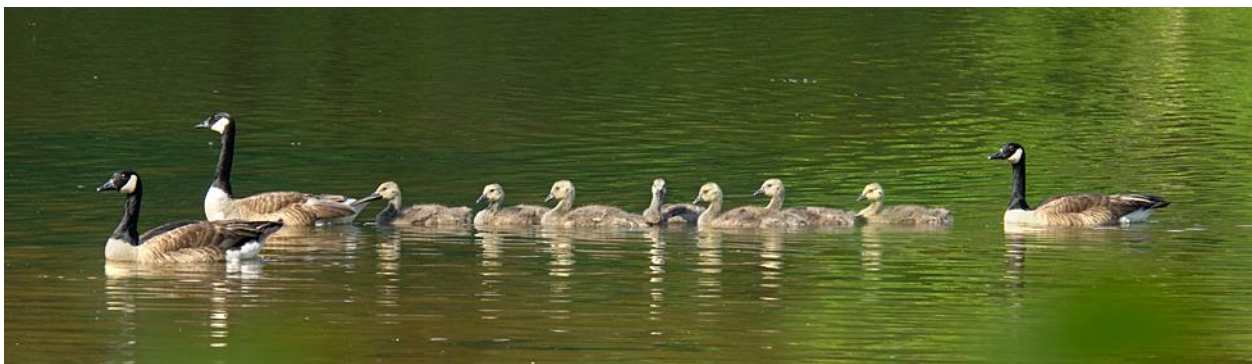


## Keeping the Wildlife Wild: Part 1

By Greg Sykes ([greg@grsykes.com](mailto:greg@grsykes.com))

Ducks and geese approaching people. A swan swimming up to and following someone cleaning up shoreline trash. Gulls swarming a photographer as soon as he opens his camera bag. A deer walking straight towards an active group of park volunteers in a hunting zone during hunting season. These examples are what happen when folks feed wildlife and animals lose their healthy fear of humans. People might think they are being “nice” or “friendly” to wildlife, but feeding them is a huge disservice. Problems include:

- **Animal desensitization to people:** as encounters between humans and wildlife get physically closer and more frequent, the chances of conflict increase. Wild animals may become accustomed to the human presence—a behavior mistaken for “tame”—but they are still wild and inherently unpredictable. Aggression can erupt for any number of underlying reasons, from injury and disease to mating season. Wildlife lack the hardwired behavioral characteristics, which centuries of selective breeding bestowed upon domesticated animals. When a familiar—even anthropomorphized—resident wild animal acts hostilely towards folks getting too close, astonished people exclaim how it was friendly days or weeks ago. Wild animals are, well, *wild!* Getting too close to animals can itself be a provocation. After a serious conflict occurs, the “nuisance” animal frequently ends up dead one way or another. So much for befriending animals.
- **Improper foods harm animals:** a visually dramatic example occurs when waterfowl eat too much bread, popcorn, and other empty calories; excessive, high-carbohydrate foods cause a wing deformity called “angel wing.” Poultry carcasses left in the woods can injure carnivores as bone splinters puncture the digestive tract. The list goes on.
- **Attracting large congregations of wildlife:** overabundance of animals such as deer and Canada geese decrease the quality of the land while increasing overcrowding, water pollution, and disease communicability. Today’s residential geese descend from live decoy hunting a century ago and subsequent breeding programs to reestablish populations decimated after overhunting. To humanely manage geese, the Fairfax County Park Authority participates in the GeesePeace program through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permits. To learn more about geese overpopulation, visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/wildlife/canada-geese> and [www.geesepeace.com](http://www.geesepeace.com).
- **Attracting the wrong animals:** leaving food scraps outside is the best way to roll out the welcome mat for rats. Other animals, such as raccoons, can become destructive in their quest for more morsels. Spilled seed from bird feeders have a way of drawing unexpected behavior from more animal species than originally intended.



**Figure 1.** For thousands of years, the sight of a Canada goose pair raising goslings could only be seen in Canada and the extreme northern tips of the United States. Within the past hundred years, human meddling with geese created resident populations throughout much of the U.S. Superficially cute as it might appear, this wild goose family, reared in Fairfax, is an example of what happens when people improperly tamper with wildlife.

- **Baiting animals for entertainment:** in addition to folks creating their private “feeding time at the zoo,” more recent concerns focus around enticing or otherwise disturbing wildlife for photographic purposes. The National Wildlife Federation recently announced that it no longer accepts images where animals were artificially lured for the picture (bird feeders being the only exception). Other photography groups are sure to adopt similar restrictions. To read about ethical wildlife photography, visit <https://nwf.org/News-and-Magazines/National-Wildlife/News-and-Views/Archives/2016/Photography-Ethics.aspx>.

In [Part 2](#), we will explore ways people can beneficially impact wildlife.

For more information on keeping the wildlife wild:

<http://audubonportland.org/wcc/urban/waterfowl>

<http://www.wildlife-removal.com/feedwildanimals.html>

<http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/environment/2014/08/11/public-feeds-angel-wing-bird-blight-scientists-say/13923013/>

<http://www.hardeybordercollies.com/id91.html>

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Canada\\_Goose/lifehistory](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Canada_Goose/lifehistory)

<http://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/mammals/deer/reasons-not-to-feed-deer>

<http://www.farmanddairy.com/columns/feeding-deer-corn-is-not-the-best-thing-to-do/14293.html>

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