



DUCK INFORMATION

From late February and into August, Irvine Animal Services receives many phone calls from residents who are concerned about the well being of ducks who have selected, what appear to be, strange locations to nest and raise their young. Many calls are received regarding a mother duck and ducklings crossing the road, or ducks nesting around a backyard swimming pool. Some calls are from residents who feel the presence of ducks at a private residence is a nuisance and should be removed.



There are many species of ducks that migrate through Orange County. The most common of the species is the Mallard. During breeding season, males have a beautiful, glossy green head with a narrow white collar. They have a chestnut breast, a white tail, yellow bill, and orange feet. The females look completely different, for they are mottled brown with a whitish tail. A female's bill is dark and patched with orange and their feet are orange. They, as well as the males, have a prominent violet blue stripe bordered with white on the lower edge of their wings.

Females usually lay about 8-10 eggs. After four weeks, the eggs hatch and the mother will take the ducklings to water, even if it means walking across a busy intersection. Females will aggressively protect their young, so the entire brood should be avoided. In 10-12 weeks, the ducklings can sustain flight and will soon fly away and join other ducks that have completed the cycle.

Federal law strictly prohibits interfering with nesting ducks. Irvine Animal Control will not ignore federal law concerning migratory waterfowl. Heavy fines are levied against anyone who violates the Federal Migratory Waterfowl Act. Once a nest is made, it cannot be interfered with and nature must be allowed to take its course.

Steps to prevent ducks from nesting in undesirable areas should be taken prior to the arrival of duck mating season. (January and February) The following is a list of steps which may be taken to discourage ducks from making a backyard area a nesting site:

- Cover swimming pools during the nesting season.
- Allow beach or pool balls to float on the surface of pools, ponds, or fountains.
- Clear away foliage from around water sources to eliminate a protected nesting area.
- Enclose above ground decks with skirting to eliminate a nesting site.

In any instance of an injured duck, it is appropriate for Animal Services to be called. An Officer will respond and appropriate actions will be taken. Be aware, however, that many times the appropriate response will be to remove only the injured duck and leave the rest alone.

DUCKLINGS IN TROUBLE

Ducklings are found alone: Mother may have been spooked away and has not returned. Give her time, she will usually return within a half hour if the area has become quiet again and the threat is gone. She is very protective of her babies and will not go far or stay away for very long. If mother does not return to her babies, keep an eye on them and call Animal Services.

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Ducklings are in water with no mother: If mother is not present, the babies tend to stay in water for extended periods of time. Mother keeps her babies warm by sitting on them and only allows brief swimming sessions before returning to the nest. If the babies are in the water for extended periods, they will become cold. Their body temperature drops dangerously and babies will succumb to hypothermia. In addition, they do not produce preening oil, to waterproof their own feathers. They get this oil when they huddle against mother. That oil only remains on their feathers for short periods and must be restored frequently. It is important to note the important role that the mother duck plays in the duckling's survival and development.

Ducklings are in a pool and cannot get out: Hypothermia will result if babies are in a pool for more than a few minutes. Mother will stay in the pool with them (to protect them) if they cannot get out and it appears as if she is voluntarily allowing them to swim. She will exit the pool as soon as the babies are given a means to get out of the water. Construct an exit ramp for the babies with a board, lawn chair or other hard form (surf boards work too). Cover the makeshift ramp with a towel so the duckling's feet will not slip and they will be able to climb out on the surface. Another option is to place bricks on the steps of the pool so the ducklings can hop into them and hop out. Another helping hand is to place a screen over the pool filter so the ducklings don't go in.

Ducklings have fallen into the storm drain: Ducklings will often follow their mother along the curb and fall into storm drains. If you hear their peeps from below or see a frantic mother above, remain calm and give mom her space. Call Animal Services who will come out and do their best to reunite the mother with her ducklings or get them to the safety of an appropriate rehab facility.

For more information or help with ducks, please call Irvine Animal Services at 949-724-7092 or Irvine Police Dispatch at 949-724-7200.

