

Common Carp Crisis

Cootes Paradise Marsh is home to many different types of birds, insects, plants, and fish. The large variety of living things means that Cootes Paradise has a high level of biodiversity. While most of these wild plants and animals live in harmony with the marsh, some species are harmful including the Common Carp.

Because of their size and colour, carp are easy to spot in the shallows of the marsh. They grow quickly and usually weigh between 2 to 11 kilograms. The largest carp can weigh 25 kilograms and measure over one metre long. They have a long dorsal fin on their back, yellow sides, a green back, and a sucker mouth.

Why are carp here? Carp are not native to the marsh. They are a highly valued food source in many cultures, so people have introduced them to places all over the world. In the 19th century, people would catch Atlantic Salmon in Lake Ontario and eat it as part of their diet. Because of this, the number of Atlantic Salmon declined, and a new food source was needed. Humans brought Common Carp here to help control algae in sewage ponds and introduced it to our lakes as a food source. Today, the carp live in all the Great Lakes and throughout much of North America.

Invasive species is a term used to describe living things that are introduced by humans and have a negative impact on the new



environment. Carp have been introduced, but how do they damage the marsh?

The eating behaviour of carp contributes to the destruction of the marsh. When they feed, a carp forces its face into the mud using their sucker-mouth to suck in the bottom material. They suck up the worms, insects, and molluscs they like to eat and spit the soil back into the water. This eating behaviour uproots wetland plants. It also stirs up the bottom of the marsh, making the water muddy and blocking sunshine from reaching underwater plants.

Carp also destroy the marsh through their spawning behaviour. Each spring, as water temperatures rise, groups of adult carp gather in the marsh. During spawning, a female thrashes about and scatters her eggs onto the submerged plants. She is chased by up to 20 males who want to be the first to fertilize the eggs. The large carp push their way through the plants, crushing and uprooting them. This frantic action can also crush other small animals that live in the marsh.

As a result, it is important to find a way to keep carp out of Cootes Paradise for the good of the whole marsh environment. Without them, wetland plants will grow and the water becomes clear, which improves the marsh ecosystem for all other plants and animals.

Check your comprehension

- 1) What are some of the physical characteristics of a Common Carp?
- 2) Why were Common Carp introduced to the Great Lakes?
- 3) Why are Common Carp considered invasive species?
- 4) The text mentions two types of carp behaviour that damage the marsh. What are they?
- 5) Why is keeping the marsh free of Common Carp important for the plants that live in the Cootes Paradise Marsh?
- 6) Imagine that you are writing a letter to RBG's Natural Lands department suggesting the best way to solve the carp problem. What would you suggest and why?