



Please Don't Feed the Deer

(or any wildlife)

Many provincial and federal agencies do not encourage the feeding of wildlife.

Feeding wildlife almost always has negative consequences for the wildlife involved, including:

- Increased disease transmission
- The loss of natural foraging skills
- Eating foods that are nutritionally incompatible
- Altered reproduction rates caused by artificial food sources. Feeding wildlife may sustain higher than natural population levels.
- Affecting migration patterns
- Altering the ecological balance. Feeding one wildlife species and not another puts some at an unfair advantage and alters the ecological balance.
- Increasing human/ wildlife interaction. Wildlife may lose their natural fear of people, which could result in dangerous encounters with people and collisions with vehicles.

People who feed wildlife do so with the best of intentions and feel they are looking after the welfare of these wild animals; however, they should be aware that wildlife needs to remain wild. Wild animals should derive their food and shelter from natural habitats and under natural conditions. This will help maintain natural adaptations that ensure the long-term survival of the individual animals and of the species.

The general rule is: Do not feed wildlife.

Feeding Deer

People are often tempted to feed White-tailed Deer during the winter in order to “save” them from winter conditions. This practice causes a particular set of problems. Research has shown that deer actually get little or no benefit from being fed during the winter.

In fact, there are a number of negative consequences:

- Deer visiting feeding areas lose their natural wildness and aversion to people.
- Feeding manufactured food products removes the deer's natural adaptations to cope with severe winters in their natural habitat.
- Natural migration patterns to wintering areas may be disrupted if the animals are enticed to remain at a feeding area.
- Deer become concentrated around feeding areas, resulting in the destruction of natural habitat.
- Concentrations of deer at feeding stations increase the risk of disease transmission among the animals.
- The digestive system of deer adapts to their typical natural food (woody browse) that is available during winter. Improper feeding of other food types can cause digestive problems that may result in death.
- Deer that become accustomed to feeders and are then not fed proper quantities or quality of food may die.
- Most of the food at a feeding area is typically eaten by a few dominant deer.
- Many deer feeding areas are near populated areas and homes, increasing the risk of dogs chasing and killing deer.
- Feeding deer near populated areas or highways greatly increases the risk of deer / vehicle collisions.
- Deer concentrated at feeding areas near homes inevitably cause a nuisance problem for neighbours, as deer eat and damage nearby shrubs and gardens.
- Winter mortality is a major driving force in keeping populations at long-term sustainable levels.

Source: Upper James River Conservation Authority: <https://thamesriver.on.ca>