

Bye bye birdie

Birds of a feather flock together and they'll also poop together. Considering mature Canada Geese produce more than 1.5 pounds of "droppings" each per day, they may not be the best choice of bird to bear Canada's name.

Seems more like an American Goose kind of thing, at least from this side of the border.

But Canadian they are and Canadian they will stay, and in record numbers too as they are a protected species with no natural predators aside from coyotes and wolves.

So what's a landowner awash in goosie gifts to do?

Get Wikked, and Marley and Phurrie, specially trained Border Collies with Bye Bye Birdie Goose Control Services Ltd. Owner Sherri Hall got the idea driving by Alliston's Nottawasaga Inn every day and watching an ever-expanding, out-of-control flock of geese taking over the property.

"I knew my dogs were capable of curtailing the problem," said Hall.

Starting with herding sheep, the dogs move to land-bound ducks and then the feathers really fly.

They are also taught to hold geese at bay while Hall practices population control.

Ganders get phenomenally angry if you get too close to their nests. Just ask Hall. Every 10 days in the spring, with the appropriate permits from Canada Wildlife Services, she goes out and oils the eggs with mineral oil while her dogs hold the gander at bay. The oil is odourless, tasteless and safe for the environment unless you're a goose egg. Since goslings return to where they are born it's important to limit the amount of births.

"It's quite a sight with the gander hissing and spitting, wings flapping and the dog crouched down on the ground barking and growling. It's quite a stand-off," said Hall. "You grease the eggs and then run like hell."

For the rest of the season, when the birds feathers have moulted and they can't fly, the dogs are trained to harass, not hurt, the geese by herding them daily. Moving the geese around prevents them from wrecking any one particular area and gives them a bad memory of that property. It takes a couple of seasons but the geese learn where the dogs are.

At the Nottawasaga Inn after four seasons of goose control, the resident goose population has gone from 1,200 to 40.

Wikked!

*Jan Soule



Sherri Hall with Wikked,
Marley and Phurrie, fend off
unwanted birds.