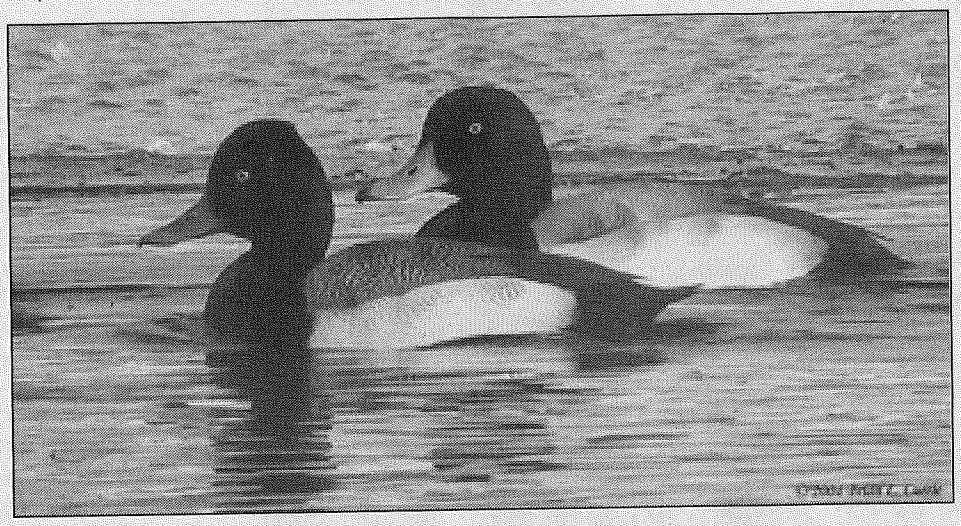
2005 Ocean County Decoy & Gunning Show
Bird of the Year



SCAUP

Aythya marila Aythya affinis

The Scaup, better known as Broadbill or Bluebill, is a diving duck common along the Jersey shore in the bays, ponds and the ocean. The Scaup is actually two types, the Greater Scaup and Lesser Scaup, both eagerly sought by hunters. The word Scaup is probably derived from scalp-meaning a bed of mussels or broken shellfish, for this duck's habit of feeding on shellfish.

Of the two species the Greater Scaup is the largest averaging just over two pounds and is found throughout the northern hemisphere, wintering mainly in coastal areas. The Lesser Scaup is smaller, averaging just under two pounds, is largely restricted to North America, and winters mostly on freshwater lakes and ponds. On Barnegat Bay one is likely to find both species mixed. The Lesser Scaup has a smaller and narrower nail (a finger nail like structure at the end of the bill) with a shorter white wing strip.

The Greater Scaup has a bigger nail and longer wing strip with a evenly rounded and Greenish tint to the male's black head, while the head of the male Lesser Scaup is slightly peaked at the back and usually shows a purplish cast. Needless to say, they are difficult to tell apart and most simply lump them together as Scaup.

Scaup represent approximately 10 percent of our national waterfowl population. Whereas the total duck population of 32.2 million is only 3 percent below the 1955-2003 long-term average, the Scaup population has declined to 3.8 million, 27 percent below their long-term average. Only the Pintail show a larger long-term decline. The exact cause of the decline is unknown but many feel it is their diet of shellfish, especially the introduced zebra mussel of the great lakes, which greatly concentrate pesticides and other pollutants. Scaup are generally birds of high open water where flocks move in almost perfect synchrony as they twist and turn and require large spreads of decoys. Many hunters also rely on whistles and flags to attract flocks over the decoys. Once a flock sets up to look over your spread, they can provide some fast and furious shooting. Hunters should dispatch cripples fast since once they dive they can surface quite a distance away.