



Canada Geese Integrated Management Strategy



East Lindsey District Council,
Tedder Hall, Manby Park, Louth, Lincolnshire, LN11 8UP
Telephone: 01507 601111, Fax: 01507 600206

Version 1.0 – 22nd March 2018



1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. There is a large Canada Geese population in our coastal towns of Mablethorpe and Skegness. The birds live in local populations around the resorts' boating lakes and have been a cause of complaint from local businesses, residents and visitors to these areas, particularly associated with the cleanliness and hygiene of the lakes and surrounding amenities. They are also a significant cause of concern to the Council in regard to the health and safety of members of the public. There is a need therefore to develop an effective management strategy to deal with the ongoing nuisance caused by the geese.
- 1.2. This Integrated Management Strategy sets out the actions that have been taken by the Council, and the next steps to take in order to ensure the population of Canada Geese in these areas is managed. This Strategy does not set out to remove the Geese, but to ensure that their population is controlled to ensure the geese remain healthy, and that the facilities provided by the Council and local businesses remain clean and hygienic to enable the local community and visitors to enjoy these resorts.

2.0 Background

- 2.1. Canada Geese are not a native species to the UK. Until the 1940s, most geese were resident in parklands and numbers remained fairly low. There has been a rapid increase in population over the past 70 years, partly due to an increase in suitable habitat such as reservoirs and flooded gravel pits. And the British population is still increasing.
- 2.2. Canada Geese can live up to 30 years. They start breeding at two to three years old, and females usually lay a single clutch of around six eggs in early April. Nests are usually close to water, often on small islands. The geese will defend a small territory as well as the nest itself, but as they are a gregarious species they will tolerate other pairs nesting nearby and frequently nest in colonies. As Canada Geese remain close to the site where they hatched, and may wait a number of years for a breeding site to become available, there may be a significant number of non-breeding adults building up at favourable sites.
- 2.3. The species has very different requirements at different times of year. In the breeding season, water bodies with islands or other undisturbed areas are selected by the geese as these make secure nesting sites. The geese may become more aggressive towards people, dogs and other waterfowl; and dogs may provoke a particularly fierce response from geese during the breeding season.
- 2.4. Following breeding, adults moult for around 35 to 40 days in June and July. During this time they are flightless and spend most of their time on the water to avoid predators.

- 2.5. As they are largely herbivorous, Canada Geese spend a lot of time grazing on grassland or in water. Parks with water courses therefore are an ideal habitat, with short grass and open landscapes that make them feel safe when grazing. However, this can lead to problems with feeding damage or trampling of vegetation, and accumulations of droppings.
- 2.6. Many people enjoy watching and feeding Canada geese, but in any feeding of wildlife there should be some consideration for others in the area who may not share the same opinion. Where you feed the birds, as well as what you feed them, is very important and encouraging large numbers of wild birds to an area can facilitate disease transmission and create environmental or health problems.
- 2.7. Feeding Geese with bread should not be encouraged as it can cause malnutrition as well as affecting their growth, leading to a wing deformity called 'angel wing', where, as the bird grows, the 'wrist' joint fails to develop properly and twists. This then causes some of the wing feathers to stick out from the body. This is caused by poor nutrition, such as a high calorie diet (e.g. bread) that is high in proteins and/or low in vitamins. It is also thought that genetics may have a role to play as it is often only found in certain populations of waterfowl. There is no cure, birds with this condition can live out their lives naturally but will be unable to fly.

3.0 Legislation

- 3.1 Canada Geese, like all wild birds in Britain, are protected under the EC Wild Birds Directive implemented in Great Britain through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended. This Act makes it an offence to capture, kill or injure Canada geese, or to damage or take their nests or eggs. There are exceptions, the most important of which relate to the open season and to actions licensed under Section 16 of the Act¹:
- **Open season** - Canada Geese can be legally shot by authorised persons (that is, persons acting with the authority of the landowners, occupiers and the owners of the shooting rights to the land involved) or trapped by approved methods during the open season (between 1st September and 31st January, or 20th February inclusive on the foreshore) except on Sundays. Care must be taken to ensure that other regulations concerning firearms safety, capture methods etc. are adhered to.
 - **Licensed action** - DEFRA issues a series of general licences under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. These allow Canada Geese to be killed or taken, and their eggs and nests to be taken, damaged or destroyed for preserving public health or safety.

¹ Natural England Technical Information Note TIN009

Action can be taken under these licenses at any time by 'authorised persons'.

- 3.2 As owner of the Boating Lakes and surrounding parks, the Council is authorised to take action to manage the geese.

4.0 Context

- 4.1 In its Corporate Strategy² the Council sets out its vision for East Lindsey, focusing on three themes, one of which being 'Pride in our Places'. East Lindsey is a collection of market towns, coastal towns and villages connected by swathes of open space, and the Corporate Strategy states that "we take our responsibility for both maintaining and sustaining our places very seriously - aiming to protect what is valued by residents and visitors whilst meeting the need for homes and employment for families who want to stay in, or come to, East Lindsey. We need to do this to keep our communities viable. We have clear service standards for cleanliness and grounds maintenance so that residents can see what we are able to provide and what they can do to help contribute to maintain clean and welcoming places".
- 4.2 However, there has been a consistently high population of Canada Geese for a number of years at both Mablethorpe and Skegness Boating Lakes. The large numbers of geese have created extensive areas of bare ground at the water's edge and across grassed areas adjacent to the Lakes.
- 4.3 Their presence has resulted in pathways and grassed areas being extremely fouled with their droppings. Canada Geese droppings are unsightly, and the droppings can make paths dangerously slippery. Consequently this involves a considerable amount of resource through our Neighbourhood Services Team having to regularly sweep and clean path areas to ensure areas are kept in a satisfactory condition to prevent the droppings being walked into local cafés, public toilets etc. from people's shoes.
- 4.4 The geese droppings on the grassed areas, where families like to picnic, is unsightly and unhygienic in these recreational areas which attract a large number of visitors in the spring and summer months, when the Geese are nesting or moulting and are present in large numbers. The Council's popular paddling pools are also located next to the lakes and grassed areas, and research has shown that the excrement of geese contains a wide variety of pathogens capable of infecting humans³.

² <https://www.e-lindsey.gov.uk/article/5632/Corporate-Strategy>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/zoonotic-diseases-zoonoses-guidance-data-and-analysis>

- 4.5 Droppings in lakes and ponds add nutrients, particularly nitrate and phosphate, to the water, which can eventually seriously affect the water quality ecosystem. The Boating Lake in Skegness in particular has experienced episodes of blue/green algae blooms in 2017 effecting local businesses and incurring additional costs associated with undertaking appropriate remedial action.
- 4.6 Canada Geese are known to sometimes show aggressive behaviour towards humans, particularly in the search for food. Part of the issue is due to the attractiveness of the habitat resulting from some local residents/visitors undertaking regular feeding sessions, sometimes with each person providing several loaves of bread daily. This can attract vermin to the area due to there being a regular source of food for rats, which incurs additional costs associated with pest control.
- 4.7 From a survey/inspection at Mablethorpe and Skegness over 2017 there is still an increasing population in particular at Queens Park, Mablethorpe in the region of approx. 200-300 Canada geese and approx. 100-200 at the Boating Lake, Skegness.
- 4.8 The Council has therefore taken advice from Natural England on a suitable Integrated Management Strategy for controlling the population of Canada Geese at the Boating Lakes so that they remain at an acceptable level.

5.0 Integrated Management Strategy

- 5.1 In order to reduce the nuisance these birds are causing in the areas around Mablethorpe and Skegness Boating Lakes, the Council has previously implemented techniques to control their behaviour. Natural England advises that different techniques are considered to achieve the best result in controlling numbers of Canada Geese. The following action plan details these different techniques and sets out how the Council intends to manage the local Canada Geese population.
- 5.2 The Council will monitor the population of Canada Geese annually throughout the main season on a monthly basis from April to September. Any growth or reduction in population will assist with measuring the effectiveness of the action plan.
- 5.3 The action plan will be reviewed annually taking in to consideration the effectiveness of the techniques identified and if any further action is necessary in order to maintain the population of Canada Geese at an acceptable level.
- 5.4 The management techniques will also be reviewed to ensure that they are current in accordance with recommended latest guidance and any new techniques identified as a result of advances in technology (e.g. human operated bird control – drone devices mimicking a bird of prey etc.), will be considered for inclusion in the action plan.

Canada Geese Integrated Management Strategy Action Plan



Technique	Description	Effectiveness	Action	Timescale	Resources
1. Removing a food source	Discouraging feeding of bread to the geese, through signage or enforcement.	Reducing feeding of bread improves their health and prevents geese from congregating in certain key areas where they are likely to cause damage, general nuisance or pose an increased risk to public health.	<p>Action has been taken to discourage feeding of bread through politely worded signage erected in the worst areas in 2017, which explained the reasons why the geese should not be fed bread. This has helped to reduce the overall population of Canada Geese massing in areas where they are causing problems and should ensure that they receive the correct nutrition by feeding elsewhere on more suitable food sources.</p> <p>It is recommended that the signage is reviewed and renewed for the summer season 2018.</p>	June –Sept 2018	Property & Technical Services
2. Visual devices	Flags, flapping tapes, balloons. Designed to scare the geese away. Particularly used to protect agricultural crops. Best used short-term as geese will become habituated to them.	Require frequent changes of location (every 2 to 3 days). Not appropriate for public parks as can be unattractive, and subject to theft.	Not recommended for use on Parks due to the recreational nature of area.	n/a	n/a
3. Acoustic devices	Gas cannons, bird calls, non-lethal shooting, etc. Particularly used to protect agricultural crops or in remote areas. Best used short-term as geese will become habituated to them.	Require frequent changes of location (every 2 to 3 days). Not appropriate for public parks due to sudden loud noises, and subject to theft. Potential for noise nuisance particularly where residential properties are nearby.	Not recommended for use on Parks due to proximity of populated areas, and use of Park amenities by families.	n/a	n/a

Technique	Description	Effectiveness	Action	Timescale	Resources
4. Human-operated bird control	People act as 'scarers', often equipped with a flag, shotgun or other scare device.	Often used where geese are regularly shot, however Canada geese have shown very little fear toward man, particularly in areas where they may be fed by the public.	Not recommended for use in Parks due to the high cost of staff resource required and the fact that the geese are used to being fed by the public.	n/a	n/a
5. Habitat management	This method relies on making a water body and its surroundings unfavourable for the geese, by landscaping, steepening banks, removing islands, barrier planting, and allowing grass to grow long.	Can be effective in encouraging birds to move elsewhere, but may adversely affect other waterfowl, damage the aquatic system and potentially pose a human safety risk.	<p>Action has already been taken over the last three years to allow vegetation to grow on the islands within the Boating Lake, which has discouraged nesting on the island, but has not had a demonstrable effect on geese numbers.</p> <p>Due to the overall size of the planted areas in the Parks it would not be practicable to introduce barrier planting. This would be more costly than a low level barrier fencing solution.</p> <p>In 2012/13 barrier planting (berberis hedging) was introduced adjacent to the car-park in Queens Park. However, the planting scheme failed due to people standing on the developing plants, to access the park.</p> <p>Due to the paths around the Lakes barrier planting at the water's edge is not an option.</p> <p>Allowing the grass to grow long would have a negative impact on the attractiveness of the amenity.</p> <p>Steepening banks and removing islands would have a negative impact on the amenity, at a substantial cost.</p>	Sept 2018	Neighbourhood Services

Technique	Description	Effectiveness	Action	Timescale	Resources
6. Fencing	The most direct form of physical exclusion.	Low fencing can be effective for deterring Canada geese as they prefer to walk to feeding and roosting sites. While a gap between the fence and the ground allows smaller waterfowl to access.	<p>Action has already been taken at Queens Park Boating Lake where a wire fence has been erected around the island. The fencing has discouraged nesting on the island but has had a limited effect on overall geese population in the park. The fence required constant monitoring and maintenance.</p> <p>Due to the size of the water course at both Boating Lakes, and the fact that both are amenity areas supporting local businesses, it is not appropriate to fence around the outside of the Lakes.</p> <p>However, it is recommended that the nesting areas are reviewed during the nesting season to identify whether the use of barrier fencing may be effective in specific areas of the Parks.</p>	May - June 2018	Property & Technical Services
7. Shooting	The most direct form of reducing geese numbers.	Shooting will reduce the local population but presents a risk in areas where the public have access.	Not recommended for use in Parks at this time.	n/a	n/a
8. Egg control	The method requires the eggs to be treated to prevent hatching, through either egg removal or oiling. Best used as a long-term programme to significantly reduce a population.	Egg removal is not as effective as egg oiling as this simply induces the female to lay more. Egg oiling is more effective as birds are very loyal to their nesting sites. Oiling of eggs kills embryos, and leaving the eggs in place, but preventing them from hatching, means adults continue to protect them.	It is recommended that a programme of egg oiling is carried out for two years, and the bird numbers monitored.	April 2018 – June 2019	Property & Technical Services

Technique	Description	Effectiveness	Action	Timescale	Resources
9. Round up and cull of adults	This method requires a suitably approved contractor to undertake the roundup of Canada Geese on site and humanely culling in accordance with guidance issued by Natural England	There will be an initial reduction in the local population but it is likely that the area would soon be re-populated by flocks of Canada Geese from other nearby grazing sites.	Not recommended for use in Parks at this time.	n/a	n/a