2023

Muscovy Duck Survey Report

Submitted to:

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

Prepared by:

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December 2023

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December 4, 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 population densities, understand the public's knowledge regarding Muscovy ducks, develop educational information, and provide 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. A second survey was conducted at both sites on September 25, 2023. This survey included duck counts, adult versus duckling counts, and identification of other environmental features may be affected by large populations of exotic and nuisance duck species. Environmental features include, but is not limited to, water quality, competition with native species, damage to property, and public safety. GHS staff interviewed one local resident in March who was out feeding the ducks. Water quality samples were collected from both ponds on March 22, 2023. This sampling included coliform counts, various nutrient concentration, and other physiological indicators used for waterbody/watershed health.

1.2 Muscovy Duck Information

Muscovy ducks were originally a food animal. Muscovy ducks are native to South America and have spread into Central America and into Texas. As of the 1960's, Muscovy ducks were first identified in Florida.

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 create a hissing sound. Muscovy ducks are easily characterized by the irregular, red skin on their face. Muscovy ducks, like over other duck species, fly and travel within an area for food sources and mating opportunities. Muscovy ducks are not considered "resident" populations, meaning they do not migrate long distances to breed.

A permit is NOT 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 undesirable in the wild because of their potential to transmit diseases to and interbreed with Florida's native waterfowl. Invasive animals, like the Muscovy duck, take over habitats stressing the natural ecosystems, which facilitates the progressive eradication of native plants and animals. Muscovy duck populations are known to cause excessive nutrient loading in small ponds due to fecal waste along with undesirable and messy sidewalks and driveways. For more information on the prohibition of releasing 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 wildlife biologists surveyed two ponds and counted the number of ducks, both native and non-native and adult and duckling, that were present in each pond and the immediate surroundings. Staff conducted interviews with residents that were open for dialogue at that time 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 relatively shallow per visual observation. 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 many observable patches of carpet grass and algae floating on the surface of the pond. Representative photos are below.

A total of **15 Muscovy ducks and 2 Mallard ducks** (native) were observed during the survey on March 20, 2023. A total of **14 Muscovy ducks and 13 Mallard ducks** (native) were observed during the survey on September 25, 2023.

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

Photos of Pond at Azalea Drive.

2.2.2 Orange Lake

Orange Lake is in a well-maintained part of the city. Orange Lake is approximately 2.5 acres, and the surrounding area is well landscaped, mowed, and maintained as it is a main feature for the downtown area of New Port Richey. 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.

Orange Lake is an integral part of the stormwater system within downtown New Port Richey. Stormwater flows into Orange Lake with every rainfall event, and Orange Lake is designed to discharge directly into the Pithlachascotee River. Because of this design, water within Orange Lake turns over on a regular basis.

Water quality was visually observed as fair during the surveys. There was minimal algae growth around the edges presumed to be due to the regular maintenance and treatment plan the City has in place 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 on March 22, 2023. On September 25, 2023, a total of **41 Muscovy ducks and 21 Mallard ducks** were observed. There were **11 unidentifiable ducks** in September that appeared to be some sort of Muscovy hybrid. These are noted for total duck population but excluded for the specific species counts. There was a fair amount of human traffic around the lake during the surveys. Several of the Muscovy ducks were not deterred when approaching them within a couple feet of them (i.e., constant human encounters presumed to be due to feeding). During the survey at Orange Lake, there were no interviews conducted with pedestrians.

Photos of Orange Lake.

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, i.e., larger human and vehicle populations, and has much higher traffic conditions being located in downtown New Port Richey.

Field Parameter Summary Table.

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. Total Coliform, which contain a large group of many different bacteria, is an indicator analysis. 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 outside of an animal host when conditions are favorable for growth.

Bacteriological Summary Table.

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 and adjacent areas 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.

Nutrient Summary Table.

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 Physiochemical 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.

Physiochemical Parameter Summary Table.

Parameter	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, which contains sand, sediments, trash, etc., 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 October 12 to October 27, 2023. In total, there were 104 responses. Most of the questions were answered by each participant. A summary of responses are included as **Attachment B**.

- 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?
- Would you support the City establishing an ordinance that forbids feeding ducks within the city limits and posting signage?
- 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 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?
- Do you know that the Muscovy ducks transmit disease to other native species?
- Have you ever seen the Muscovy ducks be aggressive?
- Do you believe the ducks damage the landscape?
- Do the ducks leave a mess or generate a smell on your property or public 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 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?
- Do you know that the Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) regulates the control guidelines of the Muscovy ducks?
- Do you know what the FWC's definition of control is?
- Do you favor the capture and euthanizing of the Muscovy ducks by a contractor hired by the City?

Of the 104 participants, 91 participants (or 88%) were residents of New Port Richey. Over half (61%) of participants reported that they enjoy seeing ducks while 24% said they enjoy seeing the ducks, but there are too many. Only 15% of the participants reported that they don't enjoy the ducks at pond on Azalea Drive or Orange Lake. Several people (9%) 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; however, 57% of participants are in favor of posting more signage and establishing an ordinance that forbids feeding ducks within the city limits.

All but three participants reported that they could identify a Muscovy duck, and an increase in a certain species of ducks over time (58%).

Slightly more than half of the participants know the ducks damage the landscape (57%), and report that ducks leave a mess or smell on their properties (56%). However, participants didn't report noticing many algal problems in water bodies with large duck populations.

Just under half of the participants (42%) were unaware that the Muscovy ducks could transmit diseases to the native duck species, but a similar number of participants (51%) did know that large Muscovy duck populations could pollute the water and harm the surrounding environment. Two-thirds (67%) 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.

Over half of the participants (61%) knew that the Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) regulates the control guidelines of the Muscovy ducks; however, 51% do not know what FWC's definition of control is. After reading the rule (USFWS 50CFR 21.54), participants were asked if they favor the capture and euthanizing of the Muscovy ducks. It was almost an even split with 47% in favor of capturing and euthanizing the ducks and 53% not in favor.

USFWS 50CFR 21.54 states "Anywhere in the contiguous United States except in Hidalgo, Starr, and Zapata Counties in Texas, and in Alaska, Hawaii, and U.S. territories and possessions, landowners and Federal, State, Tribal, and local wildlife management agencies, and their tenants, employees, or agents may, <u>without a Federal permit</u>, remove or destroy Muscovy ducks (Cairina moschata) (including hybrids of Muscovy ducks), or their nests, or eggs at any time when found. Any authorized person may temporarily possess, transport, and dispose of Muscovy ducks taken under this order." This rule shows how serious the invasiveness has become, in that any landowner may remove or destroy Muscovy ducks without obtaining a permit and without having any specialized license, education, or training.

5.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

During the six months between surveys, the total duck population doubled at the pond on Azalea Drive and nearly tripled at Orange Lake. An increase in duck populations is expected because duck populations in general can have multiple breeding cycles in the spring and throughout the summer.

The Muscovy duck population at Orange Lake, specifically the adult population, tripled from 13 adults to 41 adults observed during the time of the surveys while the Mallard duck population merely doubled. Unidentifiable ducks were observed at Orange Lake and are presumed to be hybrid due to mating between Muscovy ducks and native duck species, such as Mallard ducks. The data shows how Muscovy ducks can overpopulate an area quickly and outbreed native duck species as seen in this data collected over a single breeding season.

Duck Population Summary Table.

Pond on Azalea Drive				
Month	**Muscovy**	**Mallard**	**Other**	**Total**
March	15	2	-	17
September	14	13	-	27
Orange Lake				
Month	**Muscovy**	**Mallard**	**Other**	**Total**
March	13 adult 4 duckling	10		27
September	41	21	11	73

A general rule of thumb when considering stocking ponds (How Many Ducks Per Acre Pond? (Exact Amount REVEALED!) 2023 » Petybird.com) state 10 to 15 ducks per acre of pond. Using the higher end or 15 ducks per acre as a basis, the Muscovy duck population at both the pond on Azalea Drive (0.5-acre = 8 ducks) and Orange Lake (2.5 acres = 38 ducks) far exceeds the capacity of each waterbody. The Muscovy ducks at Orange Lake were observed to exhibit more domesticated behavior and were observed to be unafraid of humans within close proximity and even in approach 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, local 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 with native duck species as seen at Orange Lake with hybrid duck species. Muscovy ducks are known to 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 Orange Lake as the Muscovy duck population between surveys tripled where the native duck species only doubled. 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.

Based on the division of public opinion on how to address the overpopulation of Muscovy ducks, GHS recommends to begin regular egg collection and removal in an effort to reduce the population over time. At a later date, the Muscovy duck populations should be reassessed along with water quality. Another public survey should be completed to determine if the public opinion has changed over time.

If these all of these efforts fail to reduce the Muscovy duck population over time, GHS recommends full capture and euthanization of the Muscovy duck population at both locations. Regular thinning of the Muscovy duck populations conducted once per year at a minimum will decrease competition for food and habitat for the native bird populations, improve the water quality within both water bodies, and reduce fecal remains, foul odors, and additional maintenance of the public areas by the City.

Appendix A
Surface Water Laboratory Results

Appendix B
Online Survey Results

City of New Port Richey
Muscovy Duck Survey Report
November 9, 2023

Survey Question	Total	Yes		No		Weekly	Every other week	Monthly	Less often	A	B
Are you a resident within the City limits of New Port Richey?	103	91	88%	12	12%						
Do you live on a water body like a retention pond, pond, lake, or canal?	102	45	44%	57	56%						
How often do you visit Orange Lake/Sims Park in a year?	103					62	12	21	8		
Do you enjoy seeing ducks when you're at a pond, lake, or canal?	103	63	61%	15	15%					25	0
Do you feed the ducks?	103	9	9%	94	91%						
Would you support with the City establishing an ordinance that forbids feeding ducks within the city limits and posting signage?	103	59	57%	44	43%						
Do you know what a "nuisance and exotic" species is?	103	99	96%	4	4%						
Can you identify a Muscovy duck?	103	100	97%	3	3%						
Do you know that the Muscovy duck is a nuisance and exotic species?	102	73	72%	29	28%						
Have you noticed an increase in a certain species of ducks over time?	103	60	58%	43	42%						
Do you know that Muscovy ducks reproduce at a faster rate than native duck species?	103	56	54%	47	46%						
Do you know that the Muscovy ducks transmit disease to other native species?	103	60	58%	43	42%						
Have you ever seen the Muscovy ducks be aggressive?	103	39	38%	64	62%						
Are you aware that the ducks damage the landscape?	102	58	57%	44	43%						
Do the ducks leave a mess or generate a smell on your property or on public property?	103	58	56%	45	44%						
Have you noticed higher algal/green film cover in the mentioned water bodies where large duck populations are present?	103	39	38%	64	62%						
Do you know that large populations of Muscovy ducks pollute the water and are harmful to the surrounding environment?	103	53	51%	50	49%						
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?	103	34	33%	69	67%						
Do you know that the Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) regulates the control guidelines of the Muscovy ducks?	103	63	61%	40	39%						
Do you know what the FWC's definition of control is?	103	49	48%	54	52%						
USFWS 50CFR 21.54 States "Anywhere in the contiguous United States except in Hidalgo, Starr, and Zapata Counties in Texas, and in Alaska, Hawaii, and U.S. territories and possessions, landowners and Federal, State, Tribal, and local wildlife management agencies, and their tenants, employees, or agents may, without a Federal permit, remove or destroy Muscovy ducks (Cairina moschata) (including hybrids of Muscovy ducks), or their nests, or eggs at any time when found. Any authorized person may temporarily possess, transport, and dispose of Muscovy ducks taken under this order." Do you favor the capture and euthanizing of the Muscovy ducks by a contractor hired by the City?	104	49	47%	55	53%						

A-It's nice to see some, but there are too many.
B-I don't see ducks regularly.