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EDITORIAL

An idea that just doesn't fly

The eviction of the domestic ducks that have found a home in the city of Sebastopol's Laguna wetlands preserve raises disturbing questions about city priorities.

In a time of tight budget constraints and sometimes short-handed city departments struggling to keep up with the obvious day-to-day demands of a busy and growing city, the word that the city is erecting a duck entrapment pen in the Laguna Wetlands to get rid of a few domestic ducks sounds like misdirected energy, to say the least.

Were there any complaints about the ducks? None.

What, then, is the problem?

City officials and Laguna park supporters say the Wetlands Preserve is supposed to be a habitat set aside exclusively for wild native birds and other wildlife species.

"When you manage a preserve as opposed to a city park, the presumption is that any non-native is a negative influence on the purposes of the preserve," said Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation Executive Director Kim Cordell. "Leaving in non-native species totally defeats our purpose."

Maybe so, but it seems to ignore the larger context of the Laguna Preserve, where less than 100 feet from the pond where the ducks swim, Sebastopol teens dance to hip-hop music at the Teen Center, myriad indoor activities including political rallies take place in the Sebastopol Community Center, and hundreds of kids play baseball at the adjacent Little League ball park. The area also accommodates annual gala events like the Cajun Festival where crowds of people gather to eat plates heaped with boiled crawfish, another wetlands critter.

Even closer to the duck pond, hikers are invited to walk on recently-constructed trails that are also used by dog walkers and city workers driving convenient electric carts to access the wetlands for maintenance.

This is not exactly pristine unspoiled nature far from the disturbing encroachments of man.

There are other ironies. It was city staff who introduced the ducks to the Laguna in an attempt to relieve overcrowding among ducks at other city parks. And in the liberal West County, where the ideals of tolerance and diversity are held as dear as God and country, to segregate out domestic ducks for eviction from a public park could be seen as an alarming moral and ethical gaffe deserving vigorous community concern.

The sight of a few domestic ducks living peacefully in the Laguna and swimming in a former wastewater holding pond would seem to be a sight to celebrate, not grounds for eviction.

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