



EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL

CANADA GEESE POLICY

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Maiden Erlegh Lake & Nature Reserve is a 12 hectare site owned and managed by Earley Town Council. Within the nature reserve there are ancient woodlands, meadow land, pathways, the Interpretation Centre and a large lake. Fishing is permitted at the lake, under permit and from designated fishing bays. Management of the site balances protection of the flora and fauna alongside the need to provide a welcoming environment for visitors to the site. MELNR supports a wide range of creatures such as small mammals, insects and birds. The lake supports various waterfowl including swans, coots, ducks, moorhen, crested grebe, Egyptian geese, heron, cormorants and Canada geese.
- 1.2. Earley Town Council received communications from a residents' association, MERA, informing it that Canada geese were causing nuisance to local residents. MERA suggested that the problems were most prevalent during the summer months when geese are raising their young in nests at Maiden Erlegh Lake & Nature Reserve. Issues reported by MERA included:
 - Canada geese and goslings entering residents' front gardens to feed on grass,
 - Geese and goslings walking in roads and on pavements, resulting in a possible hazard to drivers and pedestrians,
 - Droppings left by the birds in gardens and on the public highway which were unsightly and could pose a health risk, especially to children.
- 1.3. MERA reported that, in 2023, the number of Canada geese in this part of Earley had increased and asked that the Town Council consider taking action towards the eggs to reduce the number of hatchlings next Spring.
- 1.4. MERA requested that the Town Council assume responsibility for cleaning pavements during the summer months.
- 1.5. In response to these reports and requests, the Town Council sought expert advice and information on the behaviour and management of Canada geese in a nature reserve environment in order to develop a policy on the matter. ETC councillors and officers attended an informative presentation on 'Canada geese at MELNR', delivered by a local resident who has been studying them for several years.
- 1.6. This policy is intended to provide a guideline for the management of Canada geese at Earley Town Council owned and managed locations.

2. CANADA GEESE

- 2.1. Canada geese are wild birds and as such are protected in law.
- 2.2. They are attracted to areas with water sources such as rivers, canals and lakes. Canada geese nest close to bodies of water and are primarily herbivorous.
- 2.3. The geese form permanent breeding pairs, an average clutch size is 6 eggs.
- 2.4. Canada geese use a creche system whereby a small number of adults will 'mind' a group of goslings.
- 2.5. Geese like to walk but do not like climbing over barriers.

- 2.6. Canada geese numbers nationally have increased over the last 50 years.
- 2.7. Licenses may be granted permitting the pricking or oiling of eggs. This is more efficient than removing the eggs from a nest (parents may lay another clutch) as these methods kill the embryo and prevent the eggs from hatching.

3. CANADA GEESE AT MAIDEN ERLEGH LAKE & NATURE RESERVE

- 3.1. The lake at MELNR is one of several lakes in the locality, all of which attract Canada geese. If the birds were to be removed from one lake, other geese would soon move in hence it would not be possible to eradicate Canada geese from one of these local lakes.
- 3.2. Outside of the breeding season, the majority of Canada geese at MELNR are day visitors who fly onto the lake in the morning and fly out in the evening.
- 3.3. Although for most of the year the geese remain on the nature reserve, often in the water, it is when the goslings are being cared for in the creche system that adults and goslings are most likely to temporarily leave the nature reserve during the day. Reasons for this include:
 - Swans – the territorial behaviour of the resident pair of swans on the lake has a significant impact on goose behaviour. Previous swans at MELNR have attacked and killed goslings, however the current swan pair appear to prefer attacking the adult geese, driving them from the lake and surrounding waterside.
 - Geese will therefore seek safety for themselves and their young further afield.
 - Adult geese and their creche of goslings will also seek food away from the lake, in surrounding roads. A significant food source for them is short, fresh grass, ie front lawns and grass verges.
- 3.4. The number of clutches of eggs per year have reduced slightly since 2021 when there were nine clutches, however, the number of goslings surviving longer have increased slightly (in 2023 there were 27 goslings in total). This is primarily as a result of a change in the behaviour of one of their main predators, the swans.
- 3.5. Predators also include rats, birds of prey and foxes.
- 3.6. Any action taken to deter Canada geese, for example removing suitable nesting sites, may also impact other species of wild birds at the nature reserve.

4. CONTROLLING NUMBERS

Any method used to control the number of Canada geese at MELNR should be appropriate to the scale of the issues being reported and the nature of those issues. The Council is aware that the geese, and especially their goslings, are very popular with many residents in the town, with some welcoming their presence in their front garden.

- 4.1 Culling (by contractor under licence) – this would reduce goose numbers only temporarily. Councillors do not support this course of action.
- 4.2 Egg pricking/oiling – reduces the number of eggs hatching but does not deter geese from nesting. Councillors do not support this course of action.

4.3 Habitat management – for example steepening banks, removing islands, landscaping, allowing grass to grow long. Such measures will also affect other waterfowl, expert advice would need to be sought to avoid unintended consequences.

5. **POSITIVE ACTIONS**

5.1. By understanding goose behaviour there may be positive actions that the Town Council and residents can take to reduce any inconvenience the geese and goslings may be causing:

- ETC will keep areas of grass on the nature reserve at a suitable height so as to encourage Canada geese to feed there.
- Residents can reduce the frequency of mowing their front lawns as geese do not like grass over about an inch in length.
- Residents can erect low temporary barriers to deter geese from going onto their front lawns.

6. **CONCLUSION**

EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL'S POLICY ON CANADA GEESE

- ETC recognise that MELNR is a nature reserve and acknowledges the Council's commitment to improving the environment, increasing biodiversity and caring for the natural world.
- ETC recognises that Canada geese are wild birds.
- ETC does not support the culling of geese nor the control of goose eggs at Maiden Erlegh Lake & Nature Reserve.
- ETC will seek to ensure that MELNR is attractive to as wide a variety as possible of wild birds and waterfowl. This will apply to the provision of suitable nesting sites and food sources within the reserve as well as to other relevant aspects of habitat management.
- ETC will seek expert advice when necessary.
- ETC will advise residents on simple measures they can take to deter Canada geese from venturing onto their lawns or into their gardens.
- ETC encourages residents to contact the Council directly with any complaints about matters relating to its sites or services in order that they can be addressed.
- ETC does not assume responsibility for the cleaning of highways land, ie roads and pavements. Highways land comes under the remit of the principal authority, in this case Wokingham Borough Council. The Town Council does not have the resources to undertake such a responsibility.

Policy adopted by Earley Town Council on 27th March 2024.