



Title: *“Keeping Company”*

Description: Canada Geese pair, Tūmai.

Photographer: Henrik Moller

Where, when: Hakapupu (Pleasant River estuary), September 2021

Sustainability? My favourite bird at our home at Tūmai, overlooking Te Hakapupu estuary, is the Canada Geese. Their honking announces their approach. Their super-organised classic V formation in flight is a mystery (why can't 20 humans get that well organised for more efficient transport?). They are spectacular and noisy when they land on the water ... and then utterly serene when afloat.

There is something utterly wild in the spirit of geese, perhaps because they evoke images of open spaces and wary vigilance of people, including approaching photographers. I think we are naturally attracted to wildness, but maybe it has become all the more important for us in increasingly urbanised and ecologically dislocated lifestyles. When viewed at dawn, like in this photograph and those that follow, the geese take on a golden and brown glow. The breeding pairs “keep company”, spending a lot of time standing and swimming around together during the breeding season, before the female lays and incubates the egg. The gander maintains guard duties near the nest.

The New Zealand population of Canada Geese primarily descended from an importation of 50 birds in 1905. Many animals were introduced, primarily by the Acclimatisation Society, for hunting and fishing, food and pest control. For example rabbits were introduced for food, and then weasels, stoats and ferrets were introduced to try to control the rabbits that had become pests. Canada Geese are also considered a pest, especially by farmers, because they feed on the tender shoots of grasses and legumes and foul pastures. Farmer advocacy led to the geese being declared a pest, and in 2011 the Canada goose was designated as an unprotected species that can be shot at any time of the year.

It's easy to look back with ecological hindsight and judge these early introductions because of the damage done and the way predation, competition and disease threatens a high proportion of New Zealand's native species. However, these introductions were well-meaning and reflected the way immigrants harked for their own plants and animals from their "home land". Freedom of access and to hunt was also an important part of our social ethos and national dream – a reaction against the way hunting and fishing were monopolised by the wealthy landowners in Britain. Even the "commoners" were to be allowed to enjoy nature and hunter-gathering in this new land of opportunity. We can think of the Acclimatisation Society in their day as a type of Rotary Club, leaders doing their civic duty to enrich New Zealand for the wellbeing of all.

More general lessons from this geese story emerge for me: plants and animals are important parts of our identity our sense of place, and feeling at home; embracing the introduced species as valued wildlife is increasingly; one person's pest is another person's pleasure, so we will need to find accommodations in how they are managed.

Photo notes: Exposure for 1/320s, 600 mm focal length, f/6.3, ISO-200.

I find it difficult to photograph Canada geese because they are "flighty" – they start honking ("Honkers" is their colloquial name) when they spot you approaching, sometimes even though you are 500 m away. Most often they'll take-off long before you are close enough, even with a 600mm lens, to get a decent shot. The photos in this series were taken by getting into position before dawn and lying prone on the sand, using rice bags to support the camera on the ground.

Digital specs: 4,782 x 2,633 pixels (13 MP).

Key words: Canada Geese, *Branta canadensis*, bird, introduced species, naturalised, pest, Henrik Moller, Aotearoa, New Zealand, Sustainability.

Price: \$120 (incl. GST) for use of the digital image.

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Henrik Moller
2 December 2012.

