



# WAYS TO REDUCE DAMAGE TO YOUR PROPERTY CAUSED BY THE CANADA GOOSE

*prepared & distributed by Upper Dublin Township Fall 2000  
in consultation with "The Goose Guys" (waterfowl management experts)*

The Canada goose population in our urban and suburban parks has become a large problem across the United States. Damage caused by "resident" geese to public property -- lakeshores, golf courses and sports fields -- as well as to private property has been severe. The cost of cleaning up facilities has also been great in terms of labor and supplies.

There are a number of ways to discourage Canada geese from using your property as a refuge. No single method is considered the "best method." Methods used are based on regional variables such as seasonal / temperature differences, flock numbers, size of property and presence of water. Applying the right combination of control methods in a cycle of implementation, observation and modification seems to give the best results.

The following information is provided to private property owners as a means of supplying background on the problem; as well as suggestions for coping with the presence of the Canada goose at various times throughout the year.

## **Canada Goose Biology**

There are 11 sub-species of the Canada goose. The sub-species causing us concern is *Branta Canadensis Maxima*, the "Giant Canada goose." This group, the largest of the sub-species, was thought to be extinct until re-discovered in the late 1960's in Minnesota.

Great efforts were then made to re-establish the "Giant." The United States Fish and Wildlife Service, state wildlife agencies and organizations such as Ducks Unlimited started a massive breeding program at state and federal wildlife refuge areas. Pairs of geese had their wings clipped, thereby allowing them to give birth to and raise generations of young in one area. These offspring were then imprinted to return each spring to their birth sites to raise their own generations of young. Considered a huge success; we are now facing the effects of this program.

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### **Biology...continued**

Why have the geese lost their biological impulse to migrate? Besides protection from game-hunters, the geese have been encouraged by the spread of suburban developments, corporate parks and recreational sites. Canada geese prefer the cut short, manicured grass found on golf courses and in parks and on lawns over the wild tundra of Canada. These shorter grasses, besides providing a plentiful source of food, afford the geese security -- they can better monitor predators with the clearer views. Furthermore, the pools and ponds that normally accompany these developments are perfect sources of still drinking water.

In a short time, the Canada goose learned that the environment created by humans was much closer to "goose paradise" than they would ever experience in Canada...with its extreme cold and food source blanketing snows...and chose to stay; thereby becoming "resident" geese.

### **The Birds & Bees of "Resident" Canada Geese**

The lack of, or low exposure to, hunting during the fall and winter has further contributed to high survival of "resident" Canada geese relative of "migrant" geese. In addition, the "resident" Canada geese live longer, perhaps 15-20 years. They breed earlier (at 2-3 years of age) and produce larger clutches of eggs (5-10) due to lack of predators, such as foxes. A female "resident" goose can produce as many as 100 young in her lifetime.

Geese will pair up for breeding season in late February or early March. Once the pair has bred, they will select a suitable site to nest. This area is usually close to shallow water with vegetation to conceal the female as she incubates the eggs. These sites include the back end of coves on lakes, weeds and other types of landscape beds. The pair becomes very aggressive in encounters with humans in the vicinity of the nest.

### **What's the problem?**

While the complacency of these beautiful birds may be of interest to naturalists, the Canada goose has been a nightmare for farmers, golf courses, public parks and recreation service providers, and tourists. Some issues created by nuisance geese are:

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- \* invade local farms and eat budding crops
- \* compete with sheep and other livestock for grazing land  
= **increased spending on fertilizer and feedstuffs**
  
- \* damage to golf greens and fairways
- \* damage to play fields
- \* damage to stream banks and shore lines
- \* overgrazed and denuded suburban lawns
- \* undesirable accumulations of droppings and feathers
- \* fouling of reservoirs and swimming facilities  
= **increased spending to clean and/or re-establish these areas**
  
- \* road hazards
- \* slipping hazard created by slick goose manure
- \* geese attack anyone approaching their nests  
= **increased liability**

**PLEASE NOTE:** The Center for Disease Control (CDC) indicates that no human illnesses have been attributed to the presence of Canada geese in the suburban setting.

### **What state and federal protection is given to Canada geese?**

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service under **the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918** and the **Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929** protect Canada geese. The former, the implementation of a 1916 convention signed by the United States and Canada, prohibits the hunting, possessing, purchasing and exporting of migratory birds "or any part, or egg of such bird." The Migratory Bird Conservation Act authorizes the funding and maintenance of wild migratory bird refuges. State law also protects Canada geese.

### **What can be done to discourage Canada geese...legally?**

There are a number of techniques that are effective in discouraging Canada geese from settling in your area or on your property. Importantly, these methods should be used in combination with one another since geese will quickly become accustomed to any single technique.

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Initiate goose control techniques as soon as you notice geese in your area. Once geese become established, they become more tolerant of disturbances and are reluctant to leave. Persistent application of a combination of methods yields the best results. Suggested methods are:

- \* Discontinue feeding
- \* Barriers &/or Modify Habitat
- \* Sport Hunting
- \* Trap & Transfer
- \* Use Decoys
- \* Install Scarecrows
- \* Use "Bird Scaring" Reflective Tape
- \* Harassment / Scare Tactics
- \* Population Control Measures
- \* Depredation Permit

**PLEASE NOTE: NEVER destroy a Canada goose, its nest or its egg(s) without a permit...*they are protected by federal law.***

### **Discontinue feeding**

Stop all feeding of ducks and geese, both wild and domestic. Well-fed, non-migratory geese serve as decoys for wild birds and cause large numbers of wild geese and ducks to congregate in unnatural concentrations. Once feeding by humans is discontinued, geese will be forced to revert to natural foods. In most instances, they will move elsewhere. Feeding must cease before any of the following techniques will be effective.

### **Sport Hunting**

Licensed and permitted hunters participate in established special Canada goose hunting seasons developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the PA Game Commission to reduce damage problems associated with local populations. In Pennsylvania, special early hunting seasons are in September and January / February. All waterfowl hunters are required to possess a state hunting and waterfowl stamp as well as a federal migratory bird stamp. LOCAL HUNTING REGULATIONS APPLY.

### **Trap & Transfer**

This is completed during the molting season. Molting is when the adult geese shed their old feathers and grow new feathers for the year. The adults and young are unable to fly during this period that usually lasts up to a month (usually sometime May to late July). This is the opportunity to round up the geese and

move them to another area. Geese are "rounded up" and then placed in transportation cages and driven to a new home.

### **Barriers &/or Modify Habitat**

**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT:** Geese are grazers and require short, green grass for food. Where grass is allowed to grow long, geese will cease to feed. Wherever possible, allow grass to grow longer along water bodies so that it is unpalatable to geese. This also discourages new growth. Along water edges, plant less attractive vegetation than grass such as pachysandra, periwinkle and Euonymus.

Geese prefer to build nests on islands, peninsulas and undisturbed grounds. During landscaping, do not create small islands or peninsulas in ponds; where these features already exist, consider changes to make these areas unavailable to waterfowl.

**WATER MANAGEMENT:** To diminish the attractiveness of a lake or pond, construct a grid of suspended wires over the water to deny the birds access to the surface. Grids can be made of single strand of #14 wire or 80-100 pound monofilament line arranged in 10-15 foot squares. Each wire must be secured so that it remains 12-18" above the water surface. This method does not work well on ducks.

The installation of grid lines over ponds and lakes should only be initiated outside of the goose molting period that occurs during June and July in Pennsylvania. Installation of grids during the molt is not recommended. Install grids early in the spring (March/April) or during the late summer (August). This will reduce the likelihood of potential harm to geese who are flightless and have no access to water.

**FENCING:** Geese prefer to land on water and walk up onto adjacent grassy areas to feed and rest. Fences, hedge rows and other physical barriers may control geese movement between water and lawn areas. All fences should completely enclose the site with no breaks for geese to sneak through. To be effective, fences need only to be about two feet tall and solidly constructed. Chicken wire fencing of 1.5"-2" mesh is durable and will last many years. Less expensive plastic and nylon netting is also available but will probably have to be replaced more often. Some homeowners have found that a fence made of two parallel monofilament fish lines (20-pound test) strung 6" to 12" above the ground level and secured by stakes (at 6' intervals) is quite successful in excluding geese. Fences may be beautified or hidden by planting hedges of boxwood or privet.

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**BALLOONS:** Canada geese are reluctant to linger beneath an object hovering above them. Large balloons, 30" in diameter, filled with helium and tethered on a 40'-50' monofilament-fishing line (50-70 pound test) will keep geese from feeding and resting on lawns. Balloons should be located where they will not become entangled with tree branches, power lines, etc. One balloon will suffice for each 5 acres of open lawn. Use light colored balloons if geese are present at dawn/dusk. Large eyespots, located so that two are always visible from any directions, will increase a balloon's effectiveness. Periodic relocation of balloons is recommended. Eye-spot balloons may be "home-made" from party balloons or may be ready-purchased.

### **GOOSE REPELLENTS:**

Either of the following is water-soluble and has to be re-applied many times.

- (1) Re-JeX-iT? (methly-anthranilate) is a non-toxic taste aversion agent that renders food sources unpalatable to geese. Chemical repellent formulations of Re-JeX-iT? may be applied to turf and water in accordance with label directions, to deter geese from feeding on vegetation and presence on bodies of water. Three commercial formulations may be used:
- (a) Re-JeX-iT? AG-36 is aqueous slurry that is mixed with water for uses on turf (lawns, golf courses, parks, etc.)
  - (b) Re-JeX-iT? AP-50 is a free-flowing wettable powder for use on temporary pools of water on airports and landfills.
  - (c) Re-JeX-iT? TP-40 is a liquid formulation for use on non-fishbearing bodies of water at landfills, tailing ponds and commercial/industrial impoundments.

**NOTE: Re-JeX-iT? is an expensive product -- contact RJ Advantage (800) 423-2473**

(2) The City of Mentor, OH uses **Grape Kool-Aid** on its lawn areas. There is a chemical in it that deters the geese and makes the grass less palatable.

### **Use Decoys**

Use of owl, swan and dead goose decoys is effective for areas around shelters or lakeshores. The **owl** decoys are a deterrent as a predator to the geese. The **swan** decoys are natural territorial enemies to the geese. **Dead goose** decoys are a deterrent to the geese as a sign that the area is not safe.

### **Install Scarecrows**

Scarecrows are a traditional method of controlling birds. They do not have to accurately resemble human form, but some part of the scarecrow should move. A loose sack or straw or a plastic streamer or flags that rustle and move in the breeze may discourage geese, if properly placed in the problem area and periodically relocated. White or black plastic trash bags can be cut into 2'x3' sheets and attached to wooden laths or poles. Place the stake in the ground at

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an angle so the flag moves in even the slightest breeze. Flags can be placed on your lawn or along the water's edge (1 per 25 linear feet of frontage).

### **Use "Bird Scaring" Reflective Tape**

Mylar tape reflects sunlight to produce a flashing effect. When a breeze causes the tape to stretch, it pulsates and produces a humming noise that repels birds. This product comes in either 1/2" or 6" width rolls. To discourage geese from walking up onto lawns from the water, string reflective tape along the water's edge. To ensure maximum reflection and noise production, leave some slack in the tape and twist the material as you string it from stake to stake. The tape should be strung about 2' about the ground around the perimeter of the area you want to protect.

### **Harassment / Scare Tactics**

**TRAINED DOGS:** Viewed by the geese as predators, Border Collies, various types of Retrievers and other breeds of trained dogs are used successfully to harass geese away from lawns, fields and ponds. No federal or state permits are required to harass geese with dogs. Dog owners are liable if geese are killed or injured. Routine harassment is required for long-term effect.

**PYROTECHNICS: OBTAIN ALL NECESSARY PERMITS BEFORE EMPLOYING THIS TECHNIQUE! CHECK ALL LOCAL AND STATE REGULATIONS GOVERNING POSSESSION OF FIREARMS AND THEIR DISCHARGE.** A federal permit is not necessary to harass waterfowl as long as the bird is not injured or killed, and is not nesting. Using shellcrackers when geese first come into an area can persuade them to go elsewhere.

Geese may also be discouraged from an area through use of other pyrotechnics such as "screamer sirens," "bird-bangers" and "whistle bombs." These devices are fired from a relatively inexpensive hand-held starter pistol and have a range of 25-30 yards. In some states this equipment may be considered a hand gun and its purchase and use are regulated. **Check and comply with rules and regulations established by local/state law enforcement agencies.**

### **Population Control Measures**

Residents may apply to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (413-253-8698) and the PA Game Commission (717-787-4250) for permits to control nuisance Canada goose populations through control of reproduction. Goose reproduction could be reduced or eliminated through treatment of eggs (spraying; addling) or removal of nests and eggs.

### **Depredation Permit**

Licensed and permitted hunters will participate in established special Canada goose hunting seasons developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the PA Game Commission to reduce damage problems associated with local populations of resident Canada geese. In Pennsylvania, special early hunting seasons are in September and January/February. All waterfowl hunters are required to possess a State hunting and waterfowl stamp as well as a Federal Migratory Bird Stamp.

### **SUPPLIERS**

The following companies supply spray repellents, pyrotechnics, Mylar tapes and flagging, automatic cannons, and other devices used to deter geese. *This list is for your convenience and is not an endorsement of the companies or the products.*

#### **Forestry Supplies, Inc.**

Jackson, MS

(800) 647-5368

[www.forestry-suppliers.com](http://www.forestry-suppliers.com)

#### **Bird-X, Inc.**

Chicago, IL

(800) 662-5021

[www.bird-x.com](http://www.bird-x.com)

#### **Geese B. Gone, Inc.**

Middleburg, VA

[www.GeeseBGone.com](http://www.GeeseBGone.com)

#### **Dead Goose Decoys, Inc.**

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

(416) 240-8702

[www.deadduckdecoy.com](http://www.deadduckdecoy.com)

#### **Bird Busters**

Washington, DC

(800) NO-BIRDS

#### **Reed-Joseph International Co.,**

Greenville, MS

(800) 647-5554