

## American Black Duck *Anas rubripes*



**Folk Name:** Black English Duck

**Status:** Winter Resident

**Abundance:** Uncommon

**Habitat:** Lakes, ponds, creeks

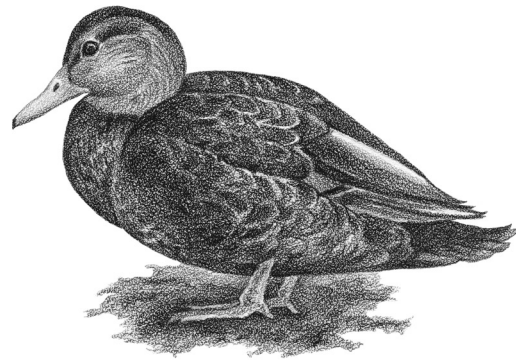
The Black Duck is the same size as the Mallard. The two are closely related, and at times, they can be hard to distinguish, especially the females. However, both the male and female are darker than the Mallard—appearing black in the male, to blackish-brown in the female. The speculum of the Black Duck is purple, while the speculum of the Mallard is blue bordered by white. In reality, a close-up inspection of the feathers of the “black” duck finds they are not black at all, but a deep mottled brown.

“Similar in size to the mallard, and resembling somewhat closely the female of that species, the black duck is another favorite of the fowler. They inhabit the coast region in great numbers, usually being found either singly or in small flocks. They feed much at night, and in their quest for food shovel the mud so vigorously that the bottom, when exposed by daylight, presents the appearance of having been visited by a drove of rooting hogs.” —T.G. Pearson

The Black Duck and Mallard are so closely related that the two species occasionally hybridize. The number of hybrids has been increasing over the past century, and hybrids have been reported here in the Central Carolinas. A featured highlight of North Carolina’s exhibit in the State’s Exhibit Palace at the historic 1907 Jamestown Exposition, was a display of wild ducks including one hybrid:

There is a case full of wild ducks—twenty-three varieties; two of each as a rule—and six or eight wild geese. They were collected by Mr. Brimley, many specimens having been prepared especially for this exhibit. With the ducks you will be shown a hybrid duck—a cross between a mallard and black duck. This was shot some time ago in North Carolina, and is one of the few specimens of hybrid ducks in existence.

In this region, Black Ducks can be found on any size lake or pond, but like Mallards, they will also use narrow stream channels that other puddle ducks avoid. Jim Layton, Rhett Chamberlain, and Binford Moon provided this report: “A flock of thirteen was flushed from McAlpine Creek at a point about five miles south of the NC–SC state line on February 16, 1947. The creek



here is less than thirty feet wide and heavily wooded on both sides.” That same year, a research study conducted by biologists at UNC Chapel Hill ranked the Black Duck as the most abundant species of waterfowl wintering in the Piedmont of North Carolina with Mallard second. Today, the Black Duck is much less common, and feral populations of Mallards are much more common. The 2015 NC Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey ranked the Black Duck population at second lowest, just above Canvasback, with a –41% change from the 64-year average. A decade of recent Greater Mecklenburg waterfowl census data ranks the Black Duck as only the twelfth most common species found here today.

One flock of more than 2,000 Black Ducks (seen in 2001) has been reported at Pee Dee NWR since the turn of the twenty-first century, but most flocks seen in the region today average fewer than 75 birds. Early



American Black Duck. (John Scavetto)

arrivals have been reported in the first week of September (2002), and departures have been reported as late as 14 May in 2003. One interesting report of possible nesting was noted in March 2016 at Pee Dee. Peter Quadarella flushed a female American Black Duck off a nest of 14

eggs and remarked: "I did not see any other ducks on the pond except a couple Mallards so I wonder if there is any hybridizing going on." The Black Duck does nest in declining numbers in coastal North Carolina, but it is not known to nest in the Piedmont.