



ASK JEFF

Lake Ecology

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Wildlife - Remember the days when geese used to migrate. They would leave mid to end of November and wouldn't return until the end of March; by the mid of March, they would start to pair up to reproduce. Well, things have changed. At the end of January, we had 20 geese on our lake. This is very strange considering we only had a handful for most of the summer. Those only stuck around for a week or so then we had a cold wave where the lake froze. It looked as if winter had finally settled in. Shortly after that freeze, things warmed up and we were back to open water and a handful of geese were back. The most unusual sight was in Beaver Cove, where we had a few patches of ice from some cold nights and I saw several geese sitting on the ice. I have been here for 45 years and this I have never witnessed before. I believe this is a result of climate change and migrating waterfowl reacting to temperature. Geese are terrestrial feeders who love short, well-maintained grass. Warmer temperature and lack of snow means there is still a reliable source of food. I know this sounds ridiculous with the 8 inches of snow we received just before this writing, but until this snowfall and that cold spell we have had a mild winter.

Geese's migration distance has become shorter and shorter over the years and now some hang around most of the winter. What does this mean to us? They will be pairing up much earlier (several in the cove look like they have already started), so we will have a very active addling season this spring. I have explained this process before but just an FYI to new residents in the lake. We try to identify nests with a sitting female and a male lurking close by. We approach the nests and gently encourage the female to leave temporarily and then we take each egg and shake it vigorously for about 15 seconds. This disrupts the gosling's development so it will not hatch. Some may not agree with this method, but you must realize that where a gosling is hatched, it becomes a lifelong resident. They will come back every year and reproduce in Lake Shawnee. They often lay 4-6 eggs a year, so we could have a lot of geese on this lake in years to come. The town of Jefferson obtains the permit from the State to allow us to do this. The main reason is their droppings end up on our grass areas and on our beaches and docks, and eventually with a rain, they end up in our lake. Several summers we have had to close beaches from the bacteria in the water from their droppings. Over the years, we have tried just about everything to discourage their numbers on our lake. From scarecrows to spraying a material on the grass that has a foul taste so geese will not eat it, to shooting firecrackers out of a shotgun to scare them, but nothing has worked, until we started to addle. It takes at least two to do the addling, one to hold the male and female at bay and the other to do the shaking. So, we are always looking for volunteers to help. If you see a sitting female, please give me call so I can go and check it out.

In addition to our geese being here early, we also had 6 swans on the lake the beginning of February. I say HAD six because we lost 2. One was found dead stuck between the two culverts that drain the wetland into Beaver Cove near Stanlick School. How it wound up there I am not sure. The other dead swan was found in the cove by Wayne and Pam Kulick's house off East Shawnee Trail. Wayne observed two other swans fighting with it. We are not sure if this is how he died. Swans do become very territorial. Thank you, Wayne for getting the deceased swan out of the water.

That's it for now. Just a reminder, since our next article will not be out until Spring and many of you will have started treating your lawns by then (I feel very weird telling you this with eight inches of snow on the ground) but please remember to use a fertilizer with no phosphorus (most fertilizers have no phosphorus). It fosters weed growth in the lake and no matter where you live, all our catch basins drain into the lake so there is a very good chance whatever you put on your lawn, the rain can carry it into the lake.

Thank you. Any questions you have about this writing or about the lake, do not hesitate to call me.