**DUCK CHARACTERISTICS**

Ducks are smaller than than their relatives (swans and geese). Ducks also have shorter necks and wings and a stout body.

A female duck is called a ‘hen’, they are identified by their very-dull, brown feathers. The females have dull-brown feathers so that they can hide from enemies and predators. They can also camouflage themselves in their nests and also protect their young.

A male duck is called a ‘drake’, you can identify the male duck by its brightly coloured feathers. They use these coloured feathers to attract the female ducks for mating. Here is a beautifully coloured Drake with a purple plumage, shiny green head colouring, silvery white body and grey wings with blue markings.

The males use their colourful plumage to attract females. However, they will lose or molt their colourful feathers when the females are busy hatching the eggs. The males will now look like the female in colour and will be unable to fly temporarily. They will molt again in early Autumn and get back their colourful feathers and be able to fly again. The females also molt. They replace all their feathers and get new ones after their ducklings are hatched.

Ducks have webbed feet, which are designed for swimming. Their webbed feet act like paddles for the ducks. The reason ducks can swim in cold water is their amazing circulatory system. Their blood vessels are laid out very close to each other in their legs and feet in a network that allows the warm and cool blood to exchange heat. This allows the warm blood going from the body into the feet to warm the cooler blood re-entering the body from the feet, and the blood going to the feet is cooled enough that the cold does not bother the duck. Thus the duck’s feet are able to tolerate the cold and not bother them. All birds have this circulatory system in their legs and feet.

A duck has water-proof feathers. There is a special gland called the ‘Preen Gland’ near the ducks tail. This tiny gland produces oil which the duck uses to coat its feathers.