

photos by STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Birds of a feather flock together this time of the year when the Canada geese take over Jack Miner's Bird Sanctuary in Ontario.

By Sue Mason  
staff writer

**Honk. Honk.**  
Near Kingsville, Ontario, it's not the sound of cars you hear, but the melodic cry of Canada geese come October and late February.  
The geese reign supreme at Jack Miner's Bird Sanctuary during their migratory flights to warm regions in late fall and their northerly summer homes around Hudson Bay in early spring.

At the peak of migrations some 30,000 to 40,000 geese stop at the sanctuary, gobbling down 5,400 bushels of corn and 10 tons of barley and putting on aerial displays that attract bird watchers from far and near.

A VISIT to the sanctuary is like a step back in time. Geese are attracted to the 400-acre site in the same way they did when Jack started the sanctuary in 1904, and the fowl are caught for banding in the same pens used when Jack happened on the idea of tracking the birds' flights.

But don't expect to see wide expanses of water and a lack of civilization. The sanctuary encompasses Miner's old brick-and-tile factory and family home. An old stable serves as a museum, and the birds' favorite resting place is across the street from the homestead.

"On weekends we have big crowds," said Jasper Miner, the only living son of the sanctuary's founder. "We'll have cars lined up for a mile on both sides of the road."

It wasn't by chance that Miner, a native of Dover

## Wild-geese chase Sanctuary a haunt for honkers

Center, Ohio, ended up with property popular with the geese. He attracted them.

IN 1904 he bought seven geese from a farmer, clipped their wings and put them in a pond that had been a clay pit for his tile factory. It took four years before 13 wild geese landed there for a rest.

But the sanctuary wasn't a haven in its early years. Of the first 11 feathered visitors, five were killed by Jack's neighbors. Even Miner, himself an avid hunter, occasionally shot geese for sport.

But in 1911, Miner decided to make his property

off limits for hunting, and it became a sanctuary for the geese and other wild fowl.

As more and more birds began to stop at the sanctuary, Miner turned to the lecture circuit to raise money to keep it going. His son, Manley, served as his business manager, and his speaking engagements took him throughout the United States and Canada.

His work attracted the attention of auto pioneer Henry Ford, who paid for the original photographs of the geese that were used to illustrate Miner's lectures.

By 1931 the Jack Miner Migratory Bird Foundation was established in both Canada and Michigan so that charitable contributions could be channeled into it. Today it takes \$250,000 a year to maintain the sanctuary.

Miner died in 1944, but the work he started has been carried on by his family. Jasper is an affable tour guide, quick to recount stories of the early days of the sanctuary, when visitors sat on top of barns to watch Miner band geese. His son Kirk left a job in industry in the early 1980s to help.

THE GEESE begin arriving at the sanctuary in mid-October and stay there until the first heavy snowfall in early December.

The geese feed at the sanctuary in the early morning and evening. Many spend their day in the field across from Miner's home, while some venture out for the three-mile trip to nearby Lake Erie.

For bird watchers the viewing is at its best at 3 and 4 p.m. That's when the Miners take to three-wheeled all-terrain vehicles to drive through the resting areas and force the flock to fly — for some exercise, Kirk explained.

The birds take to the air in a breathtaking 10-minute aerial display. The air shows, so to speak, are staged between Oct. 15 and Nov. 15 and involve between 20,000 and 30,000 geese.

The sanctuary includes a small pond for ducks and geese that are crippled and can no longer fly. Visitors, especially children, are encouraged to feed the birds barley, kept in a small shed within the enclosed area.

THE FACTORY building has been turned into a corn crib to store feed for the geese and a glass-enclosed stadium has been erected facing the ponds so visitors can watch the banding, done seven to 10 times during the geese's visit.

The sanctuary has banded more than 85,000 birds, and the Miner Museum displays jars filled with the metal bands that have been returned by hunters from 24 states and five Canadian provinces.

The museum is filled with Jack Miner memorabilia — the red and green clothing he wore on his lecture tours, gifts from supporters such as baseball great Ty Cobb and letters from Ford and Thomas Edison.

"Saturdays are really hectic when the geese are here," Jasper said. "You could get elbowed to death in the museum it's so filled with people."

Not far from where the geese land are the graves of Miner and his wife, Laona, and a few hundred feet from the sanctuary proper is the original Miner home, Heritage House, open to visitors only two days a year, the Saturday and Sunday closest to April 10, Miner's birthday.

There's also a stand of trees near the house called Kennedy Woods where visitors can enjoy a picnic lunch.

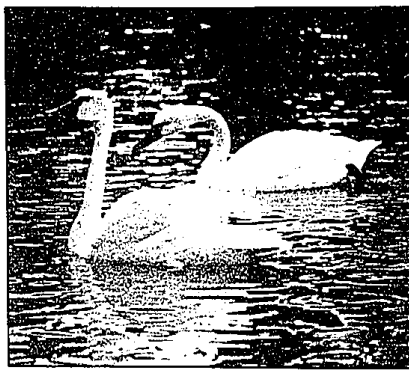
While geese are the main attraction at the sanctuary, there's plenty of other wildlife to see. Pens line the sanctuary along the road, filled with multicolored pheasants. One pen is home for an injured golden eagle.

THE SANCTUARY also has proven to be a popular resting place for wild ducks — pintail, wood, canvasback, mallard and blue teal. The later species' arrival is the first indication of the changing seasons. They are the first birds to arrive and the first to leave, Kirk said.

The Miners also raise bobwhite quail with help of students in Windsor-area schools. Each spring the Miners take the quail eggs to the schools, where the students incubate them. The young chicks are returned to the sanctuary and kept to raise the next brood, while their parents are released in the wild.

The Miners are proud of the sanctuary's success, especially considering its founder never completed school. It has served as a model for other sanctuaries throughout the United States.

"There's all this talk about wetlands preservation, but there's never any mention of food," Jasper said. "You have to have food, water and protection. If you don't have all three, it won't work."



Canada geese aren't the only ones making a splash at the sanctuary. Other wildfowl, such as these swans, also get into the swim of things.

### Wild geese won't be calling much longer

If you want to see the Canada geese at their most abundant, you'd better hurry.  
Next weekend is the last peak weekend for geese watching at the Jack Miner Bird Sanctuary.

The grounds of the sanctuary are open to the public Monday through Saturday, and the aerial displays are at 3 and 4 p.m. daily, weather permitting.

Getting to the sanctuary isn't difficult, but the best way is to follow Kirk Miner's directions:

Take the Ambassador Bridge to Canada. After leaving the bridge, follow the signs to Highway 3 and stay on the highway until the Road 29-Kingsville exit. Turn right and go three miles until you see the sign for the sanctuary. Turn right at the street with a Sunoco gas station on the corner, and you'll find the sanctuary about a mile down the road.  
For an update on the geese's arrival, call (519) 733-4043.



What's good for the goose is good for the gander when it comes to fowl food. Here little Shane Fowler gives the geese some grub.