

What do Swans eat?

<http://www.beautyofbirds.com/swandiet.html>

Swans, Geese and Ducks in our neighborhood pond ...

People are generally delighted to have these birds move into their local pond for them to enjoy.

In general, it is not a good idea to feed wild birds as it will increase their dependence on us for survival - and the food humans frequently feed them (such as bread and chips) is utterly unsuitable for them and can cause multiple health problems for them down the line.

When feeding water fowl, it is best to stay as close to their natural diet as possible

Their natural diet consists of ...

- **Swans:** In summer, the diet of swans consists mainly of aquatic vegetation, eaten while swimming, such as underwater plants and algae (Note: as algae eaters, they can be valuable in shallow bay areas, in rivers and ponds)
 - Grasses found along the banks.
 - They are also insectivores and will eat small insects
 - At other times of year, they also eat cultivated grains in open fields
- **Ducks** feed off of larvae and pupae usually found under rocks, aquatic animals, plant material, seeds, small fish, snails, and crabs.
- **Geese** consume a wide variety of plant material, including grass, leaves, roots, etc. They may also feed on aquatic plant material and waste grain left in plowed fields, as well as mollusks, crustaceans and even small fish. Many of them (such as the [Roman Rufted Geese](#)) also eat bugs, which makes them an excellent choice for those wishing to control insect populations in the backyard.
 - Note: Feeding geese is likely to reduce or even eliminates their value as natural insect controller in the backyard.

Feeding Swans, Ducks and Geese - the right way

Please note that their natural diet is best for them and that filling them up with food that is not part of their natural diet should be avoided, as it will prevent them from getting the nutrition they need as well as being potentially harmful.

HOWEVER, when winter conditions set in and little food is available - our help in providing food is likely to be very appreciated and may be even life-saving.

What NOT to feed:

- Anything that is NOT healthy for us: sugary, starchy, fatty foods, junk food, fast food
- Bread, chips, cakes, cookies, and cereal, etc - as these foods can cause digestive and serious other health problems
- Cooked and processed foods
- [Foods not safe for birds](#)

What to feed:

- **Note: Any food fed to them should be in manageable size for swallowing. Foods should be as natural as possible, unprocessed without harmful additives.**
 - Please refer to the natural diet as described above or on the relevant species pages ... If possible, feed items that are close to their natural diet.
 - Particularly in the winter months when grasses or other plant vegetation is scarce, greens such as dark green lettuce, spinach, chopped/shredded carrots, celery and alfalfa sprouts and other vegetables and greens make a great supplement. Note that lettuce may be an acquired taste and the swans may take a while to get used to it. Any vegetables need to be cut up into small pieces. Remember, birds don't have teeth!
 - Other foods to feed: Healthy popcorn (without artificial coloring and flavorings); corn / cracked corn; whole wheat GRAIN (not processed, not bread - natural state grain); whole oats; brown rice, lentils, split peas and smallish seeds
 - Equally loved and cherished are peelings from our own food preparations for dinner, such as broccoli, potatoes, green beans, cabbage -- GENTLY steamed (only enough to warm up - NEVER cook and NEVER use the microwave to warm up) and feed warm (not hot) to swans who will especially appreciate that when it's cold outside

How to feed:

- Any food should be thrown onto the water so that they can swallow water together with the food, which helps them digest the food more easily.
- Also, feeding swans, ducks and geese on land encourages them to leave the water whenever they see people, which can put them at significant risk if dogs or other predators are about.
- Also remember, even though you obviously have a deep love for these magnificent birds, there are people out there who will harm them. Turning swans into trusting pets will put them at risk of being targeted by these sick individuals.
- Watch and enjoy them from afar, not drawing their attention to you as much as possible.

Welcome to Lost Lagoon

<http://www.stanley-park-swans.com/Welcome.shtml>



Welcome to *The Swans of Stanley Park* and to their home, Lost Lagoon, situated at the entrance of Stanley Park, in Vancouver, Canada. We hope that this web site will bring you closer to this most special part of the wildlife of Lost Lagoon through the year, and will delight, as well as inform.

How and What Our Swans Eat

Mute Swans' diet consists mostly of aquatic vegetation and roots, small proportions of aquatic insects, and even tiny fish or tadpoles. Mute swans do not dive but plunge their head and long neck below the water's surface to tug at aquatic plants with their bills. Swans feed in the deeper parts of the lagoon than ducks and other waterfowl and so do not compete with them directly for food; in fact, food is made more readily available to other birds by swans because parts of the growth they consume float to the surface while the swans are feeding.

Visitors to the lagoon will notice that sometimes the swans' heads and necks are stained brown from contact with the mud on the bottom of the lake.

Swans also love grass, and a special treat for them is the opportunity to graze the grassy areas around the lagoon in the springtime. This tender grass is essential to the development of new cygnets' digestive systems, and it's one of their first ventures abroad with Mom and Dad, to find the greenest areas where they can happily nibble.

► How Much Do Our Swans Eat

Swans' body temperature is 106°F (temperature can vary slightly, depending on time of year and environment temperature) and a Mute Swan weighs on average from 20 to 27 pounds (9 to 13 kg). They need to consume about 20-25% of their total body weight per day.

Swans are not greedy and will not over-eat; they will return to a food source numerous times rather than consume it all at once.

► Foods That are Poisonous to Swans and Other Birds

CHOCOLATE is harmful and can be fatal to birds. Chocolate poisoning first affects a bird's digestive system, causing vomiting and diarrhea. As the condition worsens, the bird's central nervous system is affected, resulting in seizures and eventually death.

Salt: While all living beings need regulated amounts of sodium in their systems, salt can lead to a host of health problems in birds, including excessive thirst, dehydration, kidney dysfunction, and death. Avoid feeding them any foods with added salt.

Apple Seeds: They contain trace amounts of Cyanide. While the fruit of the apple is fine for birds, be aware that in addition to the poisonous seeds, there may be pesticides present on the fruit's skin. Be sure to thoroughly cleanse and core any apple pieces to avoid exposure to these toxins.

Onions cause vomiting, diarrhea, and a host of other digestive problems. It has been found that prolonged exposure can lead to a blood condition called hemolytic anemia, which is followed by respiratory distress and eventual death.

Dried beans: Uncooked beans contain a poison called hemagglutinin that's very toxic to birds.

Avocados cause cardiac distress and heart failure.

Mushrooms cause digestive upset, and caps and stems of some varieties induce liver failure.

Caffeine and alcohol cause cardiac malfunction.

Tomato leaves (related to the nightshades), stems, vines & leaves are highly toxic to birds.

► References

1. Swan Keeper's Handbook: A Guide to the Care of Captive Swans (Geoffrey R. Gardner, Fanchon F. Funk, Sheila A. Bolin et al) Krieger 2003
2. E.F.Sultanov (Zoological Institute, Azerbaijanian Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan)
3. Birkhead, M. and Perrins, C. (1986) The Mute Swan (Croom Helm Ltd.)
4. Ornithology Laboratory – Digestive System (Aug 2001)
5. Leslie Day, 79th Street Boat Basin Flora and Fauna Society

6. The Swan Sanctuary, Felix Lane, Shepperton, Middlesex, UK

7. (Reilly, 1968; Terres, 1980)

Mute Swan Facts

Intelligence and memory: Swans are highly intelligent and remember who has been kind to them, or not.

▶ **Behavior:** Swans respond in kind to gentle and considerate treatment. They don't arbitrarily attack people, and will only bite if they feel threatened. They are more aggressive during the nesting season because they need to protect their nest, eggs and babies. Nesting season usually starts in March and lasts a few months until the cygnets can launch out on their own.

▶ **Vision and hearing:** Mute swans have sharp vision and hearing.

▶ **Sounds:** Although they don't have a "call" they have a remarkable assortment of sounds to convey a broad range of emotions, from a gentle 'bleat' through a range of puppy-like barking notes, and a head-to-tail long snort sometimes combined with head-raising and feathers fluffed, to register delight.

▶ **How to recognize a male from a female:** Male and female look alike, but if you look carefully, you can tell one from the other:

1- Males are larger than females;

2- The knob at the base of the male's upper bill is larger than the female's knob. By the way, it's this knob that distinguishes the mute swan from all others;

3- The neck of a male is thicker than the neck of a female.

▶ **Mates for life:** Swans usually mate for life, remaining together through the year, but "divorces" have been known, and if one of a pair dies, the survivor usually seeks out a new mate, and the pair remain devoted. (see [Precious](#))

▶ **Mating:** Swans begin to breed between 3 and 4 years of age. It's a special treat to see swan mates "displaying" during the mating season, gracefully touching bill-to-bill and breast-to-breast until a perfect heart shape is formed, or gently intertwining their necks.

▶ **Eggs:** They lay from 5 to 10 eggs that take from 35 to 42 days to hatch. The female does most of the egg incubation, but every now and then the male will replace her for a while so she can have a swim and a 'bite to eat' in the lagoon.

▶ **Cygnets** are usually pale gray with gray legs that turn black as they grow, but there is a European sub-species or variant known as the Polish Mute, where the cygnets are white, with pink legs and feet. Our Mama Swan is the only one on Lost Lagoon. This coloring is due to a recessive gene.

▶ **Food:** Swans eat aquatic vegetation and insects, even tiny fish and tadpoles. Because they can plunge their long neck well below the water's surface, they're not in competition with ducks and smaller waterfowl for food. They actually help the smaller birds when parts of plants they're eating float to the surface.

▶ **Pinioning:** Following [Environment Canada's](#) regulations, the swans of Lost Lagoon have been "pinioned" meaning their wing tendons have been clipped. This is done because the Mute Swan was an introduced species, and not native to British Columbia, Canada. Pinioning ensures that they won't become feral and intermix with native species. They cannot fly away but can raise themselves above the water surface for speedier movement, or to protect their cygnets.

▶ **Size and weight:** Mute swans weigh from 6.5 – 13 kg (14 – 30 pounds), are about 160 cm (5 feet) long and can have a wingspan up to 2.5 meters (8 feet).

▶ **Neck:** A mute swan's neck has 23 vertebrae, more than any other bird.

▶ **Feathers:** A swan has some 25,000 feathers

▶ **Lifetime:** A swan in a protected environment might live as long as 30 years. For example, as at October 2005, our Boulika is about 25 years old.

▶ **Population:** Although the North American Mute Swan population is now around 13,000, there are fewer than 1,000 in Canada, and these are divided between southern Ontario and coastal British Columbia (Source: Canadian Wildlife - Vol. 13, No. 4 - Page 22).

▶ A male swan is called a "**cob**"

▶ A female swan is called a "**pen**"

▶ A baby swan is called a "**cygnet**"

▶ A group of cygnets or eggs is called a "**clutch**"

▶ A group of swans in the wild is called a "**herd**" while those in captivity are called a "**fleet**"