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Mottled Duck *Anas fulvigula*

The Mottled Duck, sometimes called the Summer Mallard, Summer Duck, or Florida Mallard (Sprunt 1954), resides and breeds in brackish and freshwater marshes along the Gulf coast from Texas to Alabama and throughout most of peninsular Florida and the upper Keys. Outlying populations are located in Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Habitat. Approximately 40% of the Mottled Duck's diet is composed of animal matter, such as insects, snails, mollusks, crayfish, and small fish. The remainder of its diet is composed of grass seeds, stems, and roots; seeds of other marsh plants; and bayberries (Howell 1932).

Mottled Ducks choose a variety of sites when nesting. Most nests are placed on the ground in dense vegetation near water, but Redding (in Sprunt 1954) found a nest built in palmetto thickets, and Beckwith and Hosford (in Johnsgard 1975a) located 3 nests in tomato fields. The nest is built of vegetation and is lined with down. Normally, 8 to 10 eggs constitute a clutch (Stieglitz and Wilson in Johnsgard 1975a), with earlier nests containing more eggs. The eggs are creamy-white to greenish-white and are incubated 25 to 27 days. The young are capable of flight at 60 to 70 days of age (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

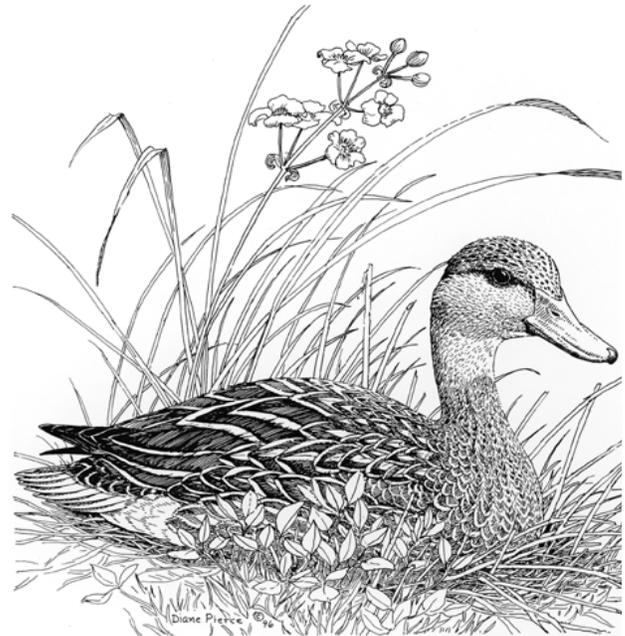


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Seasonal Occurrence. The Mottled Duck is a fairly common permanent resident in central and southern Florida. The breeding season extends from late February (Howell 1932; B. Pranty, pers. obs.) through mid-September (Cruickshank 1980), but only 1 brood per year is raised.

Status. Chamberlain (in Stevenson and Anderson 1994) claimed that 60% of the state's Mottled Ducks are found in Charlotte, Lee, Glades, and Hendry counties. However, Palm Beach County is also an important breeding area. P. Sykes (in Paul 1984) estimated 3,500 Mottled Ducks at Duda Farms near Belle Glade on 29 July 1984. More recent information suggests that the highest densities of Mottled Ducks occur in Osceola, Okeechobee, Highland Glades, DeSoto, Charlotte, and Collier counties (Johnson et al. 1991).

Comparing Howell's (1932) map with the Atlas map reveals an obvious range extension into west central Florida. Mottled Ducks are now locally common from Manatee County north to Hernando County. That Mottled Ducks still occur in heavily developed Pinellas County indicates they can adapt to urbanized environments.

Baynard (in Howell 1932) stated that Mottled Ducks first appeared in Alachua County in 1906 and were soon "resident" and "increasing in numbers." Chamberlain (in Sprunt 1954) listed records from Lafayette, Dixie, and Putnam counties. In 1967, a pair with 10 young was seen at Jacksonville Beach, Duval County (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). In the 1960s, Mottled Ducks were introduced into St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge (Stevenson and Anderson 1994), but this introduction did not succeed.

Mottled Ducks have been reported to hybridize with 2 other duck species (Mallard and American Black Duck) in Florida. L. Atherton (in Ogden 1990) observed Mottled Duck and Mallard Duck hybrids in Manatee County and other recent observations have been reported in Stevenson and Anderson (1994). Moorman and Gray (1994)

report that at least 5% of all Mottled Ducks they examined in 1993 exhibited Mallard plumage characteristics. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission [editor: now Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission] biologists have frequently observed Mottled Duck/Mallard hybrids during Mottled Duck banding operations and believe that this genetic introgression is a serious threat to Florida's Mottled Duck population; at least 5% of Florida's Mottled Ducks exhibit mallard plumage characteristics (Gray 1993). Mottled Duck and American Black Duck hybrids are known from Santa Rosa County (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The report on the American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) is both strange and surprising because this species is not known to breed in Florida and the western Panhandle is far out of range of the Florida race of the Mottled Duck (*A. f. fulvigula*). However the western race of the Mottled Duck, (*A. f. maculosa*), which occurs from Mexico to Louisiana (AOU 1957), may be responsible for records in this area (Stevenson 1976).

Bill Pranty

Mottled Duck

