



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

April 11, 2025

Delightful Ducklings!

Around this time of year, it's common for CWC to receive an influx of concerned calls about ducks and ducklings spotted in precarious places. We are currently caring for the first three orphaned Mallard ducklings of the season.

Ducklings have a 28-day incubation period and are born precocial, meaning they are able to walk, feed themselves and swim almost immediately after hatching. Once hatched, they are led to water by their mother hen where they can stay for short periods of time to find food. Ducklings do not yet have waterproof feathers so they cannot stay in bodies of water for long durations, or they risk developing hypothermia. Ducklings will stay with their mother until they are able to fly at around two months old.

Before they are independent, it is not uncommon to spot a mother hen with her ducklings waddling behind her. We get inundated with calls and texts around this time regarding ducks swimming or stuck in pools and residing in backyards. We also get calls about ducks crossing roads and nesting in congested areas.



First Mallard duckling patients of the season.

It is important to note that it is a federal offense and against the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to move or tamper with active nests and native birds, regardless of whether they are residing on your property. To prevent frustration, we recommend adjusting your property to dissuade ducks from coming into the yard in the first place. Using a pool cover is one way to ensure ducks do not swim or get stuck in your pool. If you have already spotted a family of Mallards in your yard, leaving a gate open can allow the hen and her ducklings (who are unable to fly) to safely exit the property.



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While at CWC, Mallard ducklings are kept in groups, where they are provided heat support until they are old enough to thermoregulate on their own. When a single duckling is admitted, Wildlife Technicians provide them with a feather duster and mirror, to give them the illusion that they are with others of their kind.

Ducklings are fed waterfowl starter pellets, seed and an array of greens three times a day. Our staff also harvests wild miner's lettuce from around the CWC grounds that the ducklings love to hide in and nibble on. Once the ducklings are stable, they are provided with a shallow pool where they can practice their swimming skills.

If you find a Mallard hen with ducklings in an undesirable location, contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center for advice. Do not intervene unless directed to do so by a professional. It is best to keep ducklings with their mother whenever possible, and it is likely that a Mallard hen will abandon her offspring if she feels threatened.



CWC staff provide enrichment to make enclosures similar to the wild.