



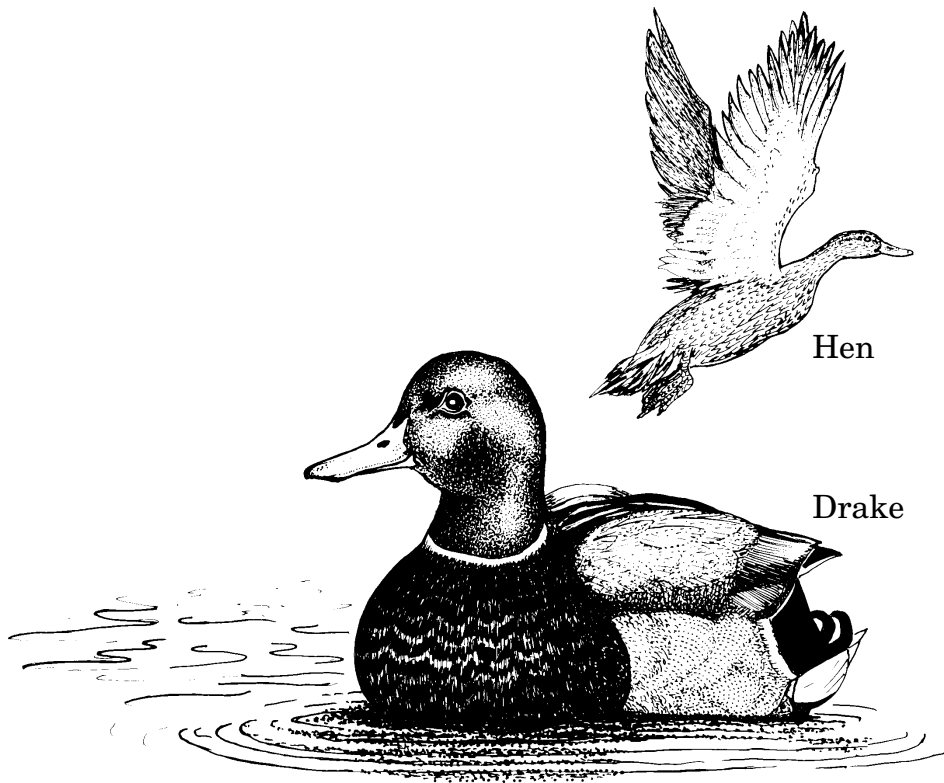
Mallard Duck

Anas platyrhynchos

The mallard is the most abundant and commonly recognized species of all waterfowl in North America. Usually seen flying in a V-shaped formation or casually searching for food in a small pond or marsh, the mallard is a duck that has inspired or impressed many people. For example, the duck hunter has made the mallard the most important game species of all waterfowl. An American clothing manufacturer uses a mallard head for its logo, as does Ducks Unlimited, a conservation organization dedicated to restoring waterfowl and wetlands.

History and Status

The population status of the mallard is considered by many to be the indicator of the health of all waterfowl. This is due to their numbers and the fact that they breed under conditions that rarer species could not tolerate. Twenty years ago, the mallard's population status was thought to be secure. Today, however, the populations of mallards, as well as other waterfowl, are drastically down from their numbers in the mid-1970s. The most important factor in this decline is the loss of their chief nesting habitat in the prairie pothole region. The region, located in the north-central United States and southern Canadian provinces, produces more waterfowl than any other region in North America. Here in North Carolina, wetlands have been destroyed to make way for golf courses and shopping malls. Only by halting habitat declines will North America's waterfowl pop-



Hen

Drake

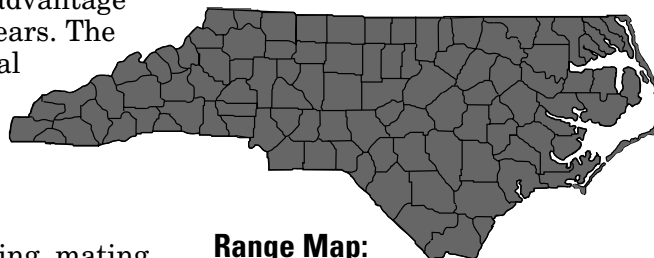
ulations, including mallards, rebound. This habitat loss occurred because of a long drought in the 1980s and the widespread draining of prairie potholes to make way for more farming land.

Description

The mallard is a large, dabbling duck with broad wings. The male's (or drake's), distinctive green head and brown chest are separated by a white neck-ring, contrasted by gray sides, a brown back, and a black rump. The female (or hen) is marked in a mottled pattern of light and dark brown streaks, accented by a dark brown streak through the eye. Both the male and female mallards sport a violet-blue spectrum on each wing. Mallards possess excellent eyesight and hearing, giving the duck an advantage when an intruder nears. The mallard is more vocal than all other game ducks and uses a variety of quacks to indicate its actions and moods (such as feeding, mating or warning calls).

Habitat and Habits

The mallard duck is the most adaptable of all ducks and is well dispersed throughout North America. While most breed on the northern prairies, some nest elsewhere, including North Carolina. Although the mallard prefers shallow wetlands for feeding and resting, it builds its nest on dry ground. During the winter months, an abundant supply of grains and other foods, and a safe roosting site are adequate needs for survival. In many agricultural areas of Canada, grain crops such as wheat have been heavily damaged because of large flocks that invade the fields after cutting and prior to combining. In the Southern states, flocks of mallards prefer rice fields. Mallards



Range Map:

Found statewide.

**WILD
Facts**

also rely on natural foods such as wild rice, pond weed, smartweed, bulrushes, and a number of other emergent and submergent plants.

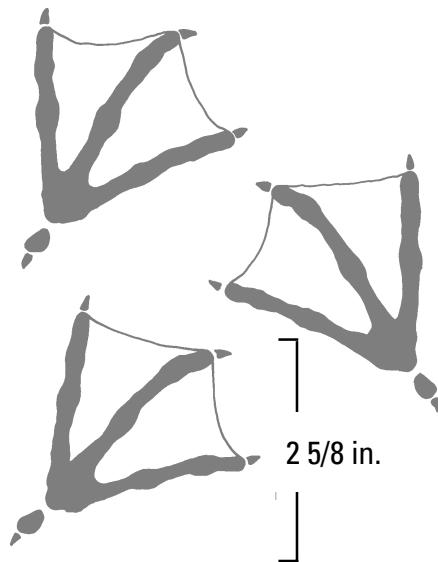
The majority of the mallard population is migratory. This means they leave their nesting sites in the North and fly south at the beginning of fall. The mallards may travel as far south as northern Mexico; however, many spend their winters in a farm pond or swamp in the mid-United States. The distance the duck flies south from its nesting grounds often depends on the harshness of the winter. Nonetheless, many ducks have become permanent residents of the Southern states, including North Carolina, where they reside near farm ponds, rivers or lakes that can support the duck's needs.

Range and Distribution

The mallard is found in every state during specific times of the year and is also found over the entire state of North Carolina. The home range for paired mallards is large, often exceeding over 700 acres. Factors that influence the mallard's range or alter its pattern include human interference, habitat and food abundance, and/or lack of a mate. In flight, mallards have been recorded attaining speeds of 70 mph; however, they typically cruise at air speeds of 30 mph.

People Interactions

Human encounters with mallards are common, but are usually very brief. Mallards, like many forms of wildlife, are shy and would rather be left undisturbed. The mallard can be legally hunted in Canada, the United States and Mexico.



References

- Bellrose, Frank C. *Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America* (Stackpole Books, 1980).
- Bent, Arthur Cleveland. *Life Histories of North American Wild Fowl* (Dover Publications, 1987).
- Johnsgard, Paul A. *A Guide to North American Waterfowl* (Indiana University Press, 1979).

Credits

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Produced January 1992 by the Division of Conservation Education, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

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MALLARD DUCK

Classification

Class: Bird
Order: Anseriformes

Average Size

Length: 19.8-27.5 in.
Wing: 10.4-11.4 in.
Weight: females 2.5 lbs.
Males: 2.75 lbs.

Food

Acorns, pond weeds, grains, bulrushes, wild rice and grain crops.

Breeding

Birds become sexually mature between 5 and 9 months. Mating occurs during the spring. Average clutch size has about 8 or 9 eggs, with one egg laid per day.

Young

Normally, a hen will have only one clutch; however, a second clutch is possible with an early first clutch. The incubation period is 28 days. After incubation, the hen tends her brood for 8 weeks; by then the brood can attain flight.