

Along The Trail

by

Ken Legg

It hasn't been so many years since I thought all wild ducks were mallards, and vice versa. Since that time, a few years ago, I have learned to identify all the ducks and duck-like birds in California.

On the Pacific coast there are some 30 species of wild ducks, divided into two main groups known as the diving ducks and the puddle ducks.

Most of the diving ducks, such as the canvasback and scaup (blue-bill), are found in coastal waters where they dive for animal food. Ducks of this group must "run" on the water before they can take off in slanting flight.

The puddle ducks include the pintail, the mallard, teal and others. These are usually found on rivers or in small ponds instead of large, open bays. Much of their food is grain, taken from the fields at night as many a rice farmer knows all too well.

Instead of diving, these ducks "tip up" for food. They extend their necks, stick their heads under water and raise their posterior ends to the sky when searching for food in shallow waters. In taking flight, mallards (as the one pictured) and other puddle ducks "jump" nearly straight up into the air.

The sexes are different in wild ducks. Males are more colorful, the females usually being a brownish color. Male mallards have glossy, green heads, a white ring around their necks and a "snookie" on their tails.

Certainly the mallard is the most familiar of all waterfowl. Wild ones have furnished us with tons of food over ages, and domesticated mallards have provided our race with vast quantities of eggs, flesh and feathers for thousands of years.

Its numbers have gained among the waterfowl of the world, and it never overlooks an opportunity to increase and multiply. A few years ago one made news headlines by nesting on top of a piling in Milwaukee. In England, and in Santa Cruz, they are seen on the city streets, and every park which boasts a pond has a mallard population.

The mallard is wary, wise, handsome and strong. In security, it is one of the noisiest of all ducks, and its loud quack

has become typical of ducks the world over.

Large broods of young are raised, up to 10 or more, but the toll taken among young ducks by natural predators is great. Large fish, like the muskie and the gar, as well as turtles, are probably responsible for as many duckling deaths as anything else.

The majority of mallards nest in Canada and Alaska. These migrate southward in winter to the southern United States and Mexico. This does not mean, however, that all individuals migrate. Quite a few of them nest and winter in all parts of California.

One writer tells of finding a mallard nest on the desert. "All around in every direction for miles and miles stretched a desert of sage-brush shimmering in the sun. As we dismounted to drink, a female mallard sprang from her nest in the sage brush by the side of the little pond."

Mallards had convoys of ducklings on the slough at Natural Bridges park both years I was there, and, of course, they are common on the San Lorenzo.

A mallard is omnivorous in regard to its food. Animal food consists of small frogs, toads, lizards, small fish, snails, mussels, leaches, earthworms and mice. Its vegetable food includes many species of seeds and aquatic plants, grain, nuts, acorns and fruits.

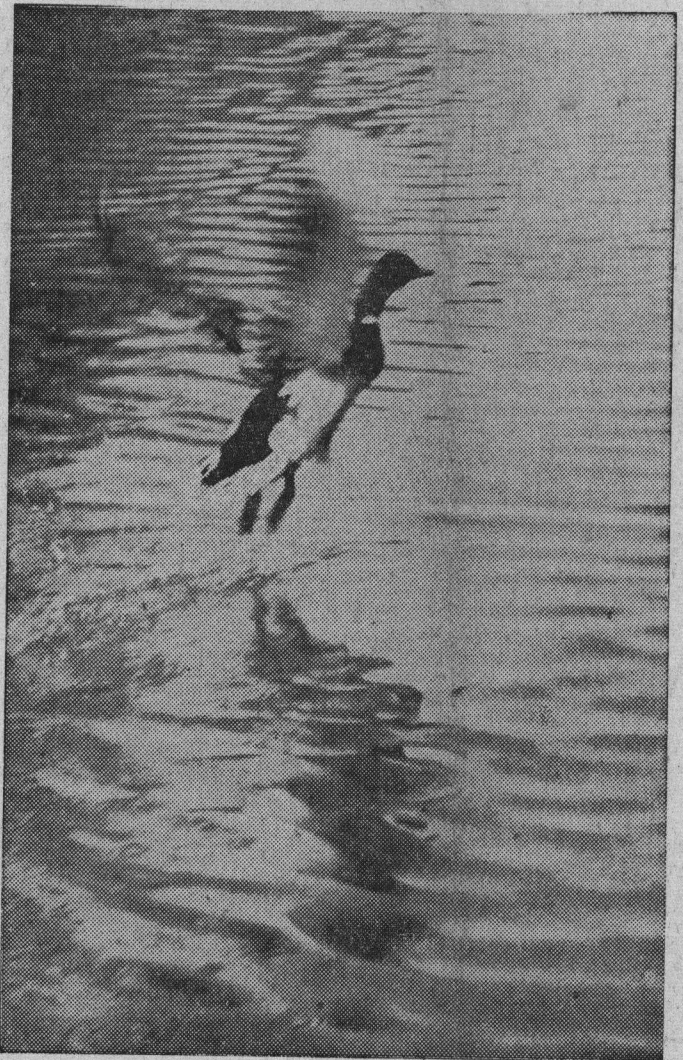
City-dwelling mallards eat as much stale bread as any other food, as people, especially children, find pleasure in feeding and watching these handsome birds.

Dr. Robertson Talks To LA College Students

Dr. Lewis Robertson, president of the Polio Foundation of California, presented to the students and faculty of the Los Angeles College of Chiropractic this weekend, the specially developed methods by which doctors of chiropractic are now able to eliminate the paralyzing effects of the disease poliomyelitis.

The polio foundation is a chartered non-profit, accredited foundation for operating

Mallard Is Familiar Duck



This mallard, pictured making one of the typical "jet-assisted" takeoffs the species always uses to get off the water is similar to those ducks which are most familiar to non-hunters. The mallard can be found almost anywhere in the United States—and it doesn't seem to demand that water be available where it chooses to live.

ICF SCHEDULES

RUMMAGE SALE

Furniture, clothing and dishes will be among the items offered at the rummage sale scheduled by the Italian-Catholic federation for next Thursday through Friday at the St. George hotel. Donations may be made to Mrs. Cecelia Maranta, chairman, at GA 3-3634.

TOWNSEND CLUB

COUNCIL TO MEET

The 10th district council of Townsend clubs will meet today in the Watsonville high school cafeteria with a cafeteria luncheon being served by the Watsonville club at 12:30 a. m. A business meeting will follow.

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