

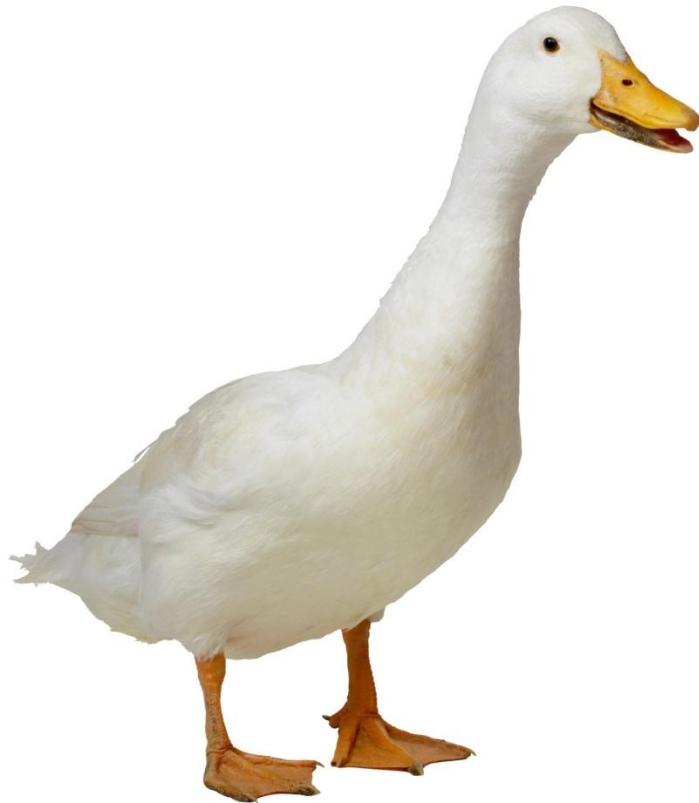


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DUCK FACT SHEET



KINGDOM:
Animalia

PHYLUM:
Chordata

CLASS:
Aves

ORDER:
Anseriformes

FAMILY:
Anatidae

SUBFAMILIES:
Dendrocygninae, Oxyurinae, Anatinae, Merginae

Duck is the common name for a number of species in the Anatidae family of birds. Ducks are divided between several subfamilies. Ducks are mostly aquatic birds, mostly smaller than their relatives the swans and geese, and may be found in both fresh water and sea water. Swimming gracefully across a pond or waddling comically across the land, ducks are a common feature of the landscape of most of America.

Ducks are very social animals. Males (drakes) and females sometimes live in pairs or together with their ducklings. They communicate both vocally and with body language. At other times ducks spend much of their time—during both day and night—in larger groups. The domestic duck has a normal life span of ten years.

Most ducks have a wide flat beak adapted for dredging. They exploit a variety of food sources such as grasses, grains and aquatic plants, fish, and insects. Some (the diving ducks) forage deep underwater; the others (the dabbling ducks) feed from the surface of water or on land. To be able to submerge easier, the diving ducks are heavier for size than dabbling ducks, and therefore have more difficulty taking off to fly. A few specialized species (the goosander and the mergansers) are adapted to catch large fish. In a wildlife pond, the bottom over most of the area should be too deep for dabbling wild ducks to reach the bottom, to protect bottom living life from being constantly disturbed and eaten by ducks dredging.

The sound made by some female ducks is called a "quack"; a common (and false) urban legend is that quacks do not produce an echo. The males of northern species often have showy plumage, but this is molted in summer to give a more female like appearance, the "eclipse" plumage. Many species of ducks are temporarily flightless while molting; they seek out protected habitat with good food supplies during this period. This molt typically precedes migration. Some duck species, mainly those breeding in the temperate and arctic Northern Hemisphere, are migratory, but others are not. Some, particularly in Australia where rainfall is patchy and erratic, are nomadic, seeking out the temporary lakes and pools that form after localized heavy rain.

In many areas, wild ducks of various species (including ducks farmed and released into the wild) are hunted for food or sport, by shooting, or formerly by decoys. Ducks and geese are wild animals, but they have domesticated counterparts who are raised for their eggs and meat, down and feathers. They're less commonly known as farm animals, yet they can certainly fall within this category.



URBAN DUCKS:

Each year, people are amazed to see ducks and ducklings in the most unlikely places, such as walking single-file through city streets or nesting under bank teller windows! Luckily, ducklings are precocious and mature quickly. Ducks commonly nest in poor spots. These nests may fall prey to cats, dogs, or human malice. However, moving the eggs and nest is not only illegal according to federal law, but also the parents usually won't follow it. It's usually best to leave the nest alone. If ducklings are beginning to scatter, or you're not sure how long they've been alone, put a plastic laundry basket over them, upside down, to contain them while waiting for the mother to return. She will see them through the lattice sides of the basket and make contact. If she returns, slowly approach and overturn the basket so she can collect her young.

If a duckling was left behind for a while and his origin is unknown, i.e. fished out of storm drain or spillway, you can contain the duckling with an upside-down laundry basket (as described above) and monitor to see if the mother returns. If she doesn't come back after 4-8 hours, call your local fish and game agency to locate a wildlife rehabilitator. These are tough judgment calls. If you need to hold the duckling(s) in captivity for a few hours, DO NOT give them water to swim in because ducklings are not waterproof until they're older. They may become chilled and die. Just give them a shallow pan of water (to drink) and some crushed, non-sugary cereal like Cheerios.

You can shepherd ducks out of an area by creating a "moving wall". Have people hold sheets between them and move behind the ducks, forcing them to walk in the desired direction. However, consider waiting to move them out because the young may be vulnerable.

FOIE GRAS:

The methods used to turn duck and goose livers into the "delicacy" known as *pâté de foie gras* are anything but delicate. Foie gras is a French term meaning "fatty liver" and it is produced by force-feeding birds. The ducks and geese force-fed for foie gras are compelled to consume much more high-energy food—mostly corn—than they would eat voluntarily. This damages their liver and often kills them. The Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare for the European Union found many examples of abuse as a result of force-feeding, including:

- Birds are routinely confined to small cages or crowded pens.
- Birds are force-fed tremendous amounts of feed via a 12 to 16-inch plastic or metal tube, which is shoved down their throats and attached to a pressurized pump.
- The force-feeding may be performed twice daily for up to two weeks for ducks and three to four times daily, for up to 28 days for geese.
- Force-feeding causes the liver to increase in size about 6-10 times compared to the normal size for a bird.
- Increased liver size forces the abdomen to expand, which makes moving difficult and painful. An enlarged abdomen increases the risk of damage to the stretched tissue of the lower part of the esophagus.
- Force-feeding results in accumulated scar tissue in the esophagus.
- The liver can be easily damaged by even minor trauma.

In 1992, the HSUS sent a veterinarian to investigate a New York State foie gras producer, which resulted in a police raid and cruelty charges against the farm. Necropsies taken of the dead birds revealed many painful conditions: The force-fed birds had chronic heart disorders; ruptured liver cell membranes; cirrhosis; traumatic esophagitis; and lesions in their gizzards and intestines. Dead birds were found with food filling their esophagi and spilling out of their nostrils.

Ducks and geese are social animals who suffer when confined in individual cages. The confinement also can lead to lesions of the sternum and bone fractures, as well as foot injuries from the cage floors. Ducks and geese also suffer when they're not allowed enough water to swim and preen, which they do naturally in the wild.

Originally, all foie gras came from France, but now the United States has gotten into this cruel niche industry. Next time you go into a store or restaurant that sells foie gras, please let them know that a product that comes from force-feeding ducks and geese is more than you can stomach.