



A Sign of Autumn



Have you seen flocks of ducks in wetlands or flying overhead? Winter is on its way. Daylight time is getting shorter.

For ducks and other animals, it's getting harder to find food. Ice on the water where ducks swim and feed is a threat. In the fall, many ducks are flying night and day to seek warmer weather.

Some start flying south in August. October and November are usually the prime migration months.

The right route

Scientists aren't sure how ducks know the right route to follow. They might be living compasses, using the magnetic pull of the Earth to guide them. They might use the sun and stars or landmarks as guides.

In North America, ducks usually follow one of four **flyways**, or bird "highways," when flying south in the winter and north in the spring.

The routes are called the Pacific, Central, Mississippi and Atlantic flyways. They follow waterways.



Migrating ducks might:

- fly only a few miles
- or up to as many as 5,000 miles each way.
- fly up to 50 miles per hour.
- fly a few miles to a couple of hundred miles per day. Some take their time and often stop a few hours to rest and sleep.

Wetland rest stops

Wetlands are areas where water is very close to or above the surface of land. They are also called swamps and marshes. Plants, animals and insects live in wetlands. Waterfowl depend on them as places to rest, feed and live.

National Wildlife Refuges are special areas set aside by the U.S. government to protect wildlife and their **habitats**, or living areas. Most refuges are established to protect migrating birds.



Ducks help us

Many people eat ducks. Duck hunting is a popular sport. Special farms raise ducks for grocery stores and restaurants.

People collect **down**, or small duck feathers, from duck nests. Ducks use the down for insulation to keep them warm. People, too, use down to keep them warm, in coats and blankets.

Ducks and people

Over time, the number of ducks goes up and down for many reasons. In recent years, many duck species have been increasing because rain and snow have filled their wetlands with water. But some ducks are still in trouble because activities by humans are destroying the wetlands.



Wood ducks

Duck Fact-a-roonies

- Diving ducks have small wings and must paddle along the water to pick up speed to take off. Their wings are so small that they can't take off from land.
- Dabbling ducks have larger wings and can take off straight up.
- Ducks can see and hear better than humans. But their senses of smell and taste are poor.
- Ducks have two layers of feathers. The thick top layer helps the duck fly. Under that layer is the fluffy down.
- Ducks also have a special gland that produces oil, which they rub through their feathers using their bill. This is called **preening**. If ducks could not preen, their feathers would get soaked with water and they couldn't fly well.
- Ducks have webbed feet that help them swim. However, their swimming legs are not good walking legs. That's why they waddle when they walk.
- Female ducks are called **hens**. Males are called **drakes**, and babies are called **ducklings**.



Mallards (left) and black-necked stilt

Resources



On the Web:

- bit.ly/MPrefuge
- bit.ly/MPducks

At the library:

- "Watch Me Grow: Duckling" by Lisa Magloff
- "Ducks Don't Get Wet" by Augusta Goldin

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of ducks are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



AUTUMN, BIRD, COMPASS, DOWN, DRAKE, DUCK, FEED, FLYWAY, HABITAT, HUNTING, LIVE, MALLARD, MIGRATE, PREEN, REFUGE, REST, ROUTE, SIGN, SOUTH, WATERWAY, WETLANDS, WINTER.

D N G N I T N U H W M Z B E P
M G T Y D E G J D E A T R F N
I I A A F U P R R T L S E L E
G S T W C H C Y I L L E F Y E
R A I R R O T K B A A R U W K
A U B E N E M U K N R D G A A
T T A T I V T P O D D C E Y R
E U H A G J Y N A S D O W N D
W M B W D E E F I S P R E E N
Y N U Z R O U T E W S L I V E

Cook's Corner

Halloween Mini Popcorn Balls

You'll need:

- 10 cups popped corn
- 1 cup diced dried fruit (papaya, mango or peaches)
- 1 cup butterscotch chips
- 1 (1-pound) bag miniature marshmallows

What to do:

1. Place popcorn, fruit and butterscotch chips in large bowl; set aside.
2. Heat marshmallows and butter in a large saucepan over low heat until melted and smooth.
3. Stir in several drops of food coloring.
4. Pour over popcorn and candy, tossing to coat evenly. Cool for 5 minutes.
5. Grease hands and form into 3-inch balls. Makes about 16 balls.



* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

1. The noise or cry that a duck makes (5-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □

2. The fluffy soft cover of the body of a duck (7-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □

3. To go down head-first into the water (4-letter verb)

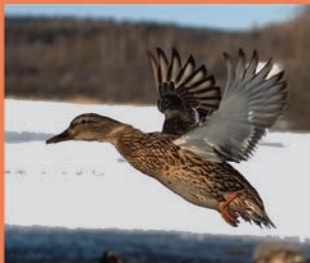
□ □ □ □

4. Young or baby web-footed swimming birds (9-letter plural noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

1. Susan heard a _____ and saw a duck close by.
2. Johnny found a pretty _____ near the pond.
3. Billy watched a duck _____ into a pool.
4. Mama Duck moved her _____ safely to long grasses.

ROOTONYM®
by Jan & Carey Orr Cook



Study the definition. When you know the missing word, fill in the letter boxes and the sentence blanks.

Answers: quack, feather, dive, ducklings.

Mini Jokes



Doug: What time do ducks wake up in the morning?
Donna: At the quack of dawn!

Eco Note



The best way to preserve wildlife is to protect the environment. Reserves and national parks can help with this protection. But not all parks and reserves are on dry land. Wetlands, such as lakes and swamps, are also protected. Marine reserves protect coastal habitats, islands and coral reefs. For example, the Florida Everglades is a wetland in the southeastern United States. Covering more than 2,400 square miles, this national park protects alligators and many species of water birds.

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For later:

Look through your newspaper for other signs of autumn.

Teachers: For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: bit.ly/MPstandards. And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



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