



# Ducks

Wildfowl - members of the duck, goose and swan family - are found on every continent except Antarctica.

Ducks usually have quite long necks, broad bills, short legs and webbed feet, made up of three toes. All these characteristics mean they're perfectly suited to swimming in water.

In the UK there are 'surface

feeding' ducks (which rarely dive) and 'diving' ducks, which spend a lot of time swimming under the water looking for food.

There are several different types of wild ducks living on lakes and rivers in the UK. Wildlife hospitals like Riverside Animal Centre often also look after domestic ducks that have been abandoned by their owners.

## Famous ducks in fiction

The most famous duck in fiction is probably Jemima Puddle-Duck, in the children's book by Beatrix Potter.

Jemima - a domestic duck - wants to find a new, safe place to lay her eggs.

When a fox invites her to nest in a shed at his home, Jemima doesn't realise the danger she's in. Will the farmer's collie dog rescue her before it's too late?



## Animal detectives - searching for ducks in your neighbourhood

Ducks are one of the easiest animals to find in the wild. Visit a lake or river in your

local park, and you're likely to see several different types of wild duck.

If you visit during April or May, you might see lots of ducklings, too!

## DUCK FACTS

### Ten things you might not know about ducks!

- 1** The mallard is the commonest and most easily recognised wild duck in Britain. The males (drakes) have dark, glossy green heads, while the females are mostly brown and have a very loud quack!
- 2** The Eider is the UK's heaviest wild duck, and the one that flies the fastest. It usually lives on the coast, and eats molluscs (shellfish) - like mussels.
- 3** The Tufted duck looks like it's had a very bad haircut! It has a black head and body, with white wings and a big feathery black tuft sticking out of the back of its head.
- 4** Most of the ducks kept by farmers, or as pets, are related to the Mallard. This includes Aylesbury ducks (which are white) and Runner ducks (which are tall and slim and shaped a bit like a closed umbrella!). In Britain, the only domesticated duck not descended from the Mallard is the Muscovy.
- 5** Most ducks in the UK breed once a year, in the spring or early summer.
- 6** Ducks have several different predators (animals which hunt them for food). Ducklings are particularly vulnerable, and are sometimes eaten by foxes, herons, birds of prey and even big fish.
- 7** Duck's outer feathers are waterproof. There is a special gland near a duck's tail which produces oil, and the duck will spread this oil over its outer feathers while grooming. The feathers underneath aren't waterproof: Instead they are fluffy and soft to help keep the duck warm.
- 8** At the edge of a duck's beak, there is a pecten - a bit of the duck's body which looks like a comb. When the duck strains water through its mouth, the pecten traps any tiny bits of food, so the duck can eat them.
- 9** Ducks have no nerves or blood vessels in their feet. That's why they don't feel the cold in their feet - even if the water is nearly freezing!
- 10** Ducks will pull small feathers out of their own chests to help line their nests.