

# Item 5.3

## RECOMMENDATION:

The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee recommends signage in City of London Environmentally Significant Areas and Parks, to provide key information regarding (1) the harm to wildlife and ecosystems as it relates to feeding waterfowl, and (2) progressive ways to enjoy wildlife viewing while protecting both (a) natural areas and (b) human and wildlife health, welfare, and safety. Signage should be located in ESAs and parks where hand feeding occurs most prominently.

## RATIONALE:

The purpose of this recommendation is to:

- Empower the public to consider the harm that feeding causes to waterfowl, other wildlife, fauna waterways, and to the environment overall.
- Provide an effective tool, through the use of signage, to address the artificially inflated population of waterfowl in the city and the environmental consequences.
- Enhance the welfare of wildlife in our city by discouraging feeding.
- Reduce human wildlife encounters and conflicts.
- Assist our community with the enjoyment of wildlife in ways that reduce harm and increase the ability to co-flourish.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Waterfowl have evolved biologically and with patterns of habitat use, migration, and foraging that support optimal health, perpetuation of the species, and survival. These preservation patterns are passed to each succeeding generation.

In Northern climates such as ours, accessibility, quantity, and quality of marsh grasses and grassland plants are severely reduced in winter. Thus, each year, birds complete fall migration to wintering grounds, and return in the spring. Waterfowl may delay migration or forgo the migration cycle due to human feeding.

Urban environments can provide sufficient food for small populations, however thousands of waterfowl concentrate in these areas because of handouts. As a direct result, road and runway safety may be compromised by waterfowl as they move through traffic areas. Waterfowl often come into conflict with humans in defense of offspring, or close proximity to humans. The city must contend with complaints from the public regarding the safety and human health consequences of supporting ever growing waterfowl populations. The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee has received a letter from a London constituent, having expressed concerns regarding the feeding of human foods, and the harmful effects for our urban wildlife observed in the City of London Parks.

**“The Human future depends on our ability to combine the knowledge of science with wisdom of wildness” Charles Lindbergh.** This quote speaks to the need to find effective ways to protect and support the wildlife and flora that sustain healthy communities, and acknowledges the need to understand natural history and ecology in order to find lasting solutions.

## ADVERSE EFFECTS OF FEEDING WATERFOWL:

- Disrupts natural and biological processes, migration.
- Artificially inflates the population.
- Negatively affects the health and safety of both humans and waterfowl.
- High concentration of zoonosis increases disease transmission between birds and through the water supply.
- Hand feeding leads to orphaned goslings, signets, ducklings as mass numbers of birds scramble for the handouts.
- Anthropomorphic foods that are most often distributed to waterfowl, such as bread and popcorn, provide no nutrition, can create blockages internally, and lead to mortality.

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- Overcrowding, competition for handouts, lack of nutrition in the food, and harsh weather combine and result in an increase in waterfowl susceptibility to life threatening diseases like avian cholera, duck plague, and avian botulism. The fact that these consequences may kill off large populations of birds is not humane.
- Wildlife rehabilitators receive calls annually regarding birds trapped in ice, which require high risk rescue.
- Feeding and mass feeding of waterfowl degrades natural areas, and brings birds of prey, wild canids, and other wildlife to the feeding area and into conflict with humans.
- Excess nutrients from droppings and handouts may result in water quality problems such as noxious algal blooms in summer months.
- The end result of seemingly kind and generous acts of feeding waterfowl can be a continuing negative cycle.
- Feeding waterfowl inflates the population artificially, and may lead to complaints to take more lethal or drastic measures to address the issue, and bring the public into conflict over issues of ethical animal welfare.
- Wildlife does not require our help to find food. Nature will support what it can feed and shelter.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Signage in areas where hand feeding of waterfowl occurs is a straightforward, effective, and fiscally responsible way to educate the public about the negative consequences of food handouts to both waterfowl and the environment.