



On board and ready for the trip to Aylmer.

# Canada Goose Management Program: Oakville, Ontario

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Eggs being sprayed.

For the past 12 years the Town of Oakville, Ontario, like many other waterfront municipalities, has had an ongoing battle with our beloved Canada goose. Nothing is more endearing than watching a mother goose scurrying her little ones along as they try to catch up and stay out of harm's way. The problem is the little ones mature quickly and anyone who has ever visited a waterfront park has witnessed the mess they leave behind which, is not so endearing.

A few facts about our friends from the North. Canada geese fall under the Migratory Birds Convention Act which means it is unlawful to hunt, kill, sell, disturb nests or eggs unless a permit is granted by Environment Canada. Yes, Canadian geese do mate for life and for the most part they will return to the same mating site every year. Nests will contain from 3 to 12 eggs. An adult goose will eat 4 lbs of grass daily, and here's the kicker, will excrete up to 2 lbs of that.

Mating starts in late February and ends mid-April. Nesting starts mid-March and goes to the middle of May. Every spring the Town of Oakville applies for and has been granted a permit that allows us to approach the nest and spray the eggs with a substance that prevents the eggs from hatching. The staff is fully trained by experts in the field and the process itself is done with the utmost care to reduce stress to the birds.

Lakefront sites, creek banks, retention ponds and past sites are checked for nesting birds. The sight of a lone goose standing neck straight and chest puffed out is a sure sign a nest is nearby. During the spraying the male bird does his best to distract our staff while the female stays close to the nest. Eventually, with a lot of hissing and nipping at the feet, they move away allowing staff to hand turn and coat each egg with the spray.

Gloves are worn during this process and the spray has no odour, so the birds do not detect any change with the egg. Once sprayed and the staff are far enough away, the goose will hurry back to its nest and is quite often seen bobbing its head as if taking count. It quickly gets back on top of the nest while its mate escorts staff away with plenty of vocal scolding. They then sit on the nest, each taking a turn with the incubation phase until finally they realize that the eggs are not going to hatch.

By then mating season is over and the geese will seek out their clan and get themselves to a good foraging area for the summer. Unfortunately for us, a good foraging area is usually one of our waterfront parks thus creating the need for Step Two of the management plan.

The Town of Oakville posts on its website that we are undertaking this task. If you have nests on your lakefront, riverfront, industrial site or apartment balcony, (yes we have done them there), and will grant us permission to enter your property and let us spray, all you need to do is sign up. Each year the list grows.

Then it's time for the Annual Goose Round Up. Again, once all logistics and permits are in place, a joint effort coordinated with a team from the City of Mississauga and our team from Oakville set out to catch and capture close to 2,000 geese to be shipped to their summer residence.

A week or so after the moulting season begins (mid May to mid July) the birds lose their flight feathers. Boats are sent out a couple of days prior to scan the water for locations and the clutches proximity to parkland. Weather is watched closely by the event coordinators — a big part of the success is dependent upon calm waters with no storms in sight. By this point staff has been fully trained and it is becoming apparent that past experience will definitely help with keeping the birds calm and stress free during the process. We have also learned that the wearing of gray or dark colours assists in the process. The standard safety orange shirts will not be seen on this day.

The day is timed from start to finish. We have more than six locations

to get the staff, t-bars and snow fence set up and angled like a runway or funnel that leads the geese into the back of a livestock transport truck. Once this is accomplished the staff walks the ground and herds any groups on land towards the runway. A human wedge is formed to push the geese in the right direction.

While this is being done the boats are herding the geese from the lake inland. This takes time as the birds are not to be stressed or overworked. Once on shore the same process of slowly walking behind them and clapping hands seems to work best in keeping them together and on the right path. Once the park is done it is off to the next location, minus the few that suddenly remembered they could fly. Obviously the moulting process has not started for them.

It should also be noted that the young are not taken, with sufficient mature geese left behind to tend to them as another endearing characteristic is any adult goose in the clan will tend to young goslings.

At the end of the two days close to 2,000 birds have been transported to a sanctuary in Aylmer. Representatives from both municipalities make the trip to ensure the release at that end goes as smoothly as the capture.

It is a lot of work. The outcome is well worth it. Think about it, 2000 geese times 2 lbs of droppings shipped away for a least six to eight weeks. Drastically reduces the complaint calls pertaining to this issue. •



Three boats corral and direct the geese to come on shore.



Head count taken as the geese go up the runway and board the transport.

Photo credit: Tom Mulvale and Brad Harden, Town of Oakville



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