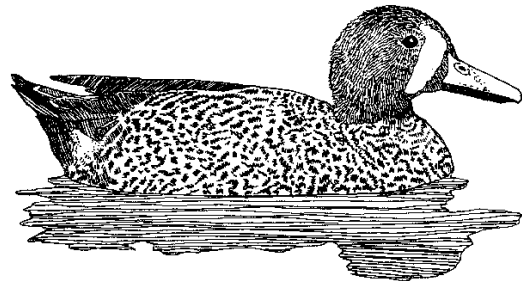
## Denizens of the Pond

In 1984 the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge was established as a stopover location for migratory birds. Primarily, these birds were songbirds and birds of prey heading to the far reaches of Central and South America in the fall. 80 other migrants also utilize the refuge on their way south.

Although, ESNWR is not known for its vast amount of waterfowl, many species can be seen in our Visitor Center pond. Throughout the spring and summer, Mallards and Gadwalls are seen in the pond. But, once the weather turns cooler and the days become shorter, other species of dabbling ducks make their presence known.

One of the first species seen in the pond is the Blue-winged Teal. These small puddle ducks look rather encrypted when they first appear because they are in eclipse plumage. Males and females all look somewhat drab and the key identification mark, the white crescent on the face of males, is nowhere to be found. By late October, most of these ducks have continued their way south and others take its place. When the Blue-winged Teal show up in our pond, their smaller cousin, the Green-winged Teal, also makes an appearance. Unlike the Blue-wings, the Green-wings stay at the pond and more of them show up at the pond as the season continues toward winter.

In November, other species arrive. More Mallards, Black backs, and Gadwalls are seen. Be other lesser known ducks are spotted through the viewing window. The Common Pintail, with its graceful posture, is one of the most beautiful. Wood Ducks have also made an appearance this year. Although their time in the freshwater pond was short, all who saw them were in awe of their beauty. American Widgeon have just recently arrived and Northern Shovelers have been frequently sighted.



Although not a duck species, American Coots also have been spotted through the scope viewfinder at the Visitor Center. Other species that can be seen from the comfort of the observation window inside the Visitor Center include various sparrow species, Yellow-rumped Warblers, am flocks of blackbirds. The most sought after sights in the pond are the Common Snipe and the many birds of prey that hunt within the ponds confines.

On many occasions, the Northern Harriers have scared the Green-winged Teal enough to have them take off in large flocks and land in other locations. An occasional Coopers Hawk is seen chasing the f locks of songbirds as it looks for a feast. One never knows what will show up in this little freshwater pond. Some days it appears rather empty, but if you are patient and keep looking out to the pond, you may see a Bald Eagle gliding over, checking the place out, or flocks of geese flying in their distinctive pattern heading to places further south. So, we invite you to visit our little freshwater pond. You may be pleasantly surprised by the finds you will make.

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