



WATERFOWL living with wildlife

In an effort to coexist with wildlife, consider the enormous hardships these intelligent and fascinating wild species encounter because so much of their habitat has been destroyed. Each year they are forced into closer contact with humans and must compete with us for food, shelter and space. With a little understanding, patience and a few precautions and common sense steps, we can all enjoy the wonderfully interesting wild animals who share our backyards and cities.

The term waterfowl refers to a variety of bird species including geese, ducks, coots, and swans. In Ontario, Canada Geese and ducks are the waterfowl most likely to come into conflict with people. Typically, issues such as nesting in spaces that are not ideal, feces, and aggression are the 'problems' that people encounter with ducks and geese.

Habitat. Waterfowl are normally found around lakes, ponds, parks, and golf courses. Most waterfowl spend more time on land than in the water. Most waterfowls' preferred habitat is natural wetlands, however due to human urbanization, wetlands are constantly being destroyed which forces waterfowl to compete for space in urban areas. Therefore, waterfowl now make use of human-created wetlands such as storm water management ponds and decorative ponds.

Diet. Geese tend to eat grass and agricultural crops while ducks prefer submerged vegetation and aquatic insects. The specific dietary needs of waterfowl vary with species and habitat.

Reproduction. Waterfowl are typically monogamous and both parents help to protect the nest. Nesting generally occurs between late March to May and different species of waterfowl produce differing numbers of eggs, and incubate for varied periods of time. However, in all species of waterfowl, the parents never leave the young alone until they are completely independent. In some cases, this may mean that the young will remain with the parents for a year after hatching.

Common questions:

How can I deter waterfowl from my property?

There are two ways in which waterfowl typically come into direct conflict with people: fecal depositions and protective parents. These two issues arise especially in relation to Canada Geese.

Habitat modification is the most effective, long-term strategy for dealing with these issues because it deters geese from inhabiting a particular area.

Physical barriers

A barrier of long grass separating grazing areas from a water source is successful in deterring waterfowl from an area. Waterfowl do not like to walk through tall grass because it interferes with mobility and predators can hide in it. Some natural barriers that can be used are: trees, brush, shrubs, hedges, and wildflowers. Turning areas of unused lawn into a meadow will also decrease the amount of grazing land available for geese, therefore making the location less attractive to them. Fencing can be used to keep waterfowl out of certain areas. Any barrier fencing must be installed before adults begin nesting otherwise goslings will be trapped and may not survive.

Scare devices

To avoid conflicts with protective waterfowl parents, you may also want to try various scare tactics to deter the birds from using the area as a nest site. Scare tape or aluminum pie plates can be attached with string to posts on certain areas of the property. Acoustical alarms or motion-sensitive sprinklers can also be used to scare geese away from an area. Plastic balls placed in ponds are successful at scaring waterfowl away from the water. Plastic flags may also be used as a deterrent for waterfowl and general human disturbances can help deter waterfowl from your property. Scare tactics must be put into place as soon as you notice geese in the area. If you wait too long they will begin nesting and be very resistant to leave the area.

The best thing to do if you are faced with protective parents is to stay away from the nest site and give the birds lots of space.

A duck/goose has nested in my backyard/in the parking lot at work. What should I do?

Unless the birds are in immediate danger, they should be left alone. Unfortunately, due to ongoing urbanization, ducks and geese sometimes locate their nests in places that are inconvenient for humans. However, under the federal *Migratory Bird Convention Act*, it is illegal to harass, move, harm, or kill any migratory bird or migratory bird eggs. It is also illegal to disturb the nest site of a migratory bird. Therefore, while the goose or duck is nesting in your backyard, or in the parking lot at work, you will have to be patient and leave them alone. If you can offer the birds any protection (i.e. fencing off a portion of the parking lot so that cars are not driving through the nesting area), please do so!

If the birds are in immediate danger and require assistance, please contact your local Ontario SPCA Branch, affiliated Humane Society or a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.