



Duckling feeders

Duckling creep feeders Improving mallard breeding success

The survival of wild hatched mallard ducklings can be very variable. Many are no doubt lost to predators, especially mink, foxes, rats, pike, feral cats, crows and other corvids, and so seasonal predator control is advisable through the rearing season. Often the natural food supply can be inadequate to support all of the ducklings hatched (particularly if the water contains a large population of fish). It can therefore be a good idea to provide suitable food for the ducklings.

The best way to do this is to provide 'creep feeders' which exclude the adults, which otherwise harry the ducklings and prevent them feeding. In particular adults also consume an excessive amount of the food provided for the ducklings.

It is surprising how soon wild hatched ducklings will find and use such feeding stations and just how their survival can be improved as a result.

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The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

For over 75 years our scientists have been researching why species like the grey partridge, water vole, corn bunting and black grouse have declined. We are continually developing practical measures to reverse these declines.

Our aim is simple - a thriving countryside rich in game and other wildlife.

We are an independent charity reliant on voluntary donations and the support of people who care about the survival of our natural heritage.

Siting

1. The simplest form of 'creep' consists of an old broody coop placed near the water's edge, on a fairly open grassy section of shore, with chick crumbs inside and grain nearby. The more of these the better, as this increases the chances of the ducklings finding them and reduces competition.

2. Larger feeders can be made (see page 2) with weldmesh sides which will allow ducklings in up to three weeks, but will exclude adults. The best way to use these

is to build them on floating rafts with sloping ramps for easy access. These should be moored close to the shore until the ducklings find them and begin to feed from them. Then they can be pulled out into the open water, using a running loop around a couple of posts. In this way the ducklings are safer out on the water than they are on the shore. Initial siting of the feeder rafts where the adults are used to feeding will also help the ducklings to start using them, as will scattering a little barley on the edges.



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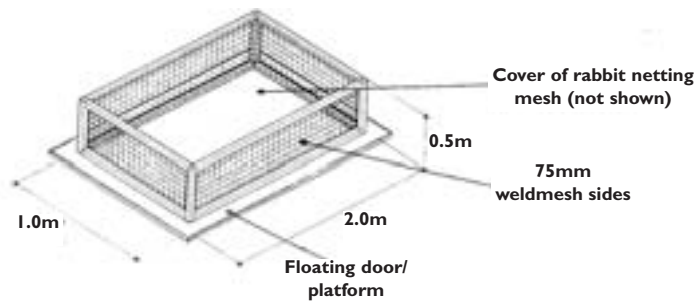
www.gct.org.uk

Construction

Materials

- Old door/platform to form raft.
- Rabbit netting mesh (for roof).
- 75mm (3") weldmesh for sides.
- Wood for construction of frame (see sketch for dimensions).
- Duckling feed (in cage).

Sketch of creep feeder for ducklings with mesh sides to exclude the adult birds (the roof netting is not shown).



(Above) Ducklings using a creep feeder. (Left) Scatter barley around the outside of the creep feeder to attract adult ducks.



Results

Two examples which may encourage you to introduce creep feeders on your wild duck breeding areas include a pond in East Lothian where 12 pairs of duck each spring hatched eight to 12 ducklings annually, but rarely did more than two or three survive to maturity, most succumbing within the first few days after hatching. Following the introduction of a duckling creep feeder in the summer of 1995, average duckling survival has increased to seven ducklings per adult family.

In Angus on a larger lochan, nesting mallard were seen to produce ducklings each year, but the total population never reared double figures of ducklings to maturity. In 1994 a single creep feeder was installed with the net result that the average duckling production has exceeded 100 every year since. Indeed several creep feeders are now used on this water. In this case nesting boxes on rafts were also supplied to provide predator-proof nest sites.



Creep feeder secured near the shore until the ducklings find it.

More information

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's Advisory Service can provide further advice on feeding systems for gamebirds, and on all aspects of game management. For information, please contact 01425 651013.

