

mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Anseriformes

Family: Anatidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The mallard is 20 to 28 inches long. The male has shiny green head feathers, a white ring around his neck, gray body feathers with brown chest feathers and a violet-blue wing patch. The female has brown-and-cream speckled body feathers. Both the male and the female have white tail feathers, orange feet and a yellow bill.

BEHAVIORS

The mallard is a year-round resident in the northern two-thirds of Illinois. Its winter range includes the southern one-third of the state and continues south to Mexico. The mallard lives in or around marshes, ditches, swamps, grain fields, ponds, rivers and lakes. It is commonly seen in urban areas. The mallard feeds on aquatic plants, corn, grasses, seeds, small aquatic animals and insects. The call is "yeeb kwek." Females produce the distinctive quacking sound. Mallards form mating pairs in the fall but do not mate until spring. Spring migrants begin arriving in Illinois in February. Nesting occurs from April through July. Seven to 16 blue-green eggs per clutch are laid in a nest on the ground. The nest is lined with grasses, leaves and feathers. Mallards occasionally nest in trees. The female incubates the eggs and cares for the young. One brood per year is raised. Most mallards nest in southern Canada, but nesting does occur in Illinois. Mallards are unable to fly for about a one-month period in late summer when they are molting their flight feathers. Fall migration begins in September. In the winter the birds fly away from water to feed in the early morning, return to the water to rest during the middle of the day and fly out again in the evening to feed, returning to the water for the night.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; Lake Michigan; marshes; rivers and streams; swamps; temporary water supplies

Woodland Habitats

None

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge

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