



Part 1: Odd Ducks

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Cherie Langlois

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For starters, while all other domestic duck breeds presumably descended from the wild Common Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), domestic Muscovies arose from a different waterfowl species, the wild Muscovy (*Cairina moschata*).

A long-tailed tropical perching duck, the wild Muscovy lives in wooded wetlands from the Rio Grande through Mexico and Central America, down to South America. The Incas of Peru likely domesticated these big birds centuries ago to provide pest-control (on my farm, they eradicate slugs) and supply meat, eggs, and feathers.

Over the years, I've discovered that my domestic Muscovies not only look different from Mallard-derivatives (see photo: drakes have a face only a mother Muscovy could love!), they also behave differently.

The lighter-weight females and young males can fly quite well, and they love to perch on fences, in trees, and sometimes (messily) on our barn roof.

Instead of noisy quacks, the drakes make quiet hissing sounds, while the females utter breathy squeaks (they'll emit noisier squawks if scared). They're also more aggressive and less water-crazy than other ducks.

In the wild, Muscovies nest in tree holes.

At my farm, the females keep me on my toes by seeking secret spots to lay their large clutches: under the pump house, in a corner of the sheep/goat stalls, hidden behind hay stacks.

This spring I was lucky: two Muscovy girls scooped out depressions in the straw and laid eggs in the chicken pen – a nice convenient, safe spot for a change.

For the first time, though, the two normally solitary nesters nested side-by-side, almost touching!

They looked content enough (I imagined them gossiping about the other fowl to fill the time), so I let them incubate their eggs for the requisite 35 days or so, curious to see what would happen.

Next time: Find out what happened ...?

Do you have any odd animals on your farm? I'd love to hear about them.

~ Cherie

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