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PLEASE!
Keep 'em wild!

DON'T FEED THE WILDLIFE

Each year, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife receives a multitude of calls concerning nuisance and damage behavior associated with wildlife. All too often, the animal causing the damage is doing so because it has been fed and/or tamed by a neighbor, or attracted to a feeding area for competitive or predatory reasons. And all too often, this animal winds up dead. Although feeding wildlife is not illegal in the State of Oregon, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife policy strongly discourages this activity because it is so harmful to wildlife in many ways. Some cities have city ordinances that ban feeding wildlife, and the city police departments should be contacted if a complaint must be filed.

People who feed wildlife encourage them to occupy not just their own property, but the properties of their neighbors, an inconsiderate and un-neighborly practice. Unnaturally large concentrations of fed animals can devastate yards, gardens, and crops, and wildlife that have lost their fear of people often become dangerous and must be destroyed. Crows and bluejays attracted to bird feeders are carriers of the West Nile Virus, which can be fatal to humans. Raccoons, opossums, skunks, and foxes eat bird seed, and can carry rabies, distemper, and other fatal diseases that may be passed to pets, livestock, and other wildlife. A young child in Grants Pass was bitten by a rabid gray fox that had been fed by a neighbor, and had to suffer painful preventative treatments. That neighbor could be facing an expensive lawsuit for creating an attractive nuisance. Likewise, people feeding deer could possibly be held liable for deer-car accidents in their neighborhood. Feeding wildlife often attracts other wildlife species that people may not want inhabiting their neighborhood. Black bears are particularly dangerous when intentionally or inadvertently fed by people (i.e. trash cans, bird & deer feeders, etc.). Cougars follow deer, their primary prey, and often wind up in residential areas where deer are being fed, becoming serious human safety threats that must be lethally removed. Intentional feeding of bears and cougars is a violation of state law and citations can be issued. Even something as apparently harmless as feeding songbirds can be extremely harmful to your local bird populations and other opportunistic wildlife. Trichomoniasis, mycoplasmosis, and Salmonella are deadly diseases caused by unsanitary bird feeders, which kill hundreds of birds every year. Turkeys and other non-native birds such as starlings, house sparrows, and pigeons tend to proliferate when fed by humans to the extent that they out-compete native birds for food and nesting spots. Starlings, crows, and house

sparrows are extremely aggressive and will kill nestling bluebirds, swallows, and other native bird species. Turkeys fed by people congregate in flocks of 300+ birds depositing large quantities of feces, creating a public health issue, and destroying property.

People who feed wildlife for their own selfish enjoyment may sometimes be reasoned with through proper education. Teaching wildlife, especially game animals like deer or turkeys, to come to people for food, reduces their natural wariness and significantly increases their odds of being killed by hunters, predators, and automobiles. Furthermore, food items offered by people rarely provide the nutritional benefits of a natural diet, and wildlife diseases tend to proliferate in areas where wildlife is fed. Young animals need to learn natural diet selection and wild behaviors that are the result of years of evolution that make them fit to live in this world. Young wildlife fed by humans do not learn these skills, and are poorly equipped to find food, shelter, water, and safety, the basic necessities.

Our black-tailed deer population in southwest Oregon has declined dramatically in the last decade, and one of the major causes has been disease, which is often spread by unnaturally concentrating animals around feeding and watering stations. Adenovirus, a disease that killed 10's of thousands of deer in Northern California back in the 1980's, has been documented in southwest Oregon during the last few years and is spreading to other parts of the state. This disease is very contagious and if one sick deer puts his nose in a bucket or uses a feeding station, every deer behind him will contract the virus and 95% of them will die. It is a heartbreaking sight to arrive at someone's feeding station, water trough, or salt lick to find several otherwise healthy-appearing deer, lying dead around the feed trough with blood coming out both ends. It is an excruciatingly painful way to die, and I'm sure it is not the intent of the people who feed deer to cause this tragedy. Another disease that is killing our deer herds is called hair-loss syndrome. This is caused by a heavy infestation of exotic, external parasites that thrive and are spread in areas where animals are concentrated, such as feeding stations. This disease typically affects the young of the year who bite and scratch at their skin to the extent that they create large patches of bare skin, and are no longer protected by a warm winter coat. They die slow agonizing deaths due to hypothermia (freezing to death) or pneumonia (respiratory disease). This disease is also associated with feeding stations where deer concentrate in unnaturally large groups. Additionally, corn and other high-protein grains can be fatal to deer and elk.

So as you can see, feeding wildlife is a very harmful practice to be discouraged at every opportunity. Please feel free to share this information with your friends, relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances because most people who feed wildlife are concerned for the welfare of the animals, even if they are not concerned about their neighbors. For additional information please feel free to contact your local ODFW office.

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