

Efforts to stop Canada geese from fouling beach successful

By David Desjardins

GLOBE STAFF

Town officials seem to have finally persuaded some of the peskier beachgoers at the Arlington Reservoir to pursue their water activities elsewhere.

As recently as last summer, people visiting the town beach on Lowell Street were accustomed to finding the path from their blankets to the water — an enclosed, filtered swimming area that adjoins the larger reservoir near the Lexington border — littered with the droppings from an army of Canada geese that patrolled the waterfront, sometimes frightening young children with their

aggressive behavior.

The presence of the geese had grown so offensive that some residents simply stopped going there.

But this summer, visitors are finding a changed landscape at the "Res," as many in town call the beach. Interviewed earlier this month, many beachgoers said that, although 40 or so ducks still inhabit the area, both the sandy stretch along the water and a large grassy section nearby have been largely free of the Canada geese, which some people consider more objectionable, and their droppings.

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Geese driven from 'Res' beach

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"There's been a huge difference," said Cindy Santana, one of a dozen or so people visiting the beach on a hazy morning. "Last year, there were geese roaming all over and droppings all around. Now it's a nicer environment. You don't have to watch where you're stepping."

Nearby, Elaine Duffy agreed. "We've been delighted with it here so far," Duffy said. "I haven't seen one goose; in fact, I've seen only one goose dropping."

Arlington officials attribute the change to a combination of tactics: patrolling of the beach area by a Medford-based border-collie operation; installation of temporary fencing along the length of the 3-foot-high berm that separates the swimming area from the larger reservoir; and goose-egg ad-dling, which prevents the eggs from hatching.

"We've been very aware that the geese in particular can be a nuisance," said Leslie Mayer, a Park and Recreation commissioner and cochairwoman of the Vision 2020 Arlington Reservoir Committee. "They're so territorial and make such a mess. We've been trying to limit the things that make the beach area attractive to them."

Mayer said that both the berm fencing and the border collies —

which are brought to the beach regularly to chase the geese away — were employed last year to try to control the geese population, but were introduced too late in the season to be effective. "This year the fence went up earlier and the dogs came in earlier," she said. Mayer also said a town bylaw that prohibits the feeding of waterfowl may have helped the situation.

Since 2000, the town has also hired employees of the US Department of Agriculture to ad-dle goose eggs on Elizabeth Island, across town in Spy Pond. According to Christine Connelly, director of public health in Arlington, many of the Canada geese at the reservoir are hatched on the island. The ad-dling is done each April, she said; in 2000, 71 eggs were ad-dled; in 2001, 58; last year, 176; and this spring, 148. The town paid \$3,000 this year for the ad-dling, she said.

Although he is pleased so far with the results, Kevin Brooks, waterfront director at the reservoir, said, "It's too early in the season to tell whether [the geese] will stay away." He noted that some geese had returned briefly July 16, and he and his staff herded the 10 or so fowl out the entrance gate and cleaned up their droppings before opening the beach.

Still, Brooks is encouraged. "We haven't seen them in the same numbers we've had in past years,"

he said. "In the past, we've had 50 geese in here at a time."

Not everyone is pleased with the reduction in waterfowl at the beach.

"I personally like the ducks and the geese," said Jo Anne Preston, watching a group of children who were taking swimming lessons. "The idea is not to eliminate nature, but to teach people how to live with it," she said. Having the ducks and geese at the beach, she said, offers "a way to teach your children about nature."

For others, however, the beach is now a friendlier place. Recalling a visit to the reservoir last summer, Brooks Harrelson said he had to warn his children to stay off the grass there because it was so fouled with goose droppings. "Periodically, several gaggles of geese would march around the beach, and you had to stay out of their way, as they can be ferocious," he said. "And they'd leave behind them a line of goose droppings."

This summer, he wrote in a message posted to the Arlington e-mail list, "It was a totally different experience from the last two years. We did not have to pick our way through minefields of goose droppings, and we didn't have to constantly fend off [hordes] of brazen ducks after any little snack, package, or parcel we might have . . . We really appreciated the difference."