

The Hazards of Feeding Wildlife

Many people enjoy feeding wildlife because it allows them to have close contact with the animals, or because they believe they are helping the animals survive. While seeing wild animals up close can be enjoyable, providing wild animals with a steady, human-supplied food source nearly always leads to problems for both the animals and humans.

There are many good reasons not to feed wildlife including:

Feeding increases the chance of disease transmission to wildlife, people and pets. A constant, human-provided food source may attract many more wild animals to the area than would normally be found there. When food is readily available, animals will gather in abnormally large numbers. By gathering animals together in unnatural groups, diseases can spread much more quickly through the animals being fed, and increase the chance of spreading diseases to other species of wildlife, people and pets.

Feeding can create unintended conflicts with humans. Wild animals that are used to being fed by humans commonly lose their fear of people. Many people do not think about the neighborhood impact when they start feeding wildlife. Wild animals do not usually discriminate between one person and another, and will often start pestering neighbors. The animals may also cause damage to homes and property because they expect to be fed and have lost their fear of people. Animals that are unafraid of people will approach them for food, and are sometimes mistaken as rabid, aggressive or mean, then killed for that behavior. An instinctive wariness of people is important to a wild animal's survival.



Feeding can degrade surrounding native habitat. Wildlife habitat is negatively impacted when animals are unnaturally concentrated in areas where feeding occurs. Reproduction rates may also be affected when an artificial food source is readily available. In the wild, the number of animals being born is often directly related to the amount of natural food available. The number of animals surviving will also depend on how much food is available. This is nature's way of keeping a balance. When an unnatural food supply becomes available, animals may produce more young and soon there may be more animals living in the area than what the natural food sources can support. The best thing you can do to care for the wild animals on your property is to give them habitat, not handouts.

[Naturescaping](#) is a great way to provide the animals with natural sources of food and shelter that will not put them in danger the way a human-provided food source will. You will still be able to enjoy wildlife on your property, but at a safe distance for both you and the animals.

Feeding can lead to unhealthy animals and foraging habits. When young wild animals are taught to depend on a human-provided food source, they may not fully develop essential foraging skills. Animals who are raised relying on humans for food may struggle to survive in the absence of that artificial food source when they disperse from their parents' territory. Additionally, when a constant human-provided food source is available, animals who would normally have a varied diet may switch to eating mainly this constantly available food. Just like humans, most wild animals need a variety of foods in their diet, and if they fill up on "junk" food, they will not get the nutrients they need to stay healthy.



NC Wildlife Resources Commission
1751 Varsity Drive
Raleigh, NC 27606
(919) 707-0040
www.ncwildlife.org