

Mallard Duck

(Anas platyrhynchos)

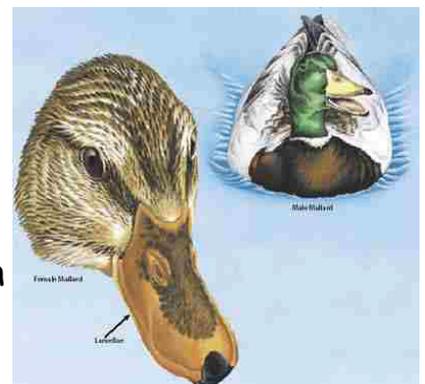


DID YOU KNOW:

Ducks, including mallards, have oil glands on their backs near the tail. They spread the oil over their feathers with their bills. The duck oil keeps the bird warm and dry so it can stay afloat and is able to fly.

EATING HABITS:

Mallards are considered dabblers, which is a term used to describe how they feed. Dabbling ducks have lamellae, which are comb-like structures along the edges of their bills that strain insects and plants from the water. The duck then eats the strained food. Mallards are often seen with their heads under water and their tails in the air. With its bill under water, the duck opens its mouth to gather water, then strains the water out, keeping only the good stuff.



THE YOUNG:

Mallards build nests in grasses and reeds near water. The female mallard plucks the soft feathers from her chest and uses them to line the nest for warmth. She lays eight to ten light-green eggs that hatch in about a month. As soon as the downy ducklings hatch and have dried, Mom leads them directly to the water. They follow Mom and feed from the water. Young mallards can fly at about two months after hatching.

HABITAT (HOME):

Freshwater ponds, lakes and marshes are the favored habitat. Grassy areas near water are important for nesting and shelter. Mallards can be seen throughout North America. They tend to nest in the middle and northern parts of the continent and migrate in the winter to the middle and southern parts. They may use salt-water marshes in the winter months.

DEFENSIVE HABITS:

The mallard's main defense is flight. They can spring from the water, hover a short time, and then fly away. A mother duck will protect her clutch of eggs or ducklings by hissing at an intruder in hopes of scaring it away. If caught, a duck will try to beat the intruder off with its wings.

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- The male and female look very different. The female's plumage is a mottled brown. The male has a colorful green head, chestnut brown chest and lighter colored wing feathers.
- The body heat of a nesting female may cause the surrounding grasses to grow more quickly. She arranges this grass to help her stay camouflaged on the nest.



Male
←



Female
→