

Junk Food for Ducks Key Issues to Cover

Bread is fattening, which makes it harder for waterfowl to fly and evade predators. Feeding bread can also lead to other problems:

- Duckling malnutrition: in areas where ducks are regularly fed bread, ducklings will not receive adequate nutrition for proper growth, nor will they learn to forage for natural foods.
- Rotting bread kills off many pond invertebrates, which are an important part of waterfowls' natural diet. This can also cause diseases; particularly deadly is duck viral enteritis, which could kill all birds in the area in a single outbreak.
- Excessive bread also attracts foxes, rats, mice and insects, which can harbour additional diseases; some of these can even be dangerous to humans.
- So, whenever you can, feed the ducks and geese on waterfowl seeds or pellets (which also float if they get into the pond), or best of all, collect worms and slugs from your own garden!

When talking to older children, you might mention **food webs** showing feeding connections (what-eats-what) in a wildlife community. Wildlife experts broadly lump all life forms into one of two groups: **producers** and **consumers**.

To show the relationships within these communities, people usually draw diagrams to show what eats what. Most plants are producers. The consumers are normally divided in to three groups: **herbivore**, **carnivore** and **omnivore**.

There will be three cards (see web link below) showing some of the producers and consumers found in the pond. The **natural** foods for ducks are the smaller things on these pictures. Of course, natural ponds would not be surrounded by mown grass, hence the need for worms and slugs from your own garden!

See http://www.npt.gov.uk/PDF/Ponds_Lesson_4_Make_a_Food_Chain.pdf

Environmentally conscious people refrain from offering bread to waterfowl to avoid dietary problems and other issues caused by a carbohydrate-rich diet.

To encourage more people to understand the problem, we propose to follow up the article in the Ham & Petersham Magazine and this presentation by:

- periodically setting up a special table at the pond to distribute information and some feeding pellets designed to provide a balanced diet for waterfowl;
- stocking two local shops with suitable feed;

As soon as possible, we hope to publish a leaflet which will initially be posted on the HUG website and subsequently printed, to support these and future similar activities. We also hope to visit schools to carry this message to staff and pupils and set up a poster competition across the local schools.

We would be pleased to hear your views and ideas on this and related issues.