

## Understanding the City of St. Thomas's Goose Management Program

*When the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources reintroduced Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) across southern Ontario beginning in 1968, the project was heralded as a wildlife management success: people welcomed the majestic, white-cheeked birds back to Southern Ontario. It soon became apparent that wildlife managers had created a monster: fuelled by a ready food supply and safe from hunters, the goose population stopped migrating and began to double every five years, reaching an estimated 250,000 birds in southern Ontario by 1997. Today, municipal and wildlife officials are trying everything in their power to discourage geese without discouraging people from using urban green space — a tricky balance since geese and humans are drawn to the same places for the same reasons: secure, manicured lawns and waterfront vistas.*

### Facts about the Goose Management Program:

1. The goose management program is not in place to eliminate **all** Canada geese from Pinafore and Waterworks Park. The goal of the program is to reduce the local population of Canada geese in the parks to a manageable level that allows a safe environment for park patrons and park wildlife, including the geese that remain.
2. Preventing Hatching - Eggs oiled in the parks are done before they are incubated – there are no baby goslings in the eggs that are removed. Local populations can be reduced by preventing hatching because when geese become adults, they tend to nest in the area where they learned to fly.
3. The goose management program has been in place since 2016, and is administered by a licensed agency whose plan is reviewed and approved by the federal Ministry of the Environment Canadian Wildlife Services on an annual basis.

### Frequently Asked Questions: Goose Management in St. Thomas

#### Why do you have a goose management program?

This program has been implemented to address concerns about increasing goose populations, goose droppings, aggressive birds and conflicts with park users. Geese are a hyper abundant species. The intent of the program is not to kill or remove all of the birds in the parks, but rather, we are attempting to reduce the local population to a manageable level for the parks by preventing the hatching of eggs.

Our approach helps reduce local problems of damage and danger caused by Canada geese. Even though the program aims to reduce the number and severity of conflicts, the goose population will remain at healthy levels into the future.

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The program does not remove all geese; many do continue to frequent and nest in the park, which is consistent with our objective to reduce the over-abundance to a level that is manageable and supports human activity plus wildlife use of the parks.

### **What does the goose management program involve?**

The program attempts to reduce the local geese population in Pinafore Park (including Lake Margaret) and Waterworks Park to a manageable level for each park. To achieve this, the City of St. Thomas works with a licensed contractor and the Canadian Wildlife Services to develop a plan to prevent hatching by oiling eggs. As fewer eggs hatch, birds may relocate because their breeding attempts failed, and population numbers will eventually fall as adults die naturally.

The *Migratory Birds Convention Act* recognizes that birds may sometimes cause damage and danger, and provides management tools to reduce those conflicts. No migratory birds, their eggs, or nests may be removed without a permit, so city staff works with our licensed contractor to apply for and obtain a permit from Environment and Climate Change Canada and Canadian Wildlife Services to manage the geese population in Pinafore and Waterworks Parks.

### **Are there other ways to control the population that doesn't include preventing hatching?**

Yes. In addition to oiling, we have been working to naturalize the park's shorelines and lake edge with rocks, more shrubs and vegetation, and letting areas naturalize, which helps make it a less desirable nesting place overall. Over time, we hope this will naturally reduce the population without need to intervene. Along with naturalization, we discourage the feeding of Canada geese by posting signs in public areas. Geese will not abandon a site as long as people feed them. When the diets of geese are not supplemented with handouts and they have to depend on the more limited natural food supply, some or all will move elsewhere. Feeding geese artificial foods such as bread can even be detrimental to the birds' health.

### **How is this program considered ethical or legal?**

The federal Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change considers geese to be a hyper abundant species, meaning they can become easily overpopulated in a park or urban area.

The *Migratory Birds Convention* recognizes that birds may sometimes cause damage and danger, and provides management tools to reduce those conflicts. No migratory birds, their eggs, or nests may be harmed without a permit. The City of St. Thomas works with a professional agency to apply for and obtain a permit from Environment and Climate Change Canada and Canadian Wildlife Services to manage the geese population in St. Thomas.

You can learn more about this issue on the Government of Canada's website here: [Ministry of Environment and Climate Change - FAQ - Canada Geese](#)

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### **The geese in the parks don't bother me. What harm are they doing?**

There will always be geese in the park. When geese overpopulate an urban area, like Pinafore and Waterworks Parks, their large populations can create conflicts with people and pets, and reduce enjoyment of public spaces. This has been a concern at both parks, generating complaints from citizens who use the park.

Nesting Canada geese will actively defend their nest sites, and aggressive pairs can sometimes cause injuries, especially to small children or pets. Large flocks of Canada Geese can also denude grassy areas and other landscaped areas where the grass is kept short and where there are ponds, lakes, and other bodies of water nearby. Compress or erode soil in parks and green spaces

The egg oiling program helps to reduce the numbers of geese in the park to a more manageable level, thereby reducing many of the conflicts and barriers to enjoying this public space, such as geese chasing or attacking people or pets, messing on pathways and lawns or being hit on the road.

### **What happens to the eggs?**

Geese lay 4 to 12 eggs over a series of 12-15 days. The eggs are not incubated until after all the eggs are laid. Prior to incubation, a licensed contractor is hired by the City and approved by Environment Canada and Canadian Wildlife Services to undertake the oiling of the eggs.

Once the eggs are oiled they do not hatch. The geese will think there is something wrong with the nesting area and most often will eventually move on to another area.

### **Are there baby geese in the eggs?**

No. We are not killing baby geese. The eggs would be no different than a chicken egg at the stage when we oil the eggs. The eggs are not incubated (incubation is the process that initiates development) until after all the eggs are laid, usually 15 days after the first one is laid. The eggs in Pinafore and Waterworks Parks are oiled prior to incubation, no goslings are harmed.

### **What would happen if we didn't oil the eggs?**

There would be several hundred geese frequenting our parks every year. The high number of animals in the relatively small space further increases the risk of conflict with people, pets and vehicles passing through the parks.

The program keeps the population at a manageable level, making the parks safer both for patrons and other wildlife, including the geese that remain.

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### **Why not relocate the eggs instead of removing them?**

We are not permitted to re-locate the eggs to a different location.

### **What happens to the eggs that do hatch or the geese that move into the park from elsewhere?**

Some geese will remain in the park. Some nests will not be found and some eggs will hatch. These families will remain in the parks for the season and will likely return the following year.

### **Why choose this method of population control?**

Our approach is meant to reduce conflicts, not remove every bird we encounter. The reduction in a local population is supported by the federal government responsible for overall population management. Our practice of egg oiling is approved through a permit from Canadian Wildlife Services. While we appreciate the practices can be difficult to understand, they are employed in many municipalities in Southern Ontario where similar conflicts occur.

The program does not remove all geese from the park. Rather, it ensures that a manageable population remains and it ensures that those that do stay in the park are able to nest and will benefit from the suitable and available habitat and less competition.

### **Why not fine people who feed the geese?**

There are signs posted at Pinafore and Waterworks Parks requesting park-goers not to feed the geese or ducks. Some locations may need to enforce no-feeding regulations and by-laws.