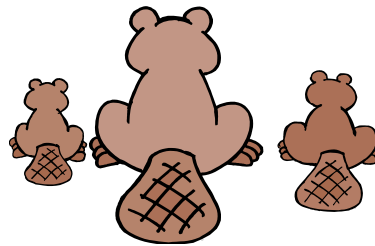


## What can you do to help this situation?

- Support the Beaverdam Park staff in the decision to stop selling supplemental food to feed the ducks and geese.
- Educate others on why it is important to not feed waterfowl.
- Do not bring food from home to feed the ducks and geese. They will find food just fine on their own.
- Make sure you place all trash in the provided trash receptacles.
- Enjoy the waterfowl at a safe distance. They are wild animals and not domesticated “pets”.



The text contained in this brochure was taken from *Virginia Wildlife*, July 2005 issue, “Feeding Wildlife: Food for Thought” by Carol A. Heiser.



## BEAVERDAM PARK

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## BEAVERDAM PARK



## The Impact of Feeding Wildlife



## To feed or not to feed?

Feeding wild birds and mammals may be fun; but many aspects of it can accelerate the spread of disease, alter animal behavior and interfere with complex food web processes.

Typically, the food items that people present to wildlife are **not nutritious** and can interfere with good growth and development. This dynamic is evident in the deformed wings of geese or ducks that inhabit water bodies where people have been feeding them on a regular basis. White bread and other junk food from our kitchens does not contain the proper nutrients for adequate bone growth in young waterfowl. Their wing bones can become twisted, stunted and dysfunctional as a result of continuous supplemental feeding. Wild animals require a balanced diet of appropriate vitamins and minerals to grow well and strong, just like our own children.

### The threats of feeding wildlife

From an ecological standpoint, the most serious consequence of recreational feeding is that the practice can contribute to numerous **health problems** within wildlife populations. When wild animals like waterfowl or mammals are attracted to an area where people are feeding, the animals tend to become concentrated in that area over a short period of time. This means that any **diseases or infections** which a few of the animals might be carrying can be spread more readily to greater numbers than would ordinarily occur in the natural

environment, where the population density of the animals is lower. Artificial feeding can increase the occurrence of duck viral enteritis or “duck plague,” a disease caused by a herpes virus that’s easily transferable among a wide variety of waterfowl such as ducks, geese and swans. Infected waterfowl can carry this virus dormant in their bodies without displaying any symptoms; hence, other birds can be readily exposed and infected without visible evidence of this happening. However, just as cold sores in people tend to come out during stressful periods, the duck plague sores also develop in waterfowl when they are subjected to stressful conditions.

#### What constitutes stress of a duck or goose?

Overcrowding: the kind that occurs in lakes and ponds where birds have become concentrated by people who’ve been feeding them. The virus then erupts not only in a bird’s mouth, but also in its intestinal tract and other organs, causing hemorrhaging and eventual death.

**Overcrowded waterfowl** are also more susceptible to bacterial infections. When avian cholera is present in a population, the bacteria can survive in the water for short periods of time, making transmission easier among dense numbers of birds. The spores of another bacterium, avian botulism, can persist in the environment for many years. This organism grows in decaying organic matter, and its toxins can become concentrated by maggots, which other birds may then feed on. Therefore, when we artificially feed and concentrate wildlife, the feed itself may not make the animals directly sick but can set up the conditions for them to become sick.

The **droppings** left behind by concentrations of geese and ducks in public areas can pose additional problems for the wildlife and for people, too. One Canada Goose, for example, produces about one pound of manure a day. It’s, therefore, not hard to imagine the detrimental consequences of an accumulation of droppings from hundreds of ducks and geese, especially when they are congregated around parks and other open areas with large bodies of water where artificial feeding typically occurs.

Picnickers and children playing **may be exposed** to disease-harboring material, not to mention the nuisance of having to watch where they step. As a direct consequence of the concentration of this organic matter, water quality suffers from the excess nitrogen that subsequently runs off the land during the usual storm events. Too many nutrients in the water then leads to an **overgrowth of algae**, called an “algae bloom,” which blocks sunlight from entering the water and, thereby, adversely affects fish and other organisms in the aquatic environment.

Vegetation around the immediate feeding site is also impacted, because the overabundant waterfowl pull up the grass, trample the banks and otherwise damage the plants in adjacent habitat.

### The Result

It’s for these reasons that many communities have implemented a “**do not feed**” policy at local lakes and ponds, especially if the site is a heavily used public resource in an urban or suburban area, such as a town reservoir used for drinking water and recreation. The Code of Virginia states that “any locality may prohibit by ordinance the feeding of migratory and non-migratory waterfowl in any subdivision or other area of such locality which, in the opinion of the governing body, is so heavily populated as to make the feeding of such waterfowl a threat to public health or the environment”.

At Beaverdam Park we have decided to take the first step in this process before it gets to the point where an ordinance would need to be enacted. As of January 1, 2006 we will stop selling supplemental food for the ducks and geese. We ask that for the health of our waterfowl population the public will stop providing supplemental feed as well.