



DON'T FEED WATERFOWL

We're lucky to have so many beautiful parks and ponds in Flower Mound, and as you're out exploring them this summer, you're destined to run into ducks and geese. Feeding waterfowl is tempting, and many of us grew up thinking it was an environmentally responsible and generous way to dispose of old or stale bread. However, feeding ducks and geese is actually unhealthy and potentially dangerous for the birds. Please read on to learn more about the harmful effects of hand feeding waterfowl.

Birds have amazing survival skills

Waterfowl have an incredible ability to survive and avoid harsh weather conditions. They can migrate thousands of miles south to a warmer climate for the winter where food is abundant or simply endure the harsh weather in northern areas. For all waterfowl, the abundance of naturally occurring food and the quality of their diet are the main driving forces behind the birds' ability to survive.

Food quality is critical

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 feathers and recondition their bodies after migration and during breeding cycles. People unknowingly harm waterfowl by hand feeding food that is low in nutritional value.

High nutrition foods include:

- Insects
- Grasses
- Submerged aquatic plants

Low nutrition foods include:

- Bread
- Crackers
- Popcorn
- Pastries

Problems associated with feeding waterfowl include: malnutrition, disease, dependency, water pollution, and environmental degradation. Each problem is described in detail to the right.

1. MALNUTRITION

Hand feeding is physically harmful to birds and is one of the primary causes of malnutrition. Bread and similar products, including crackers, chips, doughnuts, and popcorn, have little nutritional value. These products can fill up their stomachs to the point that they don't eat the foods they need to remain healthy, and birds without proper nutrition can quickly succumb to disease and death. Malnutrition leads to:

- Low energy and muscle deterioration
- Development of deformed wings in young birds
- Loss of flight later in life
- Lowered ability to avoid predators
- Decrease in successful reproduction
- Lower life expectancy

2. DEPENDENCY

Waterfowl will congregate in areas with abundant food and space. Unfortunately, hand feeding can cause birds to become concentrated in small urban areas that are incapable of supporting large numbers of birds. The birds then become dependent upon humans for food and can become nuisance animals. Some species can become aggressive and may need to be removed. Dependence upon humans for food causes:

- Loss of their natural fear of humans, which creates aggressive behavior
- Concentration of birds near roadways, potentially causing motor vehicle accidents
- Overpopulation around small wetlands and ponds
- Delay or halting of migration to natural wintering sites

3. DISEASE

More birds mean more droppings. Excess feces cause water pollution, create an unsanitary environment for human recreation, and lead to the spread of disease in the bird population. Many avian diseases have been attributed to duck feeding. There are documented cases of waterfowl dying from enteritis, aspergillosis, and avian botulism, all due to excess food left floating in the water.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Waterfowl naturally congregate in wetlands, when and where natural foods are plentiful. However, when hand feeding occurs, the over concentration of birds may ultimately cause overgrazing and degradation to the landscape. High concentrations of birds cause:

- Overgrazing of vegetation leading to soil erosion
- Degradation of the landscape making it undesirable for other species and unsightly for humans

5. WATER POLLUTION

People will often feed waterfowl at the local pond. This not only causes a nuisance situation with birds begging for and stealing food, but also contributes significantly to water pollution in the form of fecal coli bacteria. High levels of fecal coli form bacteria in the water will affect the enjoyment of our local waters. Feeding the birds can:

- Cause gulls to be a nuisance by begging and stealing food and garbage
- Cause unsanitary conditions due to large quantities of bird feces
- Cause algae growths that can eventually eradicate fish and other life in the vicinity