

AILMENTS AND REMEDIES

INFORMATION LEAFLET

Many people enjoy keeping ducks and geese and with a bit of forethought and care, few problems occur. Good stockmanship is very important, this means getting to know your birds and their regular habits, spending some time each day watching them and trying to give them a daily routine. Often it is a change in their behaviour that can be the first sign of illness or injury.

It has been said that good stockmanship is 90% watching and 10% doing!

Also a good, well maintained environment should help reduce the possibility of ailments and injuries to your stock. Before releasing your birds into a new enclosure check it first for any potential hazards.

Make sure the are is suitably fenced, remove sharp objects, wire, string, thorny plants and thistles. Can your birds get in and out of their water easily, even if the level drops.

Fresh water and dry bedding (avoid hay) are other important factors in maintaining the good health of your stock.

Despite all your good care you may occasionally have problems - a few of the more common ones are covered below.

Aspergillosis

Laboured breathing, poor appetite and general weakness, occasionally accompanied by sticky eyes are an indication of Aspergillosis. Never use hay as bedding for nest boxes or housing, as when old or damp it attracts fungus spores which, when inhaled by birds, produce lethal lesions in the lungs and airsacs. Eider and arctic breeding wildfowl are particularly susceptible. Mouldy food and poor storage of pelleted foods are another possible source of infection. Unfortunately with this infection there is no cure.

Bubbly Eye

This is a frothy watery discharge from the eye. It occurs most frequently in domestic breeds, and some like Pekin and Muscovy seem to be more susceptible. Bathing the affected eye with salt water should resolve the problem. Ensure that the pond/drinking water is kept clean.

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Sometimes being in an exposed area with no shelter or wind break can cause Bubbly Eye. If the symptoms persist consult your vet.

Bumble Foot

This is a bacterial infection entering the foot through a crack or cut causing a swelling on the underside of the foot. This may occur in dry, hot conditions when the bird is running on hard ground, or from an injury caused by sharp objects in the enclosure, so do check your enclosure regularly. Bathing with salt water may help or alternatively veterinary Terramycin spray will sometimes solve the problem. However if it persists and hard core develops under the skin, this has to be removed and veterinary advice should be sought.

Egg Binding

Birds laying for the first time, or the sudden return of cold conditions can be the causes of females having difficulty in passing eggs. Symptoms of egg binding are the bird looking very hunched up with feathers fluffed out and generally looking miserable. Sometimes with gentle handling you can feel the egg in the lower end of the oviduct. Great care should be taken not to break the egg whilst in the cloaca as this results in death. Serious cases may be helped by putting the bird in a darkened brooder box with a heat lamp (red bulb), raising the temperature up to 85°F but allowing room for the bird to move away from the heat if required. Warmed olive oil applied to the cloaca may be of some help.

Lameness

In most cases, given time lameness will rectify itself. Always check for thorns or puncture wounds and also whether a ring is the cause of the problem. Clean any wound with antiseptic, observe the bird carefully for a couple of days with minimal handling and in most cases the problem will resolve itself. If the bird is being bullied or is struggling to keep up with other birds it is sometimes advisable to move the bird to a smaller pen with a companion for company. If swimming water is available allow the bird access as this seems to help recovery. If you suspect a fracture or if the lameness persists consult your vet.

Lead Poisoning

Beware of using a shotgun or air gun over waterfowl enclosures. One digested pellet, innocently picked up by a bird as grit, can erode in the gizzard and cause death.

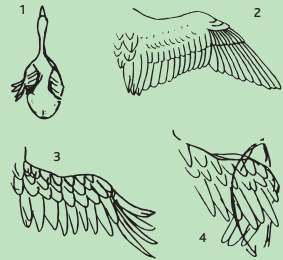
Pseudo TB

Mice are notorious carriers of this disease and should be controlled at all times. Food storage bins should be of metal and impenetrable to rodents

including rats. Starlings and feral pigeon are also likely carriers. Do not over feed your stock in the open and so attract wild birds and rodents as regular invaders.

Slipped Wing or Angel Wing

Slipped wing is a problem which can develop in young birds from about six weeks old. It affects both goslings and ducklings and is far more frequent in domestic breeds than wild fowl. The end of the wings seem to droop or fall away from the body. The bird may keep trying to refold its wings to tuck the end joints back into place. At this age the wing feathers are developing very rapidly, the quills are full of blood and heavy whilst the joints are still soft and pliable. Slipped wing can be a result of feeding chick crumbs which are high in protein for too long. It is important to change to a growers ration at 14-21 days for call and bantam ducklings and all other breeds of ducks and geese between 7-10 days. To help prevent the wing falling outwards permanently it is possible to support the end bone by strapping it to the proximal bone (see diagram). Sellotape works very well as it will allow the feathers to grow. Do not strap too tightly and if the feathers have grown any length, tuck them inside the proximal bone before strapping. It is important to check the bird after a couple of hours to ensure that the strapping is not too tight causing discomfort or has not fallen off. Remove the tape when the wing is fully developed.



1. Overhead view of affected bird.
2. Normal wing with growing feathers
3. Slipped wing - growing feathers drooping outwards
4. Correct wing showing position of strapping (Sellotape)

Stress

Although not an ailment, stress can cause upset and panic to waterfowl causing them to go off their legs thus lowering their resistance to illness. Stress is caused by external forces experienced by the bird which are unfamiliar and cause fright. Examples are; travelling, excess activity in catching a bird, bullying by other birds and prolonged cold weather. To aid the recovery of the bird it should be placed in a quiet pen with a companion and it should improve in a few days.

Wet Feather

If the preen gland at the base of the tail stops functioning the bird is no longer able to oil and preen its feathers. It will look bedraggled and decidedly unhappy and will be reluctant to enter the water. In cold conditions the bird may become chilled and die. Wet feather can be caused by muddy conditions, stagnant water or stress. If the bird is stressed, moving to a new enclosure with more selective companions can help. Occasionally the condition resolves itself after the moult, but otherwise there is no cure. Allow access to drinking water only.

Worms

All birds are host to various worms which are harmless in small numbers. This can become a problem when another ailment or stress such as change of environment or travelling allows worms to multiply with potential lethal consequences. Birds which are heavily infested may look lethargic, lose weight and need prompt treatment. When introducing new birds to your collection it is advisable to treat the birds with a proprietary wormer obtained from your vet. Panacur suspension or Flubenvet are commonly used. To prevent worms building up it is advisable to rest grazing areas and pens and apply lime on a three yearly rotation.

O T H E R I N F O R M A T I O N

This leaflet is only a brief introduction and the successful husbandry of all livestock depends on being well informed about them. The BWA Bookshop sells a number of specialist publications which cover all aspects of keeping both Wildfowl and Domestic Waterfowl. All new keepers are strongly advised to obtain a book appropriate to their interest. Leaflets in this series available from the BWA Secretary price 25p each.

Starting to keep Wildfowl

Keeping Wildfowl - Geese

Keeping Wildfowl - Perching Ducks

Keeping Wildfowl - Whistling Ducks

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Starting to keep Domestic Geese

Breeds of Domestic Duck

Starting to Show Domestic Waterfowl

Pond Construction

Ailments and Remedies

Plants for Ponds and Pens

Incubation of Waterfowl Eggs

Illustrations by Joe Blossom

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