

THE FEEDING OF SWANS AND ITS RESULTS

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Introduction

I had two motives to begin feeding the swans at Asadokoro. One is that I was worried whether there was enough food to feed these big birds in this habitat; the other is that I wanted to know their feeding habits. I had first seen the swans offshore in the Sea of Okhotsk in late September 1926. At that time I had thought they were cranes, not swans. Since then I have been interested in them and have observed their feeding habits, several changes in adaptability to the seasons, and other things.

Natural swan foods

They like to eat certain kinds of sea plants – *Zostera marina*, *Zostera asiatica*, *Ulva reticulata*, *Enteromorpha intestinalis*, *Ulva pertusa*; some kinds of water insects – *Gonocephalum pubens*; lobsters, squillas; certain kinds of land insects – locusts, dragonflies; grass seeds which float on water – *Poa pratensis*, *Juncus*, *Agrostis palustris*, *Dactylis glomerata*, *Equisetum arrense*; and the leaves of *Phragmites communis*. When they have no food in the cold season, they even eat pine needles. Because of this, the trees often die. Though I thought they might eat sand, I was surprised to learn that they eat a great deal of soil.

Effects of artificial feeding

In some places, people feed the swans tea leaves (dregs), oats and empty husks of cereal. For my part, I give them powdered shell and sand. In the coldest season, I give them soil, too.

There are four reasons which have been advanced for not feeding the swans:

- various harmful germs might be transmitted;
- they will forget how to feed themselves;
- the supernutrition will have some effect on their breeding;
- unbalanced nutrition also will have an effect on their breeding.

I agree that it is the best protection for the wild animals to return to nature. But when it is impossible for them to feed themselves because of the cold, we cannot desert them. In such cases, the swans easily eat the food given by us. Then they will not perish. At some places where swans live, it seems that people feed them only for the sake of tourist development.

I would like to express my opinion which I have formulated over the past 20 years about the four objections listed above:

- At first I was a little worried about mould but the results of my feeding set me at ease. We have to be careful about fermented soy beans; otherwise mould has not hurt them at all.
- The swans coming from over the sea stay only five or six months. Four years have passed since I started feeding the swans and they do not show any change in their feeding habits, though they rely upon me a little.
- If I give them too much food, they eat only what is necessary. To my surprise, they control themselves.
- During the night, they leave their feeding place and feed themselves offshore, to make up for any food deficiencies.

I think that Asadokoro serves as a training place for feeding. The swans which have experience of being fed are not afraid of humans and soon become used to them. So many of them are loved and given food and it is certain that that has been the reason why the swans break up into groups and live there. We have many other good reasons for feeding them. For example, we can easily catch them to mark them. The swans return here again with their marks and approach us and we can read the numbers. This is quite different from the case of feeding the monkeys and Japanese serows.

I would emphasize that feeding the swans is not injurious but beneficial.

Summary

Food of wild swans in Japan is listed, and possible problems arising from artificial feeding, which the author concludes is not injurious but beneficial.

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