

Tactful Teal

North America's trio of teal differ in flight, temperament, and hues, but unite in delivering a dazzling spectacle

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Before the frost settles in and the main migrations push south, there's a short stretch of days when the marsh belongs to the teal. And in their brief window, they offer us a few things worth holding on to. Small reminders, as seasons shift, of how to move through the world.

Some, often green-winged teal, tear through the spread with the subtlety of an unruly young Lab. Offering a flash of green, the chestnut hues splashed across their bodies, greenwings rarely allow time





to think—let alone make haste—in reaching for your trusty 20-gauge. They hit the spread hard and retreat harder, packing a memorable punch that seemingly contradicts their status as North America’s smallest waterfowl.

Then there are the bluewings, which pack their bags at the first hint of summer’s cool coattails. They’re incredibly early fall migrants—unconcerned with the status quo when it comes to the timing of other species’ migrations. Their movement is deliberate, with an urgency that wastes no time in propelling them south—perhaps to put on an aerobic, powder-blue show over your spread.

But if you’re truly lucky—especially if you live outside the Pacific Flyway—and the pieces settle precisely into place, something less expected may slip through your spread.





Rusty and regal, cinnamon teal don't travel in boisterous fashion or push into places that don't suit them. In a world that often values 'more, more, more,' cinnamons make a strong case for less, seemingly aware that not every space is meant for them—and that it's worth holding out for those that are. Because they frequently travel with bluewings, look for the black ones in the flock.

We spend most of our lives bracing against the current, caught in movement, deadlines, responsibilities, and endless distractions. But in the space between late summer and early fall, this trio of teal tactfully offers us a welcome change of pace and reflection, a quieter kind of instruction—a chance to show up wholehearted, to move deliberately, and to value what suits us best over the perpetual pressure to chase more. ▲

Renowned photographer Gary Kramer's latest book, "Waterfowl of the World," is available at garykramer.net.