

How can I help?

There are many gaps in our knowledge of how best to feed garden birds. The GBH_i is working to help develop better methods and practices based on science. Reports of garden bird disease will help us to understand the causes and take action to prevent disease outbreaks.

The aims are:

- to learn more about how best to feed garden birds so as to maximise the benefits for their welfare and conservation
- to minimise disease and other risks

We would be most grateful if you were able to support this work. Please send donations to UFAW (see contact details below).

Cheques should be made payable to the **UFAW Garden Bird Fund**.

Where can I find more information?

Further detailed information is available in a 32-page booklet on 'Feeding garden birds: best practice guidelines'. To obtain copies of this booklet, or for further information about the GBH_i, please contact UFAW:

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UFAW
Established 1926

What is the GBH_i?

The Garden Bird Health Initiative stems from the ideas of a UFAW Working Group set up (i) to develop guidelines about how best to feed garden birds for their welfare and conservation whilst minimising disease and other risks, and (ii) to identify and try to address needs for surveillance and research.

This leaflet has been developed as part of the GBH_i project by the UFAW 'Feeding Garden Birds: research needs, disease surveillance, and best practice guidelines' Working Group:

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Andy Evans, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
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John Stratford, Gardman Ltd
Mike Toms, British Trust for Ornithology
Graham Thurlow, Defra Animal Welfare
Chris Whittles, CJ WildBird Foods Ltd

If you see dead birds or signs of disease in garden birds, please call

0207 449 6685

Your report will help us to understand the causes of disease in garden birds. This is essential for developing improved methods for prevention of disease.



Feeding garden birds

Best practice
guidelines



Guidelines for how best to feed garden birds to maximise their welfare and conservation whilst minimising disease and other risks

Why feed wild birds?

There has been a huge increase in interest in feeding garden birds. In the UK we provided 60,000 tonnes of peanuts and seeds for them in 2003. We have taken over a large proportion of land for housing, industry and farming, and natural food supplies have declined. Providing food for wild birds helps to redress the balance.

In addition to providing enjoyment and fostering interest in wildlife, feeding garden birds can contribute to their welfare and conservation. It is important, however, that good hygiene precautions are taken when feeding birds, to reduce the potential for spread of disease.

What foods?

A wide variety of foods are commonly offered to garden birds. These include:

- Seeds
- Nuts
- Fat
- Fruit
- Invertebrates (eg mealworms)

None of these alone provides a complete well-balanced diet. The aim is to provide a supplement to the birds' natural diet rather than a complete alternative.



Food quality

The quality of food can vary greatly due to:

- Variations in nutrient balance
- Contamination with fungal toxins
- Contamination with infections

It is important to purchase foods from reputable manufacturers with quality control procedures (eg the regular checking of peanut supplies for aflatoxins), and to ensure that foods are stored properly in a clean, dry environment inaccessible to pests.

How much?

Amounts provided should allow for rapid turnover to reduce the chance of food becoming mouldy or contaminated.

When?

Birds can make use of feeders throughout the year. There are seasonal variations in their energy needs for keeping warm, for activity (feeding young), for growing new feathers, and for laying eggs. These demands are spread through the year so there is no great seasonal variation in daily food requirement.

Where?

- Place feeders in locations where they are unlikely to become contaminated with droppings (eg not under branches or wires where birds frequently perch)
- Locations should be inaccessible to cats



Minimising disease risks

Common diseases of garden birds are spread by contamination of food with the droppings or saliva of infected birds. The risk increases when many birds feed at the same places day after day for long periods. To minimise the risks:

- Use several feeding sites, to reduce numbers at any one place
- 'Rotate' between feeding sites, so not all are in constant use — rest periods will help to reduce infection levels
- Clean and disinfect feeders/feeding sites regularly*, especially in the months January to May. Rinse and air-dry feeders before re-use
- Maintain careful personal hygiene

Brushes and equipment used for cleaning bird feeders, tables and baths should not be used for other purposes and should be kept and used outside. Rubber gloves should be worn and hands should be washed afterwards (some diseases can also affect humans and pets).



*Suitable disinfectants include a weak solution of domestic bleach, Ark-kleens or Tamodine-E (VetArk, PO Box 60, Winchester SO23 7LS: www.vetark.co.uk), or Pet Virkon (The Bramton Company: Tel 01480 464550; www.bramton.com). All instructions on the use of disinfectants should be followed and gloves should be worn when handling disinfectant solutions.