



Canada Geese—The Ugly Truth

Canada Geese are beautiful birds. Unfortunately, they are known for having a few ugly habits. But, what is uglier is that humans are unwittingly encouraging these habits.

Although most people find a few geese along the shoreline of a lake, pond, river, or stream acceptable, problems quickly develop as the number of birds increase and when the birds no longer migrate, becoming permanent residents. These problems include: overgrazing of grass and ornamental plants; accumulation of droppings and feathers; attacks on humans by aggressive birds; and the fouling of waterbodies, swimming areas, docks, lawns, and recreational areas. Flocks of geese and other waterfowl also feed on a variety of crops.



These birds require fresh water for resting and nesting and tender young grass and other succulent vegetation for food. The plentiful, well-manicured lawns of residential neighborhoods, corporate business areas, parks, airports, and golf courses provide excellent habitat. Geese can easily become accustomed to people and residential areas. Additionally, the feeding of waterfowl by humans contributes to conflicts with humans. **Probably without even realizing it, most of us, particularly those of us who lives along the water, are putting out a “Welcome” mat to these majestic birds.**

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 protects all native waterfowl in the United States, including migratory and resident Canada geese. Under this law, it is illegal to hunt, kill, sell, purchase, or possess migratory birds except as permitted by regulations enforced by the U.S. Department of Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Service.

Canada geese and human conflicts are on the rise in the Granite State.

It is no secret—Canada geese have become problematic in some areas of New Hampshire. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services Program, which provides federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts that threaten the Nation’s agricultural and natural resources, human health, safety and property, has determined that the Canada goose population in the Granite State exceeds what is possible to provide for a balanced relationship between humans and the geese.

Multiple management techniques are needed to achieve an optimal balance.

Using an integrated approach of nonlethal and lethal methods, the USDA Wildlife Services Program helps individuals, local governments, businesses, and others manage waterfowl in ways that best balance the positive value of bird populations with the conflicts that they sometimes cause. Long-term waterfowl management results require multiple tools, each effective for different concerns. Exclusive use of only one tool will not have a long-term impact. The management techniques they recommend include lethal and non-lethal methods, as follows:

- **Discontinue feeding.** Wild birds can find their own food.
- **Modify landscaping.** Allow grass to grow longer. Along water edges, leave native vegetation, or replant areas with less attractive vegetation such as pachysandra and periwinkle.
- **Install barriers along the shoreline.** Barriers such as fences and hedgerows have been known to work.
- **Use scaring devices and move them around the property periodically.** Try large helium-filled balloons, strobe lights, scarecrows with moveable parts, and Mylar flags.
- **Utilize dogs.** Most effective are free-ranging dogs trained to chase birds as soon as they land.
- **Hunting may help.** For information on the Canada Geese hunting season in New Hampshire, visit: <https://wildlife.state.nh.us/hunting/waterfowl-season.html>.
- **Prevent nesting by manipulating the nests.** Since waterfowl are protected by law, a property owner must first register with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at <https://epermits.fws.gov/eRCGR/geSI.aspx>.
- **Obtain a depredation permit.** A Federal Migratory Bird Depredation Permit is required to capture or kill migratory birds for depredation control purposes. After applying some of the listed techniques above over an extended period of time with little to no success, a depredation permit can be requested. Land owners should apply for a depredation permit only after they have involved their local community in the decision process. If a permit is issued, landowners are expected to continue to integrate non-lethal techniques when implementing any lethal measures. Since capture and removal will result in a reduced population size, other management methods should become more effective in the future. For more information contact 1-866-4USDAWS (1-866-487-3297).

Remove the welcome mat!

NH LAKES recommends that all property owners along the edges of lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams, make their property unattractive to geese by simply not having a lawn that extends to the shoreline. The best and easiest thing to do is plant a vegetated buffer, at least three feet high, comprised of native shrubs and bushes along your entire shoreline. Not only will you discourage the geese from visiting, you will make your property more attractive while reducing the amount of polluted water that runs off of your property and into the lake!

Information for this article was found at

www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/wildlife_damage/content/printable_version/fs_waterfowl.pdf.

NH LAKES is the only statewide, member-supported nonprofit organization working to keep New Hampshire's lakes clean and healthy, now and in the future. The organization works with partners, promotes clean water policies and responsible use, and inspires the public to care for our lakes. For information, visit www.nhlakes.org, email info@nhlakes.org, or call 603.226.0299.

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