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## FOCUS ON BIRD CONTROL: Duck Duck Goose

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What animal is highly mobile, urbanized, has experienced a phenomenal population expansion in recent years, produces about a pound of fecal material a day and has become an ever increasing concern for airports, office parks, golf courses, water treatment facilities, as well as retirement and residential communities? Of course you've guessed it by the title; the "resident" Canada goose! Here we'll take a look at some of the biology, habits, concerns, controversy and possible solutions in dealing with this "large feathered pest species."

**WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS.** Understanding wildlife management concepts should be second nature to structural pest management professionals. What most animals need to live and reproduce successfully are food, water, shelter (or suitable habitat) and desirable climate. With many pest management programs implemented for structural pests, it is necessary to modify the "attractive conditions" that have contributed to their presence in order to obtain long-term control or elimination. This same concept holds true when dealing with the potential for repopulation of a site by offending wildlife.

**CANADA GOOSE BIOLOGY.** According to *Managing Canada Geese in Urban Environments* by Smith, Craven, & Lewis, Canada geese can range in size from 3 to 15 pounds depending on the subspecies and race. "Canada geese usually begin nesting at three years of age and the adult female will lay from 1 to 15 eggs," the text says. Nests are normally constructed near water and the eggs are incubated for about one month. Once the clutch of eggs hatch, the young will stay with their parents and feed primarily on grasses. Canada geese prefer to feed in open areas that provide good visibility near water sources. Each year all adult Canada geese molt and lose their ability to fly for several weeks during the summer. After the young and adults begin flying later in the summer, an increase in feeding often occurs in open grassed areas away from water sources, such as athletic fields and office parks.

Canada geese were known to nest and breed traditionally in the far northern areas of North America and migrate in large numbers each winter. Throughout the past several decades, local populations of geese scattered throughout the country have discontinued this annual migration and established rapidly expanding populations of "resident geese." Unlike their migrating "cousins," these resident geese are "imprinted" on the local areas where they were born and will often live and feed their entire lives in a relatively small area. Due to limited predatory and hunting pressures, combined with expansive grassed "feeding areas," these resident Canada geese populations are currently thriving in many urban areas throughout the United States.

Control and even harassment of Canada geese in urban settings can be controversial and serious thought should be given as to what options are available, as well as the potential repercussions

with the public prior to program implementation. It's been said that "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." I think it is fair to say that many folks observing a flight of geese flying in formation or settling into a pond find this a majestic sight to watch. On the other hand, if you are the grounds superintendent managing the property where that pond is located, one might receive a differing opinion of observing this "majestic sight."

**VISUAL REPELLENTS.** A wide variety of "visual" repellents have been used in the past to attempt to keep Canada geese from various areas. In my opinion, typically, "scare type" balloons and Mylar™ "flash tape" have had temporary or minimal success when used on a large scale. Recently there has been a new laser device that has come to market that promotes its use for bird behavior modification during low light conditions. In some situations, individuals have used "dead geese" decoys in an attempt to repel Canada geese from bodies of water with minimal success.

Richard Berman, Waltham Services, Waltham, Mass., has worked with the maintenance staff of several office parks in his area with coyote archery targets as visual repellents for Canada geese. These archery targets appear lifelike and are moved regularly to various locations on the property where geese have been known to fly into the area to feed. To date, the use of the coyote targets has proven successful for several of Waltham's clients.

**FEEDING DETERRENTS.** Currently there are several commercial products available that are designed to be applied directly to turf and act as feeding deterrents to geese. At least one product also has a UV coloring agent that, according to the manufacturer, the geese are able to see and associate with an area that has been treated with the feeding deterrent.

Chris Crammer, Crammer Pest Control, Rock Hill, S.C., has had good success with the application of feeding deterrents at several office parks. Crammer said that it is important to work closely with the grounds maintenance staff in timing applications with mowing and watering schedules. At one specific site, Crammer reported a flock of about 50 geese present last year being reduced to just two geese this year following the implementation of a feeding deterrent program.

Todd Menkee, USDA Wildlife Services, says studies have been conducted by USDA with the application of lime as a feeding deterrent for Canada geese.

**EXCLUSION.** A more permanent solution to Canada goose management on ponds or lakes is exclusion. Denying the geese direct access to the water can occur in two general ways. The first exclusion technique involves the use of obstructions at the shoreline. This process involves the planting of certain types of vegetation or installation of fencing. Typically Canada geese prefer to have direct access from the water to walk onto the shoreline. If a fence is present at the shoreline then this obstruction can prove successful in limiting the presence of geese on the property.

When Canada goose access denial to a water source is required, then serious consideration should also be given to the installation of an overhead "grid system" in conjunction with a perimeter fence. According to a paper published by Martin Lowney titled, *Excluding Non-Migratory Canada Geese With Overhead Wire Grids*, the author reported that he was successful in altering geese behavior at several sites. During his study, Lowney found that the use of 0.05-inch diameter Kevlar line attached to steel posts and stretched at 8.3 meter distance intervals in conjunction with a perimeter fence consisting of two strands of line at heights of 20 and 35 centimeters proved the most effective in repelling geese. It was also found that both polypropylene line and stainless steel wire required a much higher degree of maintenance due to line stretch or breaking.

**HARASSMENT.** The use of pyrotechnics such as "screamers and boomers" or carbide cannons can provide some temporary disruption to the presence of resident Canada geese. Unfortunately, over a fairly short period of time, the geese often become accustomed to the noises and can lose their fear of these disruptions making the effectiveness of these products minimally successful. In some situations, the use of motorized miniature planes or boats have been used with limited

success in repelling geese from specific areas. While temporarily effective, the use of these devices requires frequent visits in order to repel geese.

In recent years, dog trainers have been working with several breeds of dogs for the sole purpose of pursuing and harassing Canada geese. In many areas of the country there are individuals that have "working geese dogs" for hire that will implement programs to repel geese from specific properties. There are also individuals who sell and/or lease trained "geese dogs" to properties, such as golf courses where the groundskeeping staff works with the dog(s) on a regular basis. As with other harassment techniques, the use of dogs often requires repeated "follow-up" visits in order to keep the geese from repopulating the area.

**POPULATION REDUCTION.** During the early summer period when Canada geese are molting their primary flight feathers, the geese are unable to fly. At this time it is possible to literally conduct "goose roundups." About seven or eight years ago I had the opportunity to participate in a "goose roundup" that was conducted by a group from the USDA Wildlife Services at a local golf course. In this particular situation, about 125 geese were captured and transported for release in another state several hundred miles away. Unfortunately, like in my home state of North Carolina, it didn't take long until the wildlife department from that state discontinued this release program because they had more geese than they needed. Currently there are few areas in the United States where it is practical to relocate "resident geese" that will be far enough away from the original point of capture or other urbanized areas to avoid conflict. In some areas of the country, goose roundups have occurred and the geese have been euthanized and then their meat processed and sent to food banks. Unfortunately, this practice can prove controversial with certain segments of the public.

The publication *Managing Canada Geese in Urban Environments* states that, "If the nest of a Canada goose is destroyed, the eggs eaten by predators or the eggs removed from the nest, the geese may renest." In certain situations, isolated populations of resident Canada Geese can be somewhat "stabilized" by egg addling. This technique involves one of several techniques that will kill the embryo in the egg prior to hatching. Techniques include pricking the eggs, shaking the eggs or coating the eggs with oil. If the eggs are placed back in the nest then the mother goose will attempt to hatch these eggs unsuccessfully and not renest that season.

Keep in mind that Canada geese are federally protected and the manipulation of nests, eggs, removal or relocation of adult geese or killing of geese all require a federal permit that must first be obtained through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services.

Recreational hunting for Canada geese may have some limited impact on certain localized resident goose populations. In many situations these geese, unlike their migratory "cousins," are often present in urban areas closed to hunting or "retreat" to these areas after exposure to hunting pressure.

**SUMMARY.** It looks like the odds of being called in to deal with a "resident" Canada goose concern at the property of one of your clients are increasing every year. When you do receive these calls you must first determine if this is a project that you have the resources and expertise to address. If you do decide to take on this challenge you should closely evaluate the site and options that are available. From there you should be ready to educate and advise your client and implement your program to solve the concern created by this "large feathered pest species."

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#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION...**

A video that can be used for educational presentations about Canada geese, titled *Suburban*

Goose Management — Searching for Balance, has been produced by Cornell University Cooperative Extension. Cornell has also published an excellent 42-page guide titled “Managing Canada Geese in Urban Environments.” Both the video and guide are available at <http://www.pctonline.com/store/productDetail.asp?CatId=2&SubCatId=5&Id=55>.

In addition, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service offers a handout titled Caution: Feeding Waterfowl May be Harmful. That handout is available at [www.pctonline.com/gooseinfo](http://www.pctonline.com/gooseinfo) or [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

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