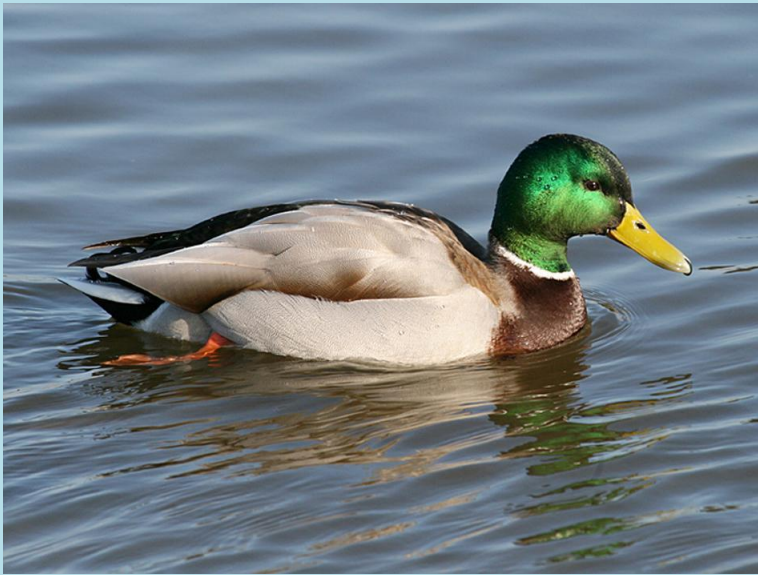


Why didn't you say?



Emerald raindrops glistened on every grass and leaf. The mallard, well-preened and quackily happy was enjoying the swollen river waters following a night of torrential rain. His foraging took him close to what, overnight, had become an island a little way from the main bank of the river.

Mallard, my glossy feathered aquatic friend! It took the mallard a few moments to

locate the voice, which he recognised instantly as belonging to the water rat. Eventually, paddling across to

the broken bow of a willow torn apart by last night's deluge, he saw the twitching nose of the rat at the centre of a very small hole behind the broken branch.

My venerable, most attractive and solicitous friend, the rat continued as the drake came closer. *I am in urgent need of your kind assistance. I find myself in a highly deplorable predicament. The raging waters which are the direct denouement of last evening's disastrous precipitation, have cast this branch longitudinally across my domiciliary accommodation. As a direct consequence of this most undesirable contingency the promontory in which my commodious premises has been constructed has sustained a serious dilapidation and caused the occlusion of the aperture from which I make my customary entrances and departures. I am unable to extricate myself from my waterlogged domain and I shall be eternally grateful for your chivalrous endeavours in locating and communicating with those creatures who will facilitate my emancipation before the waters ascend further and overwhelm me in my own habitation.*

Eh? said the mallard. *There was a lot of rain last night. Lovely don't you think!* He swam around in three complete circles, just in front of the rat, believing him to be of the same mind.

Yes, yes, yes. The rat wiped water drops from his whiskers. The mallard could hear him sloshing around inside his hole and thought it to be a very agreeable sound.

The rat tried again. *The relentless assiduity of every passing moment compels me to entreat you again dear friend. I am no expert in hydrodynamics but my legs acquaint me with the indisputable fact that the water levels are rising rapidly. It has become pre-eminently obnoxious in this locality and indeed I am apprehensive for my life. Will you please be the harbinger of my dire predicament and urgent request to my friends the otters?*

I met the otters earlier, said the mallard, and remembering how he had seen them diving for their breakfasts, he up-ended himself into a patch of weed. The rat was left staring at the mallard's tail feathers and all the while getting more and more agitated and not a little distressed.

Please, called the rat as soon as the mallard appeared the right way up again. *Please! I've attempted every modus operandi known to me, but my capacious figure encumbers me and negates all my strenuous exertions to squeeze between the branch and the bank I ascertain that in response to my previous unprofitable essays I have now become intractably incarcerated.*

You do talk posh, the mallard said. It's like listening to the music of the river to hear you. Well, I must move along. He pushed away from the bank with a single paddle of his feet.

Don't go, don't go, pleaded the frightened rat as the mallard glided away. *Help! Help! I'm stuck! I'm drowning!*

The mallard turned back. *Why on earth didn't you say so! I'll go to find the otters. They'll get you out!*

***In the human world, of course,
we always say what we mean***