

Diet and Feeding Habitats of Camargue Dabbling Ducks: What Has Changed Since the 1960s?



"In the Camargue (southern France), drastic changes in wetlands have occurred (notably extension of agriculture and salt extraction) since the 1960s, which affect the resources available to migratory waterbirds. Winter diets of Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and Teal (*A. crecca*) in 2006–2008 were assessed by analyses of gullet contents. Using PCA-based methods, duck diets were described and the main feeding habitats used by each duck species were then determined with a typology analysis. The same four food items were most important in the diet of Mallard and Teal: *Oryza sativa* (rice), *Echinochloa* sp., *Scirpus maritimus* and *Potamogeton pusillus* seeds. However, Teal diet was more diversified, with eleven feeding habitat types, compared to only five in Mallard. Both species were found to be dependent on ricefields and ricefield-like habitats. Compared to previous studies in the same area between 1964 and 1981, permanent freshwater habitats now appear to be used more intensively by Mallard and Teal, while temporary marshes are used to a lesser extent. Since the 1960s, temporary marshes have been partially replaced by permanent freshwater in order to attract more ducks, mostly for hunting. The flexibility of duck diet in response to changing food availability may explain why duck populations have not decreased in the Camargue or in Europe despite changes in land use."

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