

# Quackdown on duck feeders

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*Birds*  
**'People food is not  
very nutritious.'**

*— Dr. Duck*

city's four major duck population centers: San Lorenzo Park, Westlake Park, Neary Lagoon and Delaveaga Park. Neighborhood meetings will be held before the signs are posted to give park-area neighbors a chance to participate.

"Ducks feed best on insects and water plants," Dr. Duck warns. "People food is not very nutritious."

"Bread is terrible for ducks' digestion," Sherrod said. "It's not intended for birds, it's not natural."

Even if the food were good for the birds, Sherrod wishes people wouldn't feed them. Feeding upsets the balance of nature, and allows too many ducks to live in ponds too small for them. Disease results from overcrowding, and at several local parks birds are already sick

and dying from diseased, dirty water.

Some people contribute directly to the disease problem by dumping large amounts of rotten table scraps and household garbage near the lakes, hoping the birds will eat it.

Disease could become an even larger problem if this summer is dry, and water levels drop.

Feeding also keeps migratory birds from migrating, which interrupts breeding patterns and leaves the birds susceptible during the winter when few people visit the parks and it's too late to migrate.

"The birds won't starve if they're not fed," Parks and Recreation Director Jim Lang said. "They'll just fly off somewhere else and find their own food. But why should they fly when they're fed regularly three times a day?"

Birds lose their fear of humans when they're fed, and transform from wild animals into semi-domestic nuisances. Some birds have become aggressive and combative, terrorizing children and unwary adults and seniors.

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SANTA CRUZ — People love to feed the ducks at local parks, and most folks think they're doing the critters a favor by letting them gorge on stale bread.

What people don't know is that feeding wild birds, either ducks, geese or pelicans, is fun in the short run but actually harmful to the birds.

Banning duck-feeding outright would probably not work, and would be very unpopular to boot. But people ought to know what friendly feeding does to wild birds, so the Parks and Recreation Department is working on informational signs featuring duck-nutrition tips from "Dr. Duck".

Dr. Duck, a white, Disneyesque cartoon duck, was created by city employee and duck specialist Ray R. Sherrod to inform well-meaning bird lovers about the harsh facts of nature.

The signs, which were presented to the city Parks and Recreation Commission Monday, may eventually be posted at the