

Blue-Winged Teal at Hanningfield Reservoir
20th August 2006
The 6th Essex Record
by David Acfield

Peter Livermore and I were searching through the Teal to ascertain the number of Garganey, up to five of which had been reported over the previous few days. We came across a Blue-winged Teal at about 8.30am and it was watched for over an hour feeding with Teal, Shoveler and a single Garganey in the shallows to the right of the RAWL hide at a distance of about 50 metres.

It was larger than Teal, similar in size to Garganey. The bill was longer than the Teals', again similar to the accompanying Garganey. The head pattern was distinctive, intermediate between Teal and Garganey with a narrow pale supercilium and a dark eye stripe. There was no suggestion of a cheek stripe. The area around the bill was very pale particularly from certain angles (see photos) giving the impression of the beginnings of the crescent. The tertials appeared solidly brown without the contrasting pale edges shown by Garganey. In fact the dark rear end made it quite easy to pick up the bird even when upending. The legs were yellow and unringed, clearly viewable when it scratched or upended and occasionally a very small section of the forewing showed through; when it eventually flapped this was strikingly blue, very much brighter than Garganey.

The facial pattern, leg colour and the intensity of the blue forewing tentatively point to it being an eclipse male, very much like the long staying bird at the same site in 1999 (see photos *Essex Bird Report* between pp 40-41.) We were however unable to ascertain the exact upper wing pattern.

Another five birders saw the bird from the RAWL hide up to about 9.30am. We attempted to get a better view from the Point hide but it disappeared whilst we were walking there and it was not relocated until the afternoon when I understand a number of people saw it. As far as I know it was not seen the next day despite extensive searching.



Pete Livermore