

Pekin Duck

Class: Aves

Order: Anseriformes

Family: Anatidae

Taxonomic Name: *Anas platyrhynchos*

Range: Domesticated form of the mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*).

Habitat: Captivity; the wild mallard is found in wetland areas with slow-moving water across the northern hemisphere.

Physical Characteristics: Weigh 7-9 lb (3-4 kg) with males heavier than females. These large birds have white feathers with orange legs, feet and bill. Because they are so heavy-bodied they cannot fly. Ducklings are yellow.

Longevity: 10-15 years

Social Structure: In captivity can be bred at any time of the year. Wild mallards breed from March to May. Wild mallards will also breed with almost any other species of the genus *Anas*, including domestic breeds like the Pekin and Rouen.



Active Time: Diurnal

Diet: Wild - Vegetation, insects, grains, fruits, seeds.
Zoo - Commercial duck feed and trained with crickets!

Behavior: A common behavior seen in all waterfowl, including ducks, is called "preening". Preening is the act of combing the feathers with the bill to keep the outer feathers waterproof. This combing also removes parasites and "re-locks" the barbs and smaller hooks of each feather together to form a protective layer that repels water. A third function of preening is to spread an oil over the feathers which is obtained from the preen gland on the rump. The duck rubs its head over the gland to pick up the oil. It then rubs its head over the feathers to spread the oil evenly. The oil keeps the feathers bright and soft and allows water to run off in droplets - as in the phrase 'water off a duck's back'. Wild mallards are classified as "dabbling ducks" because they filter-feed plants and invertebrate prey from the surface of the water through their bill. They do not dive but can frequently be seen with their heads and neck underwater reaching for slightly deeper food.

Reproduction: It takes 28 days for 8-12 eggs to hatch from a nest made in a depression on the ground. The eggs are white and slightly larger than a chicken egg. Pekins can be very fast growing if fed accordingly. They can reach approximately 90% of their adult weight at 7 weeks of age. Wild mallard mothers lead their ducklings to a water source soon after hatching and never return to the nest.

Interesting Facts:

- Pekin ducks were first introduced into the United States from China in 1873.
- All modern domestic ducks (apart from the muscovy) are descended from the wild mallard which was first domesticated in China or southeast Asia over 2,000 years ago.
- The order *Anseriformes* includes numerous species of ducks, geese, and swans which are known as waterfowl.
- "Broodiness", the desire to sit and incubate eggs, has been bred out of most domestic ducks to increase egg production. To get fertilized eggs to hatch they need to be artificially incubated.
- The Walt Disney character Donald Duck is a Pekin duck!

- It's easy to see the similarity of mallard and Rouen ducks, but how did they get the all white Pekin duck breed from a mallard? The Chinese eat a lot of duck and they like the skin to look clean. That's why they had the desire to domesticate and breed an all white duck that lacks any black pigmentation on the skin from black feathers. Feather color is determined by genetics and they bred for white dominant genes.

Relationship With People: Pekins are the most popular commercially raised duck in the United States. Ducks have been domesticated for thousands of years as a source of meat, eggs and down feathers. In tropical areas some people combine duck raising on ponds with fish farming. Ponds are stocked with both fish, like tilapia, and ducks. Duck waste provides food for the animals and plants that the fish eat. In Indonesia, some people keep herds of ducks instead of sheep! During the day, a flock of 90 to 130 ducks is "herded" to a harvested rice field and allowed to feed on any leftover grain. At night, the flock is herded back to a pen, where eggs are laid early the next morning. The eggs are collected and sold, or used for food by the family that keeps the herd. In the United States people frequently purchase cute, fuzzy ducklings for a child's Easter present. When the ducklings outgrow their "cuteness" and turn into messy adults, they might find themselves abandoned at a local pond. These "drop-offs" typically survive less than three years even though many people like the interaction they get by feeding waterfowl and think they are providing for them. They mean well when they bring bags of bread and crackers to feed ducks at a pond but they are killing the birds with their kindness. Bread, crackers and popcorn are not good foods for any waterfowl. Bread swells up in a bird's stomach, making it feel "full" but providing no nutritional value. Feeling full they rest instead of searching for more nutritious food. They become habitual beggars surviving on handouts and forgetting to eat their natural food. They are usually still able to reproduce though and then the habitat becomes overcrowded with little natural food left for them to eat. Wild ducks and geese will migrate elsewhere for food but domesticated birds can't fly and will ultimately starve to death or die from complications of malnutrition.