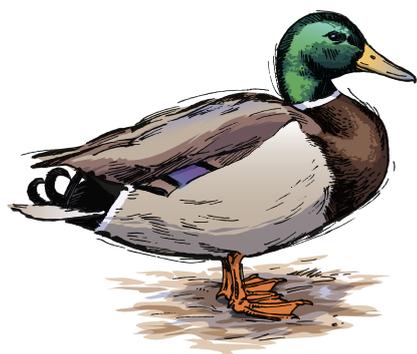


All about water birds

Living on the water

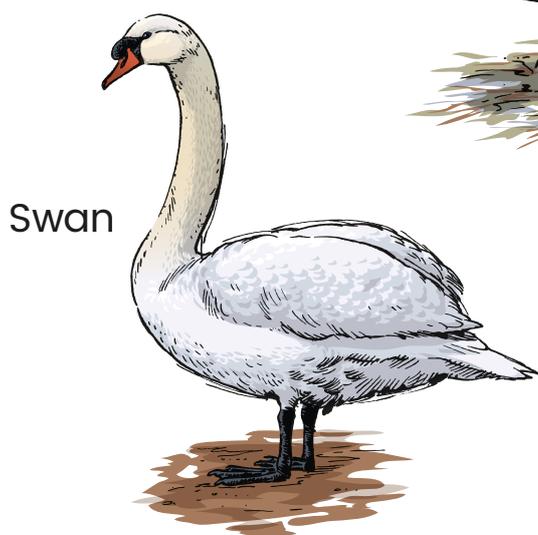
Our canals and rivers provide lots of different places for birds to live, build their nests, find food and bring up their babies. The six most common birds you will find are mallard ducks, coots, moorhens, swans, Canada geese and herons.



Mallard
duck



Canada
goose



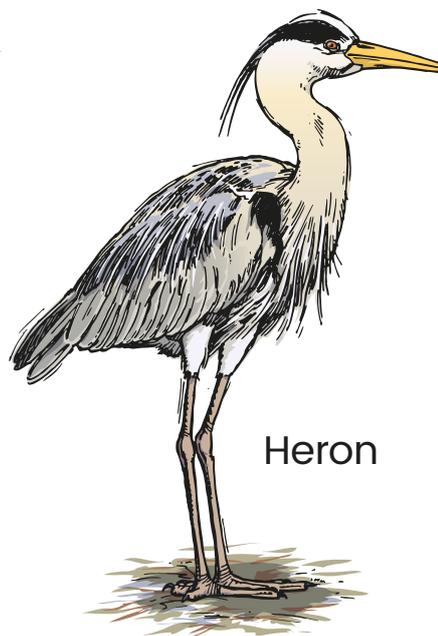
Swan



Coot



Moorhen



Heron

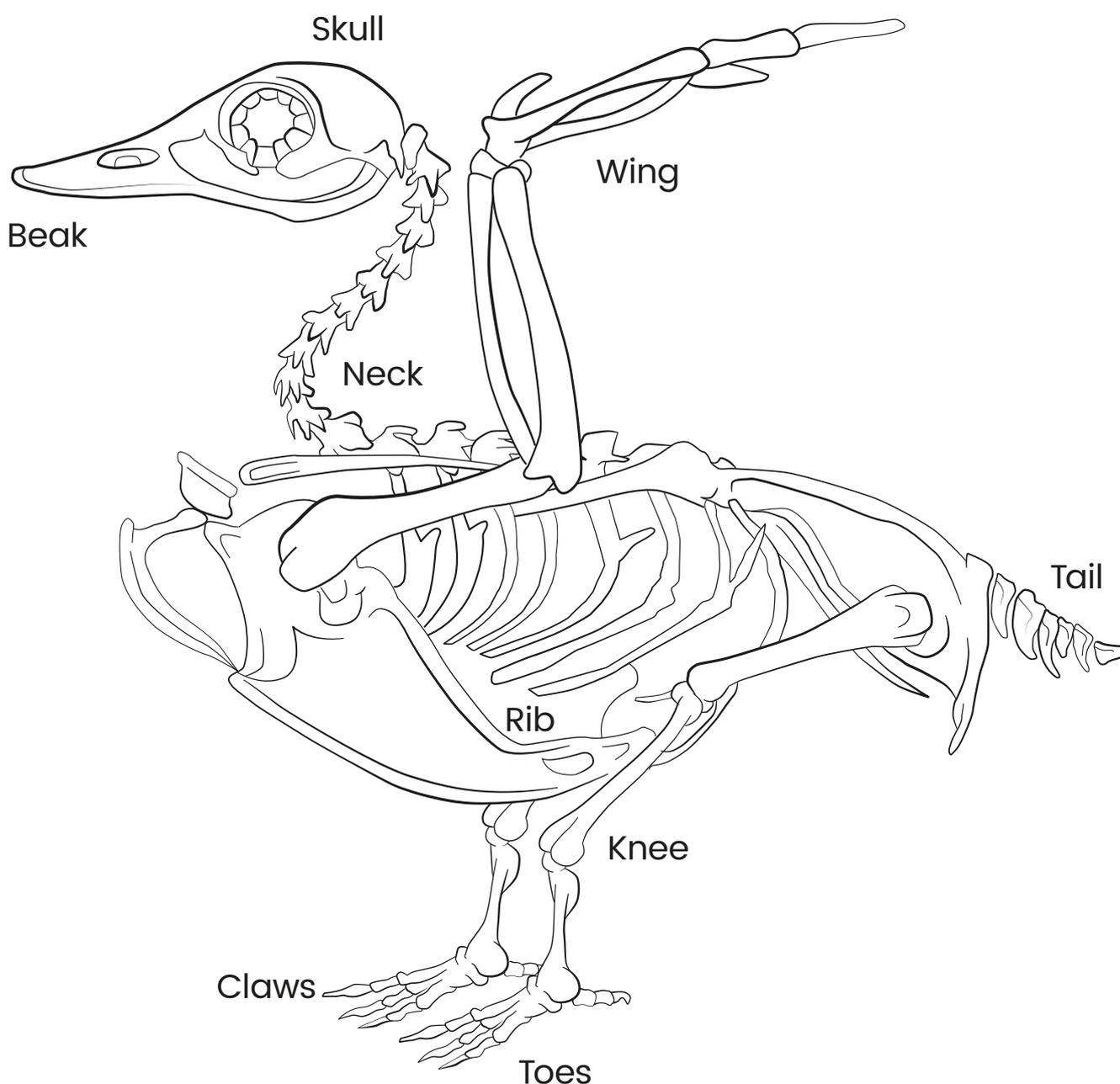
All about water birds

What do these birds have in common?

All birds are vertebrates which means they have a skeleton.

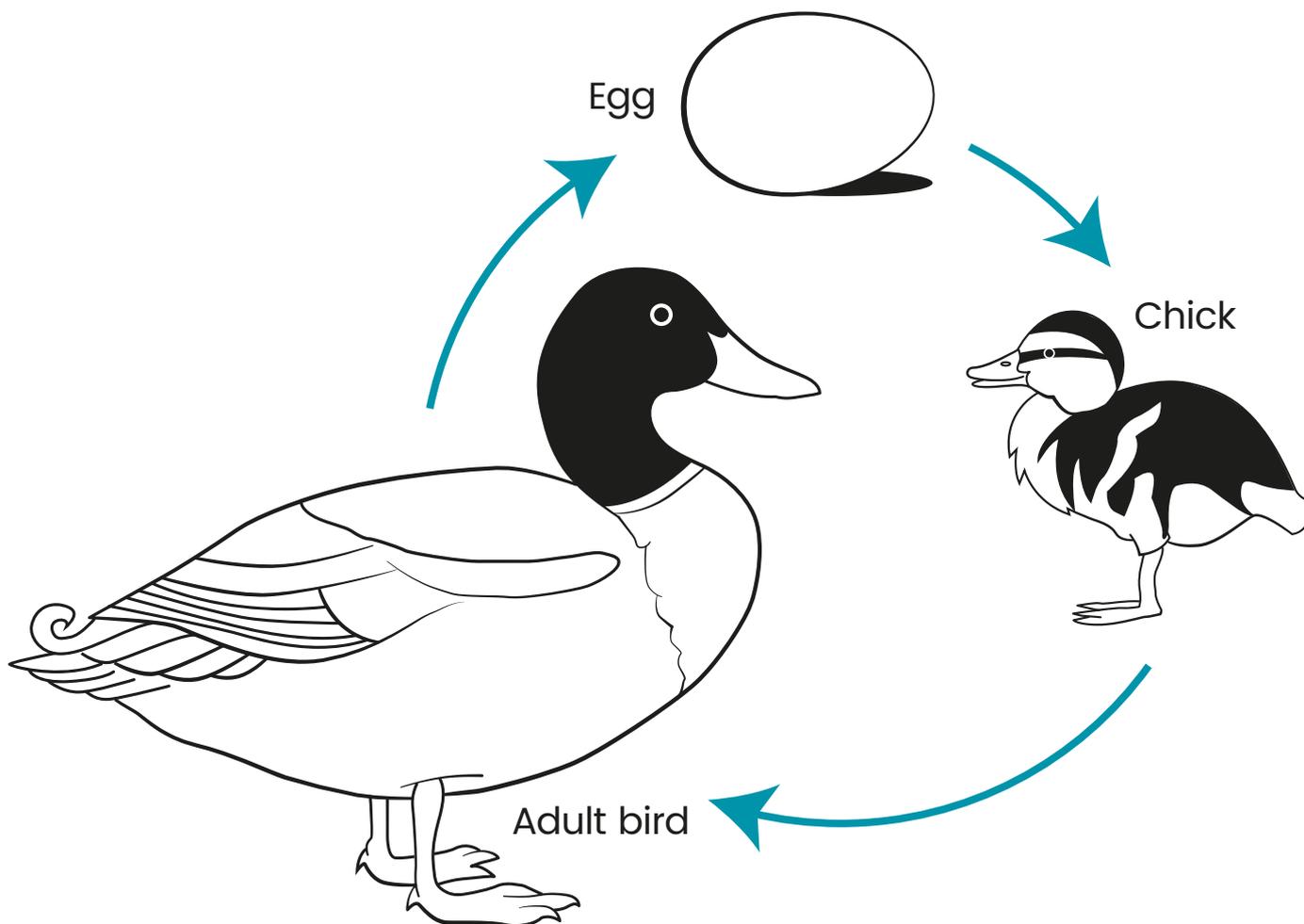
The other groups of vertebrates are fish, amphibians, reptiles and mammals.

Can you think of one animal from each group of vertebrates that live on or near water?



All about water birds

The life cycle of water birds

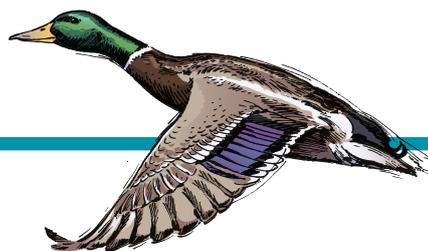


All six water birds have a similar lifecycle. They build nests in early spring where the female lays her eggs. The baby chicks hatch in early summer. The adults look after the babies for the first few months until they have grown into young adults. Sometimes the baby chicks look quite different from the adult birds. They all have waterproof feathers so that they stay dry even when diving under water.

How are these water birds different from each other?

Although these birds all live on or near water they all look quite different and they have different feeding and nesting habits. See if you can spot the differences.

All about water birds



Mallard ducks

What do mallard ducks look like?

There are lots of different types of ducks but mallard ducks are the most common bird you will find living on canals and rivers. They have short necks and a rounded beak called a bill. They have large yellow webbed feet to help them paddle through the water.

Female ducks are speckled brown. Male ducks are called drakes and have a shiny green head. The brown females are camouflaged to hide amongst rushes and branches to protect them from predators such as foxes. You may see other types of duck on the water including pochard, tufted ducks and mandarin ducks which have beautiful coloured feathers.

Ducklings on their nest

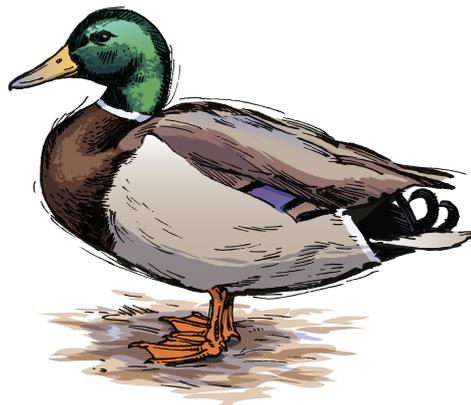
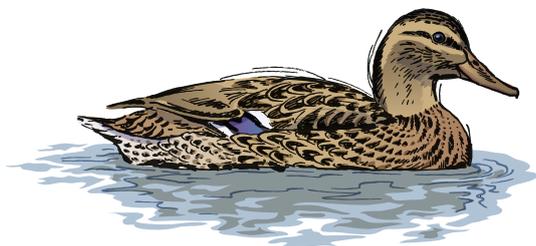


What do mallard ducks eat?

Ducks are omnivores. They eat small water creatures, plants and algae. They filter tiny food particles from the water through their bills. Sometimes they dabble which means they put their whole head and bill under the water to reach their food. Although we like to feed them bread this is not their natural diet and it can be bad for them.

Where do mallard ducks live?

Ducks build their nests from twigs and branches at the water's edge.



All about water birds

Coots

What do coots look like?

Coots are black with a round body and a white mark on the top of their heads. They have large yellow feet with spread toes to help them grip branches and walk on mud without sinking. They have a short white pointed beak. Sometimes they are quite aggressive to other birds on the water. Their black bodies are difficult for predators to see against the water.

What do coots eat?

Coots are omnivores. They eat water plants, algae and insects. They peck and search for food using their beak at the water's edge.

Where do coots live?

Coots make floating nests out of twigs and anything else they find in the water including plastic bags and burger boxes! They use their beak to build their nest.



A coot on its nest



All about water birds

Moorhens

What do moorhens look like?

Moorhens are black with a short, red, pointed beak. They are smaller and more shy than coots. They have large yellow feet with spread toes to help them grip branches and to walk on mud without sinking. Their black bodies are difficult for predators to see against the water.



What do moorhens eat?

Moorhens are omnivores. They eat plants, algae and small water creatures.

Where do moorhens live?

Moorhens make floating nests hidden amongst plants at the edge of the water.

Swans

What do swans look like?

Swans are large elegant, white birds with an orange beak. They have strong, scaly legs with webbed feet to help them swim through the water. Their white bodies confuse any predators and stand out as being aggressive.

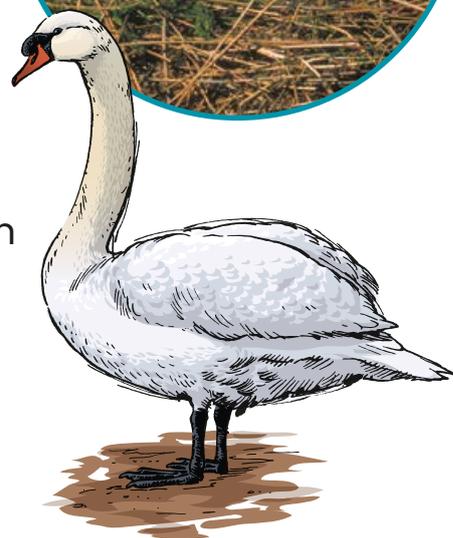
What do swans eat?

Swans are omnivores. They filter water through their beaks to feed on small animals and plants. Sometimes they stretch their necks down to reach food at the bottom of the water.

Where do swans live?

Swans build large nests hidden amongst tall reeds at the water's edge.

A swan on its nest

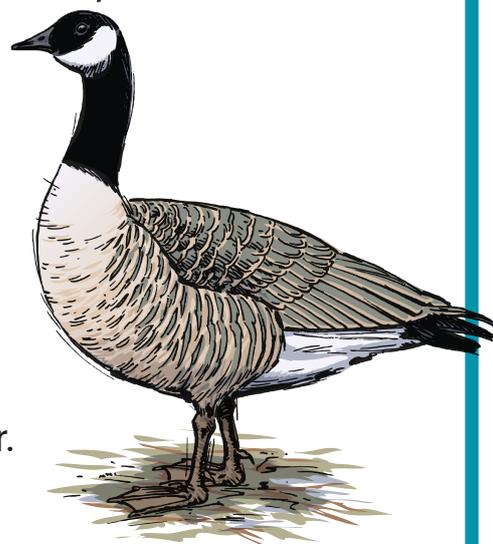


All about water birds

Canada geese

What do Canada geese look like?

Canada geese are large birds with black, white and brown markings. They have a black head and neck with a white collar. They have webbed feet to help them swim. Their different patches of colour confuse predators particularly when the light is reflecting off the water.



What do Canada geese eat?

Canada geese are omnivores. They filter water through their beaks to eat small animals and plants.

Where do Canada geese live?

Canada geese build their nests on land close to water. You often find them in large groups on or near water.

Hérons

What do herons look like?

Hérons are tall, grey birds with a long neck. They have long legs with thin toes spread widely to help them walk on mud. They have a long dagger shaped beak which they use to catch their prey. You can often spot them standing very still near the water's edge. Their grey bodies mean they can't be seen by their prey in the water.



What do herons eat?

Hérons are predators. They dive down into the water to catch small fish in their long beaks.

Where do herons live?

Hérons build their nests in the tops of trees. They are good fliers but cannot swim like other water birds.