2023

Muscovy Duck Survey Report

Submitted to:

City of New Port Richey
Attn: Robert M Rivera
Public Works Director
New Port Richey Public Works
6132 Pine Hill Road
Port Richey, FL 34668

Prepared by:

GHS Environmental
PO Box 55802
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July 2023

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July 26, 2023

Mr. Robert Rivera
Public Works Director
New Port Richey Public Works
6132 Pine Hill Road
Port Richey, FL 34668

Re.: City of New Port Richey
Muscovy Duck Survey Report

Dear Mr. Rivera,

The following report provides the information found regarding the population of the nuisance and exotic species, Muscovy ducks, specific to the stormwater retention pond on Azalea Drive and Orange Lake located in Sims Park within the City of New Port Richey, Florida. Please see the attached report for additional details regarding our findings.

If there are any questions regarding the submitted materials, please contact us at your convenience.

Sincerely,

GHS Environmental

Dana J. Gaydos
Principal

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1.0 Introduction

The City of New Port Richey requested GHS Environmental to perform a population survey of the nuisance and exotic species of Muscovy ducks. The purpose of this survey was to provide educational information, population densities, and recommendations for population control. An acute water quality program was also conducted to determine if the present duck population may contribute to poor water quality standards.

1.1 Project Summary

GHS conducted a survey counting the number of Muscovy ducks present at the pond on Azalea Drive on March 20, 2023, and at Orange Lake on March 22, 2023. This survey included duck counts and identification of other environmental features that the 'introduced' ducks may be affecting, such as water quality, competition with native species, damage to property, and public safety. GHS staff interviewed one local resident who was out feeding the ducks.

Water quality samples were collected from both ponds on March 22, 2023. This sampling included coliform counts, various nitrogen species counts, and nutrient counts.

1.2 Muscovy Duck Information

Muscovy ducks were originally a food animal and are native to South America and have spread into Central America and Texas. In the 1960's, the Muscovy duck species expanded into Florida. The male Muscovy ducks is considered the largest duck in North America (www.allaboutbirds.org). The species has no vocal cords, meaning they do not quack but rather hiss. Muscovy ducks are easily characterized by the irregular, red skin on their face.

No permit is required to possess Muscovy ducks; however, both Florida Statute 379.231 and federal regulations 50 CFR 21.25(b)(8)(i) prohibit the release of Muscovy ducks. This means they must be kept in a captive situation where they will not encounter native wildlife and will not escape captivity.

Muscovy ducks are considered to be undesirable in the wild because of their potential to transmit diseases to or interbreed with Florida's native waterfowl. Invasive animals like the Muscovy duck take over habitats and can stress the natural ecosystems and even eradicate native plants and animals. Furthermore, Muscovy duck populations may cause excessive nutrient loading in small ponds along with undesirable and messy sidewalks and driveways. For more information on the prohibition of releasing or relocating Muscovy ducks, please see the Federal Control Order (50 CFR 21.25 (b)(8)(i) and 50 CFR 21.54, paragraph c).

2.0 Muscovy Duck Survey

2.1 Methodology

GHS staff walked around each of the two ponds and counted the number of ducks, both native and non-native, that were present in the pond and the immediate surroundings. While on-site, staff conducted interviews with any residents that were present and asked about their opinions and experiences with the ducks. Water quality samples were collected from each pond and taken to the lab for analysis.

2.2 Results

2.2.1 Pond at Azalea Drive

This pond serves as stormwater treatment for the surrounding neighborhood. It is approximately one-half acre in overall size and is presumed to be relatively shallow. The vegetation around the perimeter is St. Augustine grass and oak trees. Vegetation along the top-of-bank and within the shallow areas include torpedo grass and pennywort. There was little to no vegetation within the interior of the pond, either due to the depth or consumption by the ducks. The water quality looked poor with high levels of carpet grass and algae. Representative photos are below.

A total of **15 Muscovy ducks and 2 Mallard ducks (Native)** were observed during the survey.

One resident who was feeding the ducks was interviewed. *He mentioned he infrequently feeds them, and he has never seen them aggressive. He said he liked them, but does not live around the duck pond, just in the neighborhood. He was unaware that they are nuisance ducks that cause water quality issues.*

2.2.2 Orange Lake

This lake is in a well-maintained part of the city. Orange Lake is approximately 2.5 acres. The surrounding area is well landscaped, mowed, and maintained. Scattered cabbage palm and oaks surround the lake. The native vegetation along the top of bank and scattered within the pond includes native cypress trees, bulrush, hempvine, and pennywort. Water quality appeared to be fair, there was some algae growth around the edges, and it is believed that the City has a maintenance and treatment plan for the lake. An aeration system, including three aerators and a fountain, is installed at the lake to prevent stagnant or "dead" water from occurring. Representative photos are below.

There were a total of **13 Muscovy (including 4 ducklings) and 10 Mallards** were observed during the survey. There was a fair amount of human traffic around the lake. Several of the Muscovy ducks were not discouraged when approaching them within a couple feet of them, (i.e., constant human encounters - feeding). During the survey, there were no interviews conducted with pedestrians.

3.0 Water Quality

3.1 Methodology

In situ measurements of pH, water temperature, specific conductance, dissolved oxygen (DO), and turbidity were collected at 1 foot below the water surface at both locations. Measurements were collected using a YSI Pro Plus Multi-Parameter Water Quality Meter and a Hach 2100Q Turbidimeter. All field equipment was calibrated in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications prior to deployment in the field. A single grab sample (comprised of several sub-sample vessels) was collected from approximately 1 foot (ft) below the water surface at each monitoring location for laboratory analysis. The collected samples were preserved in the field and taken to the laboratory on ice for preservation.

All field measurements and sample collection were performed in accordance with FDEP Standard Operating Procedures as prescribed by Chapter 62160, F.A.C. All laboratory analyses were conducted by a state-certified laboratory with National Environmental Laboratories Accreditation Conference (NELAC) approval. Analyses were conducted to conform to FDEP's Minimum Detection Limit (MDL) and Practical Quantitation Limit (PQL) targets.

3.2 Parameters

The following parameters will be measured in the field at each active station.

Field Measurements

Water Temperature	Conductivity	Turbidity
Air Temperature	pH	Dissolved Oxygen

Bacteriological

Fecal Coliform
Total Coliform
E. Coli

Nutrients

Total Nitrogen	Ammonia	Nitrate
Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen	Total Phosphorus	Nitrite

Physiochemical Parameters

Total Dissolved Solids (TDS)
Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD)
Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD)
Total Organic Carbon (COD)

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Field Parameters

The field parameter results are summarized below for the pond at Azalea Drive and Orange Lake. All field parameters were within normal range. Conductivity is higher in Orange Lake, which is expected, because Orange Lake retains stormwater runoff to an area that is denser and has much higher traffic conditions being located in downtown New Port Richey.

Parameter	Azalea Drive	Orange Lake
Air Temp (°C)	18.7	18.2
Water Temp (°C)	20.3	21.0
pH	7.8	7.45
Cond (µmhos/cm)	912	3,719
DO (mg/L)	6.04	5.03
DO (%)	67	57.2
Turbidity (NTU)	1.44	1.04
Color	Slightly Tannic	Slightly Tannic
Odor	None	None

3.3.2 Bacteriological

Coliform bacteria are living organisms and generally contain a large group of many different bacteria (Total Coliform). Fecal Coliform and E. Coli are subgroups of bacteria that are present in feces of animals (i.e., birds, turtles, fish, and humans). Coliform bacteria can multiply quickly when conditions are favorable for growth.

Parameter	Azalea Drive	Orange Lake
Total Coliform (#/100 mL)	2,400	2,400
Fecal Coliform (#/100 mL)	**200**	63
E. Coli (#/100 mL)	**2,400**	200

The results are expected as both ponds are open water bodies where the ducks and other animals live in or around and will desecrate in. Fecal matter will contaminate the pond through runoff from the banks during rain events.

Concentrations of 200 #/100 mL of fecal coliform is a generally accepted threshold. Ponds used for watering livestock should have concentrations less than 10 #/100 mL for agricultural purposes. A concentration for small ponds of 126 #/100 mL of E. coli is a generally acceptable threshold. Concentrations above this are considered high, and recreational activities, such as swimming, should be avoided.

Overall, coliform concentrations are considered high in the pond at Azalea Drive and Orange Lake.

3.3.3 Nutrients

Water quality samples were taken for a single event, and seasonal trends cannot be evaluated. Due to previous investigations at Orange Lake, it is known that phosphorus and nitrite are the limiting nutrients. The data collected as part of this survey continue to support this trend due to the lack of detection in the pond.

Parameter	Azalea Drive	Orange Lake
Total Nitrogen (mg/L)	2.61	0.31
Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen (mg/L)	0.51	0.31
Ammonia (mg/L)	0.48	0.11
Nitrate (mg/L)	2.1	U
Nitrite (mg/L)	U	U
Total Phosphorus (mg/L)	U	0.19 (I)

I - The reported value is between the laboratory method detection limit and the laboratory practical quantitation limit.
U - Undetected.

Ammonia is present and is relatively high, based on the SW Criteria 62-777 concentration of 0.02 mg/L. It is feasible to relate the urine and fecal matter of the ducks to degraded water quality found within the pond.

The total nitrogen concentration in the pond at Azalea Drive is high and can be related to the large population of ducks living on a small pond. Orange Lake is flushed regularly due to stormwater input downtown and the regular maintenance operations the City provides.

3.3.4 Physicochemical Parameters

Various physiochemical parameters were collected and analyzed for review. Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) measures all the dissolved organic and inorganic substances present in water. Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) measures the amount of oxygen consumed by organisms to breakdown organic matter (i.e., fecal matter). Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) measures the oxygen consumed by chemical reaction to decompose organic (i.e., fecal matter) and inorganic matter.

These parameters are used to estimate the amount of pollution in a water sample. BOD ranges from 0 to 2 mg/L as not polluted, 2 to 8 mg/L as moderately polluted, and greater than 8 mg/L as severely polluted. In general, the greater the BOD, the more rapidly oxygen is depleted, which can affect fish and other aquatic organisms in the water body. COD ranges less than 20 mg/L as not polluted, 20 to 200 mg/L as moderately polluted, and greater than 200 mg/L as severely polluted.

	Azalea Drive	Orange Lake
Total Dissolved Solids (mg/L)	580	2,700
Biological Oxygen Demand (mg/L)	U	U
Chemical Oxygen Demand (mg/L)	U	**75**
Total Organic Carbon (mg/L)	3.2	7.0

U - Undetected.

A higher concentration of TDS in Orange Lake is expected as more stormwater flushes into the lake due to its location in downtown New Port Richey. COD concentration in Orange Lake shows that it is moderately polluted based on this single criterion. This concentration may also be due to the consistent influx of stormwater runoff into the lake.

4.0 Questionnaire

GHS Environmental on behalf of the City of New Port Richey conducted an online survey regarding the effects of the Muscovy duck population at the pond on Azalea Drive and Orange Lake. The information regarding how to access the survey along an informational pamphlet on Muscovy Ducks was sent via the postal service requesting residents that reside directly adjacent to these water bodies to complete the survey. The link to the survey was also published on the City's website and Facebook page for residents that did not receive the mailer. The survey was conducted from June 26 to July 17, 2023. In total, there were 105 responses. Most of the questions were answered by each participant.

- Are you a resident within the City limits of New Port Richey?
- How often do you visit Orange Lake/Sims Park in a year?
- Do you live on a water body like a retention pond, pond, lake, or canal?
- Do you enjoy seeing ducks when you're at a pond, lake, or canal?
- Do you feed the ducks?
- Do you know which ducks are native species and which are non-native?
- Do you know what a "nuisance and exotic" species is?
- Can you identify a Muscovy duck?
- Do you know that the Muscovy duck is a nuisance and exotic species?
- Have you noticed a transition in the species of ducks over time in these areas?
- Have you noticed an increase in a certain species of ducks over time?
- Do you know that Muscovy ducks reproduce at a faster rate than native duck species?
- Have you ever seen the Muscovy ducks be aggressive?
- Have you noticed a decrease in other animal populations over time?
- Do you believe the ducks damage the landscape?
- Do the ducks leave a mess on your property?
- Do you ever notice a smell in the areas where there are large concentrations of ducks?
- Have you noticed higher algal cover in the water bodies where large duck populations are present?
- Do you know that the Muscovy ducks transmit disease to other native species?
- Do you know that large populations of Muscovy ducks pollute the water and are harmful to the surrounding environment?
- Do you know that the water quality of the pond at Azalea Drive and Orange Lake have been declining since the duck population have increased?
- What is your opinion if the Muscovy ducks were removed and relocated from Orange Lake and the pond at Azalea Drive?

Of the 105 participants, 83 participants (or 80%) were residents of New Port Richey. Slightly over half (59%) of participants reported that they enjoy seeing ducks while 28% said they enjoy seeing the ducks, but there are too many. Only 11% of the participants reported that they don't enjoy the ducks at pond on Azalea Drive or Orange Lake. Several

people (12%) reported that they feed the ducks. Signage to not feed the ducks is posted at Orange Lake but not posted at the pond at Azalea Drive.

All but one participant reported that they could identify a Muscovy duck, and more than half of the participants have noticed a transition in the species (58%) and an increase in a certain species of ducks over time (63%).

Slightly more than half of the participants believe the ducks damage the landscape (54%), and two-thirds (66%) of the participants report that ducks leave a mess on their properties. However, participants didn't report noting much of a smell (40%) or any algal problems in water bodies with large duck populations.

Just over half of the participants (53%) were unaware that the Muscovy ducks could transmit diseases to the native duck species, but a similar number of participants (55%) did know that large Muscovy duck populations could pollute the water and harm the surrounding environment. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the participants didn't realize that the water quality of Orange Lake and the pond at Azalea Drive have been declining with the increase of Muscovy ducks as well. Overall, when asked about their opinion of the removal and relocation of the Muscovy ducks, one-third of the participants (32%) selected to leave the ducks where they are, 4% of the participants were indifferent, and the majority of participants (64%) were fine with removing and relocating them.

5.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

There was a total of 13 Muscovy ducks (4 were ducklings) counted at Orange Lake and 15 Muscovy Ducks counted at the pond on Azalea Drive. There were more native ducks (Mallard ducks) observed at Orange Lake than at the pond at Azalea Drive. The Muscovy duck population at the pond on Azalea Drive far exceeds the capacity of the pond with its total size of 0.5-acre; whereas the population of Muscovy Ducks observed at Orange Lake is rather reasonable for the 2.5-acre lake. The Muscovy ducks at Orange Lake were observed to exhibit more domesticated behavior and appeared unafraid of humans within close proximity of them.

The water quality of both ponds is degraded having lower than expected dissolved oxygen concentrations, higher nutrient loads, and elevated coliform bacteria counts. These results can be directly correlated to the large duck population living permanently around these water bodies. Duck populations on both water bodies are dominated by Muscovy ducks, which are nuisance and exotic species and are considered invasive as the counts confirm that the Muscovy duck is the dominant duck species present.

Due to the smaller size of the pond at Azalea Drive (0.5-acre), the nitrogen concentration is eight times higher than Orange Lake. Ammonia, which is considered an indicator of urine and feces matter, is also high for both water bodies. Lower nutrient concentrations in Orange Lake are presumed to be influenced, i.e., lowered, due to larger stormwater input from the larger drainage basin. Both ponds act as stormwater systems with pump systems (pond on Azalea Drive) or flood gates (Orange Lake) that mechanically force water to flow out of the pond/lake. This flow helps regulate and reduce the amount of nutrient and algal build up in the water column. Orange Lake also has three aerators in various areas, which oxygenate the water column at depth and assist in the reduction of various nutrient concentrations. Despite flushing and aeration activities, each water body shows poor water quality health overall. Algal blooms have been observed in these systems due to high nutrient concentrations and are associated with past fish kills due to low oxygen levels. Both water bodies flow directly into the Pithlachascotee River then into the Gulf of Mexico.

According to the results of the public survey, the residents agree that the Muscovy duck population existing at Orange Lake and the pond on Azalea Drive are too large for those areas to maintain a healthy ecosystem, and that the large Muscovy duck population existing at Orange Lake and the pond on Azalea Drive has become a problem. The ducks generate large amounts of waste in the form of urine and feces, causing foul odors and large messes that must be regularly cleaned from sidewalks, driveways, boardwalks, and grassy areas.

Muscovy ducks interbreed and transmit diseases to native species. Muscovy ducks are considered invasive in that feral populations quickly dominate the local habitat and can reduce the native bird population within a few breeding seasons. This appears to have occurred already at the pond on Azalea Drive. During breeding season, male Muscovy ducks can act in an aggressive manner as part of the courtship ritual, and female Muscovy

ducks become aggressive to protect their brood. This aggressive behavior by Muscovy ducks has been documented to cause injury to small children.

GHS recommends full removal of the Muscovy duck population at both locations. Regular thinning (once every six months) of the Muscovy duck populations on a regular basis will decrease competition for food and habitat for the native bird populations and improve the water quality within both water bodies.

Appendix A.
Surface Water Laboratory Results

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August 10, 2023

Mr. Robert Rivera
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New Port Richey Public Works
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Port Richey, FL 34668

City of New Port Richey
Muscovy Duck Public Survey Response Summary
Orange Lake and Pond at Azalea Drive

GHS Environmental on behalf of the City of New Port Richey conducted an online survey regarding the effects of the Muscovy duck population at Orange Lake and the pond on Azalea Drive. The information regarding how to access the survey and an informational pamphlet on Muscovy Ducks were sent via the postal service requesting those residents to complete the survey. The link to the survey was also published on the City's website. The survey was conducted from June 26 to July 17, 2023. This letter summarizes the responses collected. In total, there were 105 responses. Most of the questions were answered by each participant.

The survey inquired if the participant was a resident living within the city limits, how often the participants visit Orange Lake/Sims Park, and if they live on a water body. Of the 105 participants, 83 participants (or 80%) were residents of New Port Richey. Approximately 62% of the participants indicated that they visit Orange Lake/Sims Park on a weekly basis, 13% visit every other week, 13% visit monthly, and 12% visit less often. Over half of the participants (53% or 59 participants) reported living on a water body, i.e., retention pond, pond, lake, or canal.

The participants were asked if they enjoy seeing ducks at these locations, if they feed the ducks, and if they can determine which ducks are native and which ducks are a "nuisance" or invasive species. Slightly over half (59%) of participants reported that they enjoy seeing ducks while 28% said they enjoy seeing the ducks, but there are too many. Only 11% reported that they don't enjoy ducks at Orange Lake or the pond on Azalea Drive. Several people (12%) reported they feed the ducks. Signage to not feed the ducks is posted at Orange Lake but not that pond at Azalea Drive. The large majority (84%) of participants reported knowing which ducks were native versus non-native ducks. Most participants (97 people or 93%) know what a "nuisance and exotic" species is, and all but one participant can identify a Muscovy duck. Close to 90% of the participants know that the Muscovy duck is a nuisance and exotic duck species.

The survey continued with questions regarding if participants had noticed a transition or increase in certain duck species in these areas recently. More than half of the participants have noticed a transition in the species (58%) and an increase in a certain species of ducks over time (63%). This is due to the invasive Muscovy ducks taking over the native ducks' habitats. Participants were asked if they knew that Muscovy ducks reproduce at a faster rate than native species and if they have ever seen the Muscovy ducks be aggressive. Approximately 57% of the participants knew that these ducks reproduce faster, and 53% have seen these ducks act in an aggressive manner. Just over half of the participants reported noticing a decrease in other fowl populations at both locations as well.

The next portion of the survey inquired about the damage and “mess” the Muscovy ducks cause at these properties. Participants were asked if they believe the ducks damage the landscape, if the ducks leave a mess on their property, if a smell can be noticed near large groups of the ducks, or if algal problems are noticed in water bodies where the ducks are present. Slightly more than half of the participants believe the ducks do damage the landscape (54%), and two-thirds (66%) of the participants report that ducks leave a mess on their properties; however, participants didn’t report noting much of a smell (40%) or any algal problems in water bodies with large duck populations.

The last section of the survey asked if participants know that the Muscovy ducks can transmit diseases to other native duck species, and that they can pollute the water and be harmful to the surrounding environment. Just over half of the participants (53%) were unaware that the Muscovy ducks could transmit diseases to other native species, but they did know that large Muscovy populations could pollute the water and harm the surrounding environment. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the participants didn’t realize that the water quality of Orange Lake and the pond at Azalea Drive have been declining with the increase of Muscovy ducks as well. Overall, when asked about their opinion of the removal and relocation of the Muscovy ducks, one-third of the participants (32%) selected to leave the ducks where they are, 4% of the participants were indifferent, and the majority of participants (64%) were fine with removing and relocating them.

Based on the survey results, GHS recommends removing and rehoming the Muscovy ducks from Orange Lake and the pond at Azalea Drive. Muscovy ducks are considered to be undesirable in the wild because of their potential to transmit diseases to, interbreed, or compete with Florida's native waterfowl. Invasive animals, like the Muscovy duck, can take over habitats, can stress the natural ecosystems, and can wipe out native plants and animals. Muscovy duck populations may cause excessive nutrient loading in small ponds like the pond on Azalea Drive and produce undesirable and messy sidewalks, driveways, and grass areas such as public area like Orange Lake. The local residents seem to agree that the Muscovy duck population existing at Orange Lake and the pond on Azalea Drive is too large for those areas to maintain a healthy ecosystem. Water quality is degraded as seen in the laboratory results, and algal blooms have been observed in these systems due to high nutrient concentrations and are associated with past fish kills due to low oxygen levels. With the results of our recent duck count, the resident population of Muscovy ducks at Orange Lake and the pond at Azalea Drive is too large for these water bodies. Orange Lake is one of the downtown’s most popular attractions for residents and visitors. GHS recommends removing and relocating the Muscovy duck population at both locations.

City of New Port Richey
Muscovy Duck Survey Response Summary
July 26, 2023

Survey Question	Total	Yes		No		Weekly	Every other week	Monthly	Less often	A	B	C	D	E	F
Are you a resident within the City limits of New Port Richey?	104	83	80%	21	20%										
How often do you visit Orange Lake/Sims Park in a year?	104					64	13	14	13						
Do you live on a water body like a retention pond, pond, lake, or canal?	105	59	56%	46	44%										
Do you enjoy seeing ducks when you're at a pond, lake, or canal?	105	62	59%	12	11%					29	2				
Do you feed the ducks?	104	12	12%	92	88%										
Do you know which ducks are native species and which are non-native?	103	86	83%	17	17%										
Do you know what a "nuisance and exotic" species is?	104	97	93%	7	7%										
Can you identify a Muscovy duck?	104	103	99%	1	1%										
Do you know that the Muscovy duck is a nuisance and exotic species?	105	91	87%	14	13%										
Have you noticed a transition in the species of ducks over time in these areas?	103	60	58%	43	42%										
Have you noticed an increase in a certain species of ducks over time?	104	65	63%	39	38%										
Do you know that Muscovy ducks reproduce at a faster rate than native duck species?	105	60	57%	45	43%										
Have you ever seen the Muscovy ducks be aggressive?	104	49	47%	55	53%										
Have you noticed a decrease in other fowl populations over time at both of these locations?	104	51	49%	53	51%										
Do you believe that the ducks damage the landscape?	104	56	54%	48	46%										
Do the ducks leave a mess on your property or on public property?	105	69	66%	36	34%										
Do you ever notice a smell in the areas where there are large concentrations of ducks?	105	42	40%	63	60%										
Have you noticed higher algal/green film cover in the mentioned water bodies where large duck populations are present?	104	41	39%	63	61%										
Do you know that the Muscovy ducks transmit disease to other native species?	104	49	47%	55	53%										
Do you know that large populations of Muscovy ducks pollute the water and are harmful to the surrounding environment?	105	58	55%	47	45%										
Do you know that the water quality of Orange Lake and the pond at Azalea Drive have been declining since the duck population have increased?	104	40	38%	64	62%										
What is your opinion if the Muscovy ducks were removed and relocated from Orange Lake and the pond at Azalea Drive?	105											34	4	66	1

Answers for last question on survey.
A - It's nice to see some ducks, but there are too many.
B - I don't see ducks regularly.
C - Let the ducks stay where they are.
D - I am indifferent about the ducks.
E - I am fine with relocating them.
F - I am fine with rehoming/relocating them.