

AT A GLANCE

April 2002




ROGER S. EVERETT

Last month's mystery bird proved to be a sea duck, specifically a Surf Scoter. It may be remembered that among the distinguishing features of many sea ducks are relatively thick necks, chunky bodies, oftentimes broad-based bills, and in some species (e.g., scoters, Harlequin Duck, Long-tailed Duck), prominent facial markings. With this in mind, it should be fairly obvious that April's mystery species, while clearly another duck, is not another sea duck. Furthermore, the slim proportions and well-patterned feathers on the sides and flanks indicate that the bird is a puddle duck, rather than a diving duck such as a scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Redhead, or Canvasback.

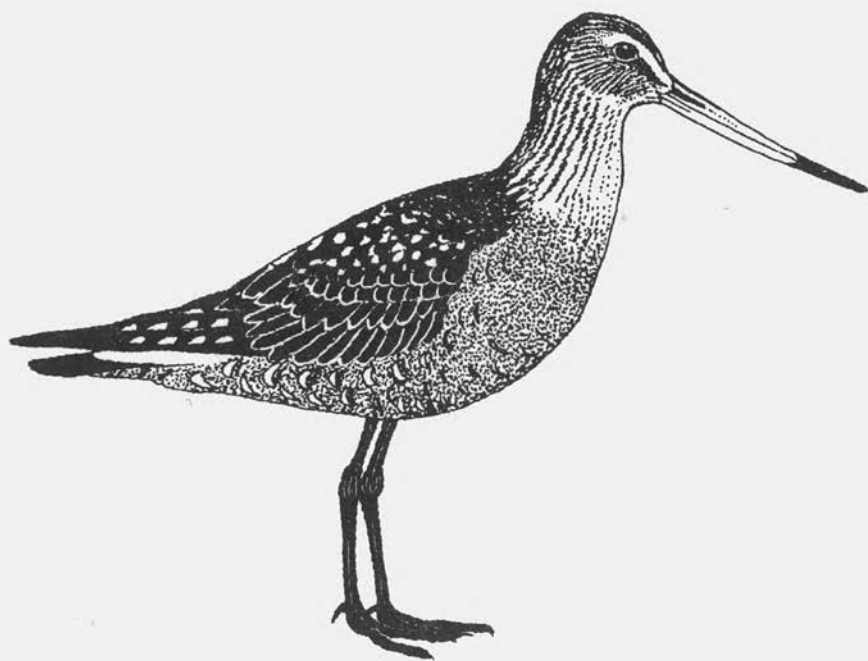
Armed with the knowledge that the bird is a freshwater puddle duck (e.g., Mallard), and the fact that it is not a drake in breeding plumage, it becomes necessary to look carefully at the overall shape, head pattern, and tail area to unravel the duck's identity. Concentrating first on the head, the bird shows a pronounced dark line through the eye, an obvious pale patch at the base of the bill, and a fairly large and somewhat broad bill. Despite the fact that the bird has its neck fully extended, the neck is not noticeably long in proportion to the body the way it would appear in a female Northern Pintail, which would also show an elongated and more pointed tail. A female Gadwall would display a decidedly angular head shape and would not have the distinct dark eye line and pale patch at the base of the bill shown by the mystery duck. A female Mallard would have distinct white outer tail feathers, while an

American Black Duck would appear heavier-bodied and darker overall, and would show a less contrasting face pattern.

Although there are several other puddle duck species regularly found in Massachusetts, only the females of the Blue-winged Teal and Green-winged Teal remain as good candidates. At this point identification becomes straightforward because the photograph clearly represents the salient points of distinction. Most important is the large and fairly broad, spreading-tipped bill, obvious eye line, and conspicuous pale patch at the base of the bill. When these are backed up by the absence of a pale streak near the under-tail coverts, the identification leaves only the Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) as a candidate. Green-winged Teals are narrow-billed and dark-faced, and characteristically display a pale streak near their under tail coverts.

Blue-winged Teals are uncommon breeders in Massachusetts, but are regular spring and fall migrants in both fresh and salt marshes throughout the state. Roger S. Everett photographed the Blue-winged Teal in the picture on Cape Cod. 

Wayne R. Petersen



GEORGE C. WEST

AT A GLANCE



DAVID LARSON

Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

WHERE ARE THE WHIP-POOR-WILLS? VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR A STATE-WIDE SURVEY!

Help us find the state's decreasing population of breeding Whip-poor-wills.

Whip-poor-wills (*Caprimulgus vociferus*) are believed to have declined severely in the past 50 years. The purpose of the survey is to collect information on the abundance and distribution of breeding Whip-poor-wills in Massachusetts. These data will be used to track population trends and to identify areas where Whip-poor-wills may still be relatively abundant, in order to guide land protection efforts, habitat management, and future research.

Survey dates: Three surveys between May 25-June 20

Survey locations: Anywhere you pick them! Surveys are 4.5-mile car routes.

Survey time: Just after sunset for 90 minutes

For more information, survey instructions, and data forms, please go to:

<<http://www.massaudubon.org/iba>> or contact:

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This survey is a joint effort of Massachusetts Audubon Society,
Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, and
Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences.