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common name	<b>Mallard</b>
scientific name	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
phylum	Chordata
class	Aves
order	Anseriformes
family	Anatidae
habitat	wetlands of all types
size	50-63 cm long

**description** Mallards are medium sized ducks. The male and female have different color patterns. The male has a shiny green head, a narrow white band around the neck, a brown chest, and gray sides. He also has a pair of curly feathers on his tail. The female is much plainer with spotted brown feathers. Both the male and female have a small blue patch on the wings.

There is a good reason for the female Mallard’s dull appearance—she will sit on the nest and guard the eggs. Her coloring blends with the surrounding reeds and grass, providing camouflage. Predators are less likely to see her and the nest that she sits on. If the predators cannot see the nest, they cannot attack it.

**fun facts** Mallards are the most common ducks in the Central Valley, particularly in winter. Many live here year-round and others migrate here from the mountains and Great Basin in order to nest and raise their young. They live in many habitats including ponds, rivers, pastures, cropland, and parks.

**life cycle** From March through July, pairs of Mallards create nests near water in sparse vegetation. After thoroughly lining the nest with down (soft, small feathers), the female lays 6 to 12 eggs. The female then sits on the eggs, keeping them warm and protected. After about 26 days, the eggs hatch and the female cares for the ducklings. The ducklings attempt their first flights 40 to 60 days after hatching.

**ecology** The Mallard's main diet is plants including grains, seeds and leaves. While nesting, they also eat aquatic insects, snails, small crustaceans, earthworms and tadpoles. Mallard eggs and ducklings are eaten by many mammals, including striped skunks, rats, coyotes, raccoons and opossums. Adult Mallards are hunted by humans and occasionally other large predators.

investigate

What other species of birds can you find in the vernal pool grassland which have colorful males and dull females? Some other birds you might investigate through classmates, books, or the Internet are Greater Yellow-legs, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark and Killdeer.

