



CITY OF CAPE TOWN
ISIXEKO SASEKAPA
STAD KAAPSTAD



WHY PEOPLE SHOULD NOT FEED WATERFOWL AND OTHER BIRDS

Feeding waterfowl and other birds such as guinea fowl is a popular activity for some people. Tossing food like bread, table scraps, corn or popcorn attracts ducks, geese and other birds to places like dams, parks and ponds.

Feeding these birds is a popular pastime and a relaxing activity bringing people closer to nature, or a fun activity for children wanting to interact with wildlife. However, feeding the city's waterfowl and guinea fowl can lead to a number of problems and even be harmful to the birds themselves.



Why is feeding water fowl and other birds a problem?

The City of Cape Town manages public areas for the benefit of residents and when overpopulation of waterfowl or other birds such as guinea fowl occurs, these areas become unsanitary and unpleasant to use due to the droppings, feathers, trampling and erosion caused.

When the bird population exceeds the number that can naturally be supported by available habitat, management interventions, such as culling, may be necessary to maintain a healthy and aesthetically pleasing environment. These interventions can often create a rift in the community and lead to conflicting views between some residents and the City of Cape Town.

Conflicting interests occur when some members of the public feed the ducks, while others request that the City of Cape Town deal with the overpopulation. Some residents don't want animals to be removed because they grow fond of the ducks or have concerns over animal welfare.

You can make a difference

You can make a difference by educating your community about the detrimental effects of artificial feeding. This matter requires cooperation from everyone, but the solution starts with each individual. Despite the City erecting signs like the one below at several dams to discourage the feeding of ducks, feeding still continues. Adherence to official requests like this one is an active step in setting an example and showing respect for the environment we all share.



Help Save Our Dam

Please DON'T feed the ducks

Feeding:

- Attracts more and more birds to the area causing overpopulation.
- Creates a species imbalance which threatens indigenous ducks.
 - Contributes to avian botulism due to overpopulation.
 - Increases levels of duck excrement in the water.
 - Causes fish deaths as a result of botulism and lack of oxygen.
- Encourages ducks to trample feeding areas and graze away grass.
- Increases erosion to the dam wall.

• No fishing • Park only in designated areas • No quad biking

Help us restore our dam to its natural beauty

Water Affairs
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Environmental Affairs

Hand for Water
Palms to Clean
Water Wasteful

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THIS CITY WORKS FOR YOU

Why is artificial feeding harmful to birds?

Although our intentions are well-meant, we are doing more harm than good for the following reasons:

- Hand-fed birds become a nuisance. Feeding birds has a compound effect. You may start feeding a few waterfowl or guinea fowl, but within a short space of time more birds are attracted and eventually great flocks can arrive.
- It leads to poor nutrition. Birds' natural diets consist of a variety of foods such as invertebrates, natural grains and plants. The food items commonly used to feed the birds are low in protein and very poor alternatives for natural foods. Competition for food items at artificial feeding sites exclude some birds, usually the youngest, because they are unable to compete.
- It leads to water pollution. Unnatural numbers of waterfowl droppings causes excess nutrients in water bodies and can lead to poor water quality as a result of increased *Escherichia coli* counts. Poor water quality poses a health risk to humans.
- It causes overcrowding. Feeding attracts birds in unnatural numbers beyond what the environment could naturally sustain. Feeding pressure leads to over grazing, badly-eroded lawns, golf courses, school playing fields and public open spaces. Overcrowding leads to unsanitary and unusable conditions as a result of bird droppings.
- It increases the spread of disease. At artificial feeding sites, birds feed on food items scattered in the same place where they defecate. This not only leads to unhealthy conditions at the feeding site, it could also facilitate the spread of disease as avian botulism and *Aspergillus* which can lead to the mortality of large numbers of waterfowl.
- Costly management efforts: Overcrowding causes damages to irrigation systems and leads to erosion. The City of Cape Town spent over R300 000 over a 12 month period at the Sonstraaldam in Durbanville in response to damage caused by the overpopulation of waterfowl.
- It leads to unnatural behaviour in birds. Birds behave unnaturally as they become conditioned to and dependent on being fed. They lose their wariness of humans and become more aggressive. This may lead to attacks on small children and even adults.
- Weakening of the species: Artificially fed birds are vulnerable to diseases that can be transferred to other birds. Young birds may starve as they lose their ability to forage for food as they are used to being fed by humans. Artificial feeding affects bird breeding cycles.

Put nature's interests first

Remove the incentive by replacing lawns with natural vegetation and stop feeding birds. The birds will not disappear when no longer fed, but a more balanced and healthy environment for all to appreciate will be created.

Families can still visit dams, ponds and parks to enjoy viewing the birds. Children should be encouraged to learn more about birds and their *natural* habits.

Communities should make decisions that are in the best interest of animals and not themselves. If we are really serious about conserving nature, we should put nature first.