

# Getting Along with Geese



## Situations:

- Their abundant droppings can create problems in parks and on golf courses and athletic fields.
- Concentrations of geese can create problems with shoreline erosion, habitat degradation, and water quality issues caused by their droppings.
- Geese can be very defensive when nesting, and if they nest near buildings and sidewalks they can become a nuisance and even a hazard to human safety when they defend their nest from unwitting passers-by.

## Why This Happens:

Once thought to be extinct, the non-migratory "Giant" race of Canada Geese was "rediscovered" in small numbers a few decades ago and thereafter transplanted widely across the US. Generations of their offspring have adapted to living happily in suburban and even urban habitats, grazing on the lush green lawns and swimming in the shallow ponds often found in these areas.

## FAQs and Humane Solutions:

### ***"Is it OK if I feed the geese in the park?"***

Feeding the geese encourages them to remain and concentrate in areas where their presence may be creating problems. This also makes them more prone to spreading diseases amongst themselves, to other wildlife, and even to humans.

The geese generally don't need handouts from people to survive. These geese are adapted to grazing on lush vegetation, such as grasses, and the large amounts of bread, corn, and similar foods people usually offer are of questionable nutritional value for the geese.



*Canada geese are grazers, and prefer the lush, mown and often fertilized grass in parks, and on golf courses and lawns.*



*Geese can cause shoreline erosion around ponds and on river banks.*

In an attempt to control various nuisance problems caused by geese, some municipalities, parks, and neighborhood associations have established ordinances or rules which forbid people from feeding geese. So if you insist on feeding geese, in order to avoid being fined, it's a good idea to check your local ordinances and site-specific rules before you do so

***"I live across the street from a park and geese often come over into my yard from the park. They leave so much of their poo behind that my children can't even play in our yard. What can I do?"***

There are a number of ways you can go about humanely resolving problems involving Canada geese. There is no one method that works in every situation. ***Utilizing a combination of approaches*** should help boost the success of your problem-solving efforts.

**Altering habitat** is considered the most effective long term approach to discouraging geese from an area. Methods include:

**Visual barriers** – For grazing, geese prefer a large, unobstructed lawn in close proximity to open water. **Bushes and shrubs** provide cover for predators to hide and limit visibility for geese, and this makes geese feel uncomfortable. So planting bushes or even a hedge, adding large rocks, a wall or fence, or other **obstacles to visibility** can make geese avoid an area.

**Less palatable plants** - Young grass shoots, particularly of finer-bladed varieties such as Kentucky bluegrass, are preferred fare for geese. **Less palatable plants** such as native grasses and wildflowers, or tall fescue, common periwinkle, or English Ivy could eventually be substituted, if possible. For the near-term, and if changing the composition of the lawn is not possible, you can make your lawn less "tasty" for the geese by watering less or not at all, reducing or eliminating the use of fertilizer, and allowing the grass to grow taller.

**Exclusion** means introducing barriers, whether physical (like an actual multi-wire or wooden fence), or visual (something that doesn't physically prevent the geese from entering an area but which the geese do not want to cross).

**Fences** - can deter geese from walking into an area. Fences need to be at least 30 inches tall and have no openings larger than 3 inches. Chicken wire, picket fencing, and plastic mesh, [mylar ribbon strips](#), and plastic snow fencing are examples of effective material. Even simple barrier fences made by tying multiple strings spaced a few inches apart to vertical uprights which are spaced no more than about 20 feet apart can be effective. Fences are most effective if erected in early spring before nesting occurs or in early summer when geese have young and are molting their flight feathers and are unable to fly over the fence.

Fencing is generally not effective in keeping geese off of large areas when they are flight-capable because they can simply fly over the fence.



*Temporary fencing to protect a park shoreline and newly-planted goose-resistant vegetation from wear and tear by geese*



*[Iritape](#)® is a holographic mylar tape that can be used to make a temporary visual-barrier fence for geese*

**Repellents** are chemicals designed to deter an animal from eating a particular food or from entering or living in a designated area. For discouraging geese, **methyl anthranilate** is a non-toxic, biodegradable human food ingredient that can serve as a taste-repellent when applied to grass. It is marketed under various brand-names such as Goose Chase®, and Liquid Fence Goose Repellent®. These products are applied by spraying them on the lawn using the dilutions recommended by the manufacturer. The products should be reapplied every 7-14 days, after a rain, and after each lawn mowing.

**Scare Tactics** are non-chemical devices or activities designed to arouse fear or alarm to deter an animal from entering or lingering in a particular area.

They include noisemaking devices such as the Goose B-Gone Super Sonic®, sirens, electronic whistles, etc.), visual deterrents such as Irri-tape® mylar tape, strobe lights, Scare Eye® balloons, coyote effigies, etc., devices that scare by other means such as the Scarecrow® motion-activated sprayer -- which frightens birds entering its sensor area by blasting them with a harmless, though frightening, blast of water, and low-tech methods such as simply going out and making noise by banging on pots or pans, yelling and waving your arms as you approach the geese.

***"I'm a grounds-keeper at a condominium complex. We have multiple ponds and lots of problems with goose droppings on lawns and patios, and we're seeing shoreline erosion caused by the geese. What's the best way to handle these issues?"***

In addition to the methods discussed directly above, there are some other actions you can take that may prove useful:

Shorelines - Geese prefer to walk, rather than fly, from land into water and *vice versa*. And they prefer to do so where the shoreline is gently sloped. They do not like to walk over rocks, nor do they like to have to push their way through dense shoreline vegetation to get in and out of the water. So to discourage geese from feeding on areas of grass near the water, to discourage them from using a particular portion of shoreline for entry and exit from the water, and to help stabilize the shoreline from erosion, a band of "**riprap**" (chunks of stone rubble) can be added to the shore at the waterline.

Planting or encouraging **emergent vegetation** (growing out of the water, e.g. cattails) close to the shoreline and tall grasses or shrubs in a wide band along the edge of the shoreline will help prevent erosion and create a physical and visual barrier that the geese should not want to cross. Aesthetically, these offer the best solution, however, constructing a three-foot-high fence between the shoreline and adjacent lawn areas will also discourage geese.

Aerators – Consider **shutting off pond aerators in the late fall**. This should help the pond ice over earlier, and without open water, the geese will be encouraged to move elsewhere.

Discourage Feeding – Goose feeding done by residents or visitors can help attract and retain geese at your location, so it should be discouraged.



*The Scarecrow® motion-activated sprayer connects to your garden hose and frightens approaching geese with a sudden blast of water*



*A border of tall grasses planted along the edge of this pond at a hospital dissuades geese from feeding and lounging on adjacent lawn areas*

***"I've heard the County is doing something called "egg addling" in the parks to help control the geese. What is this? Is it humane?"***

Egg addling is a humane technique used to limit the reproduction of Canada geese. Addling involves locating goose nests in the early spring very soon after the goose has started incubating the eggs, dipping each egg found in corn oil and replacing them in the nest. The coating of oil on the egg stops the transfer of oxygen through the shell and thus stops further development of the barely-developed embryos. The dipped eggs are left in the nest for about two weeks. The goose will continue to incubate the eggs during that time. After two weeks workers remove the now non-viable eggs from the nest. Because the goose has had two weeks on her nest, this satisfies her urge to nest so she will not attempt to re-nest again that year. Without the two weeks on the nest she would likely just start nesting all over again.

Addling requires a permit from the Wisconsin DNR and should be employed only by those trained in its proper use, in combination with other goose management tools such as habitat modification, and only when non-lethal methods have been tried and shown to be less than fully effective.

***"Geese are nesting next to a sidewalk right outside of our business. One of the geese, I guess it's the male, threatens our clients when they come and go from our building. I'm afraid someone's going to get hurt. Is there anything we can do?"***

Background - Canada Geese in urban areas will often choose nest sites in what seem to us humans to be less-than-ideal places, such as landscaped medians in parking lots, flat roof tops, and planters or landscape shrubbery on bridges or next to busy sidewalks. Of course, understandably, protecting one's nest and offspring is a very basic instinct, and both parents will be very protective of the nest and eggs, and their goslings.

A goose will lay one egg about every day-and-a-half and may lay up to 15 eggs (10 to 12 is more common). Once she is done laying all her eggs she will then begin to incubate them together for about 30 days. So the longest the pair will be at the nest site is about 45 days. Once the eggs have hatched the parents will walk their family to a nearby (but may be up to 2 miles away!) body of water, and they won't return to the nest.

We typically get several calls each spring from people who are having problems with a defensive male goose accosting people who are passing – according to the goose – too close to its nest site. In these cases the male goose's strategy is to try to scare the "intruder" away by spreading his wings, hissing and running or sometimes flying toward the person. The goose doesn't usually make contact with the person, but there are exceptions, and there is the potential for someone to get hurt

### **Solutions –**

- Prevention - Before the geese have laid eggs you can encourage them to move along and nest somewhere else by treating the grass around the nest area with a goose repellent (see "Repellents" above). You can also use exclusion techniques (see "Exclusion" above) to deny the geese access to planters or other areas they have previously used or appear to be preparing to use for nesting.



*A goose family in an urban park, with nearby shoreline erosion*



*Canada goose parents will vigorously defend their young! Source: Pixabay*

- Construct a barrier - Use 4'-tall or taller temporary fencing material such as snow fence or plastic barricade fencing **between the sidewalk and the goose nest**. This barrier should help give both the geese and people greater security. Keep in mind any type of fencing that is put up must not keep the parents from getting to and from the nest and must not prevent the goslings from leaving the nest area.
- Signage – Put up signs to warn pedestrians that there is a goose nest and protective parents ahead. Suggest options for other routes they can take so they avoid the geese.
- Alternate Route – Temporarily close the sidewalk that passes through the problem area. Direct customers to an alternate entry to your building.
- Nest Removal? - Canada geese are a protected species, therefore once they have a nest with eggs you cannot legally disrupt or move the nesting geese or their nest without a special permit. You may be tempted to move the nest and eggs to a “better” location, but the geese are very unlikely to continue to incubate their eggs if they are relocated. If you are convinced that removing the nest or geese is the only way to protect human safety in your situation, contact the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

***“Geese are nesting in a little landscaped area in a big parking lot at a busy shopping mall. I’m really concerned for the geese: How are they going to safely get from their nest to water after their babies hatch? Is there anything someone can do?”***

This, and similar situations, have become very common in the Greater Milwaukee area in the last 15 years or so. In more rural areas, geese will typically nest on raised muskrat houses in a marsh, or on an island or peninsula in a river, lake, or pond. Apparently, these parking lot “islands” and raised planters in business and residential areas have enough similarities to attract urban geese to these unseemly nest sites.

#### **Solutions-**

- Prevention – Prior to nesting, exclude (see “Exclusion” above) geese from using these locations, especially if they’ve used them in the past and you want to prevent them from using a location again.
- Move the Nest? – If the nest is moved to another, “safer” location, the geese are very unlikely to resume incubating the eggs. Canada geese are a protected species, therefore once they have a nest with eggs you cannot legally disrupt or move the nesting geese or their nest without a special permit.
- Signage – You may want to erect barricades and signs to keep traffic and pedestrians away from the nest area.
- Escort – Soon after the eggs have all hatched, the parent geese will attempt to lead their goslings from the nest site to whatever body of water they’ve decided upon as a destination. The local police and/or lot security may be able to give the goose family an escort across the parking lot to a safe place. The escort can help keep the geese safe during their passage and will likely also help keep motorists safer as well. The escorts may need to slowly and quietly guide the goose family around obstacles and hazards on their trip.

Your local, licensed wildlife rehabilitator may also be able to help. In Milwaukee County, you are welcome to call us for advice or other possible help at (414) 431-6204.



*Soon after hatching, the parents will lead their goslings from the nest site to water.*

*Source: Pixabay*



*This fencing helps keep geese off the beach yet provides beach access for people*



*This temporary fencing will protect new, tall shoreline vegetation from geese until it becomes well-established*



*Carelessly-discarded fishing line is a frequent cause of injury for geese near urban areas*

***If you find a goose in Milwaukee County that you think might be injured, sick, or otherwise in need of help, please call us (414) 431-6204 for advice. If you live outside of Milwaukee County, you can find a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area by using this map on the Wisconsin DNR web site <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/directory.html>***



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