

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*



Folk Name: Greenhead, English Duck

Status: Resident

Abundance: Common

Habitat: Lakes, ponds, creeks, turf grass

“Large droves of mallard ducks are to be seen on the Catawba river these days.” —*Carolina Mountaineer*, November 21, 1883

The Mallard is our familiar year-round resident duck of rivers, creeks, lakes, and ponds. But like the Canada Goose, this was not always the case. In the early years, the Mallard was only a migrant and winter resident in the Central Carolina region. It was not found here during the breeding season. Christmas Bird Count data indicate Mallards were reported on almost every winter count conducted here since 1936, but this duck was not found here during the summer. In fact, prior to 1965, there were only three records of Mallards documented nesting in North Carolina away from the coast—even coastal breeding records were sparse—and only three nests had ever been reported in South Carolina.

In Mecklenburg County in 1965, Elizabeth Clarkson reported: “A few nesting, probably with domestic stock,” and Mallard was first documented on the Charlotte Spring Bird Count two years later in May 1967. In the late 1960s, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service worked to encourage large landowners throughout the Southeast to raise and release Mallards, resulting in the continued expansion of a semi-wild or “feral” stock in both Carolinas. By 1980, the Mallard Duck was nesting in all regions of the Carolinas. Today, local nesting can begin as early as the end of February. Precocial ducklings can be seen in the water following hens by the second week of March.

In 1978, Anne Yenne published an essay titled “A



Mallard Summer” about her excitement watching a pair of feral Mallard’s nesting activities in Charlotte:

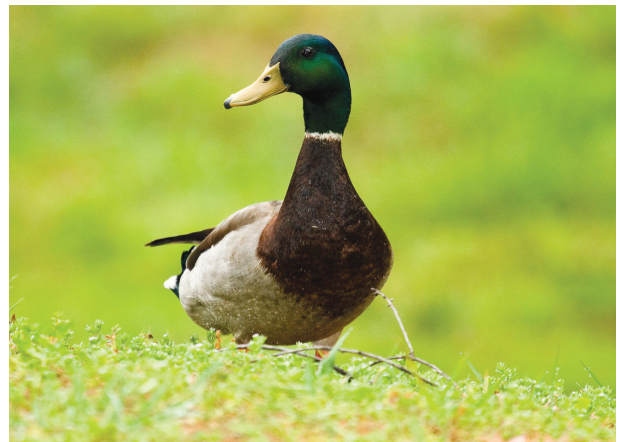
When things became interesting, I started jotting down diary notes on their activities. On April 17–18, they hatched out a dozen ducklings. The entire block was ecstatic, but our joy was short lived, as the babies disappeared within 24 hours. We examined our obvious contribution to this tragedy, wondering if the ducks would have taken a safer, more remote place to nest if we had not habituated them to our feeders. We felt guilty for having tampered with their wild instincts. We wondered if they would abandon us for a better place if we discontinued the food.

Two months later she recorded a second attempt:

Hurrah! Mrs. Duck leads four adorable ducklings into our feeding area. They look to be 3 or 4 days old. We call to her. I go for the feed and Bob runs for the camera. She comes immediately, talking to her babies and encouraging them to eat, which they do, rolling and scrambling for food. Ditto the next day.



A female Mallard with young. (Phil Fowler)



Male Mallard. (Jarrett Wyatt)

Unfortunately, the end result was the same on June 15th: “no sign of young. They take flight. We wonder if they feel grief as we do.”

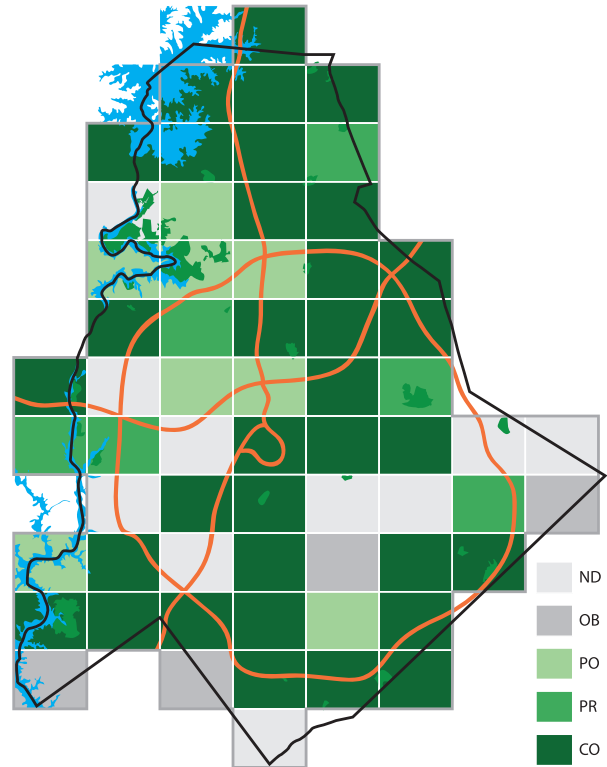
The term “duck lover” can be a bit of a double entendre as the Mallard has long been a favored target of Carolina sportsmen as well as of bird watchers. The esteemed tradition of duck hunting has been passed down here from generation to generation, and Mallard hunting continues locally today. One Charlotte hunter posted this report on a local website in January 2000:

Duck hunt in a beaver swamp in Mecklenburg County, NC. Hunted a small open water patch near a beaver dam that was littered with duck feathers. Set up at daylight and the first visitors were 6 teal. We let them go because the mallards, in groups of 2–6 came right behind the teal. The shooting was fast and furious. No shot was over 25 yards and most of the birds were taken coming up off the water. Finished up with a pair of Black Ducks. We were limited out in 20 minutes!

And again, 3 days later on 20 January, he posted:

Duck hunt in same beaver swamp as above, however, this time we hunted another area of the swamp. Teal came at first light then the mallards, bunches of 2–20. Limited out in 30 minutes and again had a pair of blacks show up. I harvested the larger of the two (which as I guessed turned out to be a drake) and let the smaller black (presumed to be a hen) go.

South Carolina duck harvest data summarized from the last 12 years ranks the Mallard as the second most harvested duck in the Broad River region, just behind Ring-necked Duck.



Mecklenburg County Breeding Bird Atlas:
Widespread (PR/6, CO/34)