

The 1980 Peterson field guide properly places the Northern Shoveler on the same page with the Blue-winged and Cinnamon teals, adjacent to the former. The recent "Thirty-fourth Supplement to the A.O.U. Check-List of North American Birds" lists these ducks in consecutive order within the genus Anas, thus acknowledging the close phylogenetic relationship. The Herbert H. Dill photo in the last issue of Bird Observer was offered because it emphasizes the similarities here. If your eye foundered on the large, "spoon-shaped" bill of the right-hand bird in the photo, you may have hesitated somewhat in your identification, for, alas, there is no conspicuously marked, breeding-plumaged male to guide you. So, *cherchez la femme* in the field guides.

A sharp-eyed birdwatching friend and I experienced this same uncertainty one day at Great Meadows Wildlife Refuge when a flight of smallish ducks, brightly displaying blue wing patches, settled into the water near us and were promptly "called" Blue-winged Teal. When we checked them through our telescopes, field guides in hand, we hesitated, questioned, debated, wavered, and finally were unable to reach whole-hearted agreement as to which of two species we were observing. Although a difference (slight) in bill color is apparent in the plates, the text of the field guides makes no mention of this, and we failed to consider this or to make field notes. According to Richard Forster, the bill of the Northern Shoveler is light-colored. Our perplexity can perhaps be better appreciated if the reader consults photographs 141, 142, and 143 in The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds: Eastern Region (Knopf, 1977). Now, look again carefully at the picture in October's issue. If you leapt to the conclusion, without qualm or query, that these ducks are Blue-winged Teal, you are . . . absolutely correct! But if you did so without accounting for the shoveler-type bill, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it" (Acts 3:17).

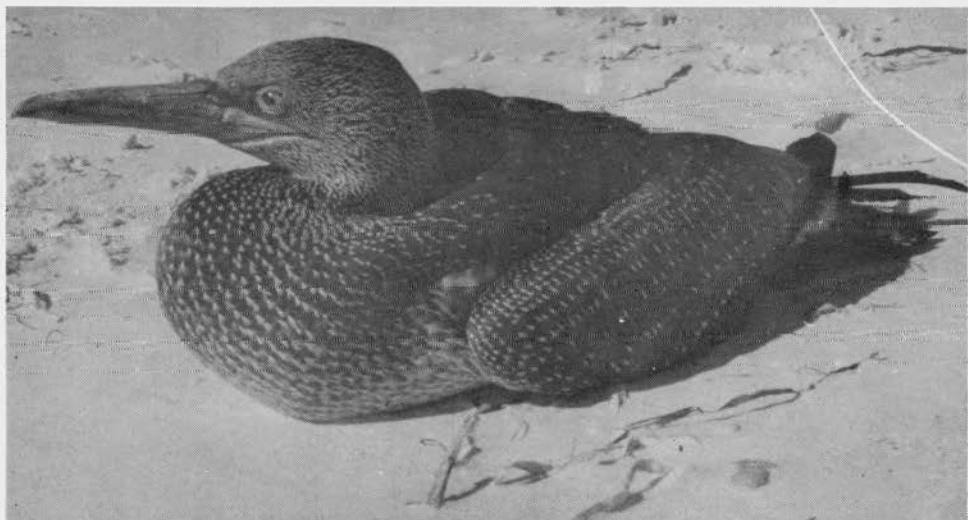
D.R.A.



Blue-winged Teal

Photo by H.H. Dill  
Courtesy of M.A.S.

# At a Glance . . .



*Photo by J.M. Brewer*

*Courtesy of Massachusetts Audubon Society*

Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's *At a Glance*.