

# Feeding Ducks at the Darebin Parklands

## ***Please don't feed the ducks bread!***

Feeding ducks and other birds is often a favourite family activity when visiting Darebin Parklands. Unfortunately feeding ducks bread causes more harm than good. Bread is like junk food for ducks, and as such has very little nutritional value yet they love it! If eaten in moderation bread does little harm but with all the visitors to the Parklands, it doesn't take long for the birds to gorge themselves with bread. In addition to the animal health issues, behavioural changes can make wild ducks vulnerable to predation and there are also environmental health impacts such as blue-green algae.

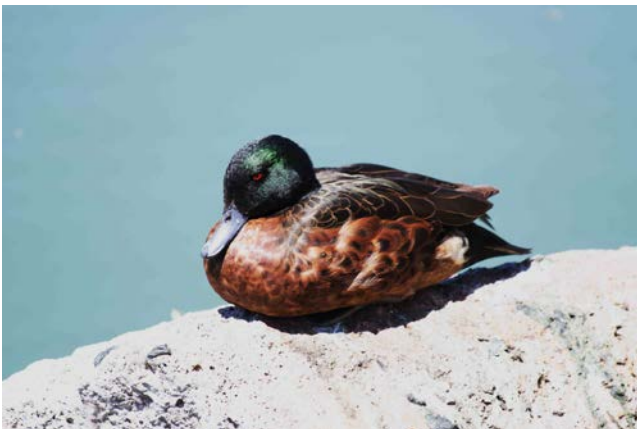
## ***What problems can bread cause?***

### ***Malnutrition***

Birds that fill up on bread are not eating enough of their normal diet and so are missing out on important vitamins and minerals. This can lead to abnormalities in chicks and ducklings such as weak and deformed bones. Small birds need lots for energy to keep warm and to fend for themselves. It is possible that if they fill up on bread they do not have room for the high energy foods (seeds, insects) necessary to keep them warm during the cold winter nights or to escape from predators.

### ***Gut problems***

Birds' digestive tracts were not designed to cope with bread. Dry bread in particular can swell up inside a bird and cause blockages which can sometimes be fatal. Bread can also become impacted in birds' digestive tracts, which can lead to infection and death.



*Male Chestnut Teal*

## ***What problems can feeding birds in general cause?***

### ***Behaviour***

Birds can become tame and confident around people. This can make them vulnerable to attacks from pets and cruelty from other people. They too can become aggressive towards people. Large birds can become more aggressive and dominant over smaller or younger birds. Birds can become dependant on being hand fed and chicks and ducklings do not learn how to forage for themselves. This is necessary for their long term survival. Ducks will also tend to crowd around popular feeding spots making those spots a breeding ground for disease and bacterial infections.

### ***Disease***

Rotting food scraps and build-up of faecal matter adds nutrients to wetlands. This can cause algal blooms in warmer months. Blue-green algae is the biggest casuse for concern as it may be toxic to humans as well as wildlife.

### ***Healthier alternatives***

We do understand that some people will still really want to continue this family activity. If so, please feed them only very small amounts and use these healthier alternatives:

- Lettuce and other leafy greens
- Cracked corn, oats, or other grains
- Grated vegetables and fruit
- Worms from your garden

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