



## **Suggested procedures for capturing a family of Mallards at a swimming pool**

### **Goal:**

The goal of this procedure is to capture an entire family of Mallards (mother duck and ducklings) in order to relocate them to a more suitable habitat after the mother duck has nested near a pool and the ducklings have hatched and are swimming in the pool.



Female Mallard and ducklings

### **Day 1 (on first sight of the ducklings):**

1. Contact City Wildlife and DC Animal Care and Control immediately and tell them the eggs have hatched. (See Contacts, below.)
2. Count the ducklings. (If some eggs have not hatched by the end of Day 1, disregard them. They are probably not viable.)
3. Turn off the skimmer system.
4. Raise the water level or install a ramp so the ducklings can get out of the pool. It helps to put a wet towel on the ramp for traction.

5. Identify a shed or building that is accessible to the mother duck. Prepare this enclosure by limiting the accessible area within it (close off doors, vents, and access to other rooms or hallways). Remove sharp or hazardous objects.
6. Open the gate to the pool area so that the duck family can leave on their own if they choose.
7. Leave the family alone on the first night with the gate open, and observe them first thing the next morning. There is a remote chance they will depart on their own overnight, and if they do, they will not return. They are off to another water source.

## **Day 2 (capture and release):**

1. If the ducks are still in the pool area, prepare for capture. Clear the pool area of everyone but the wildlife capture team of 2 to 4 people (depending on the size of the pool and pool area).
2. Assemble the following equipment:
  - 2 front-opening cat carriers, one with screening small enough so the ducklings can't escape, the other for the mother duck. Place a soft towel on the floor of the ducklings' crate.
  - 1 large net (for the mother) and several smaller nets (for the ducklings)
  - 1 long duck boom made of styrofoam Pool Noodles tied together, end to end (if the pool is large)
  - 2-3 large pieces of cardboard (for herding the ducklings, if necessary)



Pool Noodles

3. Place the large net and the mother's cat carrier inside the shed. Leave the door to the shed open.
4. Remove the ramp. Make sure the skimmer is off. Block the skimmer openings, unless you could get access to a duckling in the skimmer.
5. First goal is to capture the ducklings without scaring the mother off the premises. Move very slowly and quietly (with as few people as possible) to herd

the ducklings into the pool for capture. Focus on the ducklings and give the mother wide berth. If the mother appears to want to fly off, cease operations and back off until she calms down. If she does fly off, wait until she returns (usually within 45 minutes).

6. With two people at either end of the Noodle boom, herd the ducklings toward one end of the pool so that two people there can capture them with nets. (If the pool is small, no boom is necessary.) As the ducklings are captured, place them in the carrier with the small screening.

7. Count the ducklings in the crate. Be sure you have them all.

8. Goal now is to get the mother duck to focus on the crate of ducklings. Only one person should be moving at this point, with the crate. Others stand back, away from the shed. She will be attracted to the crate because of the peeping of her ducklings. Be patient: this can take some time. **DO NOT SCARE THE MOTHER FROM THE SITE.**

9. Gradually move the crate of ducklings to the shed and put them just inside the open door, facing toward the opening so the mother can see and hear them. Once she is focused on them and pacing near the shed door, move the crate deeper into the shed and then leave the shed. Always move slowly and quietly, no eye contact.

10. All people back off from the shed. One person should stand quite close, prepared to close the door quickly, but hidden from the mother duck and preferably behind her. She will not move forward if anyone is in her forward view.

11. Wait until the mother enters the shed. This can take several tries. She may be very tentative at first, but should eventually enter the shed completely, searching for her peeping ducklings. When she is fully inside the shed and focused on the ducklings, close the door quickly and trap her inside.

12. With people shielding the apertures, open the door just enough for someone to squeeze inside and close that person inside the shed.

13. Person inside the shed gets the net that is there, captures the mother, and puts her in the second crate (which is also in the shed).

15. Take the two crates to the release site, preferably the nearest natural water source, since her drake may be there. Release the ducklings first and after most are out, release the mother. (If you release the mom first, she may not realize her ducklings are present and may fly off.) Once the mom is released, the ducklings will go to her immediately. Be sure they are all present, and if so, your work is done and the entire family has been humanely captured and released to the wild.

Notes:

- This procedure can be used after Day 2, but with each day, the mother duck becomes less bonded to the ducklings and more likely to fly off. On Day 2, she will usually stay on the premises during the capture if you work quietly and do not try to capture her.
- Never put the mother and ducklings in the same crate: she can injure them if she becomes agitated.
- If the mother can't be captured, the ducklings must be brought to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator (such as City Wildlife). They cannot survive on their own.
- Orphaned ducklings CANNOT be placed with another brood of ducklings the same age. The intended foster mother will attack them.

**Contacts:**

City Wildlife Duck Watch:

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City Wildlife headquarters:  
(202) 882-1000 (9am – 5 pm daily)

DC Animal Care and Control:

Lando McCall, Wildlife Specialist  
(202) 576-6664  
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Please contact us if you have any questions or need help.