

# Catching The Air Show At Fermilab

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>From my vantage point, the world's busiest airport is not O'Hare but a beautiful lagoon in the 6,800-acre wonderland of Fermi National Laboratory.

Every evening around 4:30, the horizon is crowded with squadrons of aerodynamically perfect flying machines floating down from the sky, converging on this one small landing area.

No accident has ever been reported, even though there is no control tower, and no company of nervous air traffic controllers radios instructions. These flying objects relate to each other in such perfect harmony that no one ever worries about them striking panic on radar screens.

These astonishing winged creations are the Canada geese who choose to spend the winter making this warm pond at Fermilab, not far from O'Hare, their airdrome.

There seem to be more of them this winter than ever before. Some estimate that 7,000 of these wondrous creatures have changed their migratory patterns because of Fermilab's pond, hospitably warmed by its particle accelerator.

As dusk falls over this densely crowded airport, an observer can detect none of the usual support systems. There are no lights, hangars or refueling vehicles. There is no shelter from the icy slashings of wintry winds.

Peering through the semidarkness, one can see, on the natural runways and taxiways, this airport's fleet hunkered down for the night. Walking along the roadway, one still catches a cacophony of sounds.

But early in the morning there is a mighty rush of flexing wings as great squadrons lift off, soaring into the sky and quickly forming into an incredible number of majestic V-formations high above the earth, emitting sounds of triumphant honking.

Gliding on the winds, swooping and wheeling through the vast open spaces, their airport is left far below and far behind.

When I was a boy, my family took me on Sunday afternoons out to the airport in Decatur so I could marvel at the clumsy-looking biplanes taking off and landing on a grassy runway. I never wanted to go home.

Sixty years later I am still wonder-struck when viewing O'Hare's daily air circus. But every day now, as I drive from Batavia through Fermilab, I am more in awe of this air show.

I keep thinking: ``These geese must know something that we don't``

Then I remember that it is they who inspired earthbound mortals to construct mechanical birds with wings so that we, too, could soar above the earth.