2022 Bird of the Year

The Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos



The Mallard is one of our most conspicuous dabbling ducks, and one of the most heavily hunted species in North America. Drakes have a shiny green head and curly black tail feathers making these ducks easily identifiable. Hens are mottled brown and black without the curly tail feathers. When viewing a flying Mallard look for the dark blue wing patch bordered with white. This patch is called a speculum, and many duck species can be identified by their speculums in flight. These ducks feed primarily on aquatic vegetation, but may also be seen on land eating seeds and invertebrates. Mallards are very adaptable, and as such can be found in almost any kind of wetland from freshwater lakes to saltmarshes. As farming created more arable land, and mallards were bred and released for hunting purposes, their range has spread to encompass much of North America.

During the market hunting years it seems mallards were here in smaller numbers than today, but since the 1930's the Mallard population has dramatically increased here in New Jersey. This has led to their population crowding local parks and spreading into saltmarshes leading to more interbreeding between Mallards and Black Ducks, a close relative found in more brackish habitats. With the increase in Mallard numbers, the use of decoys of this species has become more prevalent in the Barnegat Bay region.

