

# Keeping wildlife safe around retention ponds



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Each fall, we notice the abundance of birds in our city, especially near our retention ponds, as they fly along their migration pathways.

Many of us love seeing wildlife, and some may even want to feed these birds. It's important to remember that feeding wildlife, such as geese and other waterfowl, is rarely helpful. Most of the time, it creates problems and can actually harm them.

That's because food handouts rarely supply the nutrients that waterfowl need. When feeding is regular, they may stop seeking out healthier foods that are part of their natural diets. Inappropriate food can also be directly toxic to waterfowl or cause them to become very sick.

Wild animals, unlike our pets, need to be able to survive in their natural environment. Feeding waterfowl causes them to lose their instinctive fear of humans, and makes them more vulnerable to predators. Geese may

then approach humans aggressively and congregate near roads, where they are more likely to be struck by vehicles.

Feeding birds also increases their risk of disease. Diseases that are normally kept at bay in wild bird populations can begin to spread when there are too many birds in one area. These diseases include avian cholera, avian influenza, and avian botulism. Aspergillosis, a fatal disease that is caused when uneaten food handouts pile up and get mouldy, can also occur. In the past, aspergillosis has led to the death of waterfowl and other birds in Winnipeg.

Not only are the birds themselves at risk of harm when they're fed, our retention ponds may form algae blooms because feeding elevates levels of nitrogen in waterfowl droppings.

"If we really want to help wildlife we need to protect their habitat," says city naturalist Rod Penner. "We need to ensure our natural areas have the biodiversity needed to support a variety of wildlife."

The city has been trying to get across the message that feeding wildlife is harmful by adding signs near some of the popular feeding areas. Habitat restoration efforts are underway to restore turf grass area back to



Supplied photo

To remind everyone of the potential harm that could result from feeding wildlife, the City of Winnipeg has installed helpful signs near retention ponds, such as this one in Santa Fe Park.

native prairie grasses or forest and create habitats for pollinators and other native species.

My office has addressed matters related

to wildlife and retention ponds in the past, and if you have any questions, comments, or ideas, you can reach me by email at [devi@winnipeg.ca](mailto:devi@winnipeg.ca) or by phone at 204-986-5264.