

## Natural History

Mallards (and many species of ducks) like to nest near fresh water including ponds, swimming pools and decorative fountains. Nests are usually located in tall grass or shrubs, and in urban areas ducks have been known to nest in planter boxes or even the corner of a protected porch. The nest often looks like a divot lined with plant debris and down feathers. The breeding season extends from early spring through autumn. Mallards usually only have a single clutch but feral ducks (feral animals are those living in the wild but descended from domestic animals) can have a second brood later in the season.



Photo by Tara Allison, Welcome Wildlife

Most ducks typically lay 10-12 eggs and incubation is delayed until the laying process is complete (usually about one egg per day until the clutch is complete). Incubation lasts 26-29 days and babies hatch precocial (eyes open, covered in down, able to walk and follow mom). Typically, all viable eggs will hatch within 12-24 hours. 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. Ducklings often take to water shortly after hatching but are not waterproof and can become waterlogged easily; they must be able to get out of the water. Babies will fledge and leave with their mother around 7-8 weeks.

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

## Ducks in Swimming Pools



Photo by JoLynn Taylor, WildCare

If ducks are getting into your swimming pool, haul-outs must be available for babies to get out of the water without expending too much energy. Frog logs 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 if necessary. Place several around the perimeter of your pool since babies often 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 lands in chlorinated pool water, bacteria and pathogens are killed, but feces 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, place 3 foot stakes at the corners of the pool and attach mylar strips creating an "X" across the pool or in a grid pattern if the pool is large. 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.



Photo by Marianne V. Hale



Photo by Kate Lynch, WildCare