

DUCK CARE SHEET

Ducks are species seen in the wild all over the world, they are commonly kept as both backyard pets and in farms and small holdings. They are charismatic animals who can be tamed well to live with humans. The most common species seen as captive pets include runner, call, Aylesbury, Muscovy and hybrids.

Longevity: Ducks can live for up to 10 years in captivity.

Sociability: Ducks are highly social and need to be kept in groups for company. They are inquisitive and vocal, very active and they love to forage. Pet ducks require human interaction and enrichment. Ducks may be kept in single sex or mixed groups. In mixed groups there should be a ratio of 4-6 females per male. By law, flocks of 50 or more birds must be registered with APHA. Voluntary registration is recommended for smaller flocks.

How to tell the sex of your duck: Sexing by plumage colour is dependent on age, species and season. Most ducks may be sexed by their voices from the time they are about 6 weeks old. The females will quack loudly while the males make a soft, hoarse sound. Male ducks (drakes) acquire a curled tail feather called a drake feather when they mature.

Environment:

Ducks are best suited to outdoor living, they are not suitable for permanent indoor housing without outside access. The ultimate decision on what type of housing you choose will be dictated by size of flock, space available, cost, disease control and predator proofing.

- A secure and well-ventilated house or pen is required and should be predator proof. A 3-sided house is best to aid ventilation. Plenty of space should be provided: a minimum of 1.5-2m² per duck if they are housed during the day or a minimum of 0.5-1m² per duck for overnight accommodation. Shade should always be provided and protection from wind and adverse weather conditions.
- Ducks are messy and produce a lot of droppings, so housing should be easy to clean. The material on the ground is an important consideration. Concrete is acceptable as a base layer and allows easy cleaning, but it must be covered with substrate to prevent bumblefoot. Straw, wood shavings or rice hulls are all reasonable options but whatever is used should be dust free to avoid the risk of fungal respiratory infections.
- Contact with wild birds should be minimised as they will eat the food and can carry diseases such as parasites and avian influenza. Predators such as dogs and foxes can be kept out with

sturdy wire that extends 3 feet along the ground at the bottom. An overhang of wire at the top stops jumping over the wire. Rats and mice should be discouraged with vermin proof feeders.

- **Ducks need access to water** for preening and keeping their eyes, bills and feet in good condition. They also love to swim. Fresh water should be provided daily and be deep enough to submerge their whole head and cover their body if they choose. A shallow sided pool is best to allow easy access and exit or a ramp provided. A children's paddling pool can be ideal for this.

Diet:

Free-ranging ducks are herbivorous and eat leaves, flowers, roots, invertebrates (insects and slugs) and aquatic plants. In captivity, ducks may be fed a commercial pelleted food supplemented with fresh vegetables, fruit (avoid citrus) and live worms. The diet of adults should be supplemented with calcium (eg oyster shell). Bread should be avoided as it does not contain the correct balance of nutrients.

- For ducklings up to 3 weeks old a duck starter crumb should be fed (protein content 18-20%).
- From 3-20 weeks a good quality grower feed for ducks can be fed (protein content 15%).
- Adults should be fed a commercial layer or breeder pellet suitable for ducks (14–16% protein, increased to 16–18% when laying). A chicken layer pellet is suitable for adult laying ducks but chicken food should be avoided in juveniles.

Preventative healthcare:

To keep your pets happy and healthy we advise a yearly check up with your vet as medical problems are more easily treated if detected at an early stage – **you can register for automatic reminders.**

- Ducks do not require vaccinations
- Preventive parasite treatment is not recommended as they rarely suffer from them, however routine faecal analysis every 6-12 months is recommended to screen for potential problems.

Insurance:

We highly recommend that you take out a pet insurance policy. For a monthly fee your pet can receive the best treatment at an affordable cost. There is normally an excess to pay for each condition then after that costs are covered up to a set limit. Once you have the policy, please provide us with a copy of your insurance details. There are a lot of different companies and policies available and we suggest you contact a number of them for information- we have a leaflet advising what to look out for. Our advice is to choose a policy which provides cover for chronic illness for the life of your pet. If this policy is too much for you then the best cover you can afford will provide piece of mind in an accident or emergency.

Common health complaints:

Ducks, like other birds, have evolved to hide signs of illness for as long as possible. Birds who look ill will attract predators which is a danger to the flock and so healthy flock members will attack or ostracise an ill looking bird for the safety of the entire group. Spotting an ill looking bird can therefore be difficult in the early stages, so regular handling and monitoring to assess behaviour, body condition, food intake and weight is vital. Any signs of ocular or nasal discharge, lethargy/unwillingness to move, weight loss or loss of body condition, dull feathers or loss of feathers, isolation from flock/bullying, dirty vent, fluffed up feathers or lameness is a sign of an unwell duck. Common health conditions include:

- **Bumblefoot** – swelling to the bottom of the foot caused by pressure sore or bacterial infection, this is often caused by hard flooring or injuries
- **Respiratory infections** – various bacterial and viral infections
- **Heavy metal toxicity** - from eating contaminants in the environment such as lead weights in ponds/pools and chewing cages