

## 21 Mallard

### Identification

The mallard or wild duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*) is a large dabbling duck, with hefty bodies, rounded heads, and broad, flat bills. It is medium-sized waterfowl species 51–62 cm long, wingspan of 81-98 cm, weighs 750-1500 gr. As dabblers, they rarely dive and are often seen in the tipped-up position with its tail held vertical. The male is distinctive with iridescent bottle-green head, a white collar that demarcates the head from the purple- brown breast. It has grey-brown wings, gray flanks and a pale grey belly. Both sexes have orange legs and feet, the male has a yellowish-orange bill tipped with black, the rear is black with white-bordered dark tail and two central curled feathers above the tail that arguably make it the most easily identified duck. Females and juveniles are mottled brown with orange and black splotches on the bill. The female mallard has buff cheeks, eyebrow, throat, and neck, with a darker crown and eye-stripe Both sexes have iridescent purple-blue speculum feathers edged and white-bordered patch in the wing, which are shed during the annual summer moulting period. The female has the deep quack-quack, the male makes a softer and low-pitched sound rhab-rhab. After the breeding season Mallards moult, or shed old feathers, into what is known as an eclipse plumage. In the late fall the young gain the plumage of their respective sexes.

The adulthood age for mallards is fourteen months, and the average life expectancy is three years, but they can live to twenty. The eggs may vary in colour from dull green to almost white and are laid daily. Up to 15 may be deposited, but the usual number is between 8 and 12.

Ducklings are yellow on the underside and black with some yellow spots on the back, black bill and legs. The duckling becomes a juvenile two months after hatching and between three and four months of age, the juvenile can finally begin flying, as its wings are fully developed for flight. Male and female can finally be distinguished visually by different colours of the bill, the breast and the centre tail feather: curled in males (the drake feather) and straight in females.

### Range

The mallard is generally common and breeds throughout the temperate and subtropical Americas, Asia, Europe, and North Africa. It is a very adaptable species, being able to live wherever there are suitable wetland habitats in urban areas and natural setting. Their preferred habitats, however, are the natural grasslands that surround little reed-ringed sloughs, or marshy areas, and potholes on the prairies. They're also found in saltwater and brackish water. Mallards are social animal, often in flocks, and frequently mixes with other duck species, they are familiar in city and suburban park residential backyards.

### Diet and Foraging

Mallards are omnivore and eat a wide variety of food. They are “dabbling ducks” they tend to tip forward with their tails in the air and dabble for invertebrates, fish, amphibians, and a variety of plants. They also forage for food on land, graze and roam around on the shore and pick at acorns and berries, plants, and seeds or prey on the ground insect larvae, earthworms, snails, freshwater shrimp and shellfish. During migration, many mallards consume largely agricultural seed and grain.

### Facts

The mallard is the ancestor of nearly all domestic duck breeds. It is thought to be the commonest and most widespread duck on Earth. It is a familiar sight in the city and suburban park where they become tame and approachable and take food from the hands of park visitors. Although they appear to enjoy eating bread, this can actually harm them, and reduce the water quality.

The Mallard is an excellent mother, she will stop at frequent intervals to collect and brood, or warm, her young. If surprised by an intruder, she is likely to go flapping and squawking across the ground to defend her young

### References

Accessed July 2021

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Author : Patrizia Rapali

Revision: .....2021

Photo: Mario Coti

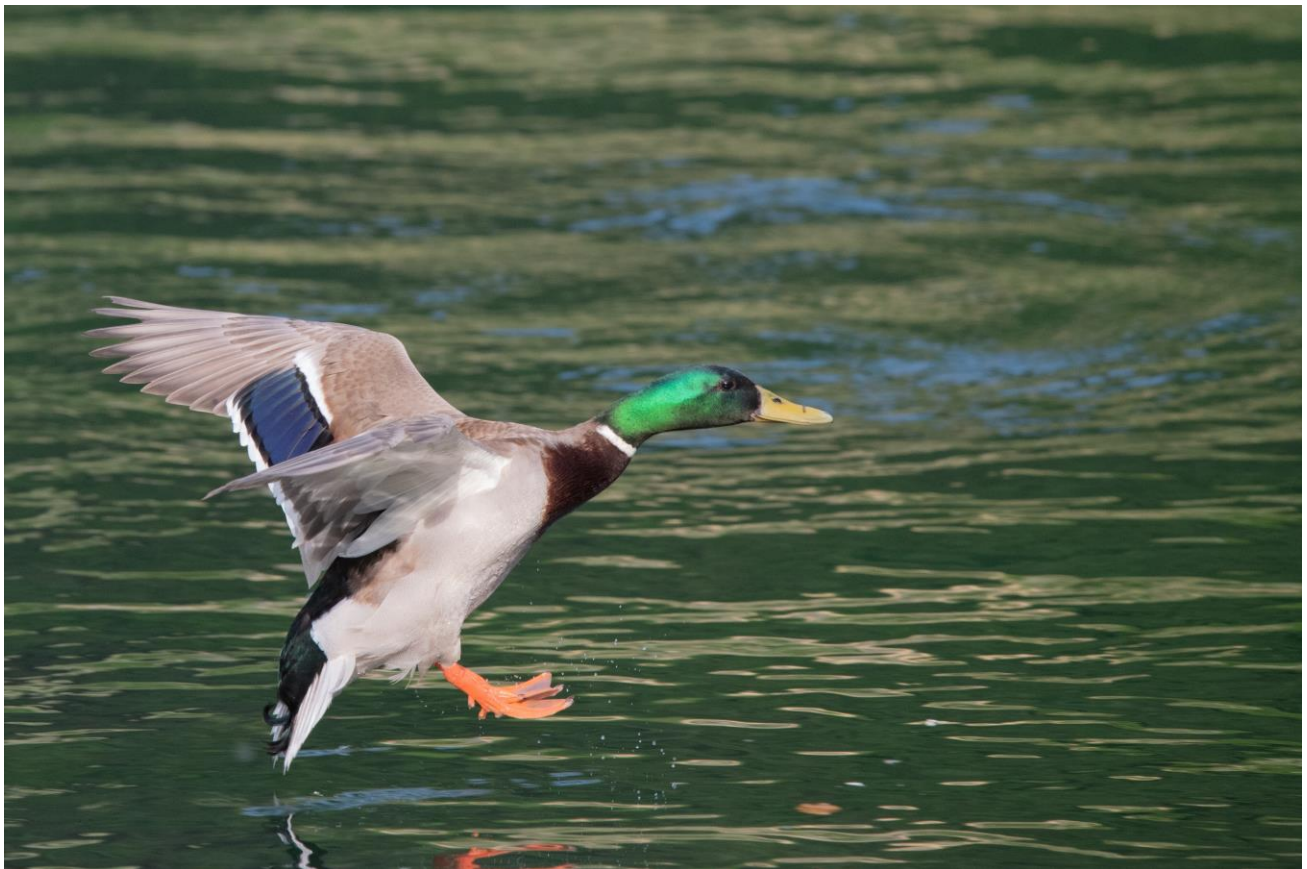




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