

## **Waterfowl Biology Frequently Asked Questions**

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**A duck is nesting in my yard. What should I do?**

Some ducks, most notably mallards, have adapted very well to our modern environment and readily nest in yards near houses and businesses. The chances of these birds hatching their nests in these urban environment are usually pretty good because the numbers of natural nest predators, such as raccoons and skunks, are often less common in urban environments than rural environments. However, domestic nest predators like dogs and cats can, and will, destroy duck nests, or other birds' nests for that matter, give the chance. Because ducks are migratory birds, the birds and their nests are protected by federal law. This means you cannot disturb the nest or the hen without the appropriate federal permits.

If you have a duck nesting in your yard, do not move the nest or disturb the hen and try to keep the local cats, dogs, and children away from it as well. Given the chance, ducks will hatch their clutch of eggs in 25-28 days, depending upon the species involved. The hen will then escort the ducklings to a nearby wetland. It is not unusual for ducks to take their ducklings 0.5 to 1 mile overland to get to a good wetland. They will also use rivers and streams to assist them in their travels. If at all possible, give the duck some undisturbed space and let nature take its course.

**There are baby ducks (or geese) in my yard and it looks like the mother has abandoned them. What should I do?**

It is unlikely that the hen has abandoned her ducklings (or goslings, in the case of geese). It is more likely that she has been momentarily frightened away or has temporarily left the brood in an attempt to lure a potential predator (such as a dog or cat) away from the ducklings. She will very likely return to gather up the ducklings after the area has been free of disturbance for a while. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CATCH THE DUCKLINGS.** Your actions may cause them to become more widely scattered, making it more difficult for the hen to gather them together when she returns. If you do capture some of them, the hen may assume that they are gone (dead) when she returns. She will then leave with the remaining ducklings, even if it is only 1 duckling, because she has a very strong urge to get the brood to the safety of water. Handling migratory birds requires a federal permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; therefore, if you round-up and confine these ducklings you could be subject to prosecution and fines.

**How can I get plans for wood duck boxes and other nest structures for ducks or geese?**

You can obtain plans for constructing wood duck nest boxes, as well as nesting structures for other waterfowl, by clicking on the link to Nesting Structures for Ducks and Geese at the USGS Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center website:

<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/birds/neststru/index.htm>

### **What kinds of ducks and geese nest in Iowa?**

Mallards and wood ducks are the most common nesting ducks in Iowa and nest throughout the state. Blue-winged teal are the next most common nesting duck but are primarily found in the prairie pothole region of north-central and northwestern Iowa. Other dabbling ducks such as pintails, shovelers, gadwalls, and green-winged teal nest in Iowa's prairie pothole region, but they are uncommon nesters. Diving ducks such as redheads, ruddy ducks, and hooded mergansers are fairly common nesting ducks in Iowa. Canvasbacks, ring-necked ducks, and scaup are uncommon nesting diving ducks in Iowa. Of the geese species, only giant Canada geese nest in Iowa. Other subspecies of Canada geese, as well as white-fronted geese and snow geese, migrate through Iowa each spring and fall, but do not nest in the state.

### **Why does the DNR band ducks and geese?**

The information obtained from banded ducks and geese is used by state conservation agencies and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to manage duck and goose populations across North America. Banding data can be used to assess hunting pressure, estimate harvest rates, estimate productivity and survival, measure the vulnerability of the age/sex classes to hunting, and link specific nesting regions with specific harvest areas. Analysis of band recoveries is essential for developing hunting regulations and assessing the impacts of those hunting regulations on waterfowl populations. However, a banded duck or goose that is recovered by a hunter must be reported to the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory to be of use in managing waterfowl populations.

### **How many ducks and geese does the DNR usually band each year?**

The DNR participates in Flyway banding programs for wood ducks, Canada geese, and mourning doves, banding about 4,000 wood ducks, 4,000 Canada geese, and 1000 mourning doves each year. A few mallards and blue-winged teal are banded as well. If a large enough sample of birds are banded and recovered each year, biologists can estimate the average survival of the birds in the population. This is important for managing most duck and goose populations, but particularly important for species, such as wood ducks, which are not directly counted each year.

### **If I recover a banded duck or goose, who should I report it to? Can I keep the band?**

You should report all banded ducks and geese that you recover to the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) in Washington D.C. The BBL keeps records of all migratory birds banded in North America. You can do this over the phone by calling (toll free) **1-800-327-2263** or on the Internet at the BBL website at: <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/homepage/call800.cfm> You can keep the band. The BBL will send you a certificate with information about the banded bird that you reported.