



Mallards--Puddling around in our fields and ditches!

The following contribution comes from our local amateur ornithologist, Jim Hiatt. Rather than pick his brain, I asked him to just compose the article himself--complete with great pictures!

The Mallard--Anas platyrhynchos, is likely the most common and well known among ducks in America, and is found pretty much throughout

North America. Even "Daffy Duck" was of this species---although real mallards don't go bouncing around yelling out "Woo-hoo, Woo-hoo, Woo-hoo!!!" Another common cartoon trademark saying of his was, "YOU'RE Despicable!" ...but enough of THAT! "That's all folks..."

They are also known among duck hunters as "Greenheads," though only the male has this feature, along with the white ring about the neck just below the green head and neck.

This is a lovely species, and is one of our larger ducks; the wingspan is some 3 feet. These and Pintails are the most prized among duck hunters--the meat is a little strong, due to the high oil content common for ducks, but making the meat very juicy. They have a greater longevity than is the case for most ducks [Birds of North America, page 62] living for some 25-30 years.

Most Mallards migrate away during the late spring, returning around August, but a fair number remain locally and live in the rice fields; or if in more open country, they live in areas with ditch-irrigation. These pix were taken in an irrigation ditch at just about Rds. 87 and 16. These, who remain locally, share this tendency with Canada Geese—I'm beginning to give some pet names!

These are very omnivorous, and eat pretty much everything that is not a plant while they are in the water; they are commonly found feeding in grain fields, where they will eat insects as well fallen grain. Interestingly, the FEMALE is the one with the characteristic "QUACK-QUACK-QUACK-QUACK" given rapid-fire and usually are given in a series of 4-6 at a time. The male makes a rather "wimpy" sounding "raab--raab--raab--raab", and is usually uttered when an intruder or predator has ventured a bit too close.

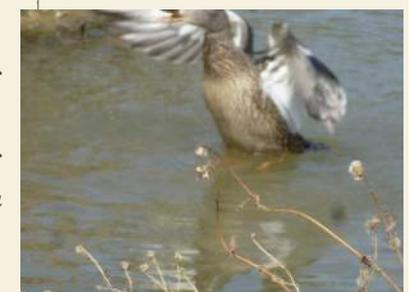
The during mating season in early spring, they pair off--after 3-6 males do "Blue Angels" versions of fancy acrobatics in the air, showing off for a single female also in the air. After a fair amount of this, she selects one and



Mallard-pair photo below courtesy of Wikipedia under File: *Anas platyrhynchos male female quadrat.jpg* All other pictures taken locally by Jim Hiatt



QUACKQUACKQUACK!!!!





they pair off from there. Once mated, she hides a nest site and has anywhere from 6-10 eggs. If you find the nest, she will rise from it, won't fly very far off, but will constantly circle; tipping her hand (or wing!) that you've stumbled across her nest, she is trying to draw you away. Being ground nesters, which are very vulnerable to raccoons after the eggs, while the mother herself is a prime target for coyotes or foxes, which see meat like hers with their infrared night vision. The young are born "precocial", meaning that they're up and about right after hatching and follow Mom to a water source to learn to feed and swim. If you come upon Mom with 6-10 little ones, she'll put on the "broken wing" act in which she feigns a broken wing, and paddles and splashes in circles to draw you away from the little ones. The pix I took involved this very thing in progress. The green head, again, makes this species one of the loveliest, and also has a cobalt-blue rectangular area on the outside edges of the wings.

Old-timers--like Beatrix Potter!--also called them a "puddle" ducks. Like Ms. Potter's *Jemima Puddle Duck*, they prefer ponds, canals and tule areas, as opposed to the Pintail, which is very much an open-water species. Happily, this mean highly-irrigated areas like ours attract them—lucky us!

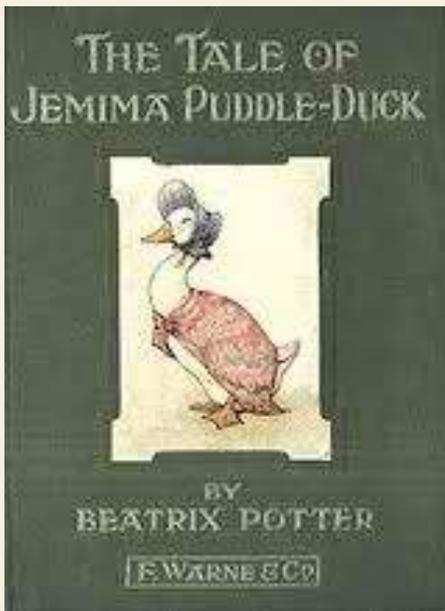
Jim



Mallard photos courtesy of Jim Hiatt.



<http://en.wikipedia.org>



Helen Beatrix Potter was an English author, illustrator, natural scientist and conservationist best known for her imaginative children's books featuring animals such as those in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, which celebrated the British landscape and country life...
[Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org)

Born: July 28, 1866,
 Kensington

Died: December 22,
 1943, [Near Sawrey](#)

Spouse: [William Heelis](#)