



*Mandarin Drake (Aix galericulata)*

## The Pleasure of Keeping Wild Waterfowl

by Charles A. Pilling  
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Wild waterfowl have fascinated mankind down through the ages. They not only have been a source of food for man in many parts of the world but have played an important part in his overall environment. No matter where we live in the world there are usually some species of wild waterfowl that either lives there or is seen as a seasonal visitor. Each species seems to seek out the environment for which it was created.

Many of us who love the great outdoors have been thrilled by the beauty and personalities of these feathered friends. Some of us have succumbed to the urge to try our hand at keeping and propagating them under captive conditions. In captivity we can study their behavior. By close observation we learn about their moods, their likes and dislikes, their instincts resulting in various activities throughout the seasons of the year. By being able to observe them up close we appreciate their beauty and charm and enjoy them more. When we

have them on display many other people can experience the thrill and pleasure of seeing some species for the first time especially where the species is from far away places. These benefits contribute to the greater awareness of the general public to the world of wild life we co-exist with.

The more experience and knowledge we gain in our efforts to propagate a species the better prepared we would be if at some time in the future that species would become threatened or endangered. When a person starts thinking about keeping waterfowl a lot of questions come to mind that should be answered. How much water do they require. What kind of food will they need. What kind of enclosure will they need to keep them from escaping and to protect them from dogs, cats and other predators. What species should I start with. Diving ducks require more water area because they depend on water for their safety more than dabbling ducks do. If they are confined in a very small pond they will not relax because

they do not feel safe. This will keep them worried and as a result they will not eat right or keep their feathers in good condition. A stress condition like this can result in more serious physical conditions developing. Dabbling ducks on the other hand are good on their feet as well as their wings so they don't worry as much about being out of water or on a small pond.

For people who are thinking about keeping waterfowl for the first time I would recommend the dabbling ducks to start with. Two very popular species are the native Wood Ducks and the Chinese Mandarin duck. These are two of the most beautiful species and the least expensive. They can be kept in a reasonably small area such as an aviary completely covered so they can be left full winged. They are perching ducks and like to fly up on tree branches or other similar places up off the ground. Because they are quite common in captivity information on all aspects of their propagation is not hard to find. When a person has gain-

*Mandarin Duck hatchlings 7 days old.*

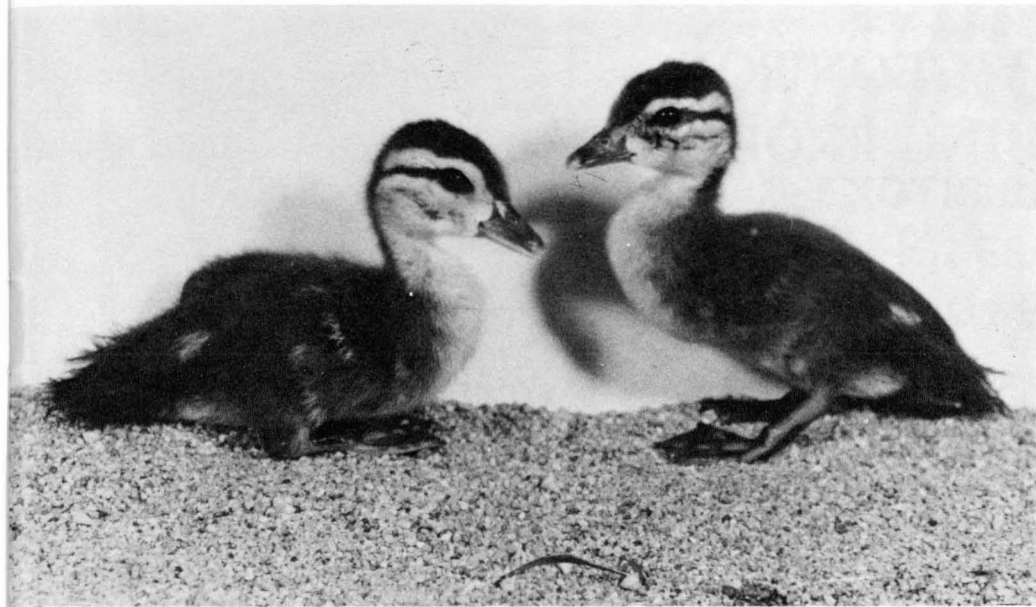


photo courtesy of San Diego Zoo.

ed experience with these two species then he can try his hand at some of the other species. If the area available to keep them in is small then it is best to stay with the small species. Geese do not require much water as they spend most of their time out of the water. Swans however spend most of their time in the water so they need a larger water area.

For the person who is looking for a fascinating and challenging hobby with a lot of pleasures and a few frustrations I can highly recommend the field of avicul-

ture. As I look out over my ponds of waterfowl an old English saying comes to mind. Water without waterfowl is like a garden without flowers.

*(Editor's Note: If one wants to keep waterfowl in a finch or parrot collection, the Wood Duck and the Mandarin Duck that Mr. Pilling points out are an obvious first choice. With a little bit of thought these ducks can be integrated into the collection and will produce variety and beauty that is hard to beat.)*

*North American Wood Duck (Aix sponsa) with hatchlings.*

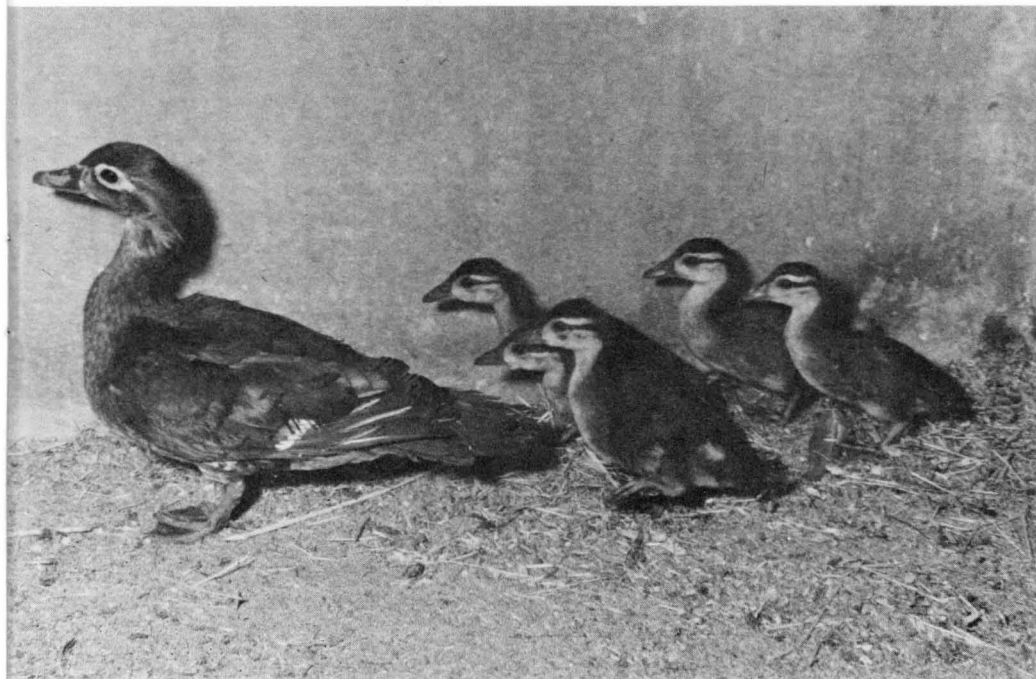


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