

# STARTING TO KEEP DOMESTIC GEESE

## INFORMATION LEAFLET

All breeds of Domestic Geese have been selectively bred from the wild Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*) except the Chinese and African, which were bred from the Swan Goose (*Anser cygnoides*). Geese are very useful as friends, guards and lawnmowers. The main breeds found in this country are: Africa, American Buff, Brecon Buff, Buff Back, Chinese, Embden, Grey Back, Pilgrim, Pomeranian, Roman, Sebastopol and Toulouse.

### HOUSING

A good dry solid house will be required, preferably with a fox-proof pen attached. This will enable you to leave your geese enclosed in the pen if you are away till dark. A stable, shed or small building will provide suitable housing. If purpose-built, the house does not need to be more than 6ft high and 4ft at the back. An area of 8ft x 6ft will comfortably house 4-6 geese. A good wide door should be provided and most of the front should be wire mesh. The house should face away from the prevailing winter wind. A higher roof makes cleaning easier, as does a concrete or wooden floor. Sections partitioned off will encourage your geese to make their nests in a secure place, as well as preventing them from stealing each other's eggs when sitting. Straw makes the best bedding and needs to be changed regularly.

### FEEDING

There are many different opinions on feeding. As a guide, feed enough food in the morning as the geese can eat in 10 minutes, wheat in the summer and layers pellets in the winter. If the birds are hungry they will usually complain loudly in the early evening. The shape of their crops is also an indication of how much extra is needed. If they have grazed adequately during the day they will not require feeding at night. If the weather has been excessively dry or there is continual frost or snow then an evening meal of wheat is necessary.

Geese are excellent if kept in an orchard as they mow neatly all around the trees and will enjoy eating windfalls. They also love scraps, but if they reject anything, do clear it away or you will attract flocks of starlings and other birds. It is advisable to

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mix a very small amount of Oyster shell and quartz/limestone grit with their normal diet. This helps digestion and makes for strong eggshells.

## **WATER**

Geese must have continual access to water both for drinking and preening. It should be deep enough for them to immerse their heads. Running water or a pond will be much appreciated but geese can manage with an old bath, sink or low tub. These, when sunk in the ground, one to each pen, and with stepped bricks to enable the birds to get out, make useful though not pretty alternatives. There should be means of draining the bath and replenishing the water regularly. With ingenuity many different articles can be adapted for use. The bank of a pond or stream needs to have a gentle slope to prevent leg or foot damage. It is also helpful to have gravel bases at the gate entrances and round the waterhole to keep mud at bay.

## **RANGE**

Under the best conditions one acre of grass will support 10-15 heavy breeds or 20 light to medium breed geese. For a medium to large-sized garden a pair or trio is sufficient.

Generally geese will graze happily wandering hither and thither, frequently where you do not want them to go. Preparation prior to purchasing geese is necessary. Your land may be sour and need attention and for this you will need to spread some lime on the grassland where the geese are hoping to graze. This should perhaps be considered an automatic precaution especially if you are new to your property. The lime will sweeten the soil and may help to reduce parasitic worms potentially harmful to geese.

New stock should be wormed on arrival, and then twice a year thereafter to keep the birds fit and healthy. Wormers can be obtained from most feed suppliers or from your vet.

## **BREEDING**

A breeding 'pen' consists of 2 or 3 geese to one gander. When flock rearing, a stocking rate of 5 geese to one gander is usual. Pens or flocks should be set up in early December if possible. If a goose or gander is aggressive or will not settle it is a good plan to keep a problem bird in close proximity to its mate but separated by wire fencing. They can then become familiar to each other without causing damage by fighting. Also, when pairing up birds into separate pens do remember to clip the flight feathers on one wing. This will stop them fence hopping and possibly confusing the different pairs. Once you have paired up your birds in the desired number, feed them intensively with breeder or layers pellets.

## LAYING

Traditionally you should expect your first eggs about the 14th February, Valentine's Day. First year birds will not generally provide good hatching eggs though there are always exceptions to the rule and the later laid eggs can be quite strong. Eggs are usually laid every other day.

## INCUBATION

There are three basic ways to incubate eggs.

1. Use a small incubator.
2. Collect the eggs and place them under a broody hen or bantam.
3. Leave them with the goose.

Some people have great success with small (holding 20/25 hen eggs) incubators. If you decide to use this method then you need to store the eggs until you have a clutch – up to 10/11 eggs. Prior to putting the eggs in an incubator they should be kept in a north-facing cool shed in a box of sand – damp not soggy.

Date and name each egg with an indelible pencil and lay it on the sand and roll them 180 degrees, back and forth one way each day. Then when you have a full clutch, place them in an incubator. It is best, if possible, to have an automatic turning incubator. Otherwise you need to turn them all about twice a day.

Another method is to let the goose sit on her clutch of eggs until the last moment – about 28/30 days - when the eggs are pipping and then place them in the incubator.

The most successful way seems to be using broodies or the goose herself. When a goose is broody or you have a reliable broody hen, date the eggs with an indelible pencil and set them. Try to give the goose her own private area so that she can sit undisturbed. This is not always possible and you may find other geese laying clean eggs in the same nest. The eggs take 28-30 days to incubate and it is important to ensure that the sitting goose can obtain enough food during her brief excursions off the nest twice a day.

There is nothing more rewarding than the first batch of fluffy goslings, especially when allowed to stay with the parents. The noise and excitement from the flock all offering good advice is incredible.

Sexing goslings is simple and there are good books available with directions. Many BWA. members are able to help. Be warned that sexing is easiest when the birds are very young or mature but in-between is difficult. The BWA. Bookshop will provide much more in-depth information as well as Standards of the Breeds.

## OTHER INFORMATION

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**

**Starting to keep Domestic Ducks**

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**Breeds of Domestic Duck**

**Starting to Show Domestic Waterfowl**

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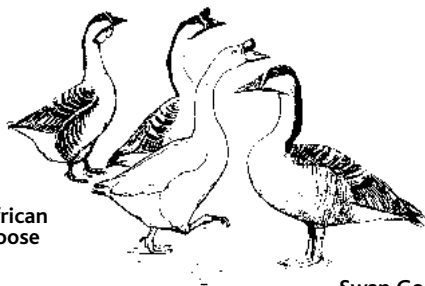
**Plants for Ponds and Pens**

**Incubation of Waterfowl Eggs**

Illustrations by Joe Blossom



**African  
Goose**



**Chinese Geese**

**Swan Goose**

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