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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

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MALLARD X EGYPTIAN GOOSE HYBRID?

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On 19 September 2014, whilst surveying the Kensington pentad (2610_2805) for the second Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2), I encountered and photographed two unusual ducks on the main dam at Gillooly's Farm, immediately in front of the Mississippi Pub.

The birds were associating with Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* and appeared to be hybrids between this species and Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*. The birds had shiny heads, dark to the point on the necks where the bright green on a male mallard ends, but with a pale patch below the eye resembling that area in an Egyptian Goose. The colour patterning on the bills was similar to that on the Egyptian Goose with the dark areas being relatively darker. The breasts had a rufous tinge close to the colour of a male Mallard, and the tails had darker and shinier feathers than typical for an Egyptian Goose. The rest of the body resembled the plumage of an Egyptian Goose quite closely. I contacted specialists to find out if these birds were indeed hybrids of the kind they appeared to be, and whether they are fertile, which may obviously have implications for the Egyptian Goose gene pool.

Prof Les Underhill provided a link which depicts a variety of hybrids, including this combination, at <http://www.gobirding.eu/Photos/HybridDucks.php>.

Dr Craig Whittington-Jones, regional ornithologist for Gauteng responded with the comment: "Several years ago there was a record of a flock of Mallard x E. Goose hybrids on the East Rand of Gauteng. We received a convincing photo, but the birds had disappeared by the time our team got to the site. At the time David Allan of the Durban Natural History Museum also shared some photos of hybrid specimens which are presumably in his collection. If I recall correctly, Dr Brett Gardner of the Jhb Zoo and Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson of BirdLife SA, were keen to capture hybrid birds and keep them in captivity to determine if they were sexually viable. I have copied them and my colleague, Sean West, on this response, so if they are still keen to conduct this research a plan can be made to capture the birds."

I last saw the birds at the same site on 26 September 2014. I am currently uncertain whether any of these specialists took sufficient interest to attempt to capture these birds for further research. It does appear that this Mallard hybrid is less frequent than its more well documented hybridization with *Anas* species, particularly Yellow-billed Duck *Anas undulata*, African Black Duck *Anas sparsa* and Cape Shoveler *Anas smithii*.

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Fig 1 – The birds which presumably are Mallard x Egyptian Goose hybrids photographed at Gillooly's Farm in September 2014.

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