

BAYOU CITY BIRDING ZINE #12 DOMESTIC GEESE & DUCKS

This zine features examples of geese and ducks who are kept on farms and raised as pets. Sometimes, these birds escape or are dumped at parks. They are bigger than their wild ancestors, and most cannot fly very well. Birds are shown in order of size, the largest ones first.

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MUSCOVY DUCK



GRAYLAG GOOSE

MALLARD

Six examples of the many different color combinations that domestic Mallards can have.



A black head and blue-gray bill.



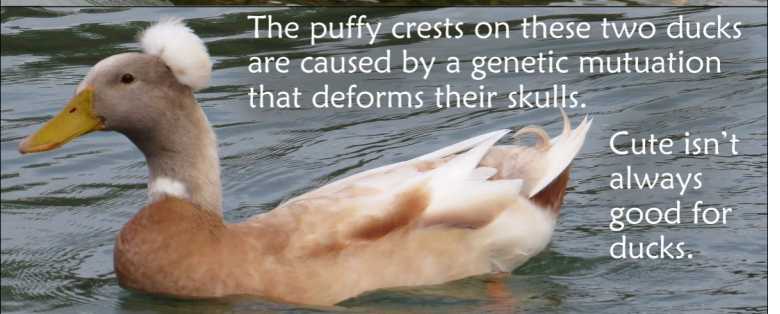
Males often have curly tails.



SWAN GOOSE



This one looks similar to a wild female.



The puffy crests on these two ducks are caused by a genetic mutation that deforms their skulls.

Cute isn't always good for ducks.

EGYPTIAN GOOSE

When is a goose not a goose?



The Egyptian Goose isn't really a goose, having a cool mix of goose-like and duck-like traits.



Pale, unmarked ducks are almost always domestic Mallards.



And yup - the "Aflac" duck is one too!

LEARN MORE...

For thousands of years, people have kept geese and ducks as farm animals. All of these tame “domestics” have as their ancestors the wild Graylag Goose, Swan Goose, Mallard, and Muscovy Duck. Just like other animals have been selected and bred to create new types, these four species have been bred to produce offspring who grow faster and bigger, lay more eggs, and/or have different colors and shapes.

Because most field guides feature wild birds only, you’ll have to go online to find more info. Search for these birds by name or google “domestic duck goose.”

Download more of the Bayou City Birding Zines at WhiteOakBayou.org

GRAYLAG (or GREYLAG) GOOSE

LOOK FOR: Those who look most like their ancestors have an orange bill, a tan neck with feathers that don’t lie smooth, tan breast, brown back, white and tan tail, an enormous white butt, and pink legs. Males are bigger than females. They can also be mostly or totally white and may breed with Swan Geese or wild geese, creating a wide range of mix-and-match looks.

FIELD NOTES: The wild Graylags of Europe were domesticated by the ancient Romans and can now be found on many family farms. A few escape or are brought to city parks. Geese are pushy and may bite.

1st SEEN ON AT

SWAN (or CHINESE) GOOSE

LOOK FOR: A goose that looks much like a Graylag, but with a black bill that has a big knob on top (bigger on males), a light tan neck with a brown stripe in back, a darker back, and orange legs. They can also be mostly or totally white and may have an orange bill.

FIELD NOTES: The wild Swan Geese that once lived across Asia were domesticated thousands of years ago in China. Like the Graylags, they are vegetarians and are usually too heavy to fly for more than a very short distance. Domestic geese make a loud honk when upset and can serve as great “watchdogs” on farms.

1st SEEN ON AT

EGYPTIAN GOOSE

LOOK FOR: A mostly pale goose with a big, brown ring around the eye, red-brown back, a dark spot centered on the breast, and a black tail.

FIELD NOTES: Egyptian Geese were domesticated by the ancient Egyptians, who featured their images in pyramids and temples, believing they represented the god of the air. They have been brought to the U.S. to serve as “decorations” for golf courses and ponds. Their bills are different from those of other geese and ducks, who can filter out water while feeding on aquatic plants. Egyptians eat “land” plants and insects.

1st SEEN ON AT

MUSCOVY DUCK

LOOK FOR: A big duck with a variable mix of black, gray, dark green, and white feathers, and red skin at the top of the bill and around the eyes. On males, this area of red skin is filled with wart-like bumps. Males are much bigger than females and many can barely fly.

FIELD NOTES: Wild Muscovys live in Central and South America. The ancient Aztecs honored them as the spirit animal of the god of wind, and Aztec rulers wore robes decorated with the Muscovy’s glossy feathers. Domestic Muscovys raise chicks year round, which can be yellow, brown, or a mix of both.

1st SEEN ON AT

MALLARD

LOOK FOR: Domestic Mallards can look exactly like wild Mallards (see Zine #11), but have been bred to take on a wide assortment of shapes and colors. If you find a duck who seems very tame, it’s most likely a domestic Mallard. Many have been dumped at parks by people who grew tired of keeping them as pets.

FIELD NOTES: The wild Mallard is the ancestor of all farm and pet ducks except for those bred from the Muscovy. There are many varieties, with six examples shown here. Please think carefully before getting a pet duck, since they require a lot of time and attention.

1st SEEN ON AT

DUCK MUTTS (HYBRIDS)

LOOK FOR: A duck who looks unlike any of the ducks in Zine #11 or #12 or in the bigger field guides.

FIELD NOTES: Mallards will often breed with other types of Mallards and dabbling ducks (see Zine #11), producing offspring whose looks will keep you guessing. These “hybrids” can usually breed again, creating new blends. Muscovys will also breed with Mallards, creating odd-looking ducks who generally can’t reproduce. Moral of the story: do the best you can to ID ducks (and geese), while understanding that the world holds a good number of mystery mutts!

1st SEEN ON AT

TO FEED OR NOT TO FEED...

What’s fun for us can be bad for geese, ducks and wild birds, who do best when they eat a balanced diet that includes the many types of plants and critters that keep their ecosystem in balance. Here’s the lowdown:

Very Bad: Bread, chips, crackers, and other junk food, which fills birds’ stomachs with empty calories and makes them more likely to get sick and spread disease.

Better: Very small amounts of corn, peas, cut up pieces of grapes, uncooked oatmeal (not the flavored kind), lettuce/greens torn into pieces, and/or birdseed.

Best: Don’t feed the geese and ducks at city parks—they are already overfed. Instead, use a bird feeder or bird bath at home to help your neighborhood birds!