LAKE FACTS

WATERFOWL: WHY NOT FEED THEM?

Ducks and geese can be a beautiful sight on a small artificial pond or lake. They seem to make our lakes look more like natural lakes. They are fascinating creatures. Watching a group of ducklings paddling along behind their mother is cute and wondrous. However, when ducks and geese become too numerous, several lake management and aesthetic problems can develop.

What problems do ducks create?

Bird droppings can be a nuisance and aesthetic detraction along the shoreline. The droppings create slippery conditions along the shoreline and certainly are not attractive in appearance. Because the droppings must be physically washed from the lake edge, they create an additional maintenance task.

Water fowl are also a source of nitrogen and phosphorus; nutrients that stimulate algae growth in a lake and cause the water to turn green. Ducks like to forage vegetation from the land. They convert it to water soluble forms of nitrogen and phosphorus during digestion. It is then deposited in the lake while they swim.

Bird wastes contain fecal bacteria. Because we sometimes fish and our children often play along the water's edge, hands or feet somehow find their way into the water. Thus, the waste material can pose a health risk.

How do we discourage them from inhabiting the lake?

Limit Food: Residents who set out food or actively feed them may be supporting unnaturally high waterfowl populations. When food becomes limited, ducks will leave to find a new source of food. If you continually feed them, the ducks will never leave.... even migratory waterfowl may take up permanent residence. Water fowl also seem to like Kentucky blue grass, perennial rye grass, and red fescue for forage. Selection of alternate grasses for winter lawns or use of ground covers may be effective in minimizing food resources. Feeding ducks items such as bread and popcorn is also very harmful to the animals. Uneaten bread and popcorn are decomposed by bacteria. One common bacteria that grows on the food (*Clostridium botulinum*) is responsible for botulism. If a duck eats the contaminated food directly or inadvertently eats an aquatic organism that consumed the contaminated food, the duck can become very ill and slowly die. A duck with botulism ("limp neck disease") is not a pleasant sight.

Limit Reproduction: Resident ducks will lay eggs in protected areas along the shoreline. Favorite areas include within heavy vegetation and under docks. Periodically collecting duck eggs is an effective means of limiting reproduction in the resident waterfowl population and the total number of ducks in general. Several homeowner's associations currently have "duck committees" composed of individuals who are responsible for searching for and removing duck eggs from the lake edges.