

Nature Trail
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The Boardwalk

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- A Picnic Area
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The Boardwalk

This is a great place to get an overall view of the pond areas. See how the ducks are doing or if the moorhen family are around the reeds. Watch the heron at the pond edge or check for chicks around the island in spring. There is box hedging and also bright yellow rapeseed oil flowers in the grassland verge providing food for insects and bees. You can smell the lavender and enjoy the vista.

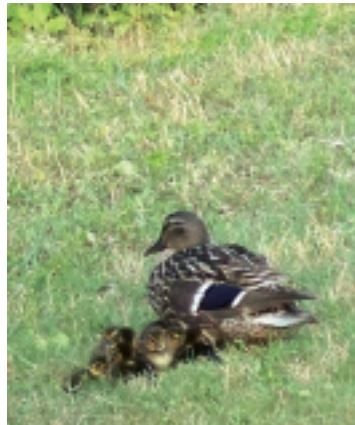


Mallard Duck

Anas Platyrhynchos / Lacha

Mallard ducks are the most common and recognizable wild ducks in the Northern Hemisphere. You'll find them near ponds, marshes, streams, and lakes. The male mallard duck, called a drake, sports a glossy green head, a white ring around its neck and a rich, chestnut-brown breast. The mottled brown female mallard looks downright dull next to the male's showy feathers. What the females lack in colour they make up for in noise. The familiar 'quack' is the call of the female summoning her ducklings.

Mallards are dabbling, or surface-feeding, ducks because they eat by tipping underwater for food—head down, feet and tail in the air, rather than diving. Mallards also forage and graze for food on land. The mallard duck's outer feathers are waterproof, thanks to oil that's secreted from a gland near the tail. Beneath this tightly packed waterproof layer of feathers lies a soft, warm layer of feathers called down.



A female mallard lays up to a dozen eggs in nests on the ground near water, often in a small depression or tree hole. She lines the nest with warm down plucked from her undercoat. Soon after birth, baby ducks, called ducklings, open their eyes. A little more than a day after hatching, ducklings can run, swim, and forage for food on their own. They stay in the nest for less than a month. A group of ducklings is called a brood. Outside the nest, the brood sticks close by the mother for safety, often following behind her in a neat, single-file line.



The females must be able to deter predators using some interesting strategies. If a threat approaches, the mother will sound the alarm by quacking loudly. If the threat gets closer, she will usually fly away, leaving her ducklings behind, trying to draw the predator away from the nest. The mother will sometimes swim out into the open water and flop around, as if she was injured. This is another way to try and draw the threat away from the little ones.



The Boardwalk



Tufted Duck

Aythya Fuligula / Lacha Bhadánach

Common throughout Ireland year-round, though much more numerous in the winter with the arrival of migrants from Iceland and northern Europe. Significantly smaller than the Mallard, the Tufted Duck is mostly found on freshwater, though in winter some will occasionally also gather on the sea. Males are predominantly purplish-black overall, with white flanks and bellies, black-tipped blue bills and striking orange eyes. They have a long, drooping crest at the back of the crown, which gives the species its name.

Females are much browner overall, though still with white bellies, and have a much shorter crest. Tufted Ducks feed primarily on insect larvae, small crustaceans and other aquatic invertebrates, though they will also eat plant material such as pondweed. They feed mainly by diving completely under the water to feed on the pond or lake bottoms.



Muscovy Duck

Cairina Moschata / Musclacha

Muscovy Ducks are not related to any other duck, in fact some believe they are descended from geese rather than ducks. They originate from South America where their name is believed to come from their insatiable appetite for mosquito's and their larvae. They also eat flies, small slugs, snails and even frogs and newts. The most obvious difference between them and 'other' ducks are the carruncles (the red feature) on their faces which is more predominant in the males.



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Moorhen

Gallinula Chloropus / Cearc Uisce

A common sight at all times of the year in Ireland, seen on ponds, canals, lakes and slow flowing streams. It belongs to the rail and crake family, though unlike most members of that group, such as the scarce Corncrake, it is not a particularly shy or secretive bird. It often comes out into the open and permits close approach by humans.



They are more or less half the size of the familiar Mallard duck. Adult birds are unmistakable when seen well, boasting a bright yellow-tipped red bill. They also have bright yellowish-green legs with almost comically large feet.

They enjoy a varied diet, including pondweed, seeds, worms, snails, small fish and even birds eggs. They pump their heads back and forth when swimming, and often fly over short distances with their legs dangling limply below their bodies.



Grey Heron

Ardea Cinerea / Corr Réisc

The Grey Heron is the largest European heron. In Ireland it is also known as the Longnecked

Hheron. The Grey Heron is the curse of fish farmers. Herons regularly feed on fish and can be seen standing patiently in a river or canal waiting for a fish to come into striking range and then it is stabbed with its dagger like beak.



The numbers of herons have increased throughout the country over the last number of years. This is due to the improved quality of water in our river systems and also the increased numbers of fish ponds in back gardens.

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Although Herons feed in water, they nest high in trees. The breeding colony is known as a Heronry. A large number of birds can nest very close together in the treetops. A good example can be seen in St. Anne's Park in Dublin.