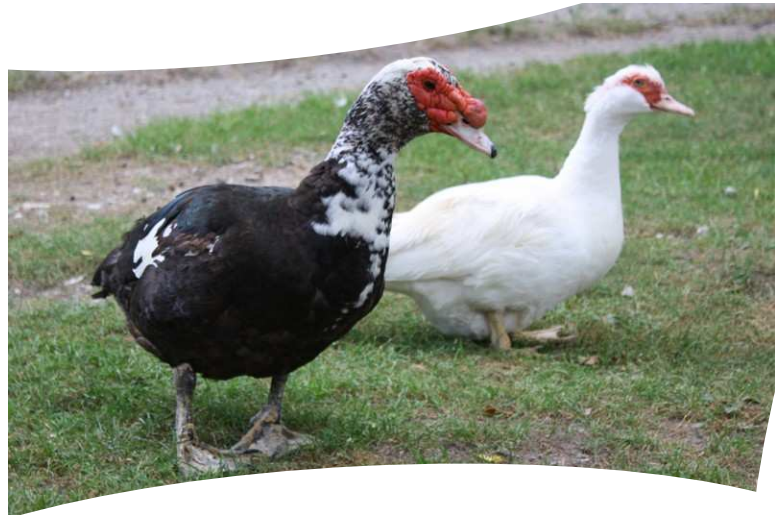


# Muscovy Duck

## *Cairina moschata*

Kingdom Animalia  
Phylum Chordata  
Class Aves  
Order Anseriformes  
Family Anatidae

Native to: Mexico and Central  
and South America.



### **Status: Least Concern**

**The Muscovy duck has benefited from nest boxes in Mexico, but is somewhat uncommon in much of the east of its range due to excessive hunting. It is not considered a globally threatened species, as it is widely distributed and thriving in some areas.**

### **Appearance & Lifespan**

The Muscovy duck is a very large breed of duck. All Muscovy Ducks have long claws on their feet and a wide flat tail. The male is about 86 cm long and weighs 10-15 lb, while the female is much smaller, at 64 cm in length and 6-8 lb in weight.

The wild Muscovy duck is mostly black, with large white wing patches. Domesticated birds may look similar; most are dark brown or black mixed with white, particularly on the head. Other colors such as lavender or all-white are also seen. Both sexes have a bare black-and-red or all-red face. The male also has pronounced caruncles at the base of the bill.

The average lifespan of a Muscovy duck is up to 20 years, that number is less attainable in the wild due to predation and injury.



## **Behavior & Reproduction**

Although the Muscovy duck is a tropical bird, it adapts to icy and snowy conditions down to  $-12^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $10^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) without concern. The male has a low breathy call, and the hen a quiet trilling coo. They are agile and speedy birds.

This species does not stay in pairs. They will mate in the water or on land which is unusual for ducks because they normally mate only on the water.

The hen lays a clutch of 8-16 white eggs, usually in a tree hole or hollow, which are incubated for 35 days. The hen will leave the nest once a day for 20-90 minutes to drink water, eat and sometimes bathe. Once the eggs begin to hatch it may take 24 hours for all the chicks to break through their shells. When the chicks are born they usually stay with their mother for about 10–12 weeks. Their bodies cannot produce all the heat they need, especially in temperate regions, so they will stay close to the mother especially at night. Ducklings are mostly yellow with buff-brown markings on the tail and wings. The male will stay in close contact with the brood for several weeks. The male will walk with the young during their normal travels in search for food, providing protection. For the first few weeks of their lives, Muscovy ducklings feed on grains, corn, grass, insects, and most anything that moves. Their mother instructs them at an early age how to feed.

## **Ecology & Conservation**

A small wild population reaches into the United States in the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. There also are feral breeding populations in North America in and around public parks in almost every state of the USA and in the Canadian provinces, small populations also exist in Europe.

This non-migratory species normally inhabits forested swamps, lakes, streams and nearby grassland and farm crops, and often roosts in trees at night. The Muscovy duck's diet consists of plant material obtained by grazing or dabbling in shallow water, and small fish, amphibians, reptiles, crustaceans, insects, and millipedes. This is a somewhat aggressive duck, the males often fight over food, territory or mates. The females fight with each other less often. Some adults will peck at the ducklings if they are eating at the same food source.

At the zoo the Muscovy ducks are fed duck and goose food, poultry grain, and romaine lettuce.

## **Did You Know?**

1. The Muscovy duck can be crossed with the domestic duck in captivity to produce hybrids which are known as Mulard Ducks but are sterile.
2. The Muscovy duck is found in all parts of the world in a domesticated state.
3. Muscovy ducks are sedentary and do not have established migration patterns.

