

FAIRFAX COUNTY WILDLIFE



FEEDING WATERFOWL

It is a popular practice for residents to feed Canada geese and other waterfowl in our parks, business areas, and communities. Many people believe that feeding waterfowl contributes to the overall health and survival of the animals; others enjoy having close encounters with the birds.

Although these actions are well-intentioned, feeding waterfowl often contributes to increased conflicts with humans and can negatively impact the health of the birds themselves. Although it is enjoyable to view these birds from a distance, wildlife officials urge residents to not feed them.

Reasons not to feed waterfowl:

- Feeding waterfowl can lead to severe habitat degradation. Providing food quickly attracts concentrations of waterfowl beyond what the natural ecosystem can support.
- Large concentrations of waterfowl can result in damage to environments from overgrazing, create unsanitary conditions from accumulations of feces and feathers, degrade water quality, erode soils, and contribute to traffic hazards.
- Feeding waterfowl can cause crowded conditions and diseases and parasites may be spread more rapidly among waterfowl populations (e.g., avian cholera, avian botulism, aspergillosis).
- Feeding of waterfowl can lead to aggressive behavior towards humans. Birds may also suffer injuries due to aggression and competition with other birds when waterfowl populations become concentrated.

- Ducks and geese can rapidly become habituated to, and dependent on, human-provided foods. Many of the items commonly used to feed geese (bread, corn, popcorn, pastries, etc.) provide little or no nutritional value and can cause significant health problems for waterfowl.
- Waterfowl that grow accustomed to being fed by people may abandon efforts to forage naturally on healthy food, leading to dietary deficiencies and malnourishment from human handouts.

Waterfowl who are fed artificial foods, like bread, and suffer from poor nutrition can develop a permanent deformity called Angel Wing, which renders them unable to fly.



It is a common misconception that suburban areas, such as Fairfax County, are devoid of food for wildlife and that human intervention is necessary for species to survive.

Suburban environments provide sufficient food resources and safety to support waterfowl – as evidenced by the abundant populations of ducks and geese present in Fairfax County.

Please help us to keep our waterfowl populations healthy and wild by not feeding ducks and geese.

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Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
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855-571-9003 (toll-free)*



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