



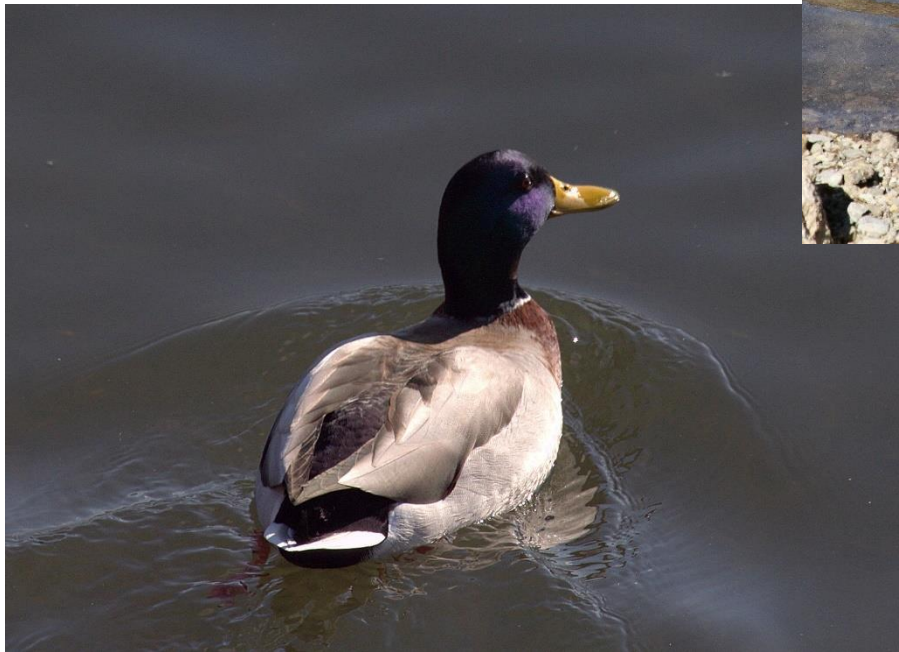
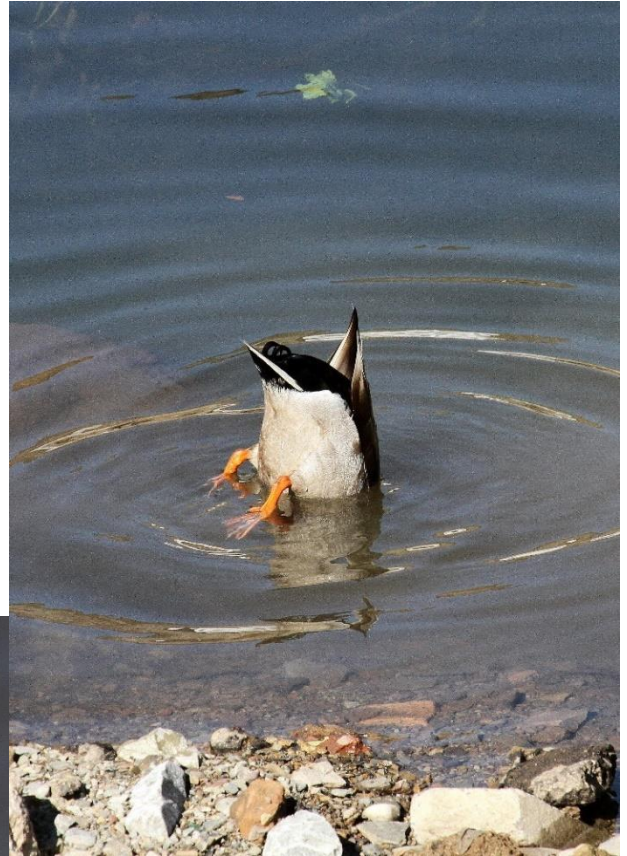
A breeding Mallard pair is an example of sexual dimorphism, wherein the drake (male) is colorful, and the hen (female) has a drabber plumage. His plumage is designed to attract females, while hers is to remain less obvious to predators.

Of all the various color that make up the drake's plumage, the most important to a hen is the chestnut-colored breast. It should be "perfect," without damaged feathers, showing the drake is strong and capable of defending himself from other males in a fight while protecting his chest.



Since the hen is the parent most responsible for raising their young, from nest-building, to laying and incubating the eggs, to protecting and teaching the ducklings, her plumage is rather inconspicuous, blending in with her surroundings on land and the water.

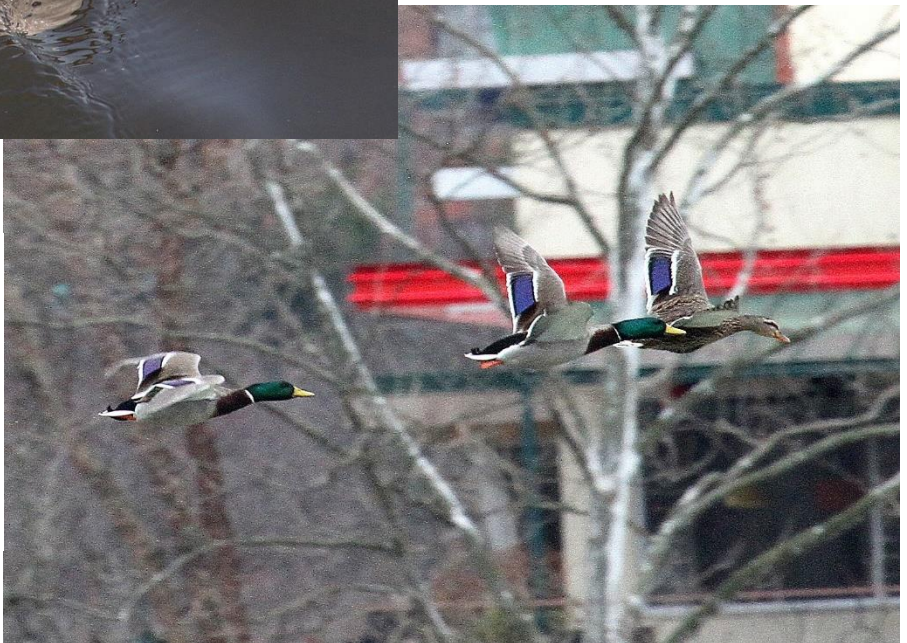
Here a drake Mallard demonstrates dabbling. In shallow water near the shore, he dips his head down underwater to feed on aquatic plants and insects on the bottom.



Although the drake's head is usually green, the structure of the head feathers may cause the head to appear blue or purple depending on the angle of light shining on those feathers.

Two drakes and a hen fly over the Monongahela, showing the blue speculum in their wings.

This color is again due to the structure of the feathers resulting in a blue appearance. The white borders are just a lack of pigment in those feathers.





After building her nest at Beechwood Farms, this Mallard hen blended in well with her surroundings as she incubated her eggs.

The location of her nest had the added benefit of a nearby Canada Goose nest, which is guarded by both Canada Geese parents.



On a cool morning in Anchorage, Alaska, this Mallard hen covered her ducklings with her wing to keep them warm.

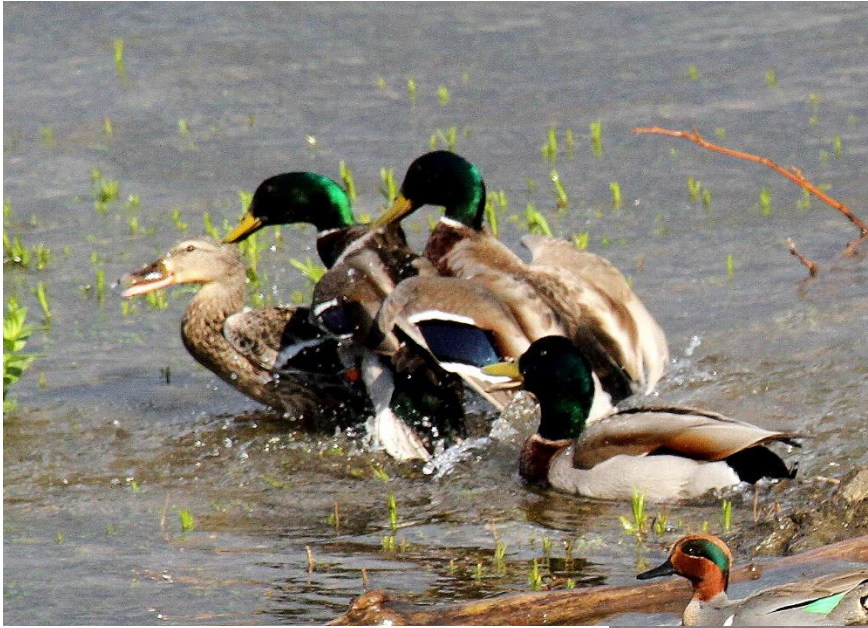
These six Mallard ducklings on Ford Lake in Ann Arbor were cute little balls of feathers, but they were also vulnerable to predation.



A Duck Hollow hen lead her older ducklings to a favorite feeding spot.
Note: She then had only three of her original clutch left to follow her.

Young Mallards that have survived to adult size take a rest on shore, basking in the sun.

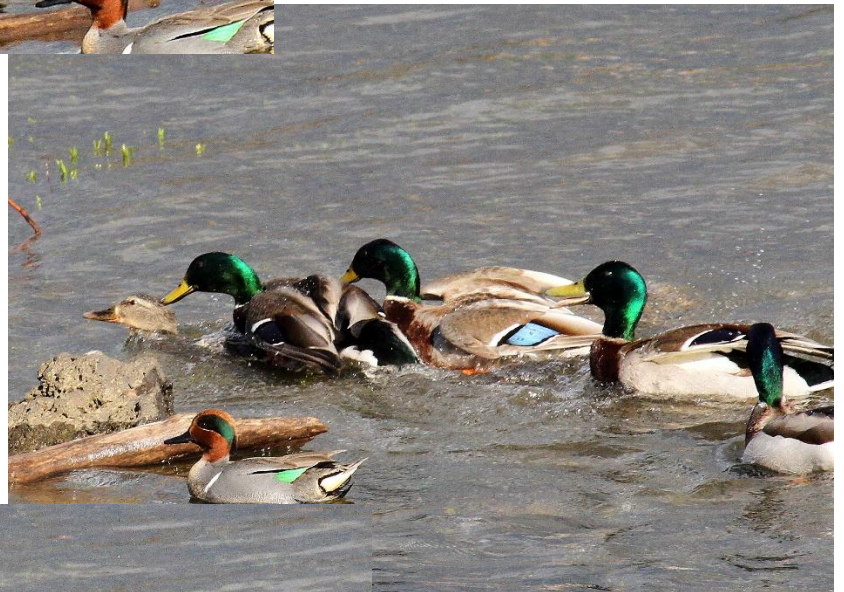




These aggressive drakes attacked an unattached hen in a gang assault, showing the seedier side of their behavior. The Green-winged Teal in these photos was an innocent bystander.

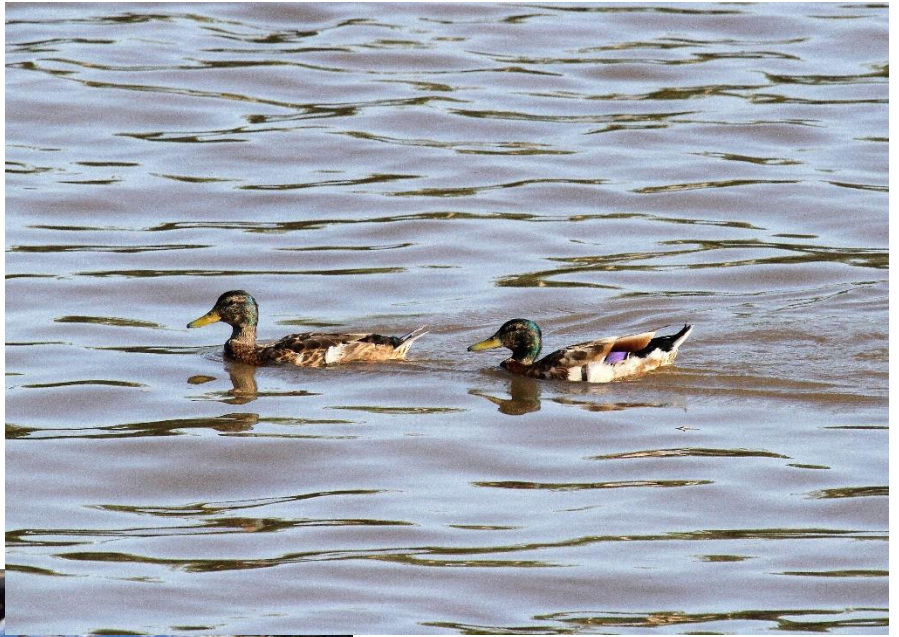
There were four drakes in this rowdy group. Note how they were pushing the hen down in the water.

The teal remained uninvolved.



The two lead perpetrators have the hen's bill underwater during the attack, which may result in her drowning.

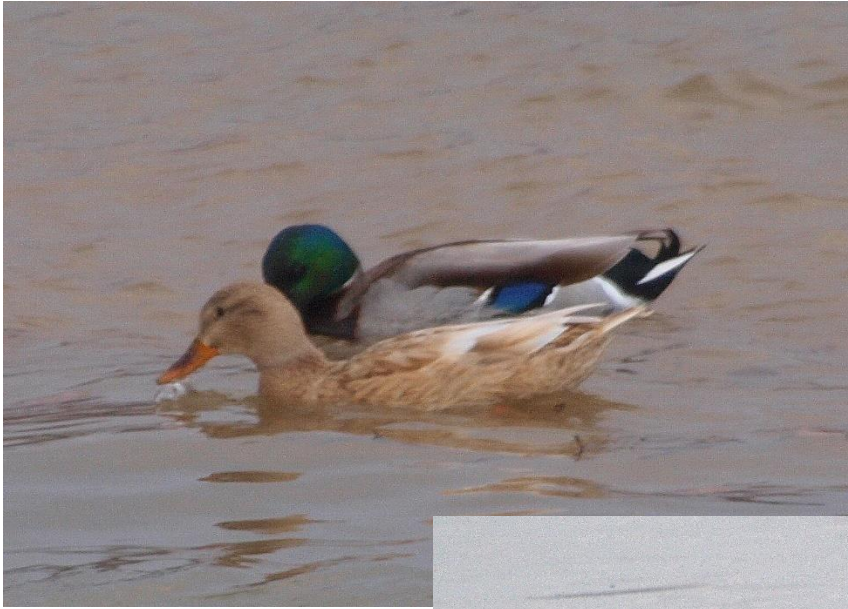
In early July, with their testosterone levels lowered, these drakes are molting to their eclipse phase. The green of their heads is fading as their body feathers change over to more drab female-like coloring. The violet speculum on the righthand bird is due to the angle of the sunlight hitting it.



Mallards do not necessarily migrate if there is open water for them. This large group was near the open streams and lakes of North Park during a CBC.

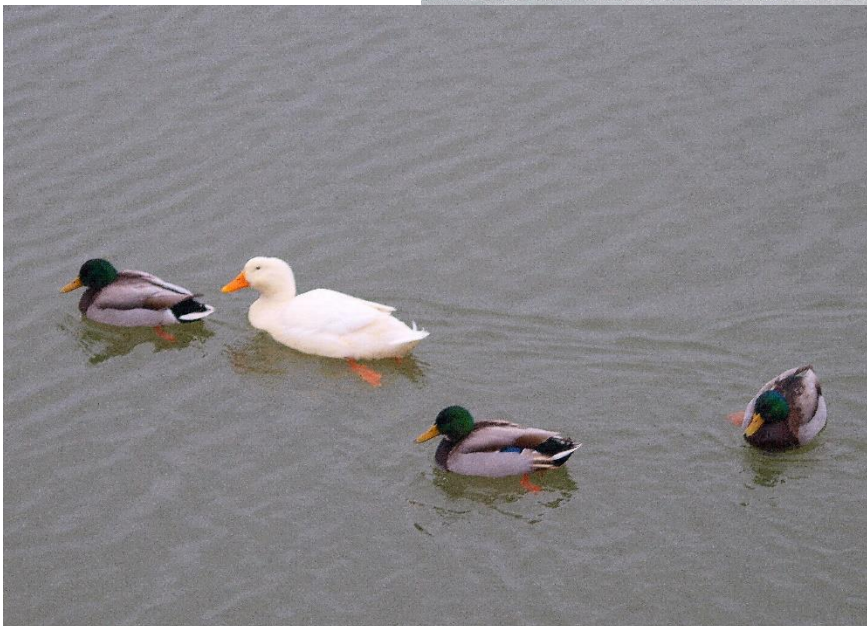
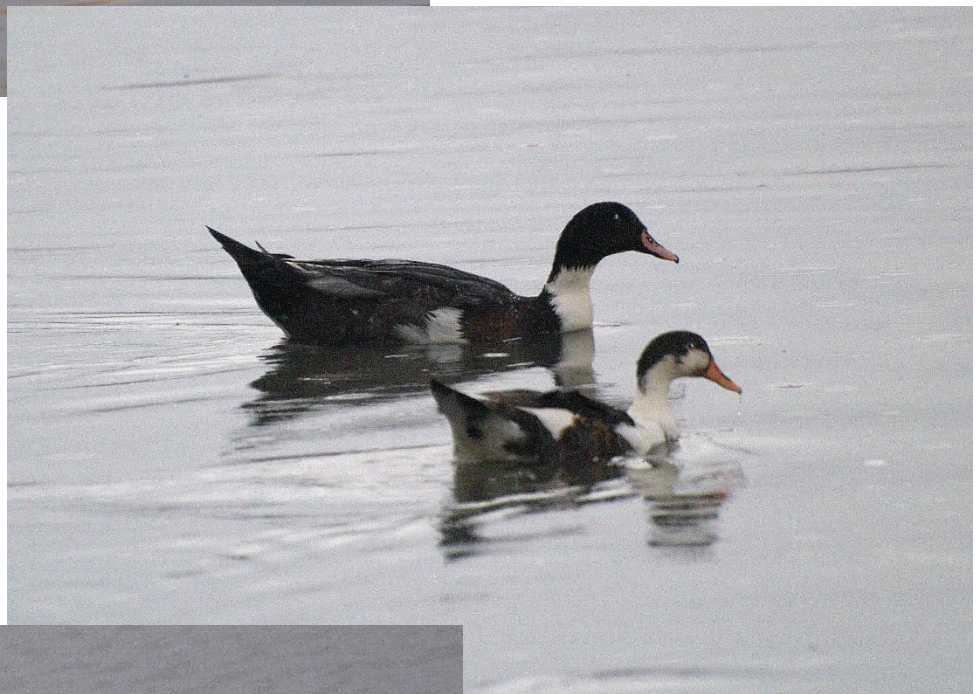
Even in freezing February, open water in the ice-choked entrance to the Duluth, Minnesota harbor let the Mallards stay without migrating. Handouts of bread (right) from residents helped them survive too.





Love is blind even for Mallards. This pair near Brunot Island was made up of a drake and a very light hen. One may think she was leucistic, but, more likely, she was a hybrid female.

Mallard hybrids can come in all plumage variations. The larger duck probably came from a Pekin Duck x Mallard combo.



This was Moe, the Duck Hollow resident Pekin Duck for many years. He could not fly, but he always was ready for a bread handout. Note his larger size compared to his Mallard buddies.

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