

Greg Harman

Editor, *Deceleration News*

RE: Flap Over Bird Poop is a Great Distraction

The recent newsletters of March 4 and 6, 2023, about water quality in San Antonio parks and the deterrence program to eliminate the rookeries at Elmendorf Lake and Brackenridge Park misstated Bexar Audubon Society's position.

Since *Deceleration News* has not contacted BAS on the issue, clarification of our position is in order.

Among the many problems with the current deterrence strategy is that no one has addressed the question of where the birds should go. How do we escape the current whack-a-mole strategy being pursued?

To assess solutions, it is necessary to understand the problem and its origins. In this case, the birds were at Elmendorf Lake and Brackenridge Park for many years before they became a nuisance. There used to be rookeries in southern Bexar County. Five or six years ago these rookery sites were eliminated, and the birds started looking for other places to nest. Being colonial nesting birds, they found companions at both locations. Suddenly the bird populations swelled exponentially. Then the rookery at Elmendorf was eliminated, causing Brackenridge Park to get inundated.

To the best of our knowledge, no other strategies for managing the problem have been offered other than simply pushing the birds away... And that is not a strategy, that is a reaction. A strategy needs to be long term and sustainable. The current approach is neither.

We suggest finding favorable habitat away from urban centers and airports to install artificial nesting structures, then use decoys and sound calls when the scouts return to attract them to new habitat. There are prior examples to indicate these methods are successful.

The intent is to reduce population in city parks by enticing some portion of the birds to an alternative habitat. If we can return the rookeries to a manageable size, then we can establish a cooperative living arrangement with the birds and eliminate the need for deterrence.

BAS would like to be clear: we neither condone nor support the deterrence programs being executed by CoSA at Brackenridge Park and JBSA at Elmendorf Lake. BAS supports a focused, long term strategy to indirectly manage rookery size in the parks so that deterrence is unnecessary.

We do not claim to be right or that this is the only way to solve the problem, nor are we trying to persuade you to our way of thinking. We are offering this strategy as a framework for further dialogue with the community at large in the absence of any other alternatives. Additional constructive ideas are welcome.

For many in San Antonio, the rookeries are the only opportunity to see the nesting, mating, and fledging behavior of birds up close. These rookeries are a marvelous lesson in nature writ large. Of equal importance is the meaning of the birds to the indigenous people of San Antonio and the role the birds of the river play in their creation story. For these reasons, BAS would like to see the continuance of the rookeries.

If you have questions, reach out to anyone on our board. We welcome open, honest dialogue on the important issues of the day. Further, we request you to publish our letter as a rebuttal to your columns.

Best Regards,

Bexar Audubon Board of Directors

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