



## Part 2: Mixed-up Moms

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*Cherie Langlois*

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I think.

I'm unsure because during the entire incubation period the expectant mother Muscovies kept trading—or more likely stealing—eggs from each other.

One morning I found the ducks hovering over their nests rather than sitting flat—a sign the eggs might be hatching.

Sure enough, when I pulled out a warm egg, I spotted small cracks at the larger end. Holding it to my ear, I heard soft peeps and scrapes. Known as “pipping,” this signals the duckling’s imminent arrival over the next 12 hours or so.

Amazingly, all but two ducklings heroically chiseled out of their eggshells at about the same time, meaning the girls had begun incubation simultaneously (what a team!).

Velma and Tica kept stealing the two remaining eggs—and their ducklings—from each other, shifting them gently from nest to nest. After everybody emerged, I found Tica hovering over both broods while Velma ate from the food dish.

I needed to move the ducklings to an adjacent pen, where they wouldn’t be bothered by the other fowl, but I worried about putting both females in with them. Although Muscovies make dedicated mothers, they can step on and accidentally crush their babies when disturbed.

Studying the moms and their little bundles of fluff, I observed that Tica, the younger duck, seemed more enthusiastic about the whole mothering thing than Velma.

Every time I came near, Tica lowered her head and gave me a menacing hiss, while Velma seemed more concerned about making up for lost time at the food dish.

My oldest duck at 6 years, Velma had experienced the joys and frustrations of motherhood a number of times, so maybe she felt burnt out. I decided to give the babies to Tica.

I caught Tica up and moved her to the next pen, then whisked the adorable ducklings into a hay bucket and transferred them into their new “nest.”

As inevitably happens whenever I move moms and ducklings, Tica became frantic. She desperately looked for a way out of the pen, back to her old nest, ignoring the babies right beneath her beak.

“Your babies are right there!” I told her.

After much persuasion on my part, Tica finally got a clue. Oh! There they are!

Meanwhile, Velma had discovered HER babies were missing. Furious, she paced outside the pen door, squeaking up a storm. The next day, even though I plied her with treats, she still hadn’t forgiven me.

Oh well, you just can’t please everybody.

Happy beginning of summer!

~ Cherie



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