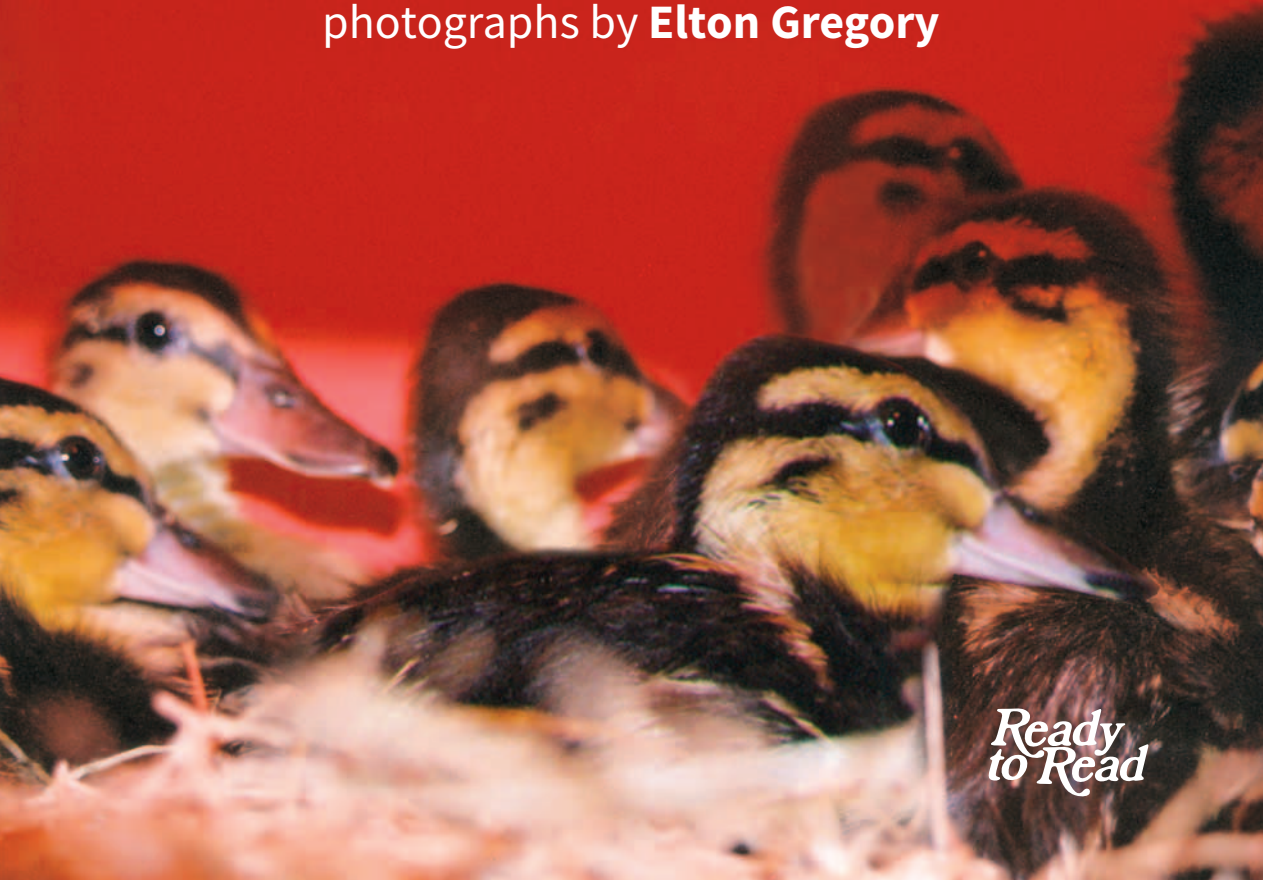


Duckling Palace

by **Philippa Werry**
photographs by **Elton Gregory**



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Ministry of Education

You know it's spring when you see a mother duck with her ducklings. But what happens if you find some ducklings *without* their mother? That's when you need a duckling palace.



Lloyd Warren works at the SPCA, and he's the king of the duckling palace. That's where he looks after ducklings that have lost their mothers.

The SPCA is the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. We care for stray pets and find homes for them. We care for wild animals as well and return them to the wild.



Most of the ducklings that people bring in to the SPCA are only a few days old. A mother duck tries to lead her ducklings to water just a few hours after they've hatched, even if there's a busy road in the way. Sometimes the mother duck is run over by traffic.



When ducklings arrive at the SPCA, the first and most important thing they need is to stay warm.

A row of incubators is ready for them. An incubator is made out of an upside-down recycling bin inside a wooden box. The bin has a hole cut in the side so the ducklings can go in and out. A heat lamp is fixed to the top of the bin. The floor is covered with straw.





Lloyd doesn't want to handle the ducklings too much, so he leaves them alone as much as possible. Ducklings can eat on their own as soon as they hatch, so Lloyd feeds them food pellets.

Now the ducklings are warm and well fed, but they also need water to drink. Lloyd needs to make sure that they can't climb into their water containers. Ducklings love water, but if they have a big bowl of it, they'll climb right in and get wet and cold.



By the time they are about twenty-five days old, the ducklings are big enough to go outside into a big paddock. For their first week, they stay in a wooden pen, and then they go out with the rest of the ducks and ducklings.

Lloyd throws them a few handfuls of food a day. “You don’t want them to get too friendly,” he says, “because you’re going to release them into the wild.”



The ducklings are fully grown at about sixty-six days old. At about eighty-five days old, just before they can fly, Lloyd releases them. He knows when they are nearly ready to fly because they start trying to take off in the paddock.



Lloyd takes them to safe places, where he lets them go. Lloyd’s ducklings have grown into ducks now. They are ready to leave the duckling palace and join the wide world.

Feather Facts



Adult ducks have a special oil gland at the base of their tail. They use their bill to spread oil from this all over their feathers. The oil makes their feathers waterproof so they can stay in the water without getting cold.

Ducklings have to wait until their feathers grow before this oil gland works. In the wild, their mother coats them with her oil when she grooms them. This makes them waterproof. Ducklings that don't have their mothers to do this get too cold if they go into water.



What to do if you find stray ducklings



Don't pick the ducklings up right away. First make sure that the mother duck isn't nearby. Look around for a nest. If you're sure the ducklings have no mother, put them in a box.

Give them a little bit of water, but make sure it's not too deep! Try not to touch them too much. That's hard, because they look so cute.



Put the box somewhere warm, like a hot-water cupboard. Then phone your local SPCA.



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To go directly to audio and TSM for this book, scan the QR code or use the short URL.



Duckling Palace

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