

Brown Female Ducks

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Birding editor Ted Floyd gives a program he calls Bare-naked Birding[†], a binocular-free bird walk designed to instruct by stripping things down to and perhaps beyond the essentials. I'm approaching this quiz somewhat the same way: no books, no apps, no websites...and when I first saw the photos and formulated my answers, no color. Then again, I've got something that other takers of this quiz don't have: the knowledge that my guesses on these birds are almost certainly correct.

Let me explain.

The first time I saw these three quiz photos was in a production meeting for this issue of *Birding* here at the ABA offices. Director of Publications Bryan Patrick, graphic designer Ed Rother, and Ted were discussing black-and-white copies of the various articles in their manuscript stage. Ted had these quiz photos in the same monochrome format and gleefully passed them by me, challenging me to shoot from the hip.

I got all three correct, and I have to say, I surprised myself. That's because I don't think of female ducks as a group I know especially well. Ted asked me then and there to write up the thought process that went on inside my head. So here—with no bolstering, referencing, or fact checking—is as close to an unadorned transcription as I can manage of the thoughts that ran through my head as I looked at each photo. I hope it's somehow instructive or at least entertaining.

Quiz Bird A

"It's a big duck. And it's a female eider because of the dark, wavy scalloping on the sides and back, along with



Quiz Bird A. Alaska, June. Photo by © Brian E. Small.

the dark, narrow, not-very-duck-like bill. It's got to be a **Spectacled Eider** because of that crazy face pattern. Let's see, I've never seen Spectacled Eider and I've only ever seen one Steller's, a female. It was very small and dark. And I don't think Common or King eiders could ever duplicate that face pattern. Yep, female Spectacled Eider."

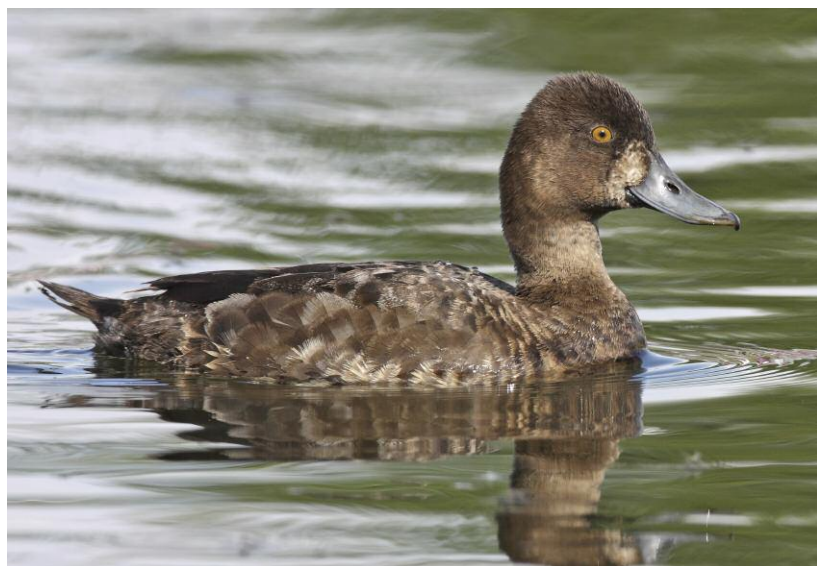
Quiz Bird B

"Okay, it looks like the theme here is female ducks. Yuck. Why couldn't it have been female warblers, or sparrows, or raptors, or shorebirds? Oh well. This looks like a teal because of its compact shape and small, refined bill. That bill looks too small for a female Cinnamon Teal, and the face pattern looks too heavy and distinct. Moving right along, the face doesn't look quite clean or crisp enough for

female Blue-winged. Plus, this bird just radiates the compact, somewhat blocky shape that I associate with **Green-winged Teal**. And searching the memory banks, I can only call up shadowy fragments of images of female Garganey, Baikal Teal, or Falcated Duck—which I’m pretty sure isn’t even a teal anymore. Nothing usable there. I’m going to have to guess Green-winged Teal.”

Quiz Bird C

“**G**ah. Two right. Why do I still feel like an idiot? Pressure’s on. Ted, Bryan, and Ed are enjoying this way too much. Am I visibly sweating? Is it lunch time yet? Okay, okay; calm down. Big brown duck. Looks like a diver. One of those scaup–Ring-necked–Redhead things... what’s the name of that genus? Uh, *Aythya*, I think. Yep, that’s it. Alrighty, doesn’t look right for female Redhead; face and head shape are all wrong. Female Ring-necked? No, again, face and bill just look scaupy. But which scaup? Crown shape doesn’t look classic for either species; forehead looks a little domed and Greater-ish, but there’s



Quiz Bird C. Alaska, June. Photo by © Brian E. Small.



Quiz Bird B. California, January. Photo by © Brian E. Small.

almost a slight peak to the hind-crown, which could nudge me toward considering Lesser. What else? The bill looks big, with a big nail, a definite Greater point. And there’s that pale crescent across the lower back of the face that Kim Eckert taught me to look for on female Greater Scaup many, many years ago when I was co-leading my first trip to Churchill with him. Now strongly leaning Greater. Quick double check of head shape. Yeah, I can live with it for **Greater Scaup**. Okay, I’m going with female Greater Scaup.”

†...and Ted Floyd got the idea from Ted Eubanks; see *Birding*, July/August 2007, pp. 36–39.



Jeff Gordon has more to say about the matter of bird identification—more generally as it relates to the ABA’s publications and other programs, as well as to the association’s history and legacy—in an online essay that accompanies these photo quiz answers. Check out his essay here: aba.org/birding/v43n5p61w1.html.