

What scarecrow? Bartlett has its scare-gators

City puts the fright in geese with visions of alligators and coyotes

By Shirley Downing

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Bartlett has new tools for bird abatement: coyotes on sticks and alligator heads.

Not real coyotes or alligators, mind you, but fake ones that look mean enough to scare flocks of wildfowl from parks and ponds.

"They don't stay around too long now," said Joe Beasley, operations manager of the Bartlett Performing Arts and Conference Center, where decoys dot the lake and grounds.

Wildfowl skimming over water at sunset can be picturesque, but masses of birds on groomed suburban lawns are mostly a nuisance.

Behind BPACC, where the birds have left feathers and excrement, what started out as about two dozen geese quickly became 250.

Complaints prompted Bartlett parks to put plastic alligator heads in the nearby lake and in other ponds in the city.

"Those worked well with the wild geese that were flying in," said David Thompson, city parks director.

"These wild geese hatched out in that pond (behind BPACC), so they grew up with the alligator heads and they were no longer scared of them."

About two weeks ago, the city put a half dozen cut-out pictures of coyotes along the walking trail that ring the pond.

"The coyotes are doing great," Thompson said, noting the geese population is down considerably from earlier this summer.

The decoys don't put much scare into ducks.

"It doesn't seem to have the same effect on the ducks that it has on the geese," Thompson said. "But the ducks don't leave the mess that the geese do."

Reaction has been mixed. Thompson said he's heard positive comments, although retiree Bob Weeks, who was fishing in the pond one day this week, said he hadn't noticed much difference. Nearby, about two dozen ducks and geese gathered 'round.

Thompson fears the geese will eventually realize the coyotes won't bite.

"I've been doing some research and we can buy some speakers and recordings of coyotes and different predators. We may place that out there if this doesn't work."

He's talked to Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency about trucking the birds north, but figures they'll return the first day of hunting season.

"When they are being shot at, they will end up back in Bartlett."

Anyone with suggestions can call Thompson at 385-5590.

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