

With spring in the air, it's a sure bet that Canada geese and mallard ducks are returning in full force to our neighborhood. For those who live on or near the water, that also means lawns and sidewalks full of bird poop. What a mess!

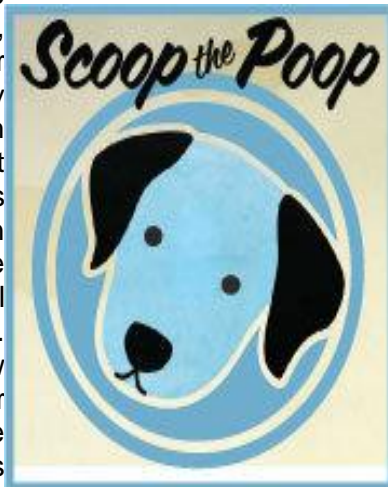
Canada geese (yes, the bird's proper name is %Canada,+ not Canadian), and mallards used to be winter visitors to the Chesapeake Bay region, flying north in spring to nest. As humans started growing winter wheat and rye in the fields, and yummy lawns, these birds found more and more to eat in Virginia. Then, folks started feeding them year round because we thought they were pretty and fun to watch (which, indeed, they are). But now there are serious problems with too many waterfowl in urban areas . too much poop, and more disease among the waterfowl from being crowded together. Most important, urban geese now threaten airplane safety near airports by flying into plane engines. Our neighborhood is less than 3 miles from the airport!

Last month we discussed water quality problems of the Lafayette River and how our entire neighborhood drains into the Lafayette through the streets and storm drains. High levels of bacteria in the Lafayette make it unhealthy for humans to swim or eat shellfish. Scientists from Old Dominion University and state and local agencies are studying the sources of bacteria. Enough is known now to say the problem comes from a combination of fecal waste (fecal means poop) from human sewer overflows, bird poop, and in some cases, dog poop. In the Lynnhaven River, for example, it is estimated that urban waterfowl contribute up to a third of that river's fecal bacteria.

While the City of Norfolk will have to fix the problems with sewer overflows, here are things we can do help reduce the bacteria going into the Lafayette.

- ◆ Don't feed the geese and ducks. If we don't feed them, they will move elsewhere to look for food. If you live on the water, you can string fishing line like a fence along the waterfront to deter waterfowl from entering your yard.

- ◆ Clean up after your dog . it's called Scoop the Poop! Always carry a plastic bag when you walk your dog. Re-using a newspaper delivery bag or plastic grocery bag works well, and pet stores sell rolls of bags that attach to the end of the leash. Using the bag like a glove, you can pick up the pet waste, turn the bag inside out around the waste, seal it and dispose in a trash can.



In your yard, train your dog to use one particular area that you can clean up and throw in the trash. Training your dog to use one area will also keep your lawn in better shape since you won't get as many %burned+spots.

- ◆ If you see a sewer overflow, call the City Department of Utilities emergency number at 823-1000. You can tell there is a problem if you see water bubbling out of a manhole or from a crack in the street. And, never let kids play in street water since it may contain harmful bacteria, viruses or chemicals.

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