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## Contents

<b>Please Read This First.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>Terms of Use .....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Disclaimer.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About the Author .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Can Your Ducks Save You Money? .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>What Age should Your First Ducks Be? .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Where to Get Your Ducks.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>A Couple of Ducks .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Ducks are not Good House-Pets .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Choosing Your Vet.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Housing Your Ducks.....</b>	<b>14</b>
The Duck House.....	15
<b>Where to get Help .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Keep Safe and Legal.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Protecting Your Ducks .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Birds.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Wild Animals .....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Controlling Predators.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<b>Water .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Choosing Your Ducks .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Which Breeds are Best?.....</b>	<b>25</b>
Meat.....	25
<i>Muscovy .....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Peking.....</i>	<i>25</i>

<b>Eggs</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<i>Orpington</i> .....	<i>26</i>
<i>Campbell</i> .....	<i>26</i>
<b>Pets</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<i>Call Ducks</i> .....	<i>27</i>
<b>Basic Health Checks</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<i>What to Look For</i> .....	<i>29</i>
<i>Don't Delay</i> .....	<i>30</i>
<b>Handling Your Ducks</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<i>Take Care for Yourself and the Duck</i> .....	<i>31</i>
<b>Travelling with Ducks</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<i>Take Care in Vehicles</i> .....	<i>33</i>
<b>Processing Your Ducks</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Resources</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Organizations for Duck Owners</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<i>United Kingdom</i> .....	<i>37</i>
<i>U.S.A.</i> .....	<i>37</i>
<b>Information</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<i>Killing Ducks for Food</i> .....	<i>38</i>
<b>Farewell from Ken Smythe</b> .....	<b>39</b>

## About the Author

Ken Smythe was introduced to ducks at an early age, when he stayed at a farm belonging to a relative.

Ken said, "They had a variety of animals as well as chickens and ducks."

"I enjoyed being around all of them. But, the ducks were a firm favorite for me right from the first time I saw them up close."

Ken wrote his book for people that want to keep ducks to provide food for their table or as pets.

Ducks have other benefits apart from their eggs and meat.

They are fun to watch and can also be a great help keeping down the bugs and some other pests in gardens and orchards.

Ken said that many people think that ducks are more difficult to look after than chickens and need a great deal more room.

"I believe that my book will help my readers become successful duck owners."

"They will learn that ducks have different requirements to chickens, for example, but they are not as hard to keep as many believe."

"This ebook will help you to save time, money and avoid stress by giving you the information you need and the best tips for successful duck keeping."

"It has all the information that you need to keep your ducks happy and productive!"

## Introduction

Ducks are fascinating to watch, but they are also of great value to their owners as a source of eggs and meat.

They can assist keeping your garden almost slug and snail free. You must carefully protect plants like lettuces which they are partial to nibbling on whenever they get the chance. But, the benefits of their presence probably far outweigh the small amount of your garden which they take in return.

### *Can Your Ducks Save You Money?*

Many people are surprised and disappointed when they check into the costs of raising ducks to provide meat and/or eggs for their table.



Unless it's done on a professional basis with a flock, your eggs and duck burgers will cost more than if you just buy some from the local store.

But, there are benefits which most people might consider more valuable which out-weigh the extra costs involved.

There are many people who are starting to keep ducks because they want to have more control over what they feed their family.

Many people have reservations about how some meat products and eggs are produced commercially. Feeding your family from your own livestock is appealing. You know what the birds eat, that they are kept in clean conditions and treated humanely through all stages of their lives.

The good news is that it is not as hard or costly as you might imagine. I believe that my book will guide you through all the steps you need to become a successful duck owner. We'll start with the information you need to know before you actually get any ducks and take you through to where you should be eating your first eggs. I envy you the enjoyment and satisfaction you have ahead of you! *Ken Smythe*

## What Age should Your First Ducks Be?

This question is important. The best answer will vary according to the purpose which you are buying your ducks for and your own experience and environment.



Buying young ducklings will save you money initially. But, you will have to pay more for their special feed and also invest more time in the first couple of months than if you bought older birds.

Advanced birds will have been cared for through the most risky time of their lives, when they are developing and subject to many perils simply because of their inexperience.

I suggest that you get birds which are about twenty weeks old or more for your first stock. They will be young enough to adapt to the routine which you devise for them, but will probably require less intense supervision than very young ducklings would.

When you have had the experience of caring for your first ducks, you will be more confident and capable to decide for yourself the type of stock you buy and raise in the future.

## Where to Get Your Ducks

There are a number of ways to get your new ducks.

Don't be in a hurry to get your ducks – that can cause you to make serious mistakes.

Reading this section of the ebook will give you a good idea of the sort of stock which will be most suitable for you and the area you have available.

You also will know what questions to ask and be able to judge from the answers and the attitude of the seller whether you should proceed with buying from them.

Some people are better at selling ducks than they are at producing good quality birds.

A good tip whenever you want to buy something, especially in a one to one situation, is to keep your knowledge to yourself. Just ask questions that will help you increase your knowledge and decide if what's offered is really suitable for your requirements.

But, don't volunteer information which may be more help to the seller than to you. Telling the seller that the breed they are offering is just what you have been looking for will mean you pay more than you probably need to.

**Casual advertisements** can be a source of good bargains but you should be wary. If you don't know the seller and can get no information about them from other duck owners, you have to check everything you see and are told before you agree to buy.

The reason offered for selling their birds may be true but you should inspect everything and follow your instincts if anything does not seem right.

You should view any casual sales as final because it would be hard, if not impossible, to get your money back. The time and cost involved might be worth more than the amount involved.

Also, you should always get only stock which you are very satisfied with. If there seems to be any question about their health, actual breed or other qualities, politely decline the offer and walk away.



**Breeders** are a wise choice when you are starting your venture with ducks. Most experienced duck owners prefer to always get their stock from them, even when there are other, probably cheaper options available.

If you are likely to be buying more stock on a regular basis, you may develop a business relationship with a particular breeder. But, when you are deciding where to buy your first few ducks, don't settle on the first lot you see. Check what is available from as many breeders of suitable birds in your area. You want to find the best ducks and one or, preferably two, reliable sources of future birds.

The breeders are, of course, a great source of reliable information about ducks. Good breeders don't mind a couple of questions but always respect their time.

Always contact them as soon as you have made a firm decision to get some ducks because they will be able to tell you whether they have the type you want and, if so, when the next lot will be ready for sale.

I suggest that you never buy anything but good quality stock. But, if you are buying ducks for food rather than to breed or exhibit, you may sometimes be able to get healthy birds that are not completely true to the breed standards from breeders.

**The Internet** is a great source of information about every aspect of keeping ducks, though there is also a lot of misinformation available there as well.

More ducks and other livestock are now being sold that way too. This should be okay if you are able to verify the reputation and standards of a particular seller.

But, you have more risk when you are dealing with sellers who are not located near you.

It's much better, especially when you are just starting out, to buy only birds which you can see and even smell.

If you order from a distant source and there is a problem with the birds you get, or if you don't get them, you will have to invest more time and money in getting the matter sorted.

Also, you may need to get special permits or follow specific procedures if you are getting birds from outside your own State. Regulations are much stricter since the outbreaks of Avian flu became more common and widespread.

**Farm sales and markets** are often the source of someone's first ducks or other stock. You can sometimes get a bargain if you have a solid knowledge of the type of bird you want to buy.

But, there can be traps if your enthusiasm is greater than your knowledge.

Some sellers will misrepresent the age, productivity, quality or even the breed of the birds they offer. This may be deliberately deceptive or they may have been misinformed themselves when they bought the birds.

There is also probably a greater risk of getting stock which has health problems in the form of disease or parasites from one-off markets and sales.

**Never make any exceptions to this rule:** Whatever the source you get your new birds from, keep them isolated and watch them carefully for two weeks before putting them with any other birds you already have.

That will help to protect your established flock.

## A Couple of Ducks

If you want to just have a small number of ducks, two is much better than one.



Ducks are very social birds and they also have a need to establish who is the "boss" duck. So, a single duck is unlikely be as comfortable without at least one other duck with it.

Don't get a male duck unless you intend to breed ducks. Then you should have at least six ducks and one drake. Less will cause the ducks to be harassed a lot by the drake during the season.

A small group of females will be fine without the attentions of a drake. They will also be easier to look after and, yes, they will probably lay just as many eggs.

The eggs will be infertile but that will not affect their nutrition value or taste to any noticeable degree.

If you have more birds and get a male that has not been de-sexed, you will need to put more effort into maintaining the health and welfare of your birds.

One drake (male duck) can happily tend to the needs of up to ten females. Having a higher ratio of drakes will probably cause the females stress because of the competing and frequent attentions of the drakes.

## **Ducks are not Good House-Pets**

Some people are happy to have their pet duck share all or part of their home.

But, this is not ideal for the people and other pets or the "lucky" duck.

The domestic arrangements are going to be upset, no matter how accommodating all the people involved try to be.

Ducks need a companion duck. Female ducks (called ducks) need one as a companion and it doesn't have to be a drake. A male duck also needs another duck around.

But, drakes are more trouble to keep than ducks. They are fairly aggressive with females and all of them tend to smell in the mating season. Most male ducklings are killed.

Two ducks are unlikely to be welcome over time in most homes.

Their droppings are loose and somebody is going to have to clean up after them. The droppings may damage some fabrics and other valued possessions.

All ducks need access to water that is deep enough for them to put their entire head and beak into. This means that there will be water scattered through that area of your home.

It is unlikely that your friends and other visitors will be used to sharing the room with a duck. This may lead to less visitors.

There are plenty of places on the Internet where you can read about people that have shared their lives and even their homes with their pet ducks.

That's fine, but I cannot believe that the duck would not have been better off living in a more natural setting such as a properly prepared duck house and without the many strange devices and events which we understand and it could not.

## Choosing Your Vet

The veterinarian that you get to treat your ducks is as important to their health as the doctor you choose for your family is to you.

You should check with other duck owners in your area where possible.

If you don't know any, you should ask at your local duck owners' organization meetings. This sort of information is likely to be worth a large part of your annual subscription.

The first question about any vet is whether they have had regular and recent experience treating ducks.

It's probably worthwhile to visit a couple of vets' premises before making your final selection. You want to see how the staff treat regular and casual clients and ensure that the facilities are of a good standard.

A vet is worth what they charge but you should inquire what your vet charges before you actually have need of their services.

It is wise to check if they use a separate veterinary service for their after-hours calls? If they do, you might want to check if the vets at the other service also have recent experience with ducks.

A vet is a valuable source of information as well as practical support for your ducks.

But, they are very busy professionals, so I suggest that you keep questions to a minimum. It's a good idea to write them out and review them before you go to your next appointment so that they will be fresh in your mind and you don't forget to ask about anything which you need to know more about.

This could save you money as well as build your relationship with your vet.

That will show your vet that you appreciate his or her help and take steps to minimize the call on his time. Although they get paid for the time, they probably have more patients waiting.

## Housing Your Ducks

The housing and protection of your birds is something which you need to sort out before you even think of making any purchases.

Ducks need access to water.

This can be natural or a pool which you install.



If you have a natural stream or pond, you need to ensure that your ducks cannot get away from your property and that they are protected from predators which will try to get in!

The area around the water source should be well-drained. If it is not, the activity of your birds will turn it into a muddy swamp fairly quickly.

This will mean the birds become dirty which can lead to health risks over time.

**WARNING:** If you let children into the area with your ducks, they need to be carefully supervised all the time. Children can drown in less than two inches of water and they can fall into streams or pools very easily when they are playing where ducks are located.

I strongly recommend that you provide a secure house with an enclosed run attached even if you are letting your birds roam each day.

That’s because ducks have reasonable night-vision and they do not roost when it becomes dark like chickens do.

All your birds should be brought into the duck enclosure each night.

Unless you train them to come back to the area near the duck house to be fed each afternoon, they will continue to forage into the night and leave the house at any time if it is not locked down.

That will put them at greater risk than they are during the daylight.

This secure area will also help to keep them safe if ever you need to go away for a period, (although someone will have to let them out and check them every day) or if there are reports at some time of stray dogs which might attack them.

The duck run does not need to be as tall as the duck house because ducks don't need to fly within it and only Muscovys use perches or tree limbs.

If you keep your birds in an enclosure, the run should have an easy to clean surface and a pool for them to use. A plastic pool may be sufficient.

It will need to be cleaned out at least every two days. Make sure you have suitable equipment for the job always available.

The water does not have to be very deep. But your ducks must be able to put their head and neck below the surface. This is how they keep their eyes and nose clean – they don't have tear ducts.

Always include at least one ramp in the pool so that the ducks can get out. That ramp must be fixed in place so that it does not move when the ducks use it. But, you should be able to remove it easily so that it can be repaired or cleaned thoroughly.

Make sure that you don't have any plants which are potentially dangerous to them in the areas where the ducks roam.

Provide some shade in their run by putting in suitable structures or plants.

Ducks can be negatively affected if they become either too hot or too cold. The level of risk varies between the breeds.

## **The Duck House**

The house for ducks needs to be secure, made of materials which cannot harm the birds and designed to allow easy access to all parts for cleaning and maintenance.

The house should be set on an area of solid material so that you will be able to clean it easily.

This is not just for your convenience. It will reduce the amount of waste and rubbish which can harbor disease and attract vermin and complaints from neighbors.

Solid construction is essential. Good locks are too.

The opening in the door to the house should be wide enough for two of your ducks to go through side by side. Because ducks have a pecking order, even when there are only two or three, there will be hassles if the door is too narrow and a junior duck gets to the door first.

If you use a door which slides across, the lower groove is likely to become blocked with muck after a while. A hinged door or a vertically sliding one is likely to need less maintenance but whatever door you use needs to be a good fit so that a predator cannot pull it away from the frame and get into where it can harm the ducks.

Make sure that there is adequate ventilation because the birds can be affected by extremes of temperature. But, you must ensure that they don't have drafts either.

Most ducks will not need perches because they don't fly. But, that means you need to ensure that the entrance to their house is low so that they can get in or out easily and quickly.

Try to put the duck's house nearer to your home than that of any neighbor so that you will know if there is any noise from them during the night.

Be prepared to get up early to release your birds into their day area or they may become noisy.

The house must be sited so that the ducks do not become stressed by being too hot or cold when the weather conditions change.

The house must be made well enough that it will withstand the most extreme weather which can be expected in your area.

Regular checking and prompt maintenance will help you keep your birds healthy and your neighbors happy.



## Where to get Help

There are many sources of help available.

I have included some useful addresses in a number of countries in the resource section at the end of my ebook.

The Internet is a popular means of accessing information but it is best used as a back-up to resources which are available in your local area and your State.

Remember that there is a lot of out-of-date and plain wrong information all over the Internet. Sometimes that happens because the person that wrote the information was misled themselves. But, sometimes, the writer is deliberately misleading.

Almost every area of the country has a group of poultry owners even in fairly small communities.

Some groups are focused on the particular needs of farmers and breeders, but they usually welcome people with just a few birds.

You can find them in your local phone book, through your local agricultural service or by asking at a veterinarian office or feed supplier.

Most organizations will let you attend a couple of meetings before you decide whether to apply and pay for membership.

You will find the fee for membership to these groups is a valuable investment. You will meet many more experienced owners who willingly share their knowledge. They will also be willing to give you recommendations for the best sources of feed and equipment and ducks, based on their personal experience.

Many of these groups arrange discount deals for their members with suppliers. They may also have deals on State or National events for duck owners.

## **Keep Safe and Legal**

Every duck owner has a responsibility to follow the rules and regulations which apply in their locality.

Although this chapter may seem a bit downbeat, it is only intended to make sure you check the rules and professional advice so that you, your family, your ducks and anyone that comes into contact with them is safe.

The outbreaks of avian flu in recent years have increased the need to maintain high standards of hygiene when handling ducks and the equipment.

You should check with your vet and ensure that your birds are inoculated with all recommended treatments.

Remember that the inoculations will take time to become effective, so ensure that you do not expose your birds to other poultry until the period is passed.

The biggest problem for most duck owners is the risk of contamination from other ducks or people that have been near them.

If you take any birds to an exhibition or other place where there are other birds, make sure you keep them isolated from the rest of your stock for a few days at least on your return.

Remove and wash all your clothing which you wear to any event as soon as you return.

Provide and use a disinfectant trough for shoes at all entrances to your bird area.

These rules may seem harsh but they are the minimum necessary.

## Protecting Your Ducks

Whether you have three ducks or a couple of dozen, you will need to pay some attention to protecting your birds from a variety of risks and also protecting your property from your ducks!

You need to fence the area, provide strong housing, eliminate anything in their area which might harm the birds and provide shelter from climatic conditions which could seriously affect their health and well-being.



Be careful about the chemicals which you use for your garden or other plants. These can be a serious hazard for your birds and also to any children that come into the area.

Snail pellets and powders can harm ducks and cause death to ducklings. They are also toxic to dogs and cats. Although some brands are now labeled as being safe, I would not use them because some vets say that they may still be harmful.

Some sprays can have poisonous residues which may remain in the fruit and also the branches of the trees. These deposits can accumulate and reach levels which may be harmful to any creature which eats or even just pecks at them. This is a problem if loose branches are put into areas where your ducks roam. Wherever possible, check what sprays have been used on any trees or other plants which your birds have access to.

Consult your local agricultural authorities for advice and information about the regulations which you must follow. Check with other duck owners too. Never use any method which could cause injury or extended suffering to any creature. That may cause damage to your reputation with neighbors and other members of the community.

Predators include wild animals, birds, rodents, domestic dogs and cats and humans.

### *Birds*

A variety of birds will attack ducks, especially young birds. Some are also a big threat to eggs.

Where practical, you should have strong netting over your runs, including areas where ducklings are roaming.

Netting is sometimes effective but it must be strong so that it does not sag under the weight of birds. If it does, it is likely that gaps will appear eventually and wild birds will push into the run.

It's also important to use a fairly small mesh so that the wild birds cannot put their heads or claws through.

### *Wild Animals*

If you have **foxes** in your area, you will need to take every possible precaution as they are a major threat to ducks.

They are territorial, so you may only have to contend with one most of the time, but that is enough! Getting rid of the local fox will not be the end of the story as it's likely that another one will be attracted into the area and your birds would be part of the reason.

Foxes have become more common in residential areas. These animals may attack your birds in broad daylight if they are hungry enough and have overcome their natural wariness around humans.

**Weasels, badgers and raccoons** are just a few of the other predators that may attack your ducks. Some are particularly attracted to the ducklings and the eggs.

**Rats and mice** are a common problem because they are also attracted by even the smallest amounts of loose seed and other duck feed.

If you see one, you can be sure that there are more of them close by. Even if you don't see them, you should act as if they are nearby. Keep checking and maintaining your defenses.

Never handle dead or live mice or rats without strong gloves and wash your hands thoroughly afterwards to reduce the possibility of an infection.

Watch for cracks and holes which may appear in your duck house walls, especially near the base. These could be made and used by rats or mice. Block them up securely as quickly as possible so that vermin don't get in and your birds do not injure themselves in the openings.

**Snakes** will be attracted to young ducks and also to the mice which come to steal some of the feed.

Always be alert, keep all areas mown and always have a clear area around the fences which protects your birds.

**People** are another potential problem. Small children need always to be supervised when they are near ducks. There is a risk that they may be nipped by a duck if they get too close or appear threatening.

They also are a risk to the health and safety of your birds, especially ducklings, which can easily be injured by unintentional squeezing or other actions.

Of course, the biggest risk from humans is deliberate theft or injury. Many people who are usually honest will take a duck if they get the chance and believe that they can get away with it.

There is always a risk with pet ducks which have developed a trust for the humans they associate with each day. They are often stolen or casually harmed and left on their owner's property by some low-life that just walked by.

All ducks need to be kept in areas where public access is prevented. Make sure the fences around your property are adequate and the area around your ducks' quarters is well lit at night and close as possible to your home.

### ***Controlling Predators***

Be careful what methods you use to control or remove any creature which you think is a threat to your ducks. Even if you have a license for a gun,

there will probably be bans on its use in residential areas and restrictions elsewhere.

You should check with your local and state authorities what methods you are allowed to use to protect your birds and other property.

You can use traps and even poison in most areas but each may catch or kill other creatures which could cause you trouble with your neighbors and even the law.

If you use poisons of any kind, ensure that it is set in ways which will make it very difficult for other creatures to get at. Remember that you also need to be able to retrieve the animals you catch or they will cause strong offensive odors within a couple of days.

Always check traps and poisons every day to ensure that you deal with anything you catch as quickly as possible.

Using live traps is a way to ensure that you get the right animals but you then have to humanely dispose of the live predator.

Don't use poisons without getting professional advice because of the risk to other animals and people, including your own family.

Fencing is the best method for controlling foxes and some other creatures. The fencing needs to extend well below soil level and should have an overhang which leans away from the pen at the top.

**Electric fencing** can be used at suitably low levels to deter predators. It is not always completely effective.

Your ducks may be upset or even hurt if the shock level is too high and the birds connect with it when they are wet.

Two layers of strong netting, one several inches inside the other, can be an effective means of keeping some predators away from your birds and reducing the stress which would be caused if they come close to the birds where there is a single layer of netting.

But, this is more expensive and both barriers need to be strong, with the edge buried well into the earth around the ducks' area.

## Water

Ducks always need access to water but a lack of a large body of water is no reason for you to get a couple of ducks.

The wild varieties need larger and deeper areas of water than most of us could provide, but many people use a child’s large pool as the main source of water for their domestic breed ducks.

You will need to move the pool around if it is on the surface so that muck does not accumulate underneath it. Moving it will be needed more frequently if the pool is located on soil because the area underneath will become messier and possibly unhealthy.



Give your ducks clean drinking water and a pool which they can splash about in, then they will be happy. Unless the pool has enough water to allow them to splash water all over themselves, they will probably not be able to spread oil from their preening gland over all their feathers.

That oil is needed for their feathers to be healthy and for the birds to float. The birds will submerge their heads in the pool which will help clean their nostrils and eyes.

But, the pool needs to be kept as clean as possible and that means you will need to do it daily. Otherwise, the accumulated muck may cause some problems.

## Choosing Your Ducks

Your selection of ducks will be governed by what you want to use the birds for.

I am including details of some of the most common and popular breeds with details of their commonly accepted suitability for different goals.

I recommend that anyone who is just getting their first ducks should try to find a suitable supply in their local area rather than buying them from a supplier farther away.

Getting your first stock locally will remove some potential risks which might happen with ordering, transport and handling the new birds when they arrive.

Breeders are always the best people to deal with. You will usually get the best prices and some great advice from them.

The local supplier will have those breeds of birds that are known to suit your local conditions.

You will be able to see them before making your purchase and the advice you get from the supplier will be directly applicable to your needs.

You may have to wait until birds of the age you decide to get are available.

Your facilities and budget will also influence what type of ducks you get and the number you keep at any one time.

If the birds you are offered seem below par, walk away. Do not accept them at a “bargain price”. The most important rule is to **get the best stock you can**. Never buy ducks which do not appear to be in top condition. They will not produce the results you desire and will cost you more in money and other resources than getting less birds of a better standard will.

It is always better to have more space than your ducks require. Stocking heavily can stress the ducks leading to health issues, reduce their productivity, degrade the area they are in and encourage the development of diseases.



## Which Breeds are Best?

Here is a brief overview of some of the most popular duck breeds for various purposes.

### Meat

#### *Muscovy*

Unlike the other breeds of duck, which have developed from the Mallard, the Muscovy is descended from a South American duck which lived in trees!



They have strong webbed feet with claws. They can fly and perch off the ground, unlike most other ducks.

They are good insect harvesters.

But, they will attack small animals, so don't let them near other domestic birds, such as fowl, or any kind of pets.

They have a crest which they raise when excited and a fleshy area called a carbuncle which surrounds their eyes and the base of their beaks.

Their confidence and striking appearance have divided duck owners into those who cherish them and others who avoid them because they say that the Muscovy looks strange and behaves badly.

They lay about 100 eggs a year and are good for the table as well, but the Peking is regarded as a better choice for meat production.

#### *Peking*

The Peking came from China in the 1800's and has been used in the development of many of the other breeds intended for meat production.

Their basic shape has been described as a rowboat sitting on its stern although some are now being bred with bodies that are more parallel to the ground.

It is prized for its ability to produce a high ratio of meat to bone. It is also a good forager and layer as well.



It needs space to roam and water to wash in.

The body is almost vertical and the tail is close to the ground. That and its loose feathering can cause the birds to get dirty

where the ground is muddy.

So, they should be kept clean. The birds must be checked for mites regularly.

Despite these points, they are one of the most valuable breeds for meat and also for developing new and better duck breeds to improve the industry.

## **Eggs**

### ***Orpington***

There are currently three varieties of the Orpington, including the Buff Orpington, which may be the most popular of the three. The original breed was developed by the same breeder that gave us the Buff Orpington chicken. They are better layers than many duck breeds and are also considered good for eating.

They are adaptable and can get along even if they do not have a body of water to swim in, but will need a source where they can splash water over themselves.

They would be suitable for a first attempt at breeding ducks provided you had some access to an experienced breeder for hands-on information and some experience with maintaining ducks first.

They can be kept in small areas or in a free-range situation.

### ***Campbell***

The best known variety is the Khaki Campbell.

They are, reputedly, the best layers of the three Campbell varieties.

They can be messy but do not fly, so they are not as hard as some other varieties to maintain. They have a need to forage, so give them enough space.

You might be able to keep them with your chickens if you have some. The two factors which might work against that would be whether you kept a drake and whether the temperament of the chickens would lead them to be stressed having the ducks with them.

The Campbell ducks will lay and get along fine without a drake. If you do get a drake, you should give it at least four ducks to service because they are very aggressive during the mating period.

They could harm or, at least cause severe stress and noticeable feather loss to the ducks if there are just one or two.

## **Pets**

### ***Call Ducks***

The small Call breeds which were developed to lure wild ducks into traps are suitable for pets.

But, they are relatively noisy and you would need to check well in advance of getting them that your neighbors would not complain to you or the local authorities about them.

Their small size, their chubby appearance and their nature gives them great appeal and makes them easy for children to handle. They are also a very popular section at poultry exhibitions.

They will be much happier with a mate of their own choosing.

## Basic Health Checks

When you learn to do more yourself with your ducks, your venture will be more efficient and you will be able to look forward to better results with less stress.

Do your own research, but check information with other duck owners, your local agricultural service or your vet to ensure that it is appropriate and legal in your area.

In this section, I will only cover those points which most duck owners do routinely.

Any of the more advanced strategies should only be done after consultation with your vet or, at the least, thorough hands-on training from an experienced and successful duck owner in your area.

This is important when you are looking at birds which you are first thinking of buying, but you will also learn the value of running your eyes over all your birds whenever you are near them.

One important tip is to focus when you are looking at your birds on a daily basis. If they are an important source of income for you, you will be doing that. But many people that just have a few ducks as a hobby tend to just give them a quick glance.

When you are looking at the same birds every day, you may not realize the significance of some part of them gradually changing in size or appearance.

You may see that one or more of your birds are getting larger and think that's a great change. But, they may have a growth developing which needs to be checked, or be adding fat from being over-fed or converting their feed better so you will get more meat.

That is important to you and also to the health of the birds. A fat duck is an unhealthy duck.

If you see a change in the appearance or condition of any of your birds and you don't know what it means, check it out.

### *What to Look For*

**Feather loss** may be caused by an illness, but a duck that loses feathers



from the back or its head in the mating season is probably being given too much attention by your drake.

If you see **dull feathers**, the ducks may not have a water source deep enough for them to sit in and throw water all over themselves. In that state, they will not be able to spread the lubricating oil from their preening gland

over themselves. This can have serious consequences and should be fixed quickly.

The **birds' eyes should be shiny**. If they are not bright-eyed, they need to be checked carefully for what is ailing them.

Any **awkwardness in the way they walk** should be checked. They are like us in that they need their legs working properly and supporting their weight well. Some illnesses can cause ducks to appear uncoordinated or dizzy.

**Dirty nostrils** or **dirty eyes** signal that they don't have a water source which they can dip their whole head and neck into. This is essential for the ducks rely on washing their eyes in clean water regularly because they do not have tear ducts.

If you see that **a duck's vent is soiled** by droppings and anything else except fresh mud, or if it smells bad, you have a sick duck because they will always keep that area clean if they are physically able to.

Ducks can be victims of **bullying**, just like humans. Any sign that a duck is reluctant to eat or go with the other ducks foraging is a sign that should be investigated.

### *Don't Delay*

Isolation is the first step, so you can observe the bird closely and give it some extra food and water which it doesn't have to share with the others.

You will also be reducing the risk of anything which is affecting the bird being transferred to others in your flock.

Any delay could mean you act too late. The birds often hide any sign of a problem until it has a strong hold on them.

One way to catch problems is to compare the actions and activity level of different birds to each other. There will be natural variations but sometimes you will notice marked differences.

Then, you can pay more attention to the bird that is not coping as well as the others. This bird has a problem and you need to find it and deal with it.

## Handling Your Ducks

In this section, I will suggest some good ways to handle your birds in different common situations.

### *Take Care for Yourself and the Duck*

You can easily damage yourself or your ducks from doing things too quickly or without proper thought.

You should be as careful of your own posture and general safety when lifting or carrying a duck as you would be if you were carrying a parcel of similar size. The duck is more likely to cause damage because it will move unless you restrain it.

You can hurt or even kill it if you do that wrong.

You also could be hurt by its beak or have your clothes stained if it sprays waste because of the stress it is feeling.

Whenever you want to pick up a duck, take a cautious approach. If you hurry, the duck will get agitated and the risks start to multiply.

Stay calm and try to ensure that the duck does the same. You will get the result you want more quickly and with less stress all around.

The best place to get your duck is when it is in the duck house, preferably in a corner.

You might make it part of your routine to catch any bird which you need to examine or transport when they come to the duck house to be fed in the afternoon. Make sure that you don't cause any alarm among the birds or it will become more difficult to get it to come in from then on.

Another tactic is to keep them closed in first thing in the morning until you catch your bird.

Otherwise, try to maneuver it into a spot where it cannot easily get away.

Put one hand loosely on the duck’s neck and slide your other arm under the duck until you can put two fingers between its legs and **gently** wrap your other fingers around them.

**Keep two fingers between the duck’s legs at all times. Never squeeze or otherwise apply any pressure which would push them together or you may seriously injure the duck.**

Keep your hand lightly on its neck, giving it support and not applying any unnecessary pressure.

Lift the duck with your arm which is under it. The duck’s beak will point toward your body and its tail will point away from you.

That will reduce the risk of its waste staining your clothes.

The duck will probably be fairly comfortable in this position.

Some duck owners use a large fishing net with a ring and a handle to catch their ducks if they cannot corner them. This will need some practice to minimize the risk to the duck of being hit with the metal rim on the net.

Another important point is that many owners cause injury to their ducks when they put them down after being very careful while they were catching and carrying them.

It can be awkward to set down a lively duck and they can get a leg seriously hurt very easily if you are not steady in your movements and as gentle as possible in that process.

Be particularly careful with all drakes in the mating season because they are excited.

Always take special care with Muscovy ducks and drakes that will bite or use their claws when upset. They are a different breed from the others, very strong and determined.

Ask other bird owners to show you how they catch and hold their birds.



## Travelling with Ducks

You may be able to buy purpose built travelling boxes for your ducks.

Some people successfully use pet-carriers made for dogs and cats to transport individual birds. Always get advice from your vet or a very experienced duck owner before trying this with your particular birds.

Each breed has its own needs and potential risks when being transported. Because the carriers are designed for creatures which are physically and emotionally very different from ducks, some types of carriers may have in-built problems which an experienced person is more likely to see in advance.

Whatever container you use, it should be:

- ✓ Strong enough to prevent the duck escaping.
- ✓ Have no holes which are big enough for the duck to get its head through in case there is a sudden stop.
- ✓ Lined with absorbent material for the ducks' waste.
- ✓ Large enough for the bird to stand fully upright.
- ✓ Well ventilated.

### *Take Care in Vehicles*

Do not put a duck in on a seat of a car which has airbags. The triggered bag would harm or possibly kill the bird. Even if it was in a strong box, the sound and shock could prove fatal.

You will need to observe any regulations which affect the transport of livestock in those areas where you are carrying the birds.

You must carry water and some food for the birds. It would be wise to only give them access to it when you stop from time to time. That will reduce the mess in the container which you have put the bird in.

If you are using commercial transport for your birds, you will need to abide by their rules as well. Check what may be involved when you arrange the travel.

## Processing Your Ducks

In some areas, there are poultry processors that will process birds belonging to people who have only a few birds. You should check your phone directory and also search the Internet. Other duck owners, your vet or feed supplier may also be sources of reliable recommendations.

But, there will be times when you, or someone in your household, will have to do it.

Killing ducks is unavoidable whether you are keeping them for pets or for profit.



If you are breeding ducks, you will probably have to kill some of the drake chicks because there is generally less demand for them and only certain breeds are suitable to be pets.

You will also possibly find an injured duck when a vet is not available. Then, you may need to end the low-quality life of an old or unhealthy bird that you don't want to let suffer any more.

This can be hard for anyone that has developed a connection with the birds, but it is inevitable. Getting someone to accept this task is essential.

They need to know how to do it efficiently so that the bird is caused minimum stress and pain.

I believe that all adults in your household should know how to do it so that an injured bird can be put out of its pain if the person that usually handles them is not available and there is no suitable vet close by and quickly available.

I understand and sympathize with those people who are stressed even by the thought of having to kill one of their birds. Instead of thinking that you are

causing them pain, remember that you have given them a good life and the best of care.

You ensure that they do not suffer by being quick and accurate. Sometimes, that is a better end than living on while their health deteriorates further.

You must check with the Agricultural department in your State and local authorities about regulations and laws which you must follow regarding the killing of your ducks, what you may or may not do with the meat and how you must dispose of the waste parts.

There can be serious penalties for not following the rules and ignorance of what is required will not excuse you.

**IMPORTANT:** I don't think that killing procedures can be adequately taught through a book. Killing a bird should only be done when you have been personally shown a suitable procedure by someone that has experience and is able to show you how, answer any questions you may have and check your first attempt. It is a good idea if there is a dead bird for you to practise first, before killing a live bird.

The most common methods are:

Dislocating the neck

Cutting the throat, or

Chopping off the head.

The first method is the most recommended currently. Provided that you have been personally shown and tested, the neck dislocation is probably the quickest which can be expected to minimize any suffering of the bird and does not involve the mess which is inevitable with the other methods.

The other two involve mess but are still widely used by people with just a few birds.

There are legal requirements in some areas which relate to the prevention of suffering of birds and animals. You should check with your poultry owners' organization and with local authorities to make sure that you comply.

Each owner should take reasonable care to minimize stress and pain to their birds at all times, including when they are processed.

Separate the bird or birds which are to be killed from your other stock. They should be kept in a separate area for a few hours to let them settle down from being moved from the other birds.

Take each bird, one at a time to a section which is out of sight of the other birds before you kill it.

The birds need to be bled and plucked as soon as possible after killing.

This process can be time consuming and tiring. That’s why many owners get a commercial processor to kill, dress and pack their birds in those areas where there is a processor that is willing to do them.

Another option is to pay someone that has experience to do the work. The cost of this can give you better results, save time and cause less stress to the birds when you are dealing with your first few birds.

This also gives you an opportunity to learn “on-the-job” so that you do the tasks well when you start doing them yourself.

If you are producing the meat for human consumption apart from members of your immediate family, you need to check the regulations in your area.

You will probably have to have separate processing area or add commercial equipment to your house so that a high standard of hygiene and safety against any possibility infection can be maintained.

When you are processing poultry, you also may have to dispose of the waste parts and refuse more carefully than just using your usual garbage collection.

## Resources

### Organizations for Duck Owners

#### *United Kingdom*

#### **British Waterfowl Association**

<http://www.waterfowl.org.uk/>

(From their website) The BWA is an association of enthusiasts interested in keeping, breeding and conserving all kinds of waterfowl including wildfowl, domestic ducks and geese.

It is a registered charity dedicated to education about waterfowl and the need for their conservation, as well as to raising the standards of keeping and breeding ducks, geese and swans in captivity.

Membership is open to any individual, organisation or corporate body with an interest in waterfowl. You do not have to be an expert to join.

#### **Poultry Pages at allotment.org.uk**

<http://poultry.allotment.org.uk/>

A site run by a dedicated owner of ducks and other poultry.

(From their website) On this site we've expanded over the years and now we cover most poultry that people keep at home for a hobby: chickens, bantam hens, ducks, geese, quail and turkeys. As well as articles and links to advice we've the best list available online of individual breeders – helping them to stay in business and you to find a local supplier of poultry.

For those needing individual help, we've a forum with a huge number of members able to share their knowledge, tips and help whatever the problem.

#### **Call Duck Association UK**

breeders,information,news

<http://www.callducks.net/>

#### *U.S.A.*

1. [Call Ducks-Call Duck Association UK - breeders,information,news](http://www.callducks.net/)

[www.callducks.net/](http://www.callducks.net/)

**Call ducks** are cute. They are the 'toy' ducks of the domestic waterfowl breeds. Everything you want to know about these birds - Britain's most popular pet duck.

New rules for Muscovy Ducks

[http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/ducks/muscovy\\_regulations.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/ducks/muscovy_regulations.html)

## **Information**

University of Minnesota Extension Service

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/livestocksystems/di1189.html>

Information about raising ducks in the U.S.A.

<http://poultrykeeper.com/waterfowl-ducks-geese/frequently-asked-questions-ducks/beginners-guide-to-keeping-ducks.html>

Information intended for people that are teaching people about raising chickens and ducks in developing countries.

[http://www.cd3wd.com/cd3wd\\_40/vita/chicduck/en/chicduck.htm](http://www.cd3wd.com/cd3wd_40/vita/chicduck/en/chicduck.htm).

Background and other info about the **Muscovy duck**:

<http://www.hobbyfarms.com/livestock-and-pets/raising-ducks-26820.aspx>

<http://www.avianweb.com/muscovyduck.html>

## ***Killing Ducks for Food***

Fact sheet (May 13th 2011) from the USA Department of Agriculture.

Although intended for full-time producers, some of the information could be useful as a reference for anyone that raises ducks.

[http://www.ffis.usda.gov/Factsheets/Duck & Goose From Farm to Table/index.asp](http://www.ffis.usda.gov/Factsheets/Duck%20&%20Goose%20From%20Farm%20to%20Table/index.asp)

## **Farewell from Ken Smythe**

I hope that my ebook has given you ideas which will save you time, money and stress.

I know that you will get much satisfaction and enjoyment from your birds. They can be a source of amusement and keep you active probably much more cheaply than other ways.

Your diet will improve with your own eggs and meat. They will also help keep your garden pest population much lower, so your plants will be healthier and more productive as well.

Your children will also learn that eggs don't really grow in cardboard or plastic boxes!

I wish that you will enjoy and prosper for years to come from your association with the clowns of the poultry world, your ducks.

***Ken Smythe***

[Another eBookWholesaler Publication](#)