

Waddles of Wellness

The Impact of Domestic Ducks in Therapeutic Environments

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Abstract

Domestic ducks represent a promising, underexplored modality within animal-assisted and green care therapies for individuals with mental health conditions and traumatic brain injury (TBI). Drawing on narrative review data, a clinical duck-based intervention, qualitative interviews, and lived experience, this review argues that structured interaction with domesticated ducks can reduce anxiety, support emotional regulation, and foster self-efficacy in ways that complement conventional care. These findings are triangulated with case narratives of community duck owners and the author's own longitudinal experience of symptom relief from migraines, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) through daily husbandry, outdoor engagement, and human-duck bonding.

Introduction

Problem: Incorporating domesticated ducks into therapeutic environments may benefit those suffering from mental health conditions

Previous Research: One study has been conducted regarding the effects on TBI patients after interactions with domesticated ducks.

Research Gap: Limited research concerning domestic ducks is available.

This Study: Analyzes the three studies (2023-2025) regarding green care, effects of daily interactions between domestic ducks and TBI patients, the perspectives of the intervention participants, as well as two non-academic sources gathering perspectives from duck owners. This in combination with lived experience was used to determine overall effects on one's mental wellbeing.

Methods

Approach: Systematic review using FSU Library OneSearch

Search Terms: "Ducks in therapy", "duck therapy", or "therapy ducks"

Time Frame: Peer-reviewed studies published between 2000-2025

Study Selection Yield: 3 articles **Final Selection:** 3 articles, all met inclusion criteria

Analysis Focus: Effects of domesticated ducks in therapeutic environments

Discussion

Existing farm animal-assisted therapy studies demonstrate improvements in initiative, attentiveness, and self-efficacy, alongside reductions in anxiety and depression, positioning ducks as a theoretically robust candidate species. A 12-week duck-centered intervention with TBI survivors showed clinically meaningful reductions in anxiety scores during active participation, while follow-up qualitative work revealed participants' descriptions of duck contact as grounding, life-changing, and protective against intrusive symptoms such as nightmares. The review proposes that ducks uniquely integrate tactile comfort, routine caregiving, and nature immersion, thereby embedding therapy into everyday environments and extending benefits beyond time-limited clinical sessions.

Longer-duration, controlled studies of duck-assisted interventions to clarify mechanisms, optimize program design, and evaluate feasibility of implementing duck-centered therapeutic ecosystems in both institutional and home-based settings should be considered.

Sources

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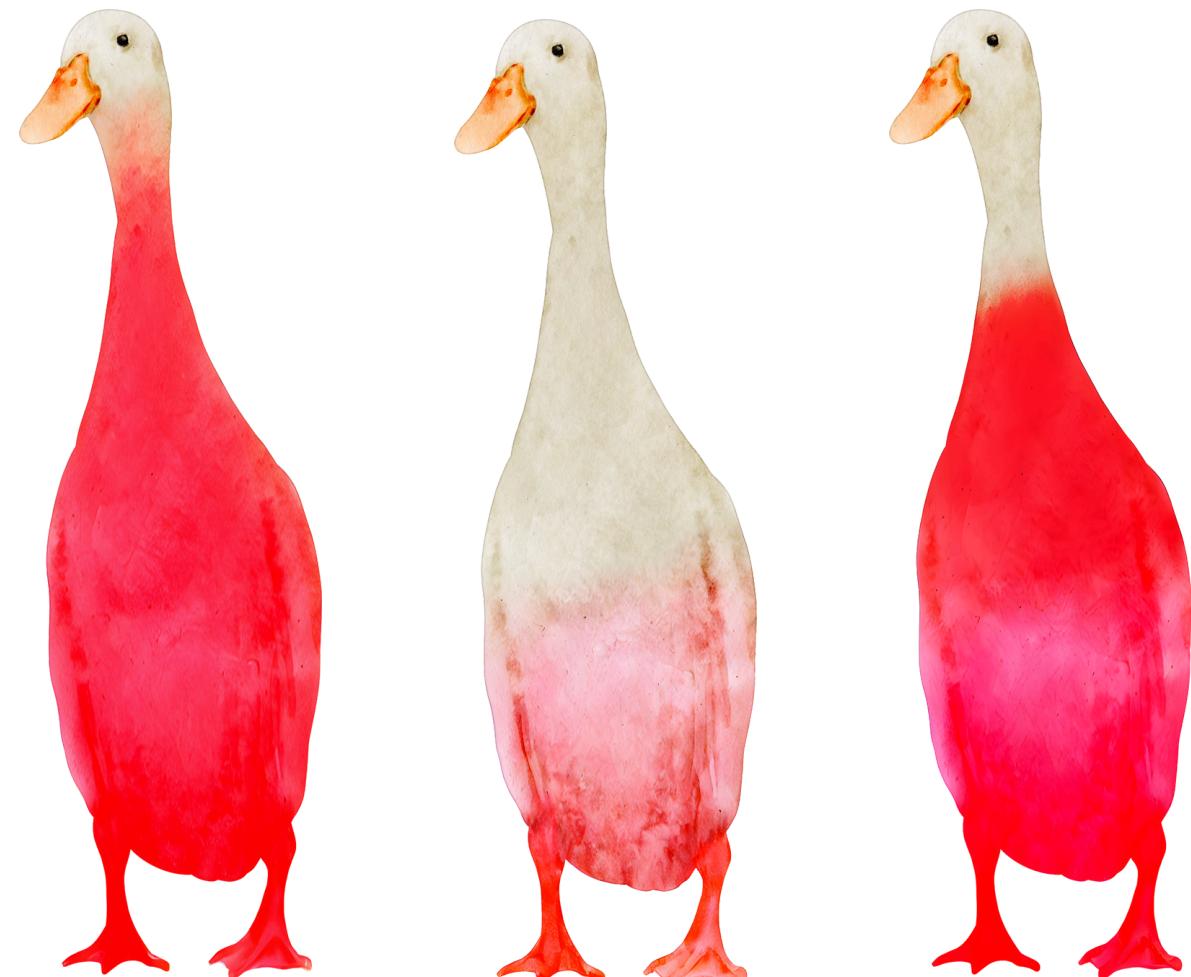
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Results

Based off of data from the intervention

Anxiety scores measured by the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS)



Baseline anxiety score

5.78

Immediately post-intervention

3.67

4 weeks post-intervention

5.67

Key Findings:

- There is a direct correlation between duck interactions and lowered anxiety scores
- Perspectives from the intervention show life-changing effects, such as significant reduction in frequency of nightmares.

Overall Insight:

- This in combination with gathered experiences of duck owners alike provide a clear idea that ducks would be beneficial aides in therapeutic environments.