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## **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.

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