Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture May 14th, 2009.
Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

Any feathers that are lost or pulled out at any time are replaced immediately by something called **adventitious molt**, a molt caused by an event.

One of the reason **gulls** are so difficult to identify is that they are constantly going through molt. Gulls start a new molt before they have finished their old molt. This is pretty well documented in Western Gulls. So new feathers are constantly coming in, you get huge amounts of individual variation.

"The Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America" by Kortwright (1942) showed birds the way they actually look. Illustrations by Shortt. Joe showed a plate of hybrids and albinos. Ducks frequently hybridize with other ducks. Some of these hybrids are pretty well known. There is a much higher percentage of male hybrids than of females. This is not an artifact of the fact that the female hybrids are more difficult to identify and therefore overlooked, the same thing happens in captivity when the parents are known, a huge percentage of the hybrids are males.
"Brewer's Duck" was collected and named by Audubon, later it was recognized to be a hybrid between Gadwall and Mallard. There have been a couple of cases, at least one good one on the Palo Alto Baylands area.
Common Goldeneye and Hooded Merganser are both cavity nesting birds. That is a reasonably well known hybrid. One bird has been at Lake Merritt in Oakland for several years that was thought to be a hybrid between Barrow's Goldeneye and Hooded Merganser.
We get a lot of white Mallard-types that are just domesticated and their plumage is white. A true albino has no pigment at all, bill, feet and eyes are pink.
A Mallard is shown in what breeders often call a dilute type of plumage, the authors call it a partial albino. The color is paler over the whole body instead of just having patches of white.

There is confusion in terminology for birds with coloration abnormalities. Birders frequently used to call birds with abnormal white patches **partial albino** and birds with a dilute, paler color **leucistic**. Sometimes the terms partial albino and leucistic have been used the other way around, though. Recently this terminology has been under attack, mostly from geneticists who have other and much stricter definitions for these terms. Geneticists insist that there is no such thing as a partial albino, albinism is either or, you either have pigment or you don't. Jeff Davis published an article in Birding magazine that introduced a whole new terminology, like **amelanistic**, (missing melanins). Apparently the terminology is mostly borrowed from herpetology. Joe was originally involved in this project together with Jeff Davis. But Joe wanted to go the other way, he wanted to be able to communicate, using plain and readily understood language. He wanted to re-allow the term partial albino.
There was another article in Dutch Birding, called "Not every white bird is an albino":
http://www.vogelringschier.nl/DB28(2)79-89_2006.pdf
Albinism is usually caused by a genetic defect, it is the absence of melanin in the bird's plumage. Pure albinos have no melanin pigments anywhere, not even in their eyes. We never see pure albinos in the wild, they are not able to survive. Albinism can happen to individuals for a whole variety of reasons. Although there are some species where it has not been recorded, it has been recorded in a wide variety of species. We see it probably most often in seabirds for some reason. Bilateral partial albinism, in which the birds are patchy in the same way symmetrically on both sides, is surprisingly common in stormpetrels and shearwaters, which can lead to misidentifications.

Teal: no special meaning, used for small surface feeding ducks. Teal are much sought after by sportsmen because they are the fastest flying and the most erratically flying waterfowl that you would want to hunt. But they are small, so there is not a lot of meat on them. They are the most agile and the most athletic of all of the ducks.

Gadwall

OCCURRENCE

Increasingly common in the Bay Area. Were scarce in the 70s, are much more common now. More a bird of the Central Valley. They do breed in the SF Bay Area. Gadwall and Mallard are among the more common breeding ducks, especially when you get down into the Palo Alto Baylands area. Also places like the Hayward area and Coyote Hills have breeding Gadwalls. Scarce in SF. May have nested there, but very rarely.

FIELD MARKS

Shape very similar to Mallard. Smaller than Mallard, but not by much.
Depending on how the feathers are held the bird has a steep forehead and sometimes appears to have quite a bump on the forecrown. Not all of the individuals do this but it often appears like that when they are in a relaxed pose.
Yellow legs, gray toes with yellow webbing.

ADULT MALE

Very subdued looking duck.
Plain gray bird with a darker, scaly chest, little crescent shaped markings.
White belly, sharply contrasting to the dark chest.
Black rear end the most distinctive feature.
Speculum white.
Some of the long scapular feathers are brown tinged.
Very fine vermiculations on the body, much coarser on the chest.
Black bill.
Head rather unpatterned, but it does have a darker crown.

ECLIPSE MALE

More solid body color than female, which has more loops; dark bill.

FEMALE

Looks a lot like the female Mallard.
Often orange at the sides of the bill, but the bill is seldom as orange as a Mallard's bill is. The dark on the bill usually all the way to the tip of the bill instead of just a blotch across the middle. (In summer in the nesting season the female Mallard's bill gets quite a bit darker than in the non-breeding season.)
Brown tail, without the white that the Mallard shows.
There can be some white on the side of the flank if part of the speculum is exposed.
Some young female Gadwall have the white speculum patch reduced or absent. Almost all females tend to have a reduced amount of white on the innermost secondaries.
If the bird gets out of the water the Gadwall would show a white belly, female Mallards tend to be darker on the belly.
The head is a little bit more petite and there is maybe a little more contrast between the pale face and neck, less markings on the neck compared to the female Mallard.

Falcated Duck

Name comes from the long falcate shaped (curved) tertials.
Old name: Falcated Teal

OCCURRENCE

Asiatic species.
Some interesting records in CA.
In May 1953 a highschool kid, Joel Hedgpeth, found one on Stow Lake. He talked to Robert Orr, who was curator at the Academy of Sciences. They took the specimens to the lake and identified the bird. An article appeared in a newspaper along with a picture of the bird. The bird had already been observed in April on Metson Lake. The record got forgotten about as an assumed escaped bird.
Likewise assumed to be an escape was one found in the Long Beach Area in January 1969.
In March 2002 John Sterling found one in with a flock of Gadwall at Honey Lake, a wildlife management area in northeastern CA, pretty far away from any urban areas. It migrated out with all the other ducks from there. That bird got accepted. There was some evidence at that time that the numbers of Falcated Duck had increased In Asia. The difference between that one and the ones that had been rejected was that a lot of birdwatchers got to see that one. There also was tangible evidence, photos.

FIELD MARKS

Female looks a lot like a Widgeon but the bill is all black.
Male quite a striking bird.

Green-winged Teal

OCCURRENCE

Widespread and abundant.
Breeding throughout much of Canada and wintering throughout much of the lower 48.
In CA mostly a winter visitor, small numbers breed in the northeastern part of the state.
There can be flocks of hundreds in places like Bolinas Lagoon in the winter.
Not a common bird in GGPark, not that kind of bird.
Frequently forages in very shallow water and in the mud, frequently walking out of the water and foraging on mudflats.

FIELD MARKS

Our smallest dabbling duck.
Bill all dark.
Legs dark.

ADULT MALE

Quite striking.
Gray body .
White vertical shoulder stripe from the bend of the wing down towards the lower sides.
Yellow on the undertail coverts outlined in black.
Some black in the scapulars.
Head reddish, a green slash starts at the eye and extends backwards, lightly outlined in buff.

Bill relatively small and dainty, all black.
Speculum green on the inner portion, black on the outer portion, with buffy on the leading edge and white on the trailing edge.
Rosy chest.

FEMALE

Difficult to identify.
Very small, rather plain, nondescript duck.
Might be confused with other female ducks, because of its small size most likely with Cinnamon or Blue-winged Teal. Has a smaller bill than either one of those.
White lateral slash on the undertail coverts, neither of the other common types of teal that we have in CA have that mark.

ECLIPSE AND YOUNG MALES

Have in addition to the line through the eye a dark stripe underneath the eye. This has caused no end of confusion because none of the field guides show that female type Green-winged Teal can have two stripes on the face. Sibley has the heads way too dark. The head on a Green-winged teal is normally quite pale. That's why they are normally more easily confused with Blue-winged Teal than Cinnamon Teal. Cinnamon Teal has usually a darker head. The two facial stripes do not mean you are looking at a Garganey. Garganey has much more white on the tertials, it's got a thicker line through the eye that encompasses the eye and a larger bill and in flight it has a bluish gray or grayish forewing.

SUBSPECIES

The NA birds are of the subspecies carolinensis.
The nominate subspecies crecca is found in Eurasia. It used to be called the Common Teal and was considered to be a separate species. In Britain it is just called the Teal, it is the only bird they have that they call Teal.
Aleutian birds look like crecca but are slightly larger. Sometimes considered a separate subspecies, nimia.

FIELD MARKS

The Eurasian and Alaskan birds do not have the white shoulder stripe. Instead they have in addition to the black scapular line a white scapular line, a horizontal racing stripe. They also are said to have slightly more emphasis on the buffy outline to the green facial patch, but there is quite a bit of variation in that.
Historically they were thought to be different species. The males are readily recognizable from each other, the females are really hard to tell. The Eurasian females have white along the leading edge of the green speculum and tend to not have buff coloration there. But Joe does not know how reliable that is and he does not know of anybody who has successfully convinced anybody of having found a female Eurasian Common Teal.

"HYBRIDS"

There are "hybrids". Most commonly they show both a white shoulder stripe and a white horizontal stripe. Birds with the shoulder stripe on one side and the horizontal stripe on the other side also occur. Mixed characters on one side or the other of the body are not that unusual. The birds were lumped quite some time ago. There are some efforts to divide the Common Teal as a separate species. There has been a Common Teal in most years in Redwood Shores in the pond behind the Nob Hill Market.

Baikal Teal

Name from Lake Baikal in eastern Siberia.

OCCURRENCE

East Asian species.
Fairly common in captivity although expensive.
Mostly found in Japan and especially Korea.
Its numbers have plummeted.
There were relatively few records for NA and they were all on the north slope of Alaska, not on Attu Island, where the active birdwatchers go, mostly just specimens collected in extremely remote areas of northern Alaska, hardly any birdwatchers had ever seen it in NA
A female showed up in Colorado, close up photos showed it was missing a rear toe, indicating that it was not a wild bird. Then there was a big pick up in the numbers in Korea and we started to get more records. There were records from the Pacific Northwest and several records from hunters who had bagged them in CA. One bird was in Santa Barbara County for some weeks in 2005/6.

FIELD MARKS

Quite spectacular, cool colors.
Green winged teal-like shouldermarking.
Tail quite different.
Extremely complicated headpattern.
Be very careful, hybrids between the American Widgeon and the Pintail or American Wigeon and Mallard often have a pattern which is like neither bird and quite a few hybrid types have a head pattern that is strongly reminiscent of the Baikal Teal. Some people therefore believe that the Baikal Teal may be ancestral to all ducks. This is not all that unusual. We infer the parents of a hybrid by its plumage, but a lot of times we don't know what the actual parents were. We certainly do know that there are numerous cases where hybrid offspring show characters that are found in neither parent.
Females: some detail on them in Nat Geo. On most of them there is a white facial spot. Some, probably young males, have a bridle that extends downward from the eye.
Speculum green in the front, black in the back.