

Protection of loons may ultimately depend on cleaning up pollution sources, but more immediate problems can be alleviated. Artificial nest structures have proven successful in reducing swamping of nests. In New England, groups of cottagers have formed associations that actually guard nests from disturbance, in some states backed up by heavy fines for harming loons.



STAGING AREA THREATENED

BY RICHARD YANK

Southern Quebec's most important staging area for Canada Geese is currently threatened by a major agricultural project being proposed by the province's Department of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries.

Lake St. Peter is a large freshwater basin formed by the widening of the St. Lawrence River half-way between Montreal and Quebec City. Extensive marshes, approximately 10,000 ha. in area, line the shores of this shallow lake and provide critical nesting habitat for an important population of waterfowl and other marsh-dwelling species. In addition, the lake's 1,500-2,000 ha. floodplain attracts large numbers of migrating waterfowl which stage there from early April to mid-May each year. Islands at the western end of the lake support one of Quebec's most important heronries.

In late April, at the peak of spring migration, an estimated 70,000-100,000 Canada Geese and 15,000 dabbling ducks can be observed along the south shore of the lake. These birds represent, respectively, 50 and 30% of the migrant population found along the total length of the St. Lawrence.

Current proposals involve a series of dikes along both shores of the lake. Control gates would allow floodwater to enter. At some point the gates would be closed and the accumulated water would be pumped back into the lake. Thus the floodplain could be drained as soon as possible, allowing earlier access to the fields for sowing crops and increasing the length of the growing season.

While the proposed system is preferable to permanent drainage, it is obvious that the management of such a system would be of critical importance in determining the eventual impact on waterfowl. The impact on the balance of this complex ecosystem could be much more severe.

(Richard Yank's report was passed on to the NHS newsletter by Martin K. McNicholl, Chairman of the International Council for Bird Preservation.)