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The Geese of Queens: Movement and Management of Canada Geese in Relation to New York City Airports

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Non-migratory Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) populations are increasing and pose a significant threat to civil aviation as aircraft components and engines are not built to withstand the strike of a bird weighing in excess of 4 kg. Since 1995, 10 aircraft have incurred substantial damage after striking Canada geese while landing or departing from LaGuardia (LGA) or John F. Kennedy (JFK) Airports, New York City. As part of a research program to determine the origin of geese that threaten aircraft in New York City, we neck-collared 300 Canada geese within 8 km of either the JFK or LGA in 2006. After 2 years of systematic observations, approximately 39% of the geese were still recorded in the New York City study area. Birds that left have been reported in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. Geese remaining within the study area moved an average of 5 km (range 3 - 15 km) from their original banding locations and had home ranges averaging about 20 km² (range 10 - 30 km²). JFK was within the movement patterns of the marked geese. Two locations within the study were subject to harassment as part of a Canada goose control program conducted by the USDA Wildlife Services (WS) and a private company (Geese Off). Geese in these areas did not leave the study area but moved <5 km from the harassment sites. In addition to the neck-color study, WS conducted a goose removal program at Rikers Island, adjacent to La Guardia Airport from 2004-2008. The number of geese removed from Rikers Island decreased yearly (2004, n=518; 2005, n=288; 2006, n=200; 2007, n=166; 2008, n=77) and the number of goose strikes at La Guardia decreased by 80%. Our study indicates that a) geese within 8 km of the New York City airports do pose a threat to aircraft operating out of

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the airports; b) harassment programs shift geese within an area but do not necessarily reduce the threat; and c) a removal program near LGA did eliminate problematic geese and result in reduced strikes.