

The Life Cycle of a Mallard Duck

Mallard ducks are the most common species of duck found in the United Kingdom. Let's take a look at the life cycle of this amazing duck.

Finding a Mate

Mallard ducks look for a mate in late winter. Male ducks are called drakes. They bob their heads up and down, fluff up their feathers and whistle to attract a female mate.



Nesting

The female duck starts to build her nest in March. Ducks make their nests from leaves and grass. They also line them with their own down (feathers). They build their nests near water.

The female duck lays about 12 eggs in total. This is called a clutch. She lays one egg each day.



The female duck sits on her nest to keep the eggs warm. When she needs to leave the nest, she covers her eggs with down to protect them from other animals, such as foxes and crows.

Hatching

It takes about one month for a duckling to grow inside its egg. When it is ready to hatch, the duckling starts to move its head and feet inside the egg.

The duckling has a sharp point on the end of its beak which it uses to crack the shell open with. This is called an egg tooth.



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The First Days

The mummy duck keeps the hatchlings warm in the nest. When they are ready, the mummy duck leads the ducklings to the water. They never return to the nest.

Young ducks do not have flying feathers to start with, so the mummy duck needs to watch them carefully.

Growing Up

Ducklings can feed themselves. They eat leaves, insects, seeds and roots. Mallard ducks are dabbling ducks, this means they can dip their head underwater to find food.



Ducklings are able to fledge (fly) and leave their mummy when they are about 50 days old.

Mallard ducks can have their own young when they are one year old. This means that the life cycle starts all over again!

Questions

1. What is the most common species of duck found in the United Kingdom?
Tick one.

mallard

tufted

ruddy

2. What is a male duck called?

3. Complete this sentence.

The female duck lays about 12 eggs in total. This is called a _____.

4. Write the numbers 1 to 5 in the order of a mallard duck's life cycle.

The duckling hatches out of the egg.	
The mummy duck builds a nest.	
The duckling is led to water.	
The mummy duck lays her eggs.	
The duckling grows and has its own young.	

5. What does the word **fledge** mean?

6. What do you think it means when the text says 'the life cycle starts all over again'?
