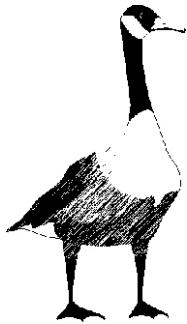

Feeding Waterfowl May be Harmful!

Regular feeding can cause

- *dependency on people for food*
- *bird/people conflicts*
- *spread of disease*



Over the centuries waterfowl have developed patterns of seeking out and feeding on highly nutritious marsh and grassland plants. These feeding patterns are then passed on to succeeding generations. Survival of waterfowl ultimately depends upon the

ability to make sufficient use of food and habitat.

In northern regions of the United States, extreme cold and snow cover severely reduces the quality and quantity of marsh and grassland plants. Thus, each year most waterfowl, like many other birds, migrate long distances in search of food and habitat to carry them through the winter. In spring they again migrate, this time returning to their northern breeding grounds.

Not all waterfowl, however, complete the migration cycle. In Howard County, there are increasing amounts of resident Canada geese. Although resident Canada geese look similar to the migratory geese, they are different. It is thought that many resident Canada geese are descendants from races of non-migratory Canada geese released in

Maryland by private individuals or released as decoy flocks during the 1930's.

Many urban environments provide sufficient space and food for small populations of waterfowl. Small ponds, community parks with lakes, reservoirs and golf courses provide ideal habitat. However, the added attraction of human handouts can result in the concentration of hundreds or thousands of waterfowl. These wild birds then become quite "tame," lose their fear of people and pick up habits that conflict with humans.

Lack of fear of cars or planes can cause traffic problems as birds casually stroll or sit in the middle of roadways or fly across airport runways. Large numbers of birds in parks, golf courses, residential lawns and agricultural fields graze, trample vegetation, and produce large amounts of defecation. One goose can produce one pound of droppings per day! Excess nutrients, caused by waterfowl droppings, in ponds and lakes may result in water quality problems such as increased harmful bacteria and algal blooms.

Food handouts often lead to large numbers of birds competing for limited food in small areas. Such crowding and competition for food combined with the stresses of less nutritious food and harsh weather increases their susceptibility to life threatening diseases like avian cholera, duck plague and avian botulism. These diseases have the potential to kill off large numbers of waterfowl.



The result of the seemingly kind and generous act of feeding waterfowl can be a continuing cycle of the birds becoming nuisances and being subjected to diseases. An infected bird may spread the disease to many other birds by infecting the water supply. When the birds are scattered over a large area, this does not pose a serious problem. However, when the birds are bunched close together their chances of contracting disease increase and the result may be disastrous.

If you care for waterfowl, there are things you can do to help them retain their wildness and maintain their well-being:

- ① **Stop feeding them!** They don't understand the problem . . . *you do*.
- ② **Learn more about waterfowl** by visiting a library, nature center, state wildlife management area, or National Refuge, then teach others what you know.
- ③ **Allow waterfowl to stay wild . . .** observe and appreciate them from a distance.

Howard County
Department of Recreation & Parks

presents

the

**Environmental
Education Series**

The goal of the Department of Recreation and Parks is to preserve a balance of ecological, natural and environmental values in Open Space land throughout the County. We strive to manage these areas in a way that will preserve their ecological integrity while making them available to the public for passive recreational use.

A key element in our management plan is public awareness and education. This brochure is one in a series of publications designed to educate the public on matters related to the conservation and preservation of our environment.

To help accomplish this goal, our staff is available to speak with various civic and community organizations and to assist with the planning and implementation of projects such as habitat enhancement, reforestation, stream walks, water quality monitoring, etc. It is our firm belief that only by working together can we fulfill the moral and civic responsibility with which we have all been charged . . . the stewardship of the land.

For additional information, or to become involved in our program, please call 410-313-4700.

Howard County Recreation & Parks
7120 Oakland Mills Road
Columbia, Maryland 21046
(410) 313-4700 Fax: (410) 313-4660

Please



**Don't Feed
the
Waterfowl!**



**Howard County
Department of
Recreation & Parks**
