



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

September 16, 2022



Photo by Jenn Guess

The Last Four Mallards of the Season

Mallard ducklings are some of the most common patients we see here at CWC. So far in 2022 we have admitted over 230 Mallards, with the vast majority of these patients being healthy orphans. These ducklings come to our facility for a variety of reasons. It is not uncommon for them to be found abandoned in pools and storm drains, and huddled together near roads and driveways. Mother Mallards (who are the sole caregivers to their offspring) will often be spooked away from her young by predators and well-meaning members of the public. Female Mallards will not voluntarily leave their babies for more than a few minutes. That means that if a duckling, or group of ducklings, is found alone there is a good chance that they are orphaned and in need of help.



Photo by Jenn Guess

Male and female Mallards will begin to form pairs in October, and their courtship will last through the winter, until the breeding season in early spring. They do not mate for life, but most couples will be monogamous for the season. Male Mallards will protect their mates from other males, who tend to “force-copulate” with unattended females.

Mallards nest on the ground, usually within 100 yards of a water source. The female will pick a sheltered location, with a natural divot in the ground. She will then bring grasses and leaves to the nest site and eventually line the nest with downy feathers she plucks from her own body. Mallards lay up to thirteen eggs over the course of two days. After a few days of incubation, the mated pair will break, and the male will leave the nest area. The male does not leave immediately after mating in order to ensure the safety of the eggs. If the nest is predated within the first few days after laying, the male and female will mate again in an attempt to have a successful clutch.

Young ducklings will emerge from the eggs after about four weeks of incubation. Although they are able to walk and eat on their own within a few hours of hatching, they are dependent on their mother for warmth and safety. Ducklings will stay with their mother for two months before being able to fly and survive on their own in the wild.

Here at CWC we have various specialized enclosures for our duckling patients. When they are just a few days old they are housed in incubators. At this age they would be dependent on their mother’s body heat to stay warm and would quickly perish if they got too cold. Once they are old enough to thermoregulate, the ducklings are moved into specialized pens that have both a small pool and a dry area with heaters. Eventually



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the young patients are placed in an outdoor aviary with a large child's pool and plenty of dry space to eat and sleep.

Our last set of duckling patients came to us one month ago as a group of four from Studio City. They were found attempting to cross a busy street, with no mother around. The finder was able to quickly transport the birds to CWC, where technicians examined each patient for any signs of trauma. Luckily these ducklings were found unharmed. Since they were three weeks old at the time of their intake these patients were able to be housed in one of our specialized pens, where they could swim and explore various food items that were offered. After a few weeks in care, the birds were ready to be moved to the larger outdoor aviary so they could have more room to practice their swimming skills and build up their muscles. In about another week our last young Mallards will be ready to be released back into the wild.

Although the duckling season for 2022 has come to an end, it is important to keep your eye out for injured or orphaned ducklings next spring. If you do find a young Mallard, place them in a box lined with paper towels. Ducklings have a fast metabolism and can pass away quickly if they are not offered appropriate hydration and nutrition. It is best to contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center for advice as soon as possible.