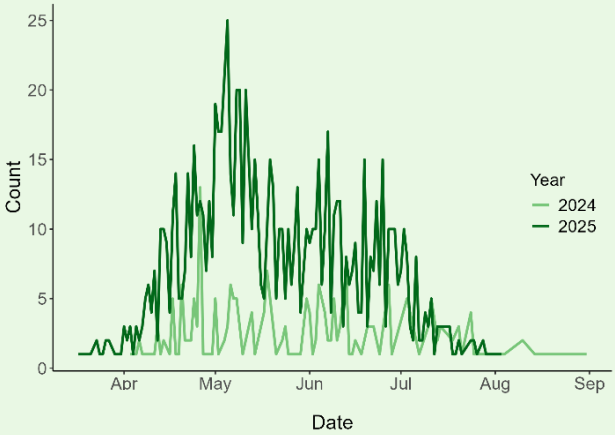
DucklingWatch 2025 report

DucklingWatch 2025 has been a success - we received 951 brood records, a marked increase from the 129 broods recorded in our Essex-based pilot last year. This dataset is being used to understand which stages of the mallard life cycle contribute most to changes in population trends.

This year, we received records from 328 sites across the UK, thanks to over 150 participants. 663 individual broods were recorded, with over 5500 individual ducklings counted. Broods were reported from mid-March to late August, peaking in the first week of May.

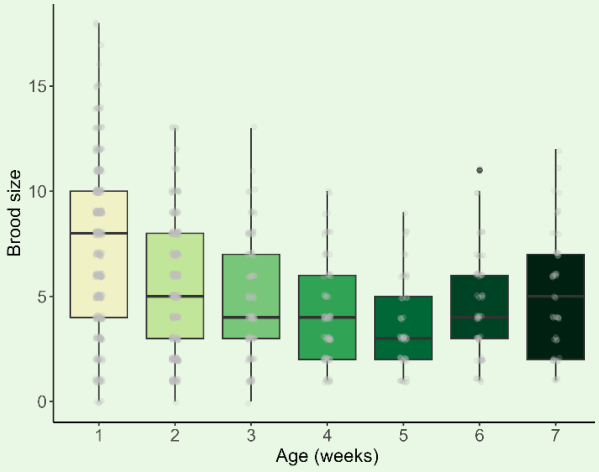
Map of locations where broods were recorded in DucklingWatch 2025.



Daily count of brood records submitted to DucklingWatch 2025 compared to the pilot in 2024.

The largest brood recorded consisted of 18 ducklings. The average brood size across all ages was 5.8, but differed significantly between age groups. The average size of broods in their first week was 7.2, which dropped to 5.3 for broods in their second week, then levelled off at around 4.5 for ducklings aged 3-7 weeks.

Duckling survival across the 8 weeks it takes for young to reach fully grown was around 15% (equivalent to a mortality rate of 85%). Duckling survival tends to be in the region of 20-50%, so this is a low survival rate, and comparable to the duckling survival rate in the Netherlands[1], where the breeding mallard population is declining at a similar rate to that of the UK's population[2,3]. This estimate may be representative of a particularly poor breeding season for UK mallards, as it is likely duckling survival was affected by the exceptionally dry and hot weather. Most broods were recorded in urban areas, so it is also possible this survival rate is more representative of broods in urban habitats. Further collection of data, particularly in rural areas, will help us better understand what influences duckling survival and how this affects the population as a whole.



Boxplot of brood sizes for each age class with raw data overlaid as grey points.

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to everyone who participated in DucklingWatch this year – you have helped us collect valuable data that is already helping us better understand our mallard population. We would also like to thank every person, organisation and bird club who helped to spread the word about this project**. We are particularly grateful to the Essex Birdwatching Society, the British Trust for Ornithology and all the people who recorded broods in 2024 & 2025 for helping us establish this project.**

DucklingWatch will continue in 2026 so we would be grateful for your continued support by recording broods next season and sharing the project to get even more people involved.

DucklingWatch was established to collect data for a PhD supported by the Natural Environment Research Council (UKRI) and the ARIES Doctoral Training Partnership [grant number NE/S007334/1].

Author: Hannah Coburn **ducks@essex.ac.uk**

References

1. Wiegers, J.N. *et al.* (2022) 'Integrated population modeling identifies low duckling survival as a key driver of decline in a European population of the Mallard', *Ornithological Applications*, 124(3):1–12

2. Bremer, L. *et al.* (2015) *Populatieontwikkeling Wilde Eend, Krakeend, Kuifeend en Tafeleend in Nederland: wat weten we over de achtergronden?* Sovon-rapport 2015/65, CAPS-rapport 2015/01. Sovon, Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology.

3. Heywood, J.J.N. *et al.* (2025) *The Breeding Bird Survey 2024*. BTO Research Report 787. British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford.