

Beware of Ducks!

Several years ago I was working at Teledyne Brown Engineering, near the campus of the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH). Across the street from my office complex was a small lake that ran along Sparkman Drive and defined the western-most border of the UAH campus.

One beautiful Spring day at lunch, I decided it would be a fun change to walk across Sparkman Drive and around to the UAH side of the lake where there was a little park and several wooden benches facing the lake. There I could enjoy a peaceful lunch, watch (and perhaps even feed) some ducks, and enjoy the beauty of the little lake. Lunchtime rolled around, and I eagerly retrieved my sack lunch from the office refrigerator. I purchased a canned soft-drink and started off on my luncheon adventure.

It wasn't long before I had crossed Sparkman Drive. I started walking around the northern side of the lake and heading toward the far side. This was a perfect day weather-wise, and I expected to see many others enjoying their lunches on the park benches as well. However, no one was there - - I just noticed a few ducks.

I finally reached my destination, sat down on the bench and started unwrapping my brown paper sack. My lunches generally were not that extravagant. I usually had a sandwich made with a few slices of lunch meat, a slice of cheese, and a smear of mustard; some type of chips; and maybe a few cookies or something simple for dessert -- and maybe an apple. As I recall, this particular lunch was nothing special.

As I began unwrapping the brown paper lunch bag, and as I started removing my sandwich from its plastic wrapping, apparently these simple sounds triggered an unexpected response in the nearby duck population. Ducks have no visible ears, but apparently they have a keen sense of hearing! Before I could take the first bite of my sandwich, I noticed an army of ducks approaching -- from all directions! These ducks were not your garden variety ducks either -- these ducks were trained to quickly approach and surround anyone who could be a possible food source. It was a trap, and I had obviously stepped into it with both feet! Speaking of stepping into it with both feet, I noticed the ground of the entire area was liberally littered with duck poop -- things didn't smell so great!

My peaceful-get-away-lunch-by-the-lake plan was rapidly unraveling. I was surrounded by what seemed to be hundreds of hungry, loudly-quacking ducks; my shoes were covered in duck poop; and I was alone on a park bench on the far side of the lake! There was no way I could even begin to eat my lunch now -- the thick duck-poop aroma was really overpowering, and more and more ducks were arriving every second -- I don't remember seeing that many ducks before!

I made a decision -- lunch or no lunch, I had to make a break for it! I do not remember exactly how I broke through the encircling duck hordes -- I think in a moment of desperation, I tossed my sandwich and chips to the ducks as a diversion and then slipped quietly away as the gnashing

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of duck bills began. Anyway, it was all too apparent that my little lunch break was over -- it was also all too clear why no one else was lunching on that side of the lake!

I quickly made my way back around the lake -- like a dog with his tail between his legs. Lunch was over, and I was still hungry! I looked around to see if anyone had witnessed the quack attack, and to my knowledge, aside from the ducks, there were no witnesses.

I have often thought back to that day, and I am always thankful that there was no one with a video camera sitting on the other side of the lake filming my little picnic. I'm sure their video would have won them enough money for a nice vacation in Hawaii.

I wonder... are there ducks in Hawaii?

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