

FROM THE MAIN GATE

August 2024

Undoubtedly, most residents have had the pleasure of observing the abundant wildlife that also consider Hershey's Mill their home; and even I have found myself pulling out my camera to photograph a fawn, bluebird, litter of fox kits, or even the occasional bald eagle while traversing our community.

However, my frequent travels through Hershey's Mill have also led to a more sobering discovery...the many areas being used by residents to feed our local wildlife, especially the foxes and deer.

When wild animals are fed by residents, especially from a young age, they begin to view the feeding area as a safe source of provision; and because these feeding areas are usually close to multiple homes, these animals do not develop a necessary, healthy fear of humans, other animals, and human habitats. Subsequently, these animals begin following and approaching humans; and this ultimately leads to the need for the animal to be euthanized.

While their intentions may be admirable, most people don't realize how destructive, and even dangerous, feeding wildlife can be to the animals themselves, our residents (yes, our residents), and their pets. For instance, in the last two years, Security has seen an increase in calls regarding aggressive behavior by young deer and foxes towards people and dogs. In one instance, a young deer attacked a dog that was tied up on its owner's front porch; and there have been multiple instances where foxes have approached people/dogs in parking areas, on sidewalks, or in their yards. One fox even approached a golfing foursome and stole a golf ball right off the tee box. Obviously, this is not normal wildlife behavior; and it is inadvertently encouraged by residents who attempt to feed these animals.

While feeding deer may enhance wildlife viewing, decades of research has clearly shown that supplemental feeding leads to increased disease risk (especially with Chronic Wasting Disease at our borders), long-term habitat destruction, increased vehicle collisions, habituation to humans and alteration of other deer behavioral patterns and, ultimately, the demise of the value of deer and deer-related recreation.

Foxes are omnivores, but their preferred food is rodents and birds. Feeding processed food or vegetables to wild animals can be like feeding a burger and fries to a newborn. Their systems just cannot process it. If foxes become dependent on a resident's feeding area, their desire to hunt on their own will diminish; and naturally shy and wary foxes begin to behave as though it is okay to be in close contact with humans. While that doesn't sound like a bad thing, it is. For their own protection, foxes and other wild animals need to stay away from humans. If they learn it is okay to come into a backyard, or up to a house, for food, then they will start coming into other yards, or up to other homes, as well. These foxes will be in much more danger of being killed or injured, as their proximity to human habitat will expose them to risks/dangers they would not otherwise encounter.

Please help protect our wildlife and residents by enjoying our wildlife from a distance, but please do not feed them!