

Canada geese: Public Enemy No. 1?

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[The iconic Canada goose is losing its allure across North A ...](#)

Barry Gray, the Hamilton SpectatorThe iconic Canada goose is losing its allure across North America.

Some are trapping them. Others want us to stop feeding them. Still others want more days to hunt them.

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Danielle Wong

Hamilton's geese: You have your say

They are shot at and gassed south of the border.

But in Hamilton, Canada geese are just considered a nuisance.

The birds have been exterminated in the U.S. for being airplane-flight hazards -- some had flown into the engines of US Airways Flight 1549 in January last year, forcing the plane to famously land on the Hudson River.

In Hamilton, officials are more worried about water quality than downed planes.

"(Geese feces) is almost the entire reason we can't swim," Jim Hudson said yesterday.

The executive director of the Bay Area Restoration Council (BARC) said there is a direct correlation between the presence of these geese and the E.coli levels in our beach waters.

"There's no question it's not industrial waste, not sewage treatment plant effluent. It's bacteria from Canada geese and gulls deposited at the beach."

According to Environment Canada, there are more than 400,000 temperate breeding geese in Ontario.

"I think they're flying and pooping carp," joked longtime lakeshore stroller Ron Dennis.

The 65-year-old, who was walking in Bayfront Park yesterday, said he also frequents parks in Burlington and Oakville. "You got to be careful where you walk," he said.

Some jurisdictions take a hard stand on geese. The U.S. Department of Agriculture said about 400 geese in Brooklyn's Prospect Park were gassed with carbon dioxide for apparently endangering airplane flights. Police in western New Jersey are investigating after 18 geese were beaten and shot in the head in a parking lot near a pond.

In Canada, there are 104 days each year where hunters can harvest Canada geese, said the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters' wildlife biologist, Ed Reid.

"Though hunting is a positive impact on slowing the growth, it's not preventing it and that reflects the restrictions on the number of days (we can hunt)," he said.

Two years ago, Environment Canada scientist Tom Edge used DNA fingerprinting to prove bird droppings were to blame for bacterial pollution that makes Bayfront Park unsafe for swimming.

In 2005, Hamilton public health implemented a bird exclusion project at Pier 4. The city installed a buoy line to deter Canada geese from swimming into the water, a fence around the perimeter to keep geese from walking into the area and started raking the sand to remove fecal matter. As a result, safe water program manager Eric Mathews said Pier 4 was open to swimmers more than 80 per cent of the bathing season last year.

Mathews hopes the city will extend the exclusion project next year to Bayfront, which was closed 73 days of the 111 days in last year's bathing season.

Last summer, BARC launched a campaign to stop people from feeding geese at the harbour beaches. They recently expanded the campaign to Lasalle Park in Burlington, spokesperson Lainie Tessier said, adding she would like to start handing pamphlets out at the canal area in Dundas.

The city will also post BARC's signs at the harbour beaches.

The Hamilton Conservation Authority recently started trapping and relocating geese at Valens Conservation Beach. In the first two weeks of last month, they moved about 70 geese to different conservation areas. The authority has also manipulated grass cutting at Fifty Point Conservation Area and Confederation Park. Authority spokesperson Bruce Mackenzie said the geese dislike long grass because it blocks their line of vision.

The John C. Munro Hamilton International Airport has not had any issues with the geese, said Frank Scremin, director of operations.

GOOSE FACTS

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

* Geese poop every seven minutes or so. Up to 96 times and 1.4 kilograms a day. A flock of 50 geese can produce nearly as much waste as two elephants.

* Geese can be notorious bullies. Fiercely protective during nesting season, the birds have been known to attack passersby. Geese can be stubborn, too, sending bikers flying into the bushes when refusing to budge from trails.

* There are three types of Canada geese locally.

Resident geese: live here year round.

Moult migrants: arrive in the summer and flock to beaches and parks where they find food and safety during their moult.

Fall migrants: fly south to Hamilton, stay for the mild winters and go back north in spring. These birds are often less of a problem simply because they're here when weather keeps residents away from the waterfront.

* Depending on the subspecies, Canada geese can weigh from 1.1 kg to 8 kg. Wingspans range from 90 cm to 2 m.

* In 1950, there were about one million Canada geese in North America. Today, there are probably more than eight million.

* The Giant Canada Goose used to breed in southern Canada and the northern United States but disappeared from most of its range by the late 1800s. Geese from captive flocks were reintroduced to the southern parts of their former range and Canada geese were restored in Pennsylvania, New York, Ontario and west to southern Alberta.

Sources: Hinterland Who's Who, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Mct, Spectator Files

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--With files from The Canadian Press