King’s Pond Control of Feeding?

Introduction

Large populations of wildfowl have a very detrimental impact on freshwater ponds. The birds graze and trample vegetation including marginal aquatic plants; they denude the habitat of amphibians and invertebrates and aquatic plants; the water is severely polluted by their faeces.

This is from The Pond Book published by The Freshwater Habitats Trust:

> *Unfortunately, it is exceptionally difficult to make an intensively used duck pond function as a useful refuge for other wildlife – the pressure is too great. So, in urban locations where feeding ducks is one of the traditional pleasures, it may be best to agree that waterfowl and people’s enjoyment have priority over wildlife needs. And to focus conservation attention on other sites where the wildlife gains will be greater.*

King’s Pond is not a small village duck pond, but the effects of the waterfowl population can be seen as described above.

Wildfowl, and control of their numbers will be an important factor in the long-term success and sustainability of King’s Pond.

Whichever Option is implemented, the control of wildfowl numbers and the feeding of wildfowl will be important in the ongoing management of the site.

What are the pros and cons of feeding ducks and other wildfowl bread?

Feeding ducks and other wildfowl bread is a long-standing tradition, but conservation organisations now generally recommend limiting or avoiding it in favour of healthier alternatives.

Pros of feeding bread

✅ **Easy and inexpensive**
Bread is readily available, often uses leftovers that might otherwise be wasted, and ducks will readily eat it.

✅ **Encourages people to engage with wildlife**
Feeding ducks can help children and adults connect with nature and develop an interest in local wildlife.

✅ **Not immediately toxic**
Fresh bread is not poisonous to ducks. Small amounts of bread as an occasional treat are unlikely to cause harm to healthy birds.

Cons of feeding bread

❌ **Poor nutrition**
Bread contains mainly carbohydrates and relatively few of the nutrients ducks need. If birds fill up on bread, they may eat less of their natural diet of plants, seeds, insects and other nutritious foods, potentially leading to malnutrition.

❌ **Can contribute to health problems**
A bread-heavy diet has been linked to conditions such as "angel wing", a wing deformity that can prevent waterfowl from flying properly, although this is disputed. Young birds are particularly vulnerable.

❌ **Pollutes ponds and rivers**
Uneaten bread sinks and rots, adding nutrients to the water. This can encourage algal growth, reduce water quality and harm aquatic ecosystems.

❌ **Attracts rats and pests**
Excess food left around ponds can attract rats and other scavengers, which may spread disease and prey on eggs or young birds.

❌ **Causes overcrowding**
Regular feeding can concentrate large numbers of birds in one location. This can increase disease transmission, create habitat damage and lead to excessive droppings around the waterbody.

❌ **Can alter natural behaviour**
Wildfowl may become dependent on people for food rather than foraging naturally, which can affect their behaviour and health.

Better foods to feed ducks

If you'd like to feed ducks responsibly, organisations such as the Canal & River Trust recommend:

- Defrosted frozen peas
- Sweetcorn
- Oats
- Bird seed
- Chopped lettuce, kale or other leafy greens
- Waterfowl pellets

For a river-fed or spring-fed pond

It's worth noting that feeding bread can add to nutrient loading and organic matter in the water. In a pond already accumulating silt, regular bread feeding may increase algae growth and speed up the build-up of nutrient-rich sediments along the margins.

Summary

A little fresh bread occasionally isn't usually a major problem, but as a regular food source it's poor for ducks and can damage pond ecology. Peas, sweetcorn, oats and waterfowl pellets are much better choices. There is a company that will install and manage wildfowl feed for free (see link and Appendix A below).

Sources

canalrivertrust.org.uk	What do ducks eat? Six things you can feed ducks
staffsmoorlands.gov.uk	Feeding ducks in our parks
vetdergikafkas.org	Angel Wings Syndrome in Swans
hopefield.org.uk	Should You Feed Ducks Bread? The Truth Might Surprise You
freshwaterhabitats.org.uk	The Pond Book
feedducks.com	Appendix A