

Invasive goldfish may harm breeding of Arboretum's toads and frogs: resident

The farm pond in the Aurora Arboretum is a favourite strolling spot for Robert White.

A nature enthusiast from his earliest memory, he's always had an affinity for toads and frogs, and this pond is a prime breeding location for the amphibians in one of the Town's most expansive green spaces.

Each spring, he regularly checks the pond for activities, eagerly anticipating breeding season and being able to watch the population grow from tadpole to adulthood ? but a routine check-in last week left him alarmed.

What he saw were ?more than three dozen? invasive goldfish populating the pond.

Whether they were put there by someone wanting to offload some unwanted pets or deliberately knowing they are an invasive species is unclear. But, from White's perspective, what is certain is the future of the pond is anything but.

?I have monitored that pond probably close to 10 years, so I always look forward to it every spring,? he tells The Auroran. ?I went to check to see if they happened to arrive yet ? I didn't think they would have because they usually arrive at the beginning of May, but with this weather, you never know. That is going to have a very negative impact on the tadpole population in there.?

White says he immediately alerted the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, who referred him to the Ministry of Natural Resources. He also reached out to the Town of Aurora, who connected him with the Arboretum, but he says he's still waiting for follow-up.

?I am hoping something gets done about it sooner rather than later because in two weeks the toads are going to arrive and they will all be breeding there,? says White. ?The tadpoles take less than a month to develop and then there are going to be tadpoles all over that pond and they are just going to get picked off by the goldfish.?

White doesn't know just when his fascination with amphibians was first sparked, but the Brampton native recalls going from house to house as a child ?rescuing? toads that had become trapped in neighbourhood window wells.

When he discovered the pond in the Arboretum, especially as it allows you to go right up to the edge of the water and get a ?bird's eye view? of the growth, he couldn't help but be a repeat visitor.

?Right after the tadpoles fully develop, there are baby toads everywhere. There must be hundreds and hundreds of them that get run over by bikes and people walking,? he says. ?I've always wondered if they could ever get the Town to seal off that pond for a week or two when the toads are still emerging. It's sad to see these little, tiny defenceless toads [out there]. People don't even notice them; they just walk right over them.

?The toads survive, they have a population there, but that is what I am worried about. If these goldfish start hammering off all the tadpoles, that can have a real impact on the toads' population numbers. It is not just the toads; there are also leopard frogs, green frogs, and bullfrogs that inhabit that pond. It's not good. The goldfish will absolutely eat the tadpoles. Worst case scenario, I'll get out there with a rod and a pole and try to get some of them out myself because they are invasive species. They don't belong there. That's the point and I think somebody intentionally released them so they could go and feed them, gaze at them or whatever. If they are not removed immediately, I am going to monitor it all.?

The Town of Aurora says they are aware of the Issue and working with partners to address It.

?We are aware of the concerns around the sighting of invasive species within the Arboretum farm pond and are working with regulatory agencies to mitigate the potential impacts of the goldfish,? said Carley Smith, Manager of Corporate Communications for

the Town of Aurora. ?We have reached out to local regulatory agencies and will proceed accordingly.

?I'd love to take the opportunity to remind residents that releasing of any fish, particularly invasive species such as goldfish is not permitted in any ponds or watercourses in Aurora, and doing so can have detrimental negative ecological impacts to aquatic habitat.?

The Aurora Community Arboretum had not responded to requests for comment at press time.

By Brock Weir