

Say No to Easter Ducks! And Chicks



Dear Wildlife Friends,

Please allow me to vent **and** educate!

Every Spring, well-meaning parents and other normally responsible adults fall prey to the lure of soft, yellow peeps, who are cute as can be, chirping and quacking in their enclosures at local farm stores. Legitimate purchasers of these chicks would be actual farmers or "country squires" with lots of land and a pond or lake.

But in many cases, the cute yellow ducklings are an impulse purchase, bought on a whim without any thought about the necessary immediate, as well as eventual care of the birds.

Our well-recognized local breed of wild duck is the Mallard. Every breed of domestic duck, except the Muscovy, has been bred from stock containing Mallards.

The most common "Easter duck" is the Pekin. At maturity, they are a large white duck with orange bill and feet. For hundreds of years, these birds have been bred for meat and feathers. They are domestic animals. That means they have been bred to be around and cared for by people:

- They have **no** survival skills,
- their foraging abilities are practically nil,
- they need to be fed by their owners, and
- they are usually too heavy to take flight.

For all of these reasons, Pekins, and other breeds of domestic ducks such as Khaki Campbells, Runner Ducks and Muscovies, do not fare well in the wild. But in too many instances, that is exactly where they end up.

Those cute yellow ducklings need a lot of care. They need the correct diet if they are to develop properly. They need constant access to water, but cannot be allowed to become soaking wet or they can become ill. When they first come home with you, they need a source of heat. And most importantly, they make a mess!

For all of these reasons, many Easter ducklings soon wear out their welcome in the average suburban home, and the well-intentioned owners start looking for a place to "release" their young ducks. In most cases, it's not the local farmer.

The ducks are dropped off on ponds, lakes and rivers. More accurately, these domestic animals are abandoned to

fend for themselves, and in Pennsylvania, it is a crime punishable by fines and/or imprisonment (Pennsylvania Statutes Title 18 PA.C.S.A. §5533, "Cruelty to Animal").

Besides being illegal, releasing domestic ducklings is simply irresponsible. As I have previously pointed out, these birds are unable to survive in the wild. They get into all sorts of trouble:

- They are attacked by predators,
- they become entangled in fishing line, and
- they suffer nutritional issues due to poor diets of bread and garbage.
- In areas where there are large numbers of male Pekins, the females are forced to copulate repeatedly and are often severely injured in the process.
- They are hit by cars,
- abused by people and otherwise neglected.
- When they need rescued, it is difficult to catch them or even find resources to help them.
- On top of that, feral domestic ducks compete for food, habitat and nesting sites with wild ducks, some species of which have decreased populations.

So say "NO" to Easter ducks, please. Buy the kiddies a plush duck, bunny or maybe even a possum instead.

Beth Shoy

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& Sr Rehabilitator**



Internet Photo