

# Statement of Position on Artificial Feeding of Wildlife

Biology Discipline, Science Division

Lane Community College

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## *Rationale*

There have been reports recently of people providing food for the turkeys on campus, and the feeding of feral cats is an ongoing activity. The turkey population has responded to artificial supplementation of its food by increasing suddenly and substantially. Because of their more secretive and largely nocturnal nature, it is more difficult to assess the size of the cat population, but we can reasonably assume that it, too, has grown in response to an increase in available resources. As scientists and ecologists, we believe these trends are reasons for concern. We have agreed, therefore, to oppose the feeding of wild and feral animals, as outlined in the position statement below.

The biology discipline of Lane Community College opposes the artificial supplementation of food to wild and feral animals for the following reasons:

Most studies on the effects of supplementing food for wildlife indicate that the practice has negative consequences for the animals in question, the ecosystems they live in, and people in the vicinity of the supplemental feeding operations (reviewed in L. Dunkley and M. R. L. Cattet, 2003, Digital Commons @ U of Nebraska –Lincoln, *A Comprehensive Review of Ecological and Human social Effects of Artificial Feeding and Baiting of Wildlife*).

Artificial feeding of wildlife can harm the animals being fed in the following ways:

1. Their behavior may be altered.

- a. Concentrated food sources can lead to increased competition among the animals with attendant injuries and infections.

- b. The food source may alter normal movement and distribution of the animals.

- c. Being fed may cause animals to become habituated to human contact, losing fear of all humans, including hunters.

2. Artificial feeding may promote the spread of disease and parasites by increasing the proximity of host animals to one another.

3. Artificial feeding is likely to increase the availability of a resource that limits population size. As a result of the food supplements, the population may exceed the local carrying capacity for the species. Then, should food supplements fail to materialize, some animals will die of malnutrition and starvation.

4. Artificial food sources may not contain the full spread of nutrients needed by the animals being fed. Locally, we regularly see waterfowl with deformed wings as a result of eating food provided by humans. These deformities are called 'angel wings', a sadly ironic term, as these animals will surely die slow, painful deaths.

Artificial feeding is also detrimental to humans for several reasons:

1. Close contact with wild animals always carries the potential for the spread of disease. When the animals are already more susceptible to infection as a result of the density of their groups, the danger to humans is magnified.

2. Animals that lose their fear of humans are more likely to act aggressively toward people, especially any person that has the audacity not to feed them.

3. Aggregations of animals at artificial food sources can attract other, potentially dangerous animals (Wild turkeys could attract cougars, for example).

4. People observing artificially fed animals will not see them in a natural situation. Artificially induced behaviors might be misread as normal, and the human observers will do the opposite of learning.

There are also problems associated with the feeding of feral cats and other pets that have gone wild. In addition to the dangers of spreading disease, and altering the behaviors of the animals in potentially dangerous ways, feral animals almost always degrade the ecosystems they live in. For example, feral cats prey extensively on wildlife. In one study, 70 cats killed over a thousand small animals in a year (P. B. Churcher and J. H. Lawton, 2009, Predation by Domestic Cats in an English Village, *Journal of Zoology*, Vol. 212 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1469-7998.1987.tb02915.x/abstract>).

For these reasons, we urge the members of the LCC community to resist the urge to feed wildlife and/or feral pets. Let's enjoy healthy, wild animals as they should be: in the wild and with minimal interference on our part. And let's enjoy pets as they should be: domesticated and in the home.