rather long and slender; body full, depressed. Feet short, stout, placed a little behind the centre of the body; tibia bare a little above the joint; tarsus short, somewhat compressed, anteriorly with small scutella, laterally and behind with angular scales; hind toe extremely small, with a very narrow membrane; third toe longest, fourth a little shorter, but longer than second; all covered with numerous oblique scutella; anterior connected by reticulated membranes. Claws small, arched, compressed, rather acute. Plumage dense, soft. Wings of moderate length, acute; second quill longest, first very little shorter; inner secondaries elongated and tapering; tail short, much rounded, of sixteen feathers. Œsophagus rather narrow, dilated on the lower part of the neck; stomach an extremely muscular, transversely elliptical gizzard; intestine long and rather wide; cœca long. Trachea of the males with a transverse bony unsymmetrical dilatation at the inferior larynx.

THE MALLARD.

+ANAS BOSCHAS, *Linn.*

PLATE CCCLXXXV.—MALES AND FEMALES.

Although it is commonly believed that the Mallard is found abundantly everywhere in the United States, I have received sufficient proof to the contrary. If authors had acknowledged that they state so on report, or had said that in the tame state the bird is common, I should not have blamed them. According to my observation, and I may be allowed to say that I have had good opportunities, this valuable species is extremely rare in the wild state in the neighbourhood of Boston in Massachusetts; and in this assertion, I am supported by my talented and amiable friend Mr. NUTTALL, who resided there for many years. Farther eastward, this bird is so rare that it is scarcely known, and not one was seen by myself or my party beyond Portland in Maine. On the western coast of Labrador none of the inhabitants that we conversed with had ever seen the Mallard, and in Newfoundland the people were equally unacquainted with it, the species being in those countries replaced by the Black Duck, *Anas fusca*. From New York southward, the Mallards become more plentiful, and numbers of them

CP

Mallard

1. 2. Males 3. 4. Females

Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon, F.R.S.E.L.S.

Engraved & Col'd by J. T. Bowen, Philad'a

are seen in the markets of Philadelphia, Baltimore, Richmond in Virginia, and other towns. Although they are very abundant in the Carolinas and Floridas, as well as in Lower Louisiana, they are much more so in the Western Country. The reason of this is merely that the Mallard, unlike the sea Ducks, is rarely seen on salt water, and that its course from the countries where it chiefly breeds is across the interior of the continent. From our great lakes, they spread along the streams, betake themselves to the ponds, wet meadows, submersed savannahs, and inland swamps, and are even found in the thick beech woods, in early autumn, and indeed long before the males have acquired the dark green colour of the head. Many of them proceed beyond the limits of the United States.

It would be curious to know when this species was first domesticated; but, reader, the solution of such a question is a task on which I shall not venture. In the domestic state every body knows the Mallard. When young it affords excellent food, and when old lays eggs. A bed made of its feathers is far preferable to the damp earth of the camp of an American woodsman, or the plank on which the trained soldier lays his wearied limbs at night. You may find many other particulars if you consult in chronological order all the compilers from ALDROVANDUS to the present day.

Be not startled, good reader, when I tell you that many of these Ducks are bred in the lakes near the Mississippi, nay even in some of the small ponds in the low lands or bottoms of the States of Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois; for in many parts of those districts I have surprised the females on their eggs, have caught the young when their mother was cautiously and with anxiety leading them for greater safety to some stream, and have shot many a fat one before the poor thing could fly, and when it was so plump, tender, and juicy, that I doubt much whether you, like myself, would not much prefer them to the famed Canvass-backed Duck.

Look at that Mallard as he floats on the lake; see his elevated head glittering with emerald-green, his amber eyes glancing in the light! Even at this distance, he has marked you, and suspects that you bear no good will towards him, for he sees that you have a gun, and he has many a time been frightened by its report, or that of some other. The wary bird draws his feet under his body, springs upon them, opens his wings, and with loud quacks bids you farewell.

Now another is before you, on the margin of that purling streamlet. How brisk are all his motions compared with those of his brethren that waddle across your poultry-yard! how much more graceful in form and neat in apparel! The Duck at home is the descendant of a race of slaves, and has lost his native spirit: his wings have been so little used that they can hardly

raise him from the ground. But the free-born, the untamed Duck of the swamps,—see how he springs on wing, and hies away over the woods.

The Mallards generally arrive in Kentucky and other parts of the Western Country, from the middle of September to the first of October, or as soon as the acorns and beech-nuts are fully ripe. In a few days they are to be found in all the ponds that are covered with seed-bearing grasses. Some flocks, which appear to be guided by an experienced leader, come directly down on the water with a rustling sound of their wings that can be compared only to the noise produced by an Eagle in the act of stooping upon its prey, while other flocks, as if they felt uneasy respecting the safety of the place, sweep around and above it several times in perfect silence, before they alight. In either case, the birds immediately bathe themselves, beat their bodies with their wings, dive by short plunges, and cut so many capers that you might imagine them to be stark mad. The fact, however, seems to be, that all this alacrity and gaiety only shews the necessity they feel of clearing themselves of the insects about their plumage, as well as the pleasure they experience on finding themselves in a milder climate, with abundance of food around them, after a hard journey of perhaps a day and a night. They wash themselves and arrange their dress, before commencing their meal; and in this other travellers would do well to imitate them.

Now, towards the grassy margins they advance in straggling parties. See how they leap from the water to bend the loaded tops of the tall reeds. Woe be to the slug or snail that comes in their way. Some are probing the mud beneath, and waging war against the leech, frog, or lizard that is within reach of their bills; while many of the older birds run into the woods, to fill their crops with beech-nuts and acorns, not disdaining to swallow also, should they come in their way, some of the wood-mice that, frightened by the approach of the foragers, hie towards their burrows. The cackling they keep up would almost deafen you, were you near them; but it is suddenly stopped by the approach of some unusual enemy, and at once all are silent. With heads erected on out-stretched necks, they anxiously look around. It is nothing, however, but a bear, who being, like themselves, fond of mast, is ploughing up the newly fallen leaves with his muzzle, or removing an old rotting log in search of worms. The Ducks resume their employment. But another sound is now heard, one more alarming. The bear raises himself on his hind legs, snuffs the air, and with a loud snort gallops off towards the depths of his cane-brake. The Ducks retreat to the water, betake themselves to the centre of the pool, and uttering half-stifled notes await the sight of the object they dread. There the enemy cunningly advances, first covered by one tree, then by another. He has lost his chance of the bear, but as he is pushed by hunger, a Mallard will do for the bullet of his rusty rifle. It is

an Indian, as you perceive by his red skin and flowing black hair, which, however, has been cut close from the sides of his head. In the centre of his dearly purchased blanket, a hole has been cut, through which he has thrust his bare head, and the ragged garment, like a horse's netting, is engaged as it were in flapping off the last hungry mosquitoes of the season that are fast sucking the blood from his limbs. Watch him, Mallard. Nay, wait no longer, for I see him taking aim; better for you all to fly! No—well, one of you will certainly furnish him with a repast. Amid the dark wood rises the curling smoke, the report comes on my ear, the Ducks all rise save a pair, that, with back downwards and feet kicking against the air, have been hit by the prowler. The free son of the forest slowly approaches the pool, judges at a glance of the depth of the mire, and boldly advances, until with a cane he draws the game towards him. Returning to the wood, he now kindles a little fire, the feathers fill the air around; from each wing he takes a quill, to clean the touch-hole of his gun in damp weather; the entrails he saves to bait some trap. In a short time the Ducks are ready, and the hunter enjoys his meal, although brief time does he take in swallowing the savoury morsels. Soon, the glimmering light of the moon will see him again on his feet, and lead him through the woods, as he goes in pursuit of other game.

The Mallards that remain with us during the whole year, and breed on the banks of the Mississippi or Lake Michigan, or in the beautiful meadows that here and there border the Schuylkill in Pennsylvania, begin to pair in the very heart of winter; and although Ducks are quite destitute of song, their courtships are not devoid of interest. The males, like other gay deceivers, offer their regards to the first fair one that attracts their notice, promise unremitting fidelity and affection, and repeat their offers to the next they meet. See that drake, how he proudly shews, first the beauty of his silky head, then the brilliancy of his wing-spots, and, with honeyed jabberings, discloses the warmth of his affection. He plays around this one, then around another, until the passion of jealousy is aroused in the breasts of the admired and flattered. Bickerings arise; the younger Duck disdains her elder sister, and a third, who conceives herself a coquette of the first order, interposes, as if to ensure the caresses of the feathered beau. Many tricks are played by Ducks, good reader, but ere long the females retire in search of a safe place in which they may deposit their eggs and rear their young. They draw a quantity of weeds around them, and form an ill-arranged sort of nest, in which from seven to ten eggs are laid. From their bodies they pluck the softest down, and placing it beneath the eggs, begin the long process of incubation, which they intermit only for short periods, when it becomes absolutely necessary to procure a little sustenance.

At length, in about three weeks, the young begin to cheep in the shell,

from which, after a violent struggle, they make their escape. What beautiful creatures! See how, with their little bills, they dry their downy apparel! Now, in a long line, one after another, they follow their glad mother to the water, on arriving at which they take to swimming and diving, as if elated with joy for having been introduced into existence. The male, wearied and emaciated, is far away on some other pond. The unnatural barbarian cares nothing about his progeny, nor has a thought arisen in his mind respecting the lonely condition of his mate, the greatness of her cares, or the sadness that she may experience under the idea that she has been utterly forsaken by him who once called her his only and truly beloved. No, reader, not a thought of this kind has he wasted on her whom he has left alone in charge of a set of eggs, and now of a whole flock of innocent ducklings, to secure which from danger, and see them all grow up apace, she manifests the greatest care and anxiety. She leads them along the shallow edges of grassy ponds, and teaches them to seize the small insects that abound there, the flies, the musquitoes, the giddy beetles that skim along the surface in circles and serpentine lines. At the sight of danger they run as it were on the water, make directly for the shore, or dive and disappear. In about six weeks, those that have escaped from the ravenous fishes and turtles have attained a goodly size; the quills appear on their wings; their bodies are encased with feathers; but as yet none are able to fly. They now procure their food by partial immersions of the head and neck in the manner of the old bird. At this period they are already fit for the table, and delicate as well as savoury food they afford. By the time that the leaves are changing their hues, the young Mallards take freely to their wings, and the old males join the congregated flocks.

The Squatters of the Mississippi raise a considerable number of Mallards, which they catch when quite young, and which, after the first year, are as tame as they can wish. These birds raise broods which are superior even to those of the wild ones, for a year or two, after which they become similar to the ordinary Ducks of the poultry-yard. The hybrids produced between the Mallard and the Muscovy Duck are of great size, and afford excellent eating. Some of these half-breeds now and then wander off, become quite wild, and have, by some persons, been considered as forming a distinct species. They also breed, when tame, with the Black Duck (*Anas fusca*) and the Gadwal, the latter connection giving rise to a very handsome hybrid, retaining the yellow feet and barred plumage of the one, and the green head of the other parent.

I have found the Mallard breeding on large prostrate and rotten logs, three feet above the ground, and in the centre of a cane-brake, nearly a mile distant from any water. Once I found a female leading her young through the

woods, and no doubt conducting them towards the Ohio. When I first saw her, she had already observed me, and had squatted flat among the grass, with her brood around her. As I moved onwards, she ruffled her feathers, and hissed at me in the manner of a Goose, while the little ones scampered off in all directions. I had an excellent dog, well instructed to catch young birds without injuring them, and I ordered him to seek for them. On this the mother took to wing, and flew through the woods as if about to fall down at every yard or so. She passed and repassed over the dog, as if watching the success of his search; and as one after another the ducklings were brought to me, and struggled in my bird-bag, the distressed parent came to the ground near me, rolled and tumbled about, and so affected me by her despair, that I ordered my dog to lie down, while, with a pleasure that can be felt only by those who are parents themselves, I restored to her the innocent brood, and walked off. As I turned round to observe her, I really thought I could perceive gratitude expressed in her eye; and a happier moment I never felt while rambling in search of knowledge through the woods.

In unfrequented parts, the Mallards feed both by day and by night; but in places where they are much disturbed by gunners, they feed mostly by night, or towards evening and about sunrise. In extremely cold weather, they betake themselves to the sources of streams, and even to small springs, where they may be found along with the American Snipe. At times, after heavy falls of rain, they are seen searching for ground-worms over the corn-fields, and during the latter part of autumn, the rice plantations of Georgia and the Carolinas afford them excellent pasture grounds. I have thought indeed that at this season these birds perform a second migration as it were, for they then pour into the rice-fields by thousands from the interior. In the Floridas, they are at times seen in such multitudes as to darken the air, and the noise they make in rising from off a large submersed savannah, is like the rumbling of thunder. So numerous were the Mallards while I was at General HERNANDEZ's in East Florida, that a single Negro whom that gentlemen kept as a hunter, would shoot from fifty to a hundred and twenty in a day, thus supplying the plantation with excellent food.

The flight of the Mallard is swift, strong, and well sustained. It rises either from the ground or from the water at a single spring, and flies almost perpendicularly for ten or fifteen yards, or, if in a thick wood, until quite above the tops of the tallest trees, after which it moves horizontally. If alarmed, it never rises without uttering several *quacks*; but on other occasions it usually leaves its place in silence. While travelling to any distance, the whistling sound of their wings may be heard a great way off, more especially in the quiet of night. Their progress through the air I have thought might be estimated at a mile and a half in the minute; and I feel

very confident that when at full speed and on a long journey, they can fly at the rate of a hundred and twenty miles in the hour.

The Mallard is truly omnivorous, its food consisting of every thing that can possibly satisfy the cravings of its extraordinary appetite. Nor is it at all cleanly in this respect, for it will swallow any kind of offals, and feed on all sorts of garbage, even putrid fish, as well as on snakes and small quadrupeds. Nuts and fruits of all kinds are dainties to it, and it soon fattens on rice, corn, or any other grain. My friend JOHN BACHMAN, who usually raises a great number of Mallards every year, has the young fed on chopped fish, on which they thrive uncommonly well. So very greedy are these birds, that I have often observed a couple of them tugging for a long time against each other for the skin of an eel, which was already half swallowed by the one, while the other was engaged at the opposite end. They are expert fly-catchers, and are in the habit of patting with their feet the damp earth, to force ground-worms out of their burrows.

Besides man, the enemies of the Mallard are the White-headed Eagle, the Snowy Owl, the Virginian Owl, the racoon, the lynx, and the snapping-turtle. Mallards are easily caught by snares, steel-traps baited with corn, and figure-of-four traps. As we have no decoys in the United States, I shall not trouble you with a new edition of the many accounts you will find in ornithological books of that destructive method of procuring Wild Ducks.

The eggs of this species measure two inches and a quarter in length, one inch and five-eighths in breadth. The shell is smooth, and of a plain light dingy green. They are smaller than those of the tame Duck, and rarely so numerous. As soon as incubation commences, the males associate together in flocks, until the young are able to migrate. This species raises only one brood in the season, and I never found its nest with eggs in autumn. The female covers her eggs before she leaves them to go in search of food, and thus keeps them sufficiently warm until her return.

MALLARD, *Anas Boschas*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. viii. p. 112.

ANAS BOSCHAS, Bonap. Syn., p. 383.

ANAS (BOSCHAS) DOMESTICA, Mallard, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 442.

MALLARD DUCK, *Anas domestica*, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 378.

MALLARD, *Anas Boschas*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iii. p. 164.

Male, 24, 36. Female, 22.

Breeds from Texas sparingly throughout the United States. Columbia river, and Fur Countries. Abundant during winter in all the Southern Districts. Not found in Maine, or farther eastward.

Adult Male.

Bill about the length of the head, higher than broad at the base, depressed

and widened towards the end, rounded at the tip. Upper mandible with the dorsal line sloping and a little concave, the ridge at the base broad and flat, towards the end broadly convex, as are the sides, the edges soft and rather obtuse, the marginal lamellæ transverse, fifty on each side; the unguis oval, curved, abrupt at the end. Nasal groove elliptical, sub-basal, filled by the soft membrane of the bill; nostrils sub-basal, placed near the ridge, longitudinal, elliptical, pervious. Lower mandible slightly curved upwards, with the angle very long, narrow, and rather pointed, the lamellæ about sixty.

Head of moderate size, oblong, compressed; neck rather long and slender; body full, depressed. Feet short, stout, placed a little behind the centre of the body; legs bare a little above the joint; tarsus short, a little compressed, anteriorly with small scutella, laterally and behind with reticulated angular scales. Hind toe extremely small, with a very narrow membrane; third toe longest, fourth a little shorter, but longer than second; all the toes covered above with numerous oblique scutella; the three anterior connected by reticulated membranes, the outer with a thick margin, the inner with the margin extended into a slightly lobed web. Claws small, arched, compressed, rather acute, that of the middle toe much larger, with a dilated, thin inner edge.

Plumage dense, soft, and elastic; of the head and neck short, blended, and splendid; of the other parts in general broad and rounded. Wings of moderate length, acute; primaries narrow and tapering, the second longest, the first very little shorter; secondaries broad, curved inwards, the inner elongated and tapering. Tail short, much rounded, of sixteen acute feathers, of which the four central are recurved.

Bill greenish-yellow. Iris dark brown. Feet orange-red. Head and upper part of neck deep green, a ring of white about the middle of the neck; lower part of the neck anteriorly, and fore part of breast, dark brownish-chestnut; fore part of back light yellowish-brown, tinged with grey; the rest of the back brownish-black, the rump black, splendid with green and purplish-blue reflections, as are the recurved tail-feathers. Upper surface of wings greyish-brown, the scapulars lighter except their inner webs, and with the anterior dorsal feathers minutely undulated with brown. The speculum on about ten of the secondaries is of brilliant changing purple and green, edged with velvet-black and white, the anterior bands of black and white being on the secondary coverts. Breast, sides, and abdomen, very pale grey, minutely undulated with darker; lower tail-coverts black, with blue reflections.

Length to the end of the tail 24 inches, to the end of the claws 23, to the tips of the wings 22; extent of wings 36; wing from flexure $10\frac{1}{2}$; tail $4\frac{1}{4}$; bill $2\frac{2}{12}$; tarsus $1\frac{3}{4}$; middle toe $2\frac{2}{12}$, its claw $\frac{5}{12}$. Weight from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 lbs.

Adult Female.

Bill black in the middle, dull orange at the extremities and along the edges. Iris as in the male, as are the feet. The general colour of the upper parts is pale yellowish-brown, streaked and spotted with dusky-brown. The feathers of the head narrowly streaked, of the back with the margin and a central streak yellowish-brown, the rest dark, of the scapulars similar, but with the light streak on the outer web. The wings are nearly as in the male, the speculum similar, but with less green. The lower parts dull ochre, deeper on the lower neck, and spotted with brown.

Length 22 inches. Weight from 2 lbs. to $2\frac{1}{2}$.

The Young acquire the full plumage in the course of the first winter.

DUSKY DUCK.

+ANAS OBSCURA, *Gmel.*

PLATE CCCLXXXVI.—MALE AND FEMALE.

This species, which is known in all parts of the United States by the name of "Black Duck," extends its migrations from the Straits of Belle Isle, on the coast of Labrador, to Texas. Strange as the fact may appear, it breeds in both these countries, as well as in many of the intermediate districts. On the 10th of May, 1833, I found it breeding along the marshy edges of inland pools, near the Bay of Fundy, and, on Whitehead Island in the same bay, saw several young birds of the same species, which, although apparently not more than a week old, were extremely active both on land and in the water. On the 30th of April, 1837, my son discovered a nest on Galveston Island, in Texas. It was formed of grass and feathers, the eggs eight in number, lying on the former, surrounded with the down and some feathers of the bird, to the height of about three inches. The internal diameter of the nest was about six inches, and its walls were nearly three in thickness. The female was sitting, but flew off in silence as he approached. The situation selected was a clump of tall slender grass, on a rather sandy ridge, more than a hundred yards from the nearest water, but surrounded by partially dried salt-marshes. On the same island, in the course of several

CP

Mallard

1. 2. Males 3. 4. Females

Audubon, John James. 1843. "The Mallard, *Anas boschas*, Linn. [Pl. 385]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 6, 236–244. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319498>.

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