

Coping With Canada Geese

Some Suggestions for Dealing with Nuisance Geese in Rural Areas

Habitats for Healthy Waters—Fact Sheet #5

Why are there so many Canada Geese?

The Canada Goose is native to Ontario but virtually disappeared at the turn of the 20th century as a result of unregulated hunting. The re-introduction of this bird in Ontario by resource managers and local conservationists has proven to be highly successful (too successful in the view of some landowners!). Increased waste grain availability, loss of predators, manicured parks and golf courses, decline in hunter numbers and the goose's own adaptability have contributed to increasing populations in southern Ontario. This increase in Canada Goose numbers has led to a higher incidence of conflicts between Canada Geese and humans. This Fact Sheet will deal specifically with minimizing or preventing Canada Goose damage in agricultural areas.



The culprit! Canada Goose numbers have increased dramatically since the 1950's.

What Damage Can Canada Geese Do?



Deep, landscaped ponds surrounded by mowed lawn contribute to the rural goose population because they provide ideal goose breeding and feeding areas.

the adult geese prefer not to walk through tall grass or shrubs to get to a feeding area with their young. They also do not like to walk through barriers such as fences or shrubs to get to a feeding area. Once geese find an area where they feel secure, they will continue to feed in that area even if other, more suitable forage exists elsewhere. **In the fall**, Canada Geese switch to a high energy diet of grains because they must put on reserves for the migration and winter period. During this time of year, geese prefer to feed on waste grain in harvested fields where they can see danger coming. Swathed grain is also vulnerable to geese, especially when wet weather increases the length of time the grain lies in the field. Barriers on the ground do little to discourage geese in the fall, but they prefer fields with little or no disturbance.

To minimize the impacts of Canada Geese on crops, we must understand the behavior and feeding patterns of these birds. Unlike many ducks, Canada Geese feed mainly in upland areas. They also prefer to breed on deep, open ponds and lakes as opposed to shallow wetlands. **In the spring and early summer**, geese are looking for fresh green growth which means they can be attracted to winter wheat or fall rye crops. If these fields are close to open water where geese are roosting, there is a high probability that the geese will feed in these fields. Later, when the goslings hatch, the parents will bring their young into neighboring fields to feed. Sprouting corn and other cereals are goose favorites at this time. Since the young are vulnerable to predators,



Canada Geese can do damage to winter wheat and fall rye, in the spring. During the fall, geese switch to cereals and like to feed in swathed or harvested fields.

What Can I Do to Minimize or Prevent Canada Goose Damage?

As a landowner, there are many things you can do to help reduce or eliminate Canada Goose damage in your fields. While these recommended tactics are required in the spring and early fall (busiest times for farmers), a small effort can pay big dividends. **No matter what technique you use, be persistent!**

Modify farm practices:

- Straight-combine cereal grains, whenever possible, rather than swathing.
- Delaying tillage practices after harvest can provide enough waste grain to attract waterfowl away from vulnerable crops.

Habitat modification: You can reduce the attractiveness of your property by concentrating your efforts on the areas between the wetlands and cultivated areas. Creating natural barriers of shrubs and tall grass will reduce goose damage in spring and early summer. Fences are physical barriers that can be used alone or in conjunction with a natural barrier (see photo).

Establish a "Lure Crop": Plant a 30-foot strip of forage where geese are exiting the wetland. Any good hay mix will do. This technique works especially well when "Flash Tape" (see below) is placed between the grass strip and the field.

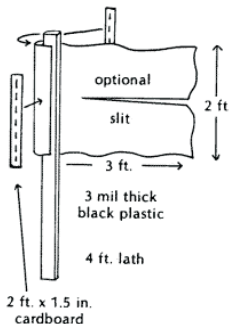
Flash Tape: This metallic ribbon is suspended in a loose spiral across the path where the geese are exiting the wetland. The flashing effect seems to signal danger by mimicking the appearance of fire. This product can be obtained directly from Eco Electrical Products Inc. (416) 281-0518.

Scare devices: Flags or scarecrows can be the most effective and least expensive scaring method. The flags are typically fashioned from lath and a 3-mil black garbage bag (see plan). They should be placed at a rate of one per 10 acres or more. Place scarecrows out immediately after the field is swathed. Scare cannons or other electronic scare devices emit loud bangs or other distressing sounds. One scare cannon per 40 acres provides optimum protection, especially when used with flags or scarecrows. Scare cannons should be timed to detonate every 10 to 20 minutes and they should be moved every 2-3 days to prevent the birds from getting habituated to them. Propane cannons and other electronic scare devices can be obtained from C. Frensch Ltd. in Beamsville, ON. (905) 563-4774.

Obtain a scare/kill permits: If geese are eating your crop, you have the right to scare them away using any means of harassment. However, if you plan to use a firearm as your harassment technique, then you will require some paperwork. A permit to scare or kill Canada Geese can be easily obtained through the Canadian Wildlife Service (905-336-4464)

Allow legal hunting on your property: This can be very effective but, only works during the hunting season.

This is a plan for a simple flag scarecrow. These are very effective when used in conjunction with scare cannons.



The "Habitats for Healthy Waters" program is a three-year (2005-2007) initiative to raise the awareness of wetland values among residents of Elgin, Oxford and Middlesex Counties. This project will also help landowners implement wetland stewardship practices that provide benefits to agriculture and the rural community through a series of demonstration sites, workshops and educational material.

Other sources of information:

- Environment Canada: "Resident Canada Geese in Agricultural Southern Ontario" and "Canada Geese in Southern Ontario—Seasonal Deterrent Techniques for Lakeside Home and Cottage Owners"
- Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association: "Probing Problem Wildlife" Factsheet

For more information on wetlands or "Habitats for Healthy Waters", please contact:

David McLachlin
C/o Ducks Unlimited Canada
(705) 721-4444 x 237
Email: d_mclachlin@ducks.ca

Ontario Stewardship

Elgin Co. Mark Emery:
Oxford Co. Dave Depuydt:
Middlesex Co. Nathan Kirby:
Chatham/Kent Don Hector:
Essex Co. Brett Groves:

mark.emery@mnr.gov.on.ca
dave.depuydt@mnr.gov.on.ca
nathan.kirby@mnr.gov.on.ca
don.hector@mnr.gov.on.ca
brett.groves@mnr.gov.on.ca

519-773-4739
519-773-4704
519-773-4751
519-354-6274
519-354-4437



Geese from this wetland would often walk over to the adjacent cultivated field to feed during the spring. The landowner solved the problem by establishing both a physical barrier (snow fence) and a good natural buffer.

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