

Mallard Ducks, Ducklings, and Duck Deterrents

Mallard Natural History

Mallards like to nest near fresh water including ponds, swimming pools and decorative fountains. Nests are usually located in tall grass or shrubs, but in urban areas, ducks have been known to nest in planter boxes, on pool decks or even in the middle of the sidewalk, as the female Mallard in this photo has done. The nest will usually look like a divot of vegetation, lined with plant debris and down feathers.



Mallard breeding season extends from early spring through autumn, with most ducklings hatching in April and May. These ducks typically lay one clutch of 10-12 eggs per year, and incubation is delayed until the laying process is complete (usually about one egg per day until the clutch is complete). Occasionally a mother duck leaves the nest for a period of time. When she does, she usually covers it with down, grass and even foliage for camouflage. Incubation lasts 26-29 days and babies hatch precocial (eyes open, covered in down, able to walk, swim, and follow mom). Typically, all viable eggs will hatch within 12-24 hours.

Ducklings take to water shortly after hatching but they are not yet waterproof and can become waterlogged easily; they must be able to get out of the water.

IF YOU FIND A DUCKLING ALONE, COLD, TRAPPED, INJURED OR WATERLOGGED, IT IS AN EMERGENCY. CONTACT WILDCARE OR YOUR LOCAL WILDLIFE HOSPITAL IMMEDIATELY.

Ducks in Swimming Pools

If ducks have access to your swimming pool, haul-outs must be available for babies to get out of the water.

A product called a “Frog Log” can be purchased online at <http://www.froglog.us/> or you can create your own haul-outs by placing 2x4s or other pieces of flat wood on the edge of your pool to create a gently sloped walkway from the water up to the edge of the pool, anchored with cinderblocks or rocks.



Photo © JoLynn Taylor

Place several haul-outs around the perimeter of your pool because a drowning animal won't know to circle around the pool to find a way out.

Also, ducklings usually follow their mother in a straight line and won't think to swim to the other side of the pool, jump up the plank, and then walk around the pool to where their mother is waiting.

While the prospect of having a mother duck and her brood of babies living in your yard and using your pool may seem like a fun endeavor, keep in mind that it will be at least seven weeks before the babies can fly and leave your yard (especially if

your water feature is the only fresh water source in the immediate area). As ducklings grow, so will the size of their droppings. When their feces land in chlorinated pool water, bacteria and pathogens are killed, but duck droppings on land should be removed daily.

If this doesn't sound like something you are willing to do, plan ahead. Remove attractants and start deterrents before the mother duck starts nesting.

Federal Protection for Ducks and other Birds

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918 makes it illegal to disturb or destroy the active nest of any native species of bird. Despite the name, MBTA also covers birds that do not migrate. Even if Mallards are around your property all year round, they are still covered by MBTA. A duck's nest is protected once the first egg has been laid or when the female is actively sitting on the nest (whichever comes first). **Once the nest is active, you can't put out any deterrents or harass the duck in any way since it may cause the mother to abandon her clutch.** Likewise, you can't haze a mother and her brood of ducklings since you could scare her away and cause her to abandon the ducklings. To avoid conflicts with wildlife, prevention is key!

Duck Deterrents

The first step to discouraging any wildlife visitors is to identify and reduce or remove attractants. Food, water and shelter are the primary reasons an animal will frequent your yard. Food sources for ducks include seeds, grasses, insects, algae, snails, worms and small crustaceans. Many of their food sources you won't have much control over but refraining from

putting out seed for songbirds, and encouraging your neighbors to do the same, is a good start. You could also cut back on watering, this would discourage insects, snails and worms as well as reduce new growth of sprouts—which are especially delectable to ducks.



Water is obviously a huge attractant for ducks; draining or covering water features can be an effective deterrent. If covering or draining your water feature is not an option, **you can also purchase several large beach balls or other inflatable pool toys and leave them drifting in the pool.** Limiting shrubs, high grasses and other foliage that creates shelter for ducks can also make your yard less attractive.

Ducks are sometimes driven off by loud noises like yelling, clapping your hands or banging pots and pans. There are also many motion-activated noise makers that can be purchased online or picked up at your local hardware store which can temporarily scare off ducks or other unwanted wild visitors. 3D decoys of coyotes or other predators can be purchased online and are most effective if moved around every couple of days, so the ducks don't become accustomed to them.

If you have any questions about ducks or other wildlife, including how to create a wildlife habitat in your yard, please call WildCare at 415-456-7283.