



Mallard ducks

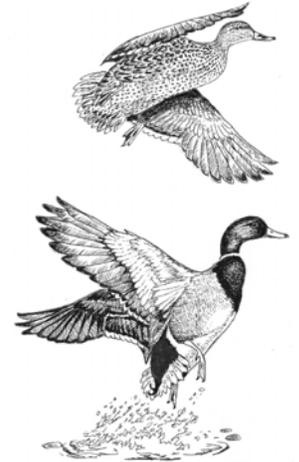
What are they?

Mallards are the most common ducks found in North America. Ducks are part of the bird family of animals. Ducks, swans, and geese are sometimes called waterfowl because they spend their time in and near the water.

What do they look like?

It's easy to spot male mallards. They have glossy green heads, with a white collar around their necks. Most of the feathers on their backs and wings are brown. They have a purple patch on their wings. Their undersides are grayish-white.

It is more difficult to spot female mallards, since they do not have such colorful feathers. Their feathers are mainly brown. Females are also smaller than the males. When they are young, both male and female mallards resemble their mother more than their father. Their feathers are a mottled brown. Adult mallards are about 2 feet long. When their wings are extended, they span about three feet.



Where can you find them?

Although some mallards do migrate (or move from one location to the other), many in the Chesapeake Bay region live here all year long. You can find them in or near the water, in rivers, lakes, marshes, or wetlands.

Mallards are dabbling ducks. That means that they feed by sticking their only heads under water. This is called dabbling. Because of this habit, they like to stay in shallow water (less than 16 inches deep), where they can easily eat underwater plants.

How do they behave?

When mallards are alarmed, they can spring directly from the water into the air. They do not have to scoot along the water in order to get up in the air, like mute swans and other large birds.

Mallards build their nests in a variety of protected places, mainly near the water. Areas filled with bulrushes and phragmites are some of the places mallards like to nest. They also build nests under large rocks, on muskrat houses, and even in tree hollows.

Each year, mallards have 8 – 12 ducklings (the name for baby ducks.) As soon as the ducklings' soft down dries out after they hatch, their mother leads them to water for their first swim.

What do they eat?

For the most part, mallards like to eat plants. They dine on leaves, stems, roots, and seeds from these plants:

- wild lilies
- reeds
- cattails
- bulrushes
- phragmites

About 90% of their diet comes from these sources.

In addition, mallards will sometimes eat insects and other small animals such as young crabs, shrimp, clams, snails, small fish, fish eggs, tadpoles, and worms.

What eats them?

Mallards are most likely to be eaten by other animals when they are very young. Animals such as foxes, raccoons, snapping turtles, and large fish often eat ducklings. Crows, snakes, and other predators also eat mallard eggs.

Creature Feature

When you hear mallards quacking, you are most probably listening to a female. Females give what is called a "hail call" to bring their ducklings and other ducks to them.