

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

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BARRY GRAY, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Turtles vie for food at the rear of Jervis B. Webb on Burlington Street East. A foul odour coming from the pond has workers in the area worried about the turtles.

TURTLES LIVING IN SOUP

Their pond, a 'hidden treasure' in a heavy industrial zone, has turned murky and smells 'horrendous,' a worker says

BY ERIC MCGUINNESS

Big snapping turtles, nesting swans, fish and even a coyote. Not what you'd expect to find living in the heaviest of heavy industrial zones, surrounded by factories and scrapyards off Burlington Street East.

But they're there, in and around a large tree-lined pond of uncertain ownership behind the Jervis B. Webb plant.

Except for the weathered walls of Stelco's old No. 2 Rod Mill at the far end, you could easily think you're out in the country as you watch swans and geese floating on the calm surface, but the grey, cloudy water has looked anything but natural the last few days.

Workers became concerned when the water turned murky and began to smell.

Arnold Guild, a machine operator who says it's always been clear enough to see fish swimming, says "the stench from the pond is new — and horrendous."

He said there was a film on the water and the turtles' shells were black. He described the smell on June 9 as so bad, employees couldn't eat lunch outdoors and had to keep nearby doors closed.

Webb staff suspected the newly opened city compost plant next door was to blame, but officials there said they hadn't spilled anything at the facility on the former Firestone tire plant site.

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TURTLES: Wildlife abounds in 'bizarre' location

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Environment Ministry officer Lance Larkin, dispatched Wednesday in response to a call from the company operating the compost plant, found the smell was going away and said water quality appeared better at the north end of the large pond, closest to the Stelco buildings and farthest from the Webb plant.

He concluded both ponds had become anaerobic or oxygen-starved, either because the inflow of water had been cut off or because something had been dumped or washed in, but it looked as if they were starting to recover.

District supervisor Mark Dunn said lack of water flowing into the ponds might have caused them to stagnate, or something spilled or dumped into a storm sewer upstream might have been flushed in by the last heavy rain.

"These ponds – and I use the term loosely (behind Webb and beside the compost plant) – are left over from

when the area was all marsh with fingers of soil going out into the harbour. They were left to channel water off, and nobody really takes responsibility for them."

There s a big colony of snapping turtles, some a couple of feet long, and it would be a real shame if their environment got messed up.

ROB MEIJER

Dunn said Larkin hadn't determined whether Stelco or the Hamilton Port Authority owns the property, but he hopes the city will now take an interest because the water is so close to the compost plant, where official opening ceremonies are to be held next Saturday.

Rob Meijer, general manager at

Webb, a materials-handling equipment manufacturer that also makes parts for nearby National Steel Car, said: "There's a big colony of snapping turtles, some a couple of feet

long, and it would be a real shame if their environment got messed up. It's clear the water isn't running and it used to run. Something happened recently, something happened to the water flow."

Chris Ingram, manager of pre-fabricating, said: "You could always see fish at the bottom. Now I don't know

if any fish are left. And the swans were beautiful a couple of weeks ago, but now they're absolutely covered in black on the bottom. We thought the turtles had actually gone."

The snappers were still around Thursday afternoon, still coming to the shore looking for someone to toss them food, but there was no sign of the sunfish and bluegills that Ingram said co-workers' kids have caught in the past.

Marilyn Baxter, executive director of the Bay Area Restoration Council, said the ponds don't figure in the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan, but are an example "of the hidden treasures that exist around the bay."

Guild said he was pleased people are paying attention to the area "because the wildlife need to be protected even if the location is rather bizarre."

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