

The Status and Occurrence of Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*) in British Columbia.

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Introduction and Distribution

The Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*) breeds only in eastern Russia, where it occurs from the base of the Kamchatka Peninsula west to the Laptev Sea and south to Amur (Brazil 2009). The entire population winters in eastern Asia, primarily on the Korean Peninsula, with smaller numbers in Japan and southern and eastern China (Brazil 2009). It is a casual to very rare migrant and summer visitor throughout western and northern Alaska as well as on the western Aleutians (West 2008, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Sightings of Baikal Teal in the Pacific states have occurred primarily in late fall and early winter (October to January) or during spring migration (March to May) (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, OFO 2012, WBRC 2012). The Baikal Teal has been recorded four times in Washington (WBRC 2011), twice in Oregon (OFO 2011), and seven times in California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2014). Away from the Pacific coast, the species was recently recorded near Calgary, Alberta in April 2009 (Retter 2009). In British Columbia, where there are only five records, this species is an accidental vagrant (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). As in British Columbia, most of the west coast records have been single-day occurrences, although an individual recently wintered at Kent in northwest Washington between December 12, 2004 and April 15, 2005 (WBRC 2012). The Baikal Teal was formerly classified as “Vulnerable” by the IUCN due to large population declines between the 1960s and 1980s (IUCN 2014). These declines were attributed primarily to excessive hunting and habitat degradation so that at their lowest levels in the 1980s the population wintering on the Korean Peninsula was estimated at c. 20,000 individuals (IUCN 2014). Since that time, however, populations have rebounded dramatically; with wintering populations on the Korean Peninsula recently in 2009 estimated at c. 1,060,000 individuals (IUCN 2014). Similarly, recent estimates at a wintering site in China, where only 300 individuals traditionally wintered, have placed the wintering population there at 8,000 – 10,000 individuals (IUCN 2014). As a result of these incredible population increases, the species was down listed to “Least Concern” by the IUCN in 2011. Its frequency as a vagrant to British Columbia and elsewhere in western North America may be expected to increase in the future, if these population trends continue. All Baikal Teals that have been found in eastern North America are likely escaped birds from captivity (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Identification and Similar Species

The adult male Baikal Teal is probably one of nature’s most spectacular waterfowl. The identification of this species is covered in most standard field guides for North America. The adult male is an obvious looking bird that should not pose any identification issues for observers. The females are far more subtle in their field marks. Great care and attention to

detail is required to identify them with certainty. If ever encountered, observers should always try to obtain photographs and take field notes of any Baikal Teal found in British Columbia. The adult male Baikal Teal has one of the more amazing head patterns of any duck in the world. The head pattern is striking with yellow in the face separated by a dark line that runs from the dark eyes down to the dark chin (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The head is pointed at the top of the crown and the bill is all black (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The crown is dark coloured and has a white line that runs from the base of the bill, over the eye to the nape (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The back of the head is green with a white line running along the neck separating this colour from the chest (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The chest is pinkish coloured with a white vertical line on the side of the breast (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The sides are gray coloured with a white line that separates the dark-coloured ventral area (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The tail is brown in colour and long in length (Brazil 2009). The back has long plumes that hang down and rusty with white edges (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The wings in flight have a white line on the secondary edge followed by a black line, green line and a rusty line (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The rest of the upper wing is grayish coloured (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The underside of the wing has a white secondary edge followed by a dark area with central axillaries white with a black leading edge (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). In size the Baikal Teal is a large duck that is slightly larger than a Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*) and much larger than a Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The female Baikal Teal has the same head and bill shape as the males (Brazil 2009). The crown is dark extending to the nape (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). At the base of the dark bill is a prominent white spot bordered with dark feathers (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The throat is white that extends up the sides of the face to the bottom of the eye (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There is a buffy eye stripe that starts at the base of the bill but is interrupted by the eye and extends behind the eye (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). There is a dark patch on the cheek with the rest of the face buffy coloured (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The back pattern is reminiscent of a female Garganey in that the feathers have dark centers with pale buff edges (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The chest and sides of the breast is brown with small dark spots that extend to the flanks (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In flight the belly is white (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The females have pale sides to the under tail coverts (Brazil 2009). The tail is brown in colour and long in length (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In flight the underside of the wing is similar to the adult male (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The upper wing pattern is also similar to the adult males but the wing is browner in overall colour and lacks an extensive green speculum as seen in Green-winged Teal (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

In British Columbia the only problematic identification issues revolve around female birds. The Green-winged Teal females also show a white spot at the base of the bill on the face (Dunn and

Alderfer 2011); however this species is much smaller to the Baikal Teal and has a prominent green speculum on the upper wing in flight (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Both female Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) and Cinnamon Teal could, by their larger size, pose identification issues (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Both species have large flat looking bills, white underwings, a grayish forewing on the upper side of the wing, and a green speculum on the upper wing in flight (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). With good views, any of these North American Teal should be easily eliminated as they are sufficiently different looking to female Baikal Teal.

Occurrence and Documentation

This species is accidental along the coast of British Columbia, where it is known from only five records. The first documented occurrence in the province was of an adult male that was shot by J. Hatter while hunting at Ladner in the lower Fraser Valley (Hatter 1960). As noted in Campbell *et al.* (1990), the date published in Hatter (1960) for the collection of the individual (December 20, 1957) appears to be erroneous as the actual specimen label states that the individual was collected on November 20, 1957. The specimen was subsequently donated to the collection of the University of British Columbia and represented the second recorded occurrence of the species in North America outside of Alaska (Roberson 1980). The second record of Baikal Teal in British Columbia was an adult male that was observed by Margo Hearne at Sandspit on Queen Charlotte Islands on May 1, 1996 (Davidson 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). Although no photographic or specimen evidence was obtained, detailed field notes of this beautifully marked duck were secured that left no doubt as to the identification of the bird in question (M. Hearne Pers. Comm.). The third occurrence of the species in B.C. is an adult male that was well-described by Kevin Jones and marginally photographed at Agassiz in the upper Fraser Valley near Chilliwack in March 8, 2002 (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). The fourth Provincial record of Baikal Teal was an adult female found by Peter Hamel and Margo Herne at Sandspit Airport in the Queen Charlotte Islands on May 14, 2012 and was photographed (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). This like the previous record for the Queen Charlotte Islands was a tide wonder and was not seen later in the day (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). The most recent record was an adult male watched carefully in a telescope by experienced field biologist Chris Chutter at the base of the Roberts Coal Port Jetty on January 10, 2013 (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). This bird was carefully watched for over thirty minutes in the company of Northern Pintails (P. Levesque Pers. Comm.). Good detailed notes were taken of this observation, unfortunately the bird was not relocated despite a large effort by observers to relocate the bird (P. Levesque Pers. Comm.). All sightings of the Baikal Teal in British Columbia have been single day occurrences, usually on a rising high tide (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). The Baikal Teal is frequently kept in captivity, and the International Species Information System (ISIS) lists captive Baikal Teal's as near to British Columbia as Tacoma, Washington (ISIS 2012). Swarth (1932) documents the extensive

importation of captive Baikal Teal into California for private collections in the late 1920s and early 1930s; a finding that led early authors to question the native status of the earliest California records (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). Despite this, however, the Baikal Teal does occur periodically in western Alaska, far from any private collections, and it is expected that small numbers should occur sporadically along the Pacific coast of North America (Roberson 1980, West 2008). Current records support this notion, and as a result most observations of the species in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California are attributed to natural vagrancy. Away from the Pacific coast, however, most occurrences are generally considered to represent escapes from captivity (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).



Figures 1-9: Record #4: Baikal Teal (female) at Sandspit Airport, QCI on May 14, 2012.
Photos © Margo Hearne.

Table 1: Records of Baikal Teal for British Columbia:

- 1.(1) immature male November 20, 1957: James Hatter (specimen: UBC 8595) Ladner (Hatter 1960)
- 2.(1) adult male May 1, 1996: Margo Hearne: Sandspit Airport, QCI (Bowling 1996, Davidson 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2013)
- 3.(1) adult male March 8, 2002: Kevin Jones (photo) Agassiz Slough, close to Tuyttens Road in Agassiz (Toochin 2012, Toochin *et al.* 2013)
- 4.(1) adult female May 14, 2012: Peter Hamel, Margo Hearne (photo) Sandspit Airport, QCI (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 5.(1) adult male January 10, 2013: Chris Chutter: near base of Coal Port Jetty, Brunswick Point, Delta (Toochin *et al.* 2013)

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