



‘Gray ducks’
possess a subtle
magnificence that
defies their bland
nickname

PHOTOS BY
GARY KRAMER

The Unsung Gadwall

“And tonight’s nominee for the most unsung, underappreciated waterfowl species in North America is ... the gadwall!” And, yes, it’s the only nominee because there’s no other duck that even comes close. What more evidence do you need than its colloquial name—“gray duck?” *Blah!*

Yet how many times, while picking up the decoys, have my hunting companions and I thought, “*Thank God for gadwalls,*” with two, or four, or a dozen subtly but remarkably beautiful gadwalls hanging



on the strap in the blind. Gaddies save the day—often—in many, many marshes.

There's nothing standoffish about gadwalls in their habits or their looks. No garish fashions. No high-altitude surprise approaches. In many situations, gadwalls are often more responsive to decoys and calls than mallards. If you do your part and put forth the effort to get where they want to be, gaddies will usually play the game fairly.

To top it off, there are lots of them and always seem to be. While this year's spring count saw a drop from last, gadwalls remained 11% above their long-term average. In the fall flight, season after season, gadwalls seem to be a duck you can count on.

Louisiana and Mississippi are far ahead of the rest of the waterfowling world in their appreciation for gray ducks. Good on them! They recognize that a camp cook who knows his or her way around a roux will turn a bag of gadwalls into a duck gravy to die for, alongside the red





beans and rice, of course. That's delicious, locavore eating if there ever was any.

Finally, the monicker "gray duck" just does not fit this beautiful bird. The breeding plumage that gadwalls take on during the winter hunting seasons in the South subtly incorporates every color of the autumn marsh that we duck hunters love. A fully plumed drake gadwall is every bit as worthy of the wall space and taxidermy bill as any wood duck or cinnamon teal.

Gadwalls may claim the title of "Most Taken-for-Granted Duck." But they sure don't deserve it! —*Bill Miller* ▲

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

