



Lakeshore State Park
Tree Swallow Boxes

:~ Nature Notes ~:

Forties in January - how terrific!!! Nice warm temperatures for waterfowl to ride the waves and find food, and open land for wildlife to easily forage without snow. Because of the mild temperatures, there are still a few American Coots (*Fulica americana*) lingering and feeding on plant material in the shallow, open water along the shoreline. However, the regular wintertime ducks inhabiting the lake right now are the Red Breasted (*Mergus serrator*), Hooded (*Lophodytes cucullatus*), and Common Mergansers (*Mergus merganser*), Common Goldeneyes (*Bucephala clangula*), Greater (*Aythya marila*) and Lesser Scaups (*Aythya affinis*), American Black Ducks (*Anas rubripes*), Buffleheads (*Bucephala albeola*), Scoters, and an occasional Canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*). I know I'm a minority when I say, "I love the winter" in Wisconsin! But, Lake Michigan is a seasonal home to a plethora of diverse ducks and they are fascinating to watch and learn about! Additionally, I never know what ducks I will see each day; there could be a Harlequin or a Long-tailed Duck or a Northern Pintail or a Gadwall.

There has been one duck, that is not like the others, frequently seen at Lakeshore State Park dabbling with other Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*), and it is a Domestic Duck (*Anas platyrhynchos domesticus*), also known as Peking Duck or Peking Duck or domesticated Mallard. This all white duck has an orange bill and legs and curled tail feathers, similar to a male Mallard. I have seen this duck fly proficiently and dabble for food. If this was a leucistic or albino Mallard, then flight and foraging would be challenging, and the bird would fail to thrive. However, this strong survivor is commingling well with other similar species, has a good weight, and can fly when deemed necessary. This Domestic Duck has been purpose bred for human consumption and originates from China.



Red Breasted Merganser
(*Mergus serrator*)



Hooded Merganser
(*Lophodytes cucullatus*)



Common Goldeneye
(*Bucephala clangula*)



Greater Scaup
(*Aythya marila*)



Canvasback
(*Aythya valisineria*)



Domestic Duck (white)
(*Anas platyrhynchos domesticus*)

The Domestic Duck has been an icon in literature, art, and music. Beatrix Potter incorporated this duck, named Jemima, in one of her published books in 1908. The rubber duck was invented by Charles Goodyear in the late 1800's during attempts to make hard rubber more flexible and soon became a bath time toy in the 1930s when the duck could float. The current style of rubber duck became even more popular by the design Peter Ganine created in 1947. Mark your calendars for January 13th because it is the National Rubber Duck Day! Other Domestic Duck legendary characters are Donald Duck and Daffy Duck. The Aflac insurance company, from a small Columbus, Georgia town, became a global sensation with Aflac Duck's witty personality and has been warming hearts since he was introduced in 2000. The University of Oregon's mascot is the Oregon Duck. The Oregon Duck looks very similar to Disney's Donald Duck character. It turns out, in the late 1940's, the athletic director, Leo Harris, was good friends with the cartoonist, Mike Royer, who introduced him to Walt Disney who informally granted permission to use the duck as the university's mascot. And then there is the Domestic Duck portrayed in music. One of my favorite composers, Sergei Prokofiev, wrote the symphony Peter and the Wolf for children in 1936. The oboe represented the duck in his story. These are just a few examples of the popular Domestic Duck used everyday around the world. Perhaps you can add to this list and share with others.

Since the Domestic Duck is a Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), I thought I would share some information about this common dabbling duck. The Mallard belongs to the Family **Anatidae** and Order **Anseriformes**. These ducks form varying sized flocks and dabble for aquatic grains and seeds, and they also strain vegetation for invertebrates. Male and female ducks seasonally pair bond. The mating display consists of several males, or drakes, attempting to attract a female by swimming around and whistling or flicking water at her with the bill. Mating occurs during breeding and non-breeding seasons. The pair will pump their heads up and down and swim close to one another. The male will then swim behind the female, mount, and grab feathers on the back of the head to briefly submerge her under the water surface. He will then dismount, swim a tight circle around the female with his head skimming the water while the female repeatedly moves her stationary body through the water to bathe then raise up and flap her wings. A ground nest is made in concealed vegetation near ponds, agricultural flooded fields, or other wetland habitats. The male leaves soon after incubation starts while the female tends to the nest and hatchlings. Once the precocious brood has hatched, the hatchlings can quickly begin feeding, swimming, and walking on land. Mallards are **synchronous molters** which means they molt their feathers over 2 - 4 weeks, mid to late summer, making them flightless during this time. Males will often isolate themselves in quiet ponds to avoid predators. Mallards are often



overlooked because they are so common. But, the drake is one of the most distinguished, colorful, and handsome ducks.

References:

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