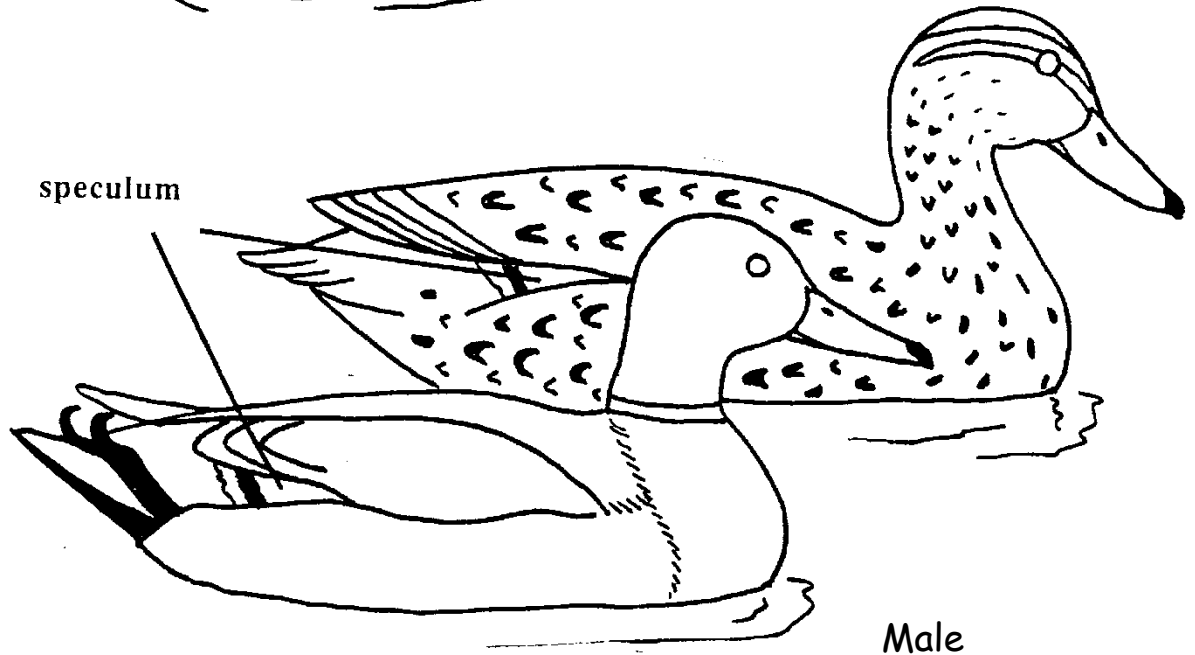


Mallard

Feeding
position



Female



Male

**Coloring instructions for both the male
and the female:**

Blue - the speculum

Black - the eyes

Orange - the legs and feet

White - the tips of the tail

For the female only:

Orange - the bill

Dark brown - the crown and eye line

Brown - the rest of her body

**Coloring instructions for the
male:**

Yellow - the bill

White - the neck stripe, sides, and
belly

Brown - the breast

Dark brown - the wing, back, and
upper tail

Mallard

Length: 16" **Wingspan:** 36"

Habitat: Resident in ponds, edges of rivers, and freshwater marshes

Field Marks: Male has an iridescent green head and yellow bill. Female is brown overall with an orange bill.

In our region, ducks are most abundant in winter. Many species of waterfowl come here to spend the winter. Many flock along the Sacramento River. The most familiar are the green-headed Mallards. You will usually see them near the edge of the river or in shallow ponds.

Watch how they feed, and you will understand why they hang out where the water is shallow. Mallards **dabble** - they paddle with their head underwater and their tail up while they graze on water plants and the small animals that live on those plants.

Ducks spend a lot of time **preening**. They work their bill through their feathers, brushing, combing, straightening, sometimes almost chewing. Preening is especially important for ducks because their feathers form a waterproof layer between the cold river water and the down feathers beneath the outer feathers. The fluffy down feathers, if

they are dry, are excellent insulation and will keep the duck warm. But if the down feathers get wet, they are useless as insulation.

Ducks waterproof their feathers by spreading oil over them. The oil is produced by a special gland near the base of the tail. Watch a duck "chew" with its bill down near the base of its tail and then bring the bill back over some area of its body, then back to the base of the tail for still more oil.

Most birds don't pair off for mating and nesting until just before nesting time. Many ducks and geese, however, do form pair bonds during the winter. One reason for this is that many of them nest in the Arctic where summers are very short. The ducks can't arrive there until the ice has melted enough to have open water on the ponds. By then, nesting must start immediately if the babies are to have enough time to grow the strength needed to migrate southward. Waterfowl don't have time for courtship when they arrive. So, they form their pairs before they migrate north.

Mallard Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- Identify a male Mallard. It has a green head, brown breast, and white sides.
- Identify a female Mallard. It is speckled brown all over.
- Hear the "quack" call of a female Mallard.
- Hear the call of a male Mallard. He gives a quieter, rasping, one- or two-noted call.
- See Mallards feeding by dabbling.
- See a preening Mallard get oil from the base of its tail.
- Watch Mallards leap out of the water and fly away.
- See the iridescent blue speculum on the back of the wing while flying.
- See courtship and pair formation occurring in winter. Watch for Mallards doing a variety of head and tail shakes, pumping heads up and down, and swimming with their necks outstretched low over the water. These displays attract a mate. As the winter progresses, you will see a female staying close to a male and often see the male driving off other males.