

Options for Controlling Canada Geese

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A Canada goose is recognized as a bird with a gray-brown body and wings; a light gray breast; black feet, bill, and neck; and a characteristic white patch on each cheek. (Figure 1) There are two types of Canada geese that are generally recognized: those birds which are migratory and those that are termed “temperate nesting” or resident/local geese. Migratory birds will spend spring and summer far north in Canada and winter in the mid-latitude states, including Kentucky. Resident birds spend much of the year within close proximity of the same location, flying only far enough to find open water or food, and in some cases making southward migrations during periods of extreme cold, but rarely to the extent of the migratory goose.

The average Canada goose produces more fecal waste than a dairy cow on a per-weight basis. In addition, gaggle of resident Canada geese have been associated with problems of over grazing. Having large amounts of fecal waste around a riparian area that has limited vegetation can lead to the runoff of nutrients, sediment, and pathogens, which can contaminate ponds, lakes, and streams in Kentucky.

Prevention and Control

There are three categories of control for managing Canada goose population: husbandry methods, non-lethal methods, and lethal methods. The first step to controlling geese in any of these methods is to eliminate human feeding of the animals.



Figure 1. Canada geese.

Husbandry Methods

Husbandry methods generally involve changing the landscape of the area to **create a less secure environment** for geese. Reducing the amount of fertilizer applied around the water body can reduce the amount of nutrient value in the grasses and make it less appealing to the geese. Geese consider shrubs and tall grasses as potential hiding places for predators. Therefore, planting or allowing taller vegetation (native grasses and shrubs) around water bodies will deter geese. Reducing the amount of mowing or not mowing at all within 75 feet of the water can also deter the geese.

Non-Lethal Control

In some instances husbandry methods alone are not sufficient to alleviate problems, and the addition of non-lethal methods may be necessary. Non-lethal control strategies can be **auditory, visual, physical or some combination of the three**. The type of strategy employed is dependent upon local laws, social acceptance and/or public use of the conflicted area. Typical auditory

methods are air cannons, scare pistols, pyrotechnics, etc. Mylar tape, eyespot balloons, and scarecrows are all example of visuals that can help scare off the geese. These methods are rarely long-term solutions and typically work better if they are in place before the infestation. Physical methods include radio-controlled toys, dogs, and water spray devices. These methods typically provide longer lasting results; however, care must be taken to prevent injury to geese.

Chemical repellents can also be used as a non-lethal way to control geese. A good chemical repellent is methyl anthranilate. The compound produces an offensive taste to geese when applied to forage and vegetation. Repellents do not harm geese in any way; however, effectiveness lasts only as long as the repellent residue and may require frequent applications. Depending on the number of applications necessary, this solution may become too expensive to be considered.

Another chemical, nicarbazin, is available as contraceptive bait for Canada geese. Any use of this product is constrained to licensed wildlife specialists or pest control operators as nicarbazin is regulated by the U.S. EPA and is a restricted-use chemical. Nicarbazin has no effect on the current population of geese; this should be kept in mind when determining if this method should be used.

A non-lethal alternative is to **relocate the geese** with help from the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. Using this method, large groups of geese can be herded into a holding pen, captured, and relocated. However, the costs associated with this method may be prohibitive.

Lethal Control

When husbandry and non lethal methods have failed, use of lethal methods (population or reproductive control) may be warranted. All lethal methods require prior review by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and respective Kentucky wildlife services. For most situations, an application for a permit must be completed and approval granted before proceeding with the methods discussed in this section.

See the following website for obtaining a permit: <http://permits.fws.gov/mbpermits/birdbasics.html>.

Recreational hunting is one way of lethal control but can only be done during season and with the proper permits/hunting license. The season is two days during September. For more information visit the Ky Fish and Wildlife Website <http://fw.ky.gov/doveguide0809.asp?lid=2143&NavPath=C151C540C162>.

A preferred alternative to killing adult geese is to reduce the population by **decreasing nesting success**. Addling and oiling are forms of lethal control because they decrease the viability of the egg. Addling eggs is the process of vigorously shaking eggs to render the embryo unviable. Oiling eggs is the process of spraying eggs in the nest with a thin layer of food grade corn oil. The oil will not allow air to pass through the shell to and from the embryo, which prevents it from developing (for the purpose of this paper, addling will refer to the act of rendering the egg useless by either means mentioned above). Proper permits must be acquired before any nests can be disturbed. Egg addling is considered a humane way to control the populations without the euthanasia of the group. For more information, the Humane Society of the United States has a publication on addling eggs that can be viewed at http://files.hsus.org/web-files/PDF/WILD_Goose_Egg_Addling_Protocol.pdf.

For more in-depth instructions on controlling Canadian goose population visit: <http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/wildlife/420-203/420-203.html#L3>.

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