

FEEDING WILDLIFE: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



If done properly, providing supplemental food and water may be beneficial to local birds. However, feeding wildlife such as waterfowl, deer or raccoons can cause harm to an individual animal or population of animals. To keep all wildlife wild and healthy, it is important to be aware of the effects wildlife feeding can have on both humans and animals. The following bullets outline the reasons to refrain from feeding wildlife.

HUMAN FOOD WAS NOT MADE FOR WILDLIFE

- **Human food can lead to diseases in wildlife.** Most human food does not meet nutritional needs of wildlife and can cause serious health problems.
- **Animals have specialized diets.** Because human food is nutrient deficient for wildlife, animals may become malnourished or die when fed human food.
- **Human food can cause damage to animals.** Animals do not distinguish packaging from food, and the packaging may be consumed resulting in abrasions, sickness and even death.



WI Humane Society

Angel wing is a deformity caused by malnutrition & is often found in waterfowl fed human food such as white bread & crackers.

WILDLIFE THAT RECEIVE CONTINUAL FEEDING TEND TO LOSE THEIR FEAR OF HUMANS

- **Animals that lose their fear of humans can become a nuisance.** Most nuisance wildlife that are reported and continue to be a problem are dispatched or relocated. Relocating animals is not suggested, as relocating creates extreme stress on the animal, animals regularly attempt to move back to their homes resulting in vehicle-animal collisions, and transporting animals creates liability if someone were to be harmed from that animal or if a disease was transmitted from that animal.
- **Predators large and small can cause harm to people and their pets.** Predators can become aggressive when agitated, hungry or diseased. Some of the diseases listed on the following page are capable of transferring to people and pets, resulting in sickness or in severe cases, death.



Cook County Coyote Project

FEEDING WILDLIFE ALTERS ANIMALS' MOVEMENTS

- Migrating ducks and geese may “stay-over” through the winter decreasing their chances for survival in certain areas.
- Vehicle-animal collisions increase along roadsides where animals are fed.
- Feeding animals can create food dependency, creating smaller ranges and altering natural behavior.
- Summer offers adequate food for birds and mammals alike and oftentimes, feeding is unnecessary and can impact the timing of animals' natural movements or migration.



CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE



Photo By Donald Savoy

MANGE



Photo by Carolyn DeConte

DENSE POPULATIONS CREATED FROM FEED LOCATIONS INCREASE DISEASE TRANSMISSION AND POLLUTION

Animal diseases are commonly spread through feces, bodily fluids and direct contact. When animals congregate in an area, the potential for transmission increases. For more information about some of these diseases, please visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “wildlife health.”

- **Viruses:** rabies, canine distemper, parovirus, rabbit fibroma, squirrel pox, West Nile virus
- **Bacteria:** abscesses, leptospirosis, tularemia, Tyzzer’s disease
- **Parasites:** mange, roundworm, tapeworm, brainworm (*parelaphostrongylus tenuis*), toxoplasmosis, swimmer’s itch, bot fly larvae
- **Prions:** chronic wasting disease
- **Fungi:** blastomycosis

Large concentrations of waterfowl and deer can pollute nearby waterways and beaches. Large amounts of animal waste can cause phosphorus and nitrogen loading. When these nutrients are mixed in reservoirs and waterways, the high levels of nutrient can cause eutrophication, resulting in low oxygen levels and even die-offs of plants and animals that rely on oxygen in the water.

USE THE FOLLOWING TIPS TO KEEP WILDLIFE WILD AND HEALTHY

- Feeding birds is beneficial and is enjoyed by many. To keep birds healthy, clean feeders and birdbaths regularly and provide a variety of foods. Planting native trees, shrubs and wildflowers near feeders offer a natural source of food and cover for birds using the feeders. To decrease the chances of nuisance wildlife, clean up spilled bird seed from bird feeders. If nuisance animals start using the feeder, take the feeder down for a minimum of two weeks.
- Feed pets indoors. If feeding outdoors, remove the food immediately after eating and keep food and water indoors overnight.
- Do not place compost waste in an area that animals can access and use a closed compost bin.
- Rinse all recyclables to remove food and odors. Keep trash and recycling in covered garbage cans.
- Enjoy wildlife at a distance. Do not encourage wild mammals to visit homes or urban areas by feeding them.

IF FEEDING WILDLIFE, KEEP IT NATURAL:

- Plant native bushes, trees, flowers and cover crops. Native plants supply wildlife with natural adequate nutrition. This is important for migrating birds, which may use the native plants on individual properties as a quick place to feed and rest, as well as other birds and mammals that live in Wisconsin year-round.
- Don’t feed wildlife by hand. Wildlife are unpredictable and can be dangerous.
- If feeding ducks or geese, use waterfowl feed found at feed stores, oats, kale or other natural foods. Do not feed waterfowl bread, crackers or other low nutrient-content food.