

MALLARD DUCK (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

General Characteristics:

Mallard males and females look different. The males have a green head, white band around the neck, yellow bill, reddish-brown chest, gray body, and blue wing mark. The females are tan and brown with a blue mark on the wings. They weigh between two and three pounds each and are 15 to 16 inches in length. Mallard duck wingspans vary between 32 and 37 inches.

Food Habits:

Mallards are dabbling ducks that eat insects, aquatic invertebrates, earthworms, acorns, and a variety of seeds from aquatic plants. They also “tip-up” in shallow water to feed on submerged plants.

Distribution and Abundance:

Mallard ducks are found across Indiana along any freshwater source. They can usually be seen in small streams, rivers, wetlands, lakes, and ponds. They will even use urban retention ponds and sometimes swimming pools. Mallards are the most commonly harvested duck in Indiana.

Reproduction:

Mallard ducks find a new mate each fall. They usually nest anytime from April through July having 6 to 14 eggs. Mallards build a ground nest made of plant material and feathers. In urban areas, mallards have been known to build nests on rooftops, near swimming pools, in window wells, and in flowerpots. The hen completes the incubation in 23 to 29 days. The ducklings are led to water within 24 hours of hatching. The hen stays with the young until they become independent, which is around 70 days. Predators include the American crow, fox, coyote, raccoon, skunk, mink, and snapping turtle.

Prevention and Control:

Sometimes large flocks lead to problems, such as feces-contaminated lawns, patios, decks, and swimming pools. When it comes to dealing with mallards, preventing them from using an area is much easier than discouraging them from using a site once they are established.

Habitat Modification

Do not feed ducks. Artificial feeding attracts and holds more birds than would naturally be found at a site. Use trays to catch bird seed that falls from feeders so that it does not hit the ground. Clean up any seed on the ground right away.

Shut off pond aerators and fountains to allow them to freeze in the winter.

Exclusion

A 2 to 3 feet high fence around an area where ducks are not wanted can help to deter them. Ducks can be kept away from a swimming pool by covering the pool, when not in use, with a cover. Another method is to use rafts, balls, and other floatable objects to cover the surface of the pool. The wind movement on these items may scare the ducks.

Repellents

There are currently no registered repellents for use in deterring ducks.

Frightening Devices

The following techniques may be used to harass mallards, where safe and legal to do so. However, some may not be legal in all areas. Check local ordinances and laws before using techniques indicated with an asterisk (*).

- **Noisemaking Devices**
 - Air horns or whistles*
 - Blank pistols *
 - Bangers; screamers; whistlers- specialized projectiles fired from a 15 mm launcher; cracker shells – fired from a 12 gauge shotgun; and firecrackers *
 - Propane cannons *
- **Visual Devices**
 - Motion sensor lights
 - Flags or eye spot balloons
 - Predator decoys
 - Mylar tape
 - Scarecrows
 - Dogs – used to chase or run ducks off
 - Remote controlled boats, cars or planes
 - Hand held lasers *
- **High Pressure Water Spray Devices**

As contrary as it may sound; ducks do not like being sprayed with water under high pressure.

 - Garden hose or sprinkler
 - Motion activated sprayer

Trapping

Mallard ducks are protected by state and federal law, which makes it illegal to capture or kill them without a permit. There are hunting seasons on the birds, but the hunter must have all necessary licenses. Hunting is often not allowed in urban areas for safety reasons. Egg and nest destruction permits may be obtained from your DNR district wildlife biologist. Trap and relocation permits are available on a limited basis from your DNR district wildlife biologist. Usually these permits are only granted in a case where the birds will be released on the same property. If the birds become a serious problem, a depredation permit may be obtained through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Permit Office (www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/mbpermits.html).

Disease Threat

Mallard ducks have been documented to carry the West Nile Virus.