

FEEDING OUR New Zealand Wild Birds

Running a wildlife rehabilitation facility that takes in more than 800 birds a year offers some wonderful insight into how our wildlife is affected by human activity. Many birds are injured and orphaned because of humans, from the shags brought in with fishing hooks and line stuck in and around their bodies, to the baby birds whose nests are destroyed because of tree felling.

Words **DR LIZA SCHNEIDER, HOLISTIC VETS**

Thankfully there are many people who are thoughtful, compassionate and kind, and have a true love and appreciation for our feathered co-inhabitants, doing whatever they can to help them. A common activity is feeding wild birds to attract them to gardens, and also to facilitate interaction – often a rewarding and joyous experience – for example, taking the kids to feed the ducks.

It's important to know that some foods can be foul to waterfowl (!) and cause more harm than good. Balanced nutrition is an important aspect of well-being for any animal. When we feed bread to birds there can be negative consequences to the birds' health, especially if the bread becomes a large part of their diet. These consequences may include:

- **Malnutrition**
- **Obesity**
- *Ducklings may learn to beg for food rather than forage for a balanced diet*
- *Uneaten bread can become mouldy and toxic if eaten later*
- *Bread that is uneaten in the water may also contribute to algal blooms and depletion in water quality, which can*

contribute to diseases such as botulism. (In a low-oxygen water environment, bacteria produce a toxin that causes birds to become paralysed.)

HERE ARE SOME FOODS THAT ARE SAFER TO USE – IDEALLY USE A VARIETY OF THESE:

- **Defrosted frozen peas**
- **Corn**
- **Duck pellets**
- **Lettuce and other greens torn into small pieces**
- **Seeds**
- **Wholemeal bread, but only in moderation**

Also be mindful that providing food to wild animals can create dependence and lead to negative issues, such as over-crowding of water-birds as they congregate where food is easily available, aggressive behaviour and a decrease in their natural behaviours.

Having respect and appreciation for our wildlife and animals in our society is so important. Ghandi said, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated." ■