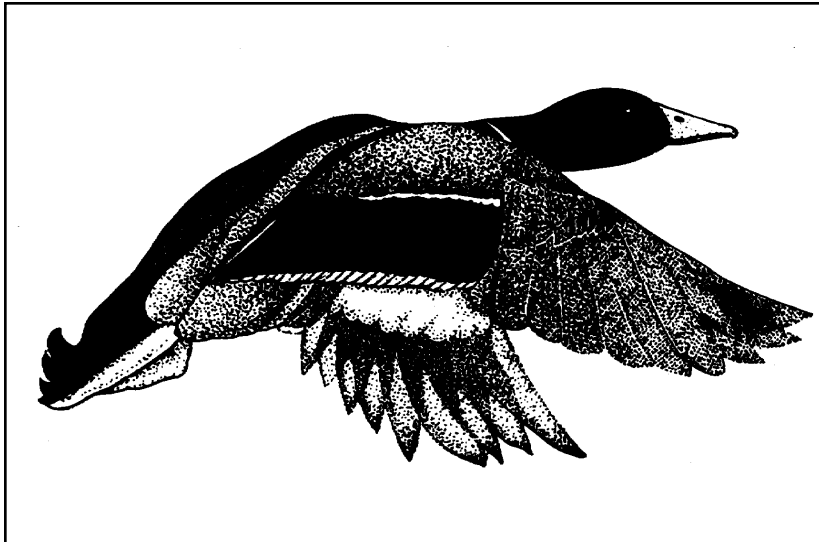
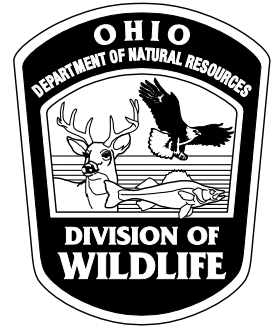


Ohio Division of Wildlife  
Life History Notes  
**Mallard**

Scientific Name: *Anas platyrhynchos*



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## Introduction

Often referred to as the "greenhead," the mallard has the most extensive breeding range of any duck in North America. Most domestic ducks such as the white ducks found on farms and at many public parks derive their origin from the mallard.

## Description

The mallard is a large duck with a stocky body. It is readily identified by its highly iridescent green head, white neck ring, and the blue-violet iridescent speculum, or wing patch that is bordered with black and white stripes. It has a whitish tail extending from a glossy black rump; its tail feathers curl up at the tip of its tail. The body is a mixture of chestnut brown and gray feathers. Its bill is yellow and feet are orange. In flight, there is a flash of white in its underwings. As with most ducks, the female of this species has a drab appearance compared to the male. The female mallard is a uniform light brown, but has the distinctive speculum identical to the male's on its wings.

The mallard is found throughout the Northern Hemisphere, including all of North America, the Arctic, and the subtropics.

## Habitat and Habits

Most mallards occupy extensive wetlands; however, they are very adaptable and can be found wherever their basic requirements of food, a permanent body of water, and cover are met. It is not uncommon to find mallards inhabiting small farm ponds, ditches with water

flowing between cultivated fields, streams and lakes, and ponds in urban areas. The only aquatic habitats they tend to avoid are small fast flowing streams.

Mallards usually nest on the ground in dense grassy cover within 100 feet of water. As always, there are exceptions—the nest may be more than a mile from water, on floating mats of vegetation in marshes, under bushes in residential areas, on rock piles, hay bales, tops of tree stumps, and in large cavities as much as 22 feet above ground.

The mallard is a dabbling duck as opposed to a diving duck. Dabblers tip their head below the water's surface to feed. Divers take their entire body below water to feed. Mallards are diurnal, they are active during the daylight hours.

They are one of the last birds to migrate from Ohio in the fall and among the first to return in the spring. As indicated earlier, mallards are quite adaptable and are able to live comfortably in proximity to humans. The quacking you hear as mallards fly overhead or swim around a pond comes only from the females; male or drake mallards whistle.

## Reproduction and Care of Young

Mallards are polygamous, meaning males breed with more than one female. Breeding usually takes place in April and May; however, it has been recorded as early as March and as late as mid-June. First broods of mallard ducklings appear in the second half of April;



most hatch between May and July. Renesting, following the destruction of a nest, may result in broods as late as the first week of August.

Mallard ducklings are altricial, meaning they are helpless, and completely dependent on the hen mallard for their care and rearing. After the ducklings have hatched and are dry (within approximately 12 hours) the hen will lead them to water. Mallards can fly at 52 to 60 days old.

### Management Plans

The Division of Wildlife erects artificial nesting structures for mallards and other waterfowl at its wildlife areas around the state. The mallard is also a popular game bird and the Division is responsible for evaluating state population estimates and incorporating federal guidelines in the designation of season lengths and bag limits for mallards and other waterfowl. These management practices help balance the population and prevent species overpopulation that can result in disease and starvation.

### Do Something Wild!

Mallards provide hours of enjoyment for wildlife enthusiasts. They are also an important part of our overall ecosystem and contribute to the wildlife diversity of the state. Helping us manage for wildlife diversity in the state are the generous citizens of Ohio. With money they either donated through the state income tax checkoff, the purchase of wildlife conservation license plates, or their direct contribution to the Endangered Species Special Account, the Division is able to purchase critical habitat essential to sustaining many wildlife species and provide educational materials and opportunities on wildlife to children and adults. This funding also helps us reintroduce species that have been extirpated from the state such as the trumpeter swan and osprey. Returning these species to Ohio increases our wildlife diversity.

Contributions to our Endangered Species and Wildlife Diversity Program are accepted throughout the year. To make a donation, please send a check to: Endangered Species Special Account, Ohio Division of Wildlife, 2045 Morse Road, Bldg. G, Columbus, Ohio 43229-6693. All contributions, whether made on your income tax return or directly, are tax deductible.

## At a Glance

Mating: Polygamous

Peak of Breeding Activity: April - May

Incubation Period: 24-28 days

Young Hatch: May - June

Number of Eggs :8-12

Eggs Produced: Once a year, but they will renest if a nest is destroyed

Young are Born: Altricial

Adult Weight: Males average 2.75 pounds; females 2.44 pounds

Adult Length: Males average 23 inches; females 22 inches

Life Expectancy: 29 years is the record; one year is average

Migration Patterns: Can be seen year-round in Ohio; however, they are not the same birds throughout the year. Winter residents have migrated south to Ohio from locations farther north.

Feeding Periods: During the day

Typical Foods: Smartweed, rice, lawn clippings, coontail, wild millet, bulrush, burweed, aquatic invertebrates, small fish, and crustaceans

Native to Ohio: Yes

