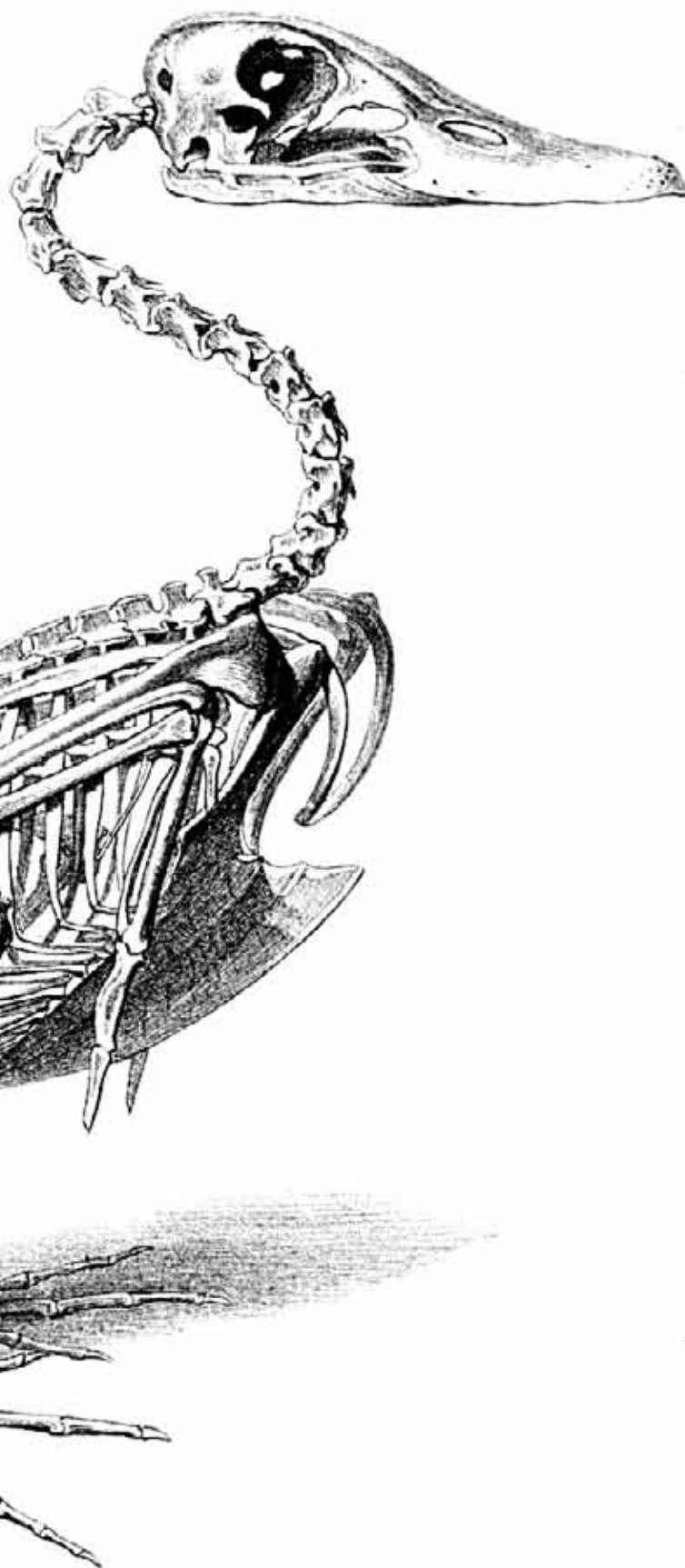


Save the Ducks

EVERYTHING
YOU EVER
WANTED TO
KNOW ABOUT
DUCKS

by Camilla Mortensen



If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, then it's a duck. Or a wigeon, which is also a duck. Ducks are everywhere in Eugene, but they are so much part of our Oregon landscape that we often walk right by them with barely a second glance. But because, through a quirk of history, the University of Oregon's sports teams compete on the national stage as waterfowl, and through a quirk of Nike the UO has tried to make these spatulate-beaked waddling avians into muscled fighting machines, *EW* would like to call attention to some of the wonders of *Anatidae Anseriformes*: the ducks.

According to Kevin Roth, a wildlife biologist at Fern Ridge Wildlife Area, about 20,000 to 30,000 ducks pass by Eugene along the Pacific Flyway each year, and many Lane County residents get up in the dark hours of dawn in hopes of bagging one of these ducks that may migrate along the flyway for 1,000 miles to land in the Beaver State: wood ducks, mallards (the most common one you'll see, Roth says), American wigeons and northern pintails to name a few. According to Oregon State's Bruce Dugger, an associate professor of wildlife, ducks are popular as domestic birds; as wild animals they bring a number of ecological benefits, and across the world many are endangered. Dugger wonders what would happen if the UO put its mascot money where its mouth is and started an effort to save the ducks. And as football season draws to an end with the Ducks playing in the Fiesta Bowl, duck-mating season is on the way and that opens up a whole other can of worms about the wild world of ducks.

DUCK, DUCK, WEBFOOT, GOOSE

Dave Holderread of Holderread Waterfowl Farm and Preservation Center, located in the Cascade foothills outside Corvallis, wrote the book on ducks. Literally. His *Storey's Guide to Raising Ducks* has been in print in one incarnation or another since 1978. Holderread, who has been raising ducks since he was in elementary school, says interest in farming ducks has increased in the past 10 to 15 years. The city of Eugene has recently begun discussing increasing the numbers of ducks, chickens and other backyard farm animals it allows in response to the increased demand for local food production.

Holderread has about 50 breeds of ducks and other waterfowl on his farm and says, "Ducks are much more versatile than chickens — and I have nothing against chickens." He says ducks are more resistant to parasites and diseases and "they are a bird that are perfectly happy in a totally wet environment, which chickens abhor. Ducks are out there like, 'Isn't this cool?'"

Holderread adds, "It just kind of makes me chuckle the way people struggle with chickens. There's a bird made for this climate, and it's not chickens."

Ducks share the same bird family (*Anatidae*) as geese and swans. There are no invasive ducks in Oregon, according to Dugger, though there is at least one invasive swan — the mute swan — listed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).

Holderread writes in his book that there are two distinct species of duck that are commonly domestically raised — mallards and muscovy ducks. Muscovys are slightly less water repellent and most domestic muscovys can still fly. Muscovys also have "talon-like toenails," Holderread writes, enabling them to perch in trees. Mallard wing sizes do not increase when the domestic birds are bred to be larger and so most domestic mallards can't fly. Ironically the UO mascot, derived from Disney's Donald Duck is the pekin duck, "bred to sleep, eat and grow really fast," and are so big they don't get around really well, Holderread says. Pekins, the typical white duck you see portrayed in pop culture, were bred in China from mallards.

GoDucks.com features an explanation of how the UO came to be the Ducks, saying that the students originally called themselves Webfooters after some patriotic New Englanders who made their way west and because the state of Oregon used to be called the Webfoot State before switching to the Beaver State in 1909. But according to a 1952 article in *Western Folklore* called "The Constant Webfoot," that's not quite right. The Webfoot moniker was originally a derogatory nickname Californians gave gold