

Release of Captive-reared Wildfowl

The practice of releasing captive-reared mallards and other waterfowl is growing in interest among some private landowners in North Carolina. The practice has been taking place in limited areas for more than a decade. The practice is being considered as a response to the decline in wintering waterfowl populations throughout the state since the 1970's. The primary motivation for such waterfowl releases is to increase hunting and viewing opportunities.

Released mallards and other ducks may adapt wild-like behaviors and move readily over the landscape. However, survivors do not migrate and therefore, attempt to nest not far from their release site. There is no evidence that mallards historically bred in North Carolina. In the early 1900's, breeding mallards were widely scattered small populations located on outer coastal regions whose southern extent was Back Bay, Virginia. Introducing captive-reared mallards or other waterfowl into areas that were never part of their breeding range is contrary to the ecological principles on which sound wildlife management is founded. To maintain ecological integrity, it is not prudent to introduce species where they have not historically existed.

Research on releases of captive-reared mallards in areas where mallards do historically breed, such as Manitoba, has consistently shown that such releases fail to restore breeding mallard populations. Further, increased breeding success of wild mallard populations is more easily attained through habitat improvements. The [North American Waterfowl Management Plan](#), endorsed by [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) and [The Canadian Wildlife Service](#), addresses large scale international concerns of waterfowl population declines and sets specific goals for habitat improvement.

Captive-reared mallards and other waterfowl may threaten wild waterfowl populations. Captive-reared mallards may harbor diseases such as duck plague that can be passed on to wild waterfowl. Captive-reared waterfowl can be asymptomatic carriers of the disease. However, wild waterfowl can contract duck plague and large wintering waterfowl populations may be vulnerable to such diseases. Captive-reared mallards that nest in North Carolina use wetland habitats that also serve as important breeding and brood rearing habitat for wild and historically occurring waterfowl such as wood ducks. The presence of captive-reared mallards may cause competition for or displacement of wild wood duck populations. Black ducks have historically nested in scattered populations in North Carolina. Captive-reared mallards may crossbreed with wild black duck populations causing further decline of that native species.

The policy of The North Carolina Chapter of The Wildlife Society, in regard to the release of captive-reared mallards and other waterfowl in North Carolina, is to:

Urge that no local, state, or national agency shall release, or permit to be released, any captive-reared waterfowl species.

Support programs to educate and encourage landowners and natural resource managers on the threats of releasing captive-reared mallards and other waterfowl to native wild waterfowl populations.

Promote public and private initiative and responsibility for improving habitat for native breeding and wintering waterfowl as identified by The [North American Waterfowl Management Plan](#).