Feeding Wildlife
A Wrong Choice

Numerous problems arise when we feed wildlife. The intention may be to have a closer encounter with wildlife, to help animals in the winter, or to increase the number of available game animals. However, feeding wildlife interferes with a natural healthy balance between wildlife populations and their habitat. For this reason, and for many others identified on this page, wildlife biologists suggest to "just say no" to feeding wildlife.

Why Feeding Wildlife Does More Harm than Good

Wildlife feeding threatens human and animal safety
As wild animals are fed they become used to the presence of people. Animals like coyotes and black bears can become a potential threat and can harm both humans and pets. Animals may behave abnormally and have to be lethally removed if they are posing a threat. Additionally, more vehicle collisions may occur as deer are drawn closer to roads nearby homes.

Wildlife feeding leads to wildlife overabundance
An overabundance of wildlife damages natural habitat and creates nuisance issues with humans. For example, overabundant deer populations can result in increased damage to natural forest habitat from over browsing, agricultural crop loss, and automobile collisions. Additionally, wildlife can approach and stay around homes. Deer can cause damage to gardens and landscape plants. Bears and raccoons raid garbage and pet food. Abundant geese and other waterfowl lead to increased droppings.

Wildlife feeding can promote the spread of diseases
In the wild, animals naturally disperse across the landscape. However, food promotes the concentration of animals into a small area. This increases the potential for diseases to spread. Food gets contaminated with feces, saliva, and urine, which easily harbor infectious disease-causing micro-organisms like bacteria, viruses, prions, or fungi. Once introduced, these diseases are difficult to eliminate and some can be transmitted to humans (zoonosis). Examples of animal diseases that can easily spread due to feeding includes, Chronic Wasting Disease in deer, House Finch Conjunctivitis, Aspergillosis in waterfowl, and Salmonellosis in songbirds.

Wildlife feeding may cause malnutrition in wildlife
Human foods do not offer a healthy diet for animals. Animals may readily consume foods like corn and bread. These foods provide an animal with little nutrition and may disrupt the digestive system. When wildlife become reliant on the food source at hand, they stop feeding on the variety of natural foods they need in their diet for proper nutrients. Feeding the wrong diet to a newborn animal can cause permanent damage to developing muscles, bones and tissues. Young wildlife may not learn to feed normally, which decreases its chance of survival. Plastics and

As deer congregate, diseases like Chronic Wasting Disease become more prevalent. Additionally, injury can result as animals become more aggressive when competing for food.

Photo by Jeremy Hurst.

Waterfowl like ducks and geese eat a variety of
other waste from raided garbage bags are also harmful to animals.

**Wildlife feeding leads to the unnatural behavior of wildlife**

Animals that become reliant on an abundant year-round food source may not migrate during the normal time of year. Fed animals also become more aggressive towards each other and towards humans as they lose wariness. This results in animals becoming devalued and losing the quality that most people like about wildlife -- their "wildness."

**Wildlife feeding is illegal for deer, bear, and moose in New York State**

To take action against many of these issues, DEC has implemented rules and regulations that prohibit the intentional and unintentional feeding for several species of wildlife, including: deer and moose feeding regulations and bear feeding regulations (leaves DEC website).

**Ways to Keep Wildlife Healthy and Wild**

Following the simple tips below can help keep our wild animals wild and healthy, while giving you a chance to view their natural characteristics in their natural habitats.

**Visit wildlife refuges and natural areas**

You can readily see a variety of wildlife like songbirds, ducks, geese, hawks, deer, moose, beavers, butterflies, turtles, frogs, and many other animals in wildlife refuges and natural areas. Many state lands offer overlook sites for great views of wildlife within their natural habitat. To find a wildlife viewing area in New York State, check out the Watchable Wildlife web page or browse through the Places to Go web pages.

**Naturescape your landscape and preserve natural habitat**

Preserving natural areas on your land and landscaping with native plants will attract wildlife.

- Did you know a deer's regular diet consists of "browse" like trees leaves, twigs, vines, and shoots, as well as "forbs" like weeds and flowering plants? Although DEC prohibits feeding deer in New York State, one exception to this rule is planting their preferred native deer foods and cutting browse for feeding. This helps provide deer the proper nutrition that they can easily digest, while helping them during harsh winters.

- For other helpful nature tips, visit the Attracting Wildlife to Your Yard web page.

**Use backyard bird feeders in the winter only and keep them clean**

Starting in late October through early March, you can feed birds with backyard feeders. As food becomes available in the spring, and as bears come out of hibernation, the feeders should be put away (read more about bears and bird feeders). It is also important to provide only a moderate number of feeders and keep them clean. They can be thoroughly scrubbed with a 10% bleach solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water), rinsed in fresh water and dried completely before refilling with bird food. Additionally, birdbaths and areas surrounding feeders should be kept fresh. All of this will offer a healthy environment for our backyard birds and help prevent the spread of disease.

**Other Helpful and Related Information**

- "Feeding Wildlife...Just Say No!" - Order this 34-page booklet produced by the Wildlife Management Institute that discusses the many issues related to feeding wildlife (leaves DEC website).