

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] On the Wellbeing of Waterfowl, and a Proposal to Resolve the Disservice of Ducks

Dear Community and Protective Services Committee,

My name is Daniel Brunt, and I am a Ninth Grade student at H. B. Beal Secondary School in London, Ontario.

There are many things that I love about London, but my most emphatic appreciation for the city comes from the wonderful parks and natural areas that scatter themselves across the Thames River and its riverlike neighbours. I walk by the River almost every day, and I love to take photos of the nature that inhabits it, particularly the wildlife. One species that I always enjoy seeing is the mallards, floating up and down the stream, year-round in some areas. What saddens me about these ducks is how many unknowing people choose to interact with them.

Feeding bread to waterbirds is a common gesture seen all over the world, but particularly in Western culture. It has been traditionalized for hundreds of years, far before Ecology or human-caused extinction was as global of a problem as it is now. I believe that our community's populace should be informed of the dangers of feeding bread to ducks, and as a potential resolution, I have come up with a proposal of how to deal with this issue. Before I introduce the idea, I must explain why bread and human-based dietary dependency is a danger to ducks.

First, the mallards themselves can be harmed. When ducks are children they need a large variety of proteins and nutrients to survive and mature properly. They eat different plants, insects, and occasionally worms and water snails, all of which create a balanced and healthy diet that ensures the ducklings' development. By feeding these ducklings bread and other non-nutritious starches, they gain a large number of calories for very little nutritional value. It can also affect their behaviours as they mature, as stated by TheSpruce, "because ducks will eagerly seek out an easy food source such as human handouts, ducklings will not learn to recognize or forage for natural foods as easily" (Mayntz). These ducks may also become more familiar with humans, causing them to take greater risks without realising their mistakes; such as crossing busy roads or going into areas with potential toxicity, including landfills. These birds may also choose to lay their eggs in areas near humans, causing overcrowding and a faster spread of disease. You can see this overcrowding in almost any of the more popular duck feeding spots; constantly crowding near bridges and the edges of river-edge pathways. Pollution can also be created if not all of the bread is eaten by the mallards, and pests can be attracted as a result.

Secondly, due to the duck population being upset and altered by the initial actions of humans, the ecological equilibrium in our city's water environments can be set awry. The CCW (Conserving Canada's Wetlands) puts this simply, "Waterfowl and waterbirds are integral parts of wetland ecosystems. They're large-bodied and often airborne, which makes them relatively easy to observe. And they're mobile; traveling far distances and stopping at multiple wetland sites along the way" (Rae). Given the situation that a duck population is damaged by the effects of human interaction stated in the previous paragraph, many ecological issues can appear. With fewer ducks taking prey upon them, the population of insects in near-water areas can drastically increase and push remaining ducks and various other small animals out of the area. This can also raise the tick population in more forested domains, harming not only animals, but humans as well. Plants can slowly die, and certain, more dominant species -

especially large turtles and hawks - may also have to vacate the area due to a lack of food. If the effects amplify for long enough, human intervention may be necessary, and in some more unfortunate scenarios, permanent damage can be done to our ecosystems.

So, how do we prevent people from feeding bread to waterbirds? There are many solutions, of course, but one of the simplest options - and the solution that I will be focusing on - is to place *signs* in the areas that people feed ducks the most (I have attached a file of various design prototypes, for your interest).

Informing people about this matter is the most important thing that London's municipality could do to prevent the issue from constantly recurring. By placing signs in areas around the River and waterways across London, passersby will be persistently reminded of the environmental dangers of feeding bread to ducks and ducklings. Signs act as a stagnant warning that can slowly reconstruct how people choose to act, as stated by PLoS One, "Signage plays an important role in our society as a means of transmitting a message in an attempt to persuade us what to do and what not to do, thus acting as stationary, persuasive communication"(Meis, Kashima, Manalo). This is why I believe that signs could slowly, but surely bring down the traditionalized act of feeding bread to ducks. With the addition of these signs, there may also come a discussion, bringing curiosity about the consequences of feeding ducks to even more people, and educating our community as a whole.

Lastly, the signs could be used to show people the alternative methods of feeding mallards. In a time of constant societal change and activism, the world is ripe for breaking traditions for more rational solutions. If there had been any time in history to reform how people act around our environment and wildlife, it would be now. As wonderfully stated in an article from the Ashoka group on Medium, "What is the defining skill for the 21st century? It's not coding, says Ravi Venkatesan — it's the ability to solve problems and lead change" (Brooks). Even if some people decide to continue their feeding of waterfowl, we can change what people are feeding them, and force them to use safer, more nutritious foods - these include birdseed, raisins, pumpkin seeds, and dried fruit.

The attributes of society are forever changing, forever improving, and forever being restructured by the people who claim it as theirs. The biggest of changes are hyperbolic ripples of many smaller actions done by a few people working together. While putting up a few signs and telling people not to throw pieces of bread at ducks may not seem like a great deed, it could be the first domino in a chain that leads to bigger and better things, weeks, months, years, or even decades in the future. Setting up these signs could save the lives of many water birds that are natural landmarks of our part of the world, protect the ever trembling equilibrium of our near-water environments, and help educate our community in the process.

Thank you for taking the time out of your day to read this.

Best wishes,  
Daniel Brunt



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- Pumpkin Seeds
- Dried Fruit