



What Is the Average Life Span of a Duck?

Read an about duck's average life span in this excerpt from Popular Farming Series: Ducks

Get to Know Ducks!

Coming in March 2008, the Popular Farming Series offers an issue all about Ducks! Get your copy online. Click here for a preview>>Ducks are not as long-lived as geese. The average life span of a domestic duck is 10 years or less.

As a general rule, the larger breeds of duck have the shortest life spans. Seldom do they live beyond five to seven years of age.

Muscovy

An exception is the Muscovy, which may live to between eight and 12 years of age, or more.

Pekin

The Pekin (probably due to its rapid growth rate as a young bird) normally lives a relatively short life—perhaps five years. The first part of a Pekin to fail as it ages is often its legs. I suspect that rapid weight gain in its first year taxes its ability to support itself. The actual useful life of an exhibition Pekin may be only three years. “Useful life” is determined by the length of time it’s useful as a breeder.

Medium to Light Ducks

The average life span of the medium and light ducks (Cayugas, Blue Swedish, Runners, etc.) may exceed that of most large ducks by two or three years.

Keep in mind, however, that ducks kept for egg production may only produce an optimal number of eggs per year for two or three years. In fact, pushing female ducks to produce large numbers of eggs will probably shorten the life of a member of any breed.

Bantam Ducks

The longest lived of the ducks by a considerable margin are the bantam ducks—the Calls and Black East Indies in particular.

A number of mine have lived a decade or more and one Grey Call female lived 15 years. They also tend to have longer useful lives from a breeder's standpoint, with males remaining fertile for as long as a decade and some females able to produce eggs for an even longer period, assuming the best of care. Because they carry less weight and don't experience ultra-fast growth rates, their bodies tend to hold up longer.

Of course, a discussion of longevity in any breed assumes that the birds are provided with a good diet and appropriate housing and are not overcrowded. ~ Lou Horton

From the article, "Donning Ducks," Popular Farming Series: Ducks. Read Horton's article and more about raising, caring for and selling ducks as part of your farm in Popular Farming Series: Ducks, available in March 2008.

Foie Gras Debate

Could ducks offer a built-in alternative?

Foie gras (pronounced fwah grah) is the fattened liver of a waterfowl (either duck or goose) produced by a special feeding process.

Historically, this product was developed by confining ducks to a very small cage or pen and force-feeding them a highly fatty diet to rapidly increase the size of their liver.

Banning Sales

In the United States, only a few companies produce foie gras, with most of it coming from New York. Recently, due to much controversy surrounding the force-feeding process, Chicago banned the sale of foie gras in retail stores and restaurants, and California is phasing out production and sales of foie gras over the next few years.



Still Common, 'Tho

Many finer restaurants still serve foie gras. In fact, I recently looked at online menus of some of the best restaurants in Louisville, Ky., and nearly all had foie gras on the menu as a main dish or as an appetizer. I'm sure the menus of nicer restaurants in many other cities are similar.

New Option or Approach?

With traditional foie gras becoming so controversial, there may be an opportunity for producing either a humanely raised foie gras or another duck-related product that can take its place on the menus of finer restaurants.

Ducks have the natural eating behavior of gorging themselves when they are offered feed. Taking advantage of this behavior—without the discomfort or pain that force-feeding causes—might open some innovative marketing opportunities for the duck raiser with an entrepreneurial spirit. ~ Matt John

From "The Business of Ducks," Popular Farming Series: Ducks. Read John's article and more about raising, caring for and selling ducks as part of your farm in Popular Farming Series: Ducks.