


Factsheet 2:

Feeding ducks and other wildfowl

Main source of information from  Canal & River Trust

In order to improve the health of our water birds and their habitats, consider swapping the usual white bread for something healthier

Bread and similar food such as biscuits and cakes are a good source of carbohydrate but they offer little else in the way of nutritional value for any birds, including waterfowl like ducks, swans and geese. Bread is the equivalent of junk food for birds and, just as with humans, too much of it can lead to weight gain and malnutrition and death.

Wild ducks and waterfowl can live longer, healthier lives by relying on natural food sources such as aquatic plants, seeds, grasses and insects but the aim is not to discourage people from interacting with wildlife, just to do it in a way that recognises their particular needs. Feeding birds is something that people have done for generations and we definitely don't want to discourage that, but we have to think about how we do it so that our children and future generations can enjoy it too. There are many healthier alternatives to offer them instead of bread. Uneaten bread can cause algal blooms on lakes, allows bacteria to breed and attracts rats and other vermin.

Why is Bread Bad for Ducks ?

- Not only can bread be fattening to ducks and make it harder for them to fly and otherwise evade predators, feeding ducks bread can also lead to other serious problems:
- **Duckling Malnutrition:** Ducklings require a varied diet and plenty of natural plants and insect proteins to mature properly. Because ducks will eagerly seek out an easy food source, ducklings will not learn to forage for natural foods as easily.
- **Overcrowding:** Where there is an easy food source the pond or lake will become overcrowded. This makes it more difficult for the birds to seek out healthier food sources and increases the likelihood of territorial aggression.
- **Pollution:** When too much bread is offered to ducks, not all of it will be eaten. Soggy, uneaten bread can lead to greater algae growth that can clog natural waterways and crowd out more desirable plants. This concentrates the pollution and can eventually eradicate fish, amphibians, and other life in the vicinity.
- **Diseases:** Feeding ducks bread can increase the spread of diseases. A carbohydrate-rich diet leads to greater defecation, and bird faeces easily harbour bacteria responsible for numerous diseases, including avian botulism. Mouldy bread can cause aspergillosis, a fatal lung infection. An illness known as angel wing is caused by lack of the right nutrients in their diet. This illness causes a deformity in birds' wings, leading to an inability to fly.
- **Pest Attraction:** Rotting supplies of food and decomposing bread creates bacteria and will attract unwelcome pests such as insects, and rats, whose urine transmits Weil's disease, which can be deadly to people.
- **Loss of Natural Behaviour:** When birds become accustomed to handouts, they lose their natural fear of humans and may become aggressive in order to get more food.

What Can We Feed them?

- Cracked corn
- Wheat, barley or similar grains
- Oats
- Rice (cooked or uncooked)
- Birdseed (any type or mix)
- Grapes (cut in half)
- Frozen peas or corn (defrosted, no need to cook)
- Earthworms
- Mealworms
- Chopped lettuce or other greens or salad mixes
- Chopped vegetable trimmings or peels
- Duck pellets

