

## PLEASE, DON'T FEED THE DUCKS

The residents of the Del Webb community of Lake Providence look forward to seeing more and more of our neighbors from the greater Providence community strolling along our shared walking path. One practice that we are not looking forward to, however, is the feeding of the ducks and ducklings that have taken up residence around the lake at Lake Providence. Granted, it is cute, and seems so harmless, to watch the ducks and their young in and around the lake flock to adults and children as they are offered bread, or other table scraps. It is definitely cute and fun to watch, but in no way is the practice innocuous. The normal diet of these waterfowl consists of insects, grasses, various aquatic plants and tiny invertebrate animals. These components of a normal diet contain all the nutrients required for the young ducks to grow and develop, and for the adults to remain healthy. Bread and other 'treats' that we offer the ducks are lacking in the majority of nutrients provided by their normal diet. Thus, malnutrition is foremost among the many detrimental consequences of our feeding of wild ducks.

When we feed the ducks they prefer to fill up on what we offer, rather than to seek out what is provided by nature. When their diet is lacking in the nutrients offered by their natural food sources, they become malnourished. For the young this can mean poor development, resulting in deformed wings and inability to avoid predators. Among the adults low energy and muscle deterioration are only two of the many consequences.

Feeding of the normal inhabitants of the lake encourages other ducks to settle there. This has clearly been in evidence over the past year by the increased number of adult ducks seen around the lake. This, of course, will result in overpopulation of the lake and surrounding areas by waterfowl. As we continue to feed them, they become more dependent on us and lose the ability to seek their natural foods. They also lose their natural fear of humans, and some become aggressive as they beg for food. The easy life, from their point of view, may also delay or completely halt their migration to normal winter habitats, and in some cases, nesting sites. Those that do not migrate produce more young ones in the spring, adding to the local duck population.

Overpopulation can have dire consequences for the ducks, as well as the human population. The ducks tend to gather in large numbers when they see humans approach, and if fed by us, will eat and defecate in the same area. Overcrowding, as is true for human populations, often leads to the quick spread of transmissible, and sometimes fatal diseases within the duck population. The overcrowding will also lead to the deposit of increased amounts of duck feces in the lake, either directly by the ducks while swimming, or due to runoff from the land surrounding the lake. This in turn can lead to increased coliform counts in the lake, though not likely harmful to us, since swimming in the lake is not permitted, but possibly to our pets, many of which just love to jump into the lake while out for walks with their owners. In addition, duck feces are loaded with nitrogen, a major nutrient contributing to the establishment of algae blooms, which clearly affect the beauty of the lake, but most importantly, may ultimately lead to fish kills. So, if you care about the ducks, and the looks and health of the lake, **please do not feed the ducks.**