

1 Ducks

12 A duck is a bird that has webbed feet and waterproof
21 feathers. Ducks have some features that geese and swans
32 have. But the wings and the necks of ducks are shorter.
43 Their bills are flatter, too. Ducks quack or whistle, but they
53 don't honk. Male ducks are called drakes, and females are
55 called ducks.

62 Ducks live throughout the world in wetlands,
71 including marshes (wet areas with long grasses) and areas
80 near rivers, ponds, lakes, and oceans. Ducks can live in
92 cold and warmer parts of the world at any time of year.
100 Many kinds of ducks migrate (travel long distances)
107 annually (each year) between their breeding grounds
117 (where they rest and raise their babies), and their wintering
127 areas, where the water does not freeze. Some ducks migrate
130 thousands of miles.

141 Ducks spend a lot of time in the water, where their
150 webbed feet help them paddle for swimming and diving.
160 They are graceful on water, but waddle and look clumsy
172 when they walk on land. This is because their legs are on
183 the sides and toward the back of the body. Most common
195 wild ducks weigh from 2 to 4 pounds (about the weight of
206 your Math book), but some smaller ducks weigh less than 1
207 pound.

216 Ducks get their food in different ways, depending on
225 their body features. Some ducks stretch their long necks
235 down through shallow water to pick food off the bottom.
246 Others dive for food in deep water. Many ducks can get
256 seeds, insects, and snails from the water. Some ocean water
267 ducks have short bills that they use to pry barnacles from
278 rocks or to grab clams. Others have long, narrow bills with
285 sawlike edges for catching and holding fish.

292 Ducks protect themselves from cold water by
301 waterproofing their feathers. They use their bills to rub
313 their feathers with a waxy oil from a place on their body
324 near their tail. Under the oiled feathers, there are soft, fluffy
333 feathers called "down". Down helps keep a duck's body
342 warm because it traps air under the outside feathers.

350 Some ducks have bright-colored feathers. Their colors
360 include green, blue, red, and brown. Some ducks are mostly
370 black and white. Most females (girl ducks) are brown, and
379 can hide by blending in with the surroundings when
388 incubating (sitting on) eggs or taking care of ducklings
390 (baby ducks).

399 Ducks seek mates during winter. (That means that boy
411 ducks try to find girl ducks to live with.) The bright colors
421 of the drakes (boy ducks) attract females (girl ducks). A
430 female usually leads her drake to the breeding grounds

440 (where she wants the male to live) during the spring
450 migration, often coming back to the same place where she
456 was hatched when she was born.

467 The ability of ducks and other birds to return to the
476 same places each year is called "homing behavior". Male
486 ducks will defend a small territory from which he drives
495 away (intimidates or fights) other males. The female builds
511 a nest in a clump of grass or reeds, or in a hole in a tree.

535 The female duck lays from 5 to 12 eggs. After she
548 starts to sit on the eggs to warm and protect them, the drake
558 leaves to join other males. The ducklings hatch from three
563 weeks to four weeks later.

572 Ducklings can run, swim, and find food for themselves
584 within 3 days of hatching. A group of ducklings is called a
594 "brood". A mother duck keeps her brood together so she

603 can protect the ducklings from predators (other animals that
607 want to eat them).

614 Animals that prey on ducklings include turtles,
622 raccoons, hawks, and large fish. Sometimes the ducklings
633 in one brood mix with another. So, some females end up
645 with broods of 15 to 25 ducklings. Ducklings have most of
659 their feathers in about a month. They learn to fly in 5 to 8
660 weeks.

669 Once the female duck has nested, the drake usually
680 leaves her and joins other drakes to molt (lose their old
690 feathers). The drakes lose their bright colors and for many
701 weeks have a brown color like that of the females. During
712 this molt, the drake also loses his flying feathers and cannot
713 fly.

723 Male ducks molt again in early fall and regain the
732 male coloring. After a female's ducklings hatch, she also
738 molts and replaces all her feathers.

747 After growing new feathers and after the young learn
759 to fly, the ducks gather in flocks (a group of ducks). They
771 usually fly in long lines or "V" formations. Flocks go to the
781 same summer and winter areas every year, even stopping to
789 rest at the same places along the way.