DUCKS

Posted on March 5, 2007 by Eddie

Category: Observations

We live in a European city and we don't see a great deal of the majesty of nature. It's lovely to see the days getting longer and the buds on the trees, but not for us the sight of migrating wildebeest or the spectacle of rutting stags. However, there is one, small natural opera which plays out every year in the grounds of Southampton University; a sight with as much passion and tension as anything that BBC nature documentaries have to offer.

Sometime in February the mallards start to reappear from wherever it is they hide out through the coldest months. The males with their beautiful metallic green heads and the females dull and brown. But it is the females that have the power and by late February or early March every female is being followed around by one or more suitors.

As I walked through the University this morning, there were groups of Mallards all over the lawns, the males arguing and fighting and trying to impress the females, who just stood there looking cool - unless a male got too close. (It was remeniscent of undergraduates on a sunny day after the exams are over!)

Mallards are so ungainly on land and their waddling around trying to impress and be impressed is faintly comical, but there is no mistaking the earnestness with which they go about this pairing ritual. Every now and then, one bird will get irritated, or perhaps a male loses out to a rival and takes to the wing. Suddenly these silly ungainly birds turn into things of real beauty, soaring off into the distance.

In a week or two, all the fighting and arguing will be over as pair bonds are established. Pairs of birds will be spotted sitting on the grass or swimming together quietly, clearly enjoying one another's company. By late April or May, the female's will be followed around by their chicks - silly bundles of feathers and beak. Through the summer the chicks will grow and develop and sometime around October or November most of the ducks will vanish from our stream. We will be on the eager look out for them next February when they return and the drama begins again.

What is the significance of all this? Well, firstly, I like ducks, but secondly, the yearly duck drama reminds me of the creator who loves this planet and the ducks so much more than I do and who keeps his promises.

"As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease."

Genesis 8:22.

When we see the ducks come back, we know he has kept his promise yet again!