

Orphaned Ducklings

INCUBATION AND HATCHING INFORMATION

A female duck lays one egg a day (usually in early morning) until she feels the clutch is complete. This can be anywhere from 4 to 24 eggs. She doesn't sit on the eggs until she is finished laying so all the eggs will be incubated at the same time and hatch within a 24 hour period of each other.

Ducklings are precocial and leave the nest with their mother after the eggs are hatched. Hatching is a stressful ordeal for a little duckling and time is needed afterwards to dry off and regain their strength. Ducklings that hatch out first in a clutch have more time to do this than the ducklings that hatch out last. By time the last ducklings hatch, their older siblings are already active and anxious to find water. The mother duck may be worried about predators and getting the ducklings into the safety of the water and also to start finding food. The egg sac will sustain a duckling for the first day or so of life; then they need to find food on their own. The ducklings that hatch out last often don't have enough time to recover but they have to follow their mother and siblings into the water and try to keep up as best as possible. Occasionally a mother duck will have to abandon eggs that are slow to hatch as the older ducklings are already getting into the lake and need her protection. If the remaining eggs happen to hatch after she leaves the nest, the ducklings are left to fend for themselves. Once a mother duck and ducklings leave the nest, they rarely return to the site. Many of the orphaned ducklings that we get in are a result of these situations.



WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FIND AN ORPHANED DUCKLING



Sometimes a duckling will stray from the group and get lost. When finding a lone duckling(s) that you're able to catch, walk around the lake with him cupped securely in your hands. Let him peep loudly. Only his mother will respond to his cries...and she should respond in a frantic, angry manner. Never put lost ducklings back into the lake as they are not likely to survive without their mother.

Never put a lost duckling back with a mother duck unless you're certain it's the right mother. Another mother duck will reject and drive off the intruder, or possibly even try to kill it. They know their own offspring and do not accept other babies.