

WATERFOWL IN URBAN LAKES & PONDS

There is nothing more relaxing than going down to the lake and feeding the ducks with leftover bread in the cool of the evening after a hard day at work. Little is more pleasurable than watching the faces of children as they feed and intermingle with the waterfowl. Many residents even have names for the individual birds and constantly look out for their well-being by providing food and nesting sites.

But with all this “good” there comes the bad as well. Domestic and domesticated waterfowl reproduce excessively due to the few natural predators in urban waters. Many times they prefer backyard and community swimming pools over the lake water. Their feathers clog suction pumps and their feces can cause health concerns as well as increased cleaning maintenance of the common areas. This waste also contributes significantly to the nutrient load in the water causing algae, weed and bacterial concerns as well as odors. Waterfowl love to nest in flower beds for protection and cause considerable damage to grass, plants and shrubs. In waters that have no shoreline stabilization, such as a bulkhead, they forage at the soil-water interface disturbing the soil and accelerating erosion. And of course, waterfowl are notorious for polarizing residents both for and against their existence.

There is a significant difference between domestic species such as the Peking and Muscovy compared to domesticated wild species such as mallards. Although the “wild” species reproduce, they don’t seem to be as successful. Geese and swans are very concerning in that they can become extremely territorial and have even attacked people causing serious injuries.

Liability is another serious issue. Even though a homeowner purchases and releases waterfowl, they become the property and responsibility of the homeowner’s association. If the waterfowl cause damage to a resident’s property, the association is responsible for those damages.

The question is not so much as whether to allow waterfowl as it is to allow for their control. This is much easier said than done. When it comes time to “thin out” the population, there’s no time for argument. As more and more residents become emotionally attached, removal of waterfowl can become an extremely hot issue. Preventing “duck wars” comes from having strict guidelines within the deed restrictions and not wavering from them.

There is no set guideline for the number of waterfowl a particular impoundment can support. This must come from those who monitor the waters as all lakes and ponds are different. However, in most urban water, one to two ducks per acre is the norm. Various species of waterfowl have various impacts on the ecological balance of the ecosystem and the fewer waterfowl present, the less impact they will have. The design of the impoundment, its primary purpose(s), management techniques, budgets, water quality and on-going problems should all be considered to ensure that fairness is achieved for everyone interested including the waterfowl.