

## **Hawksbury Lagoon update May 2019**

This month I thought I should focus on a bird species renowned for quantity rather than quality. I refer of course to the Canadian geese on the lagoon.

Commencing in 1907, multiple and repeated releases of 50 geese in 1905 and their progeny had, by 1922, established flocks of several hundred distributed along the eastern Canterbury and Otago foothills of the Southern Alps. Thereafter, the geese spread widely but remained resident and breeding only in the South Island. They were imported in an attempt to 'promote tourism'. Today the total population is estimated at 60,000 with 2/3 of the population located in the South Island. Up until 2011 Canadian geese were protected, however the rate of population growth, the damage from grazing farmland pastures (4 geese eat as much as one sheep), as well as the threat they pose to aircraft, led to them being declared a pest from this time.

The male and female of the species are similar in colouring but the female tends to be smaller. From two years of age they find a partner and mate for life. They lay on average five eggs during September and October which take 27 days to incubate. An interesting fact is that they produce between ½ to 1 ½ kilos of droppings per day. Between the Canadian geese and the Black Swans, it is no wonder the causeways are frequently messy.

In relation to the Lagoon they will often fly in using a distinctive 'V' formation, honking loudly. Their numbers have been increasing since the late 1990's and there are often flocks of over 100 birds during winter. Since 2012 some of them have begun nesting here and due to the problems they can cause at the nearby Golf course and Race track, some of our committee members carry out egg pricking in an effort to keep numbers down. Although they don't appear to migrate, they do seasonally travel between Central Otago and the coastal wetlands. Their distribution is also beginning to extend into mountain valleys within Fiordland. They out-compete native birds for food and nesting sites and can pollute wetlands (such as the Hawksbury Lagoon). It would seem that only a concerted effort across all of the South Island will keep the numbers down to something manageable. Anyone fancy cooked goose for Christmas dinner?

We are still looking for people to help monitor bird numbers or to become a 'Friend of the HL'. Just contact me.

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Hawksbury Lagoon