

Birds have Amazing Survival Skills

Waterfowl have an incredible ability to survive. They migrate hundreds of miles south to a warmer climate each winter where food is abundant, or endure the harsh winter weather in northern areas. Many species of migratory and resident waterfowl are found in Concord. For all waterfowl, the abundance of naturally occurring food and the quality of their diet are the main driving forces behind the bird's ability to survive.

Food Quality is Critical

Waterfowl require proper nutrition to survive harsh winters. The diet of a young bird during its first year of life must be high in essential fats, proteins and nutrients to ensure proper development. Adults need a nutrient-rich diet to replace their feathers, and recondition their bodies after migration and during breeding cycles. People unknowingly harm waterfowl by providing food that is low in nutritional value.

In fields, a wildlife diet consists of fallen grain. In marshes, they feed on wild rice, sedges, aquatic plants, insects, larvae, crustaceans and small mollusks. Their feeding habits are very regular. They are known to return day after day to the same location if not disturbed.



A Diet of White Bread Can be Fatal to Waterfowl

When birds feed on bread, they may stop eating natural food sources which are more nutritious. The birds may become malnourished.

High nutrition foods include: Insects, Grasses, and Submerged Aquatic Plants.
Low Nutrition foods include: Bread, Crackers, Popcorn, and Pastries.

Problems associated with feeding waterfowl include:

- Malnutrition
- Dependency
- Disease
- Water pollution
- Environmental degradation
- Increased hybridization
- Delayed migration
- Cumulative effects
- Costly management efforts
- Devaluation of the species



10 Reasons Why Feeding Waterfowl is Harmful



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1. Malnutrition

Wildlife species have evolved with skills to obtain food that has essential nutrients needed to survive, reproduce and live a healthy life. These skills maintain a balance between animals and their natural habitat. This balance is upset by artificial feeding, which is physically harmful to birds and one of the primary causes of malnutrition. Items like bread, corn, and popcorn are low in protein and poor substitutes for natural food.

Malnutrition leads to: Low energy and muscle deterioration; Deformed wings in young birds; Loss of flight; Lowered ability to avoid predation; Decrease in reproduction; Lowered life expectancy.

2. Dependency

Dependence upon humans for food causes: Loss of their natural fear of humans, which creates aggressive behavior; Concentration of birds near public parks; Overpopulation of small wetlands and ponds; Delay or halting of migration to natural wintering or nesting sites.



3. Cost of Damage

Damage-avoidance techniques such as chemical repellents, fencing, and noise makers are costly as is repairing damage done by overcrowded wildlife. At times, it may be necessary to remove nuisance waterfowl because of the damage they cause.

4. Disease

Lowered nutrition and overpopulation allow disease to spread more quickly, potentially infecting thousands of birds with fatal diseases such as Avian Cholera, Duck Plague, Avian Influenza and Avian Botulism. Although these diseases have always existed in waterfowl populations, the risks from the diseases increase when populations become concentrated at feeding sites.



5. Environmental Damage

Feeding attracts birds in unnatural numbers, beyond the capacity of natural food and water supplies. Grassy areas such as ball fields and parks can become unsanitary and unusable. Cleaning bird droppings is difficult and expensive.

High concentration of birds cause: Overgrazing of vegetation; Soil erosion; Degradation of landscaping; Unsanitary conditions due to large quantities of bird feces.

6. Water Pollution

Artificial feeding attracts birds in unnatural numbers, beyond the capacity of natural food and water supplies. Water quality suffers from excess nitrogen in animal feces. This leads to an overgrowth of algae that absorbs oxygen and blocks sunlight from entering the water, adversely affecting fish and other organisms in the aquatic environment.



7. Hybridization

At feeding sites, domestic geese have interbred with wild geese, compromising the wild population.

8. Delayed Migration

Artificial Feeding alters normal migration patterns of waterfowl. Birds may delay or cancel their annual trip north.

9. Overcrowding

Geese are territorial birds who will not hesitate to protect their nest and eggs. An aggressive adult goose can easily knock down a child or senior citizen, and geese can fly up to 50 mph. Geese will fly up to hit a human, cat or dog in the face. This is especially likely if the goose has nested in a place near human traffic like a city park.

10. Devaluation

From treasure to nuisance? Wildlife managers recognize that the public's perception of the value of wildlife is often reduced when numbers swell and affect people's quality of life.

For Information on Local Wildlife:

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