



The Trouble with Resident Geese

Canada geese, a bit of background:

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) along with state wildlife agencies introduced the resident population of geese we have today in hopes of providing more game birds for hunters. Prior to this, the native, migratory populations of Canada geese were in decline. The imported Canada goose eggs were placed in incubators until they hatched; then the birds were reared by humans until they were old enough to survive on their own.

Once released in the Puget Sound lowlands, these young transplanted geese had no parental goose guidance so they did not learn to migrate. Consequently, this subspecies, known as Common Canada Geese, now remains in the Puget Sound area all year.

These are big birds that eat a lot and defecate copiously. Some swimming areas have had to be closed due to high coliform counts in the water that were traced to waterfowl. The nutrients from their droppings also contribute to the eutrophication of small lakes by stimulating algal growth.

There is also a possible health risk from the droppings and, in certain situations, a threat to safety because especially aggressive birds may attack humans when defending their nest sites. This natural behavior can be hazardous especially to small children.

Geese attracted to the banquet of mowed grass at airports present a more serious problem. Airplanes taking off and landing are faced with the threat of collisions which can damage and even disable a plane.



King County



Resident geese reproduce more rapidly than their migratory cousins. The estimated resident goose population in the Puget Sound area increased by 434 percent over a 10-year period. On the Atlantic flyway, hunters killed 272,000 geese during a special season in 1998 compared to 2,300 in 1988. (*Congressional Record*, Aug 19, 1999, p 45270 col 3).

There are several subspecies of Canada geese, all of which have migratory populations. Some, like Aleutian Canada Geese, are endangered. Others, like Cackling Canada Geese, are about half the size of Common Canada Geese. It is great fun to see the different subspecies congregating in the spring and fall when they migrate through. In summer, the only geese remaining in the Puget Sound region are generally the common, resident populations.

Nonlethal methods for coping with resident Canada geese

Landscape adaptations can be very effective. Maintaining grass at a height of 10 inches rather than 2 inches works well. Breaking up lawns with clumps of shrubbery that block the birds' view of approaching predators makes them less comfortable in an area. Replacing lawns with more environmentally friendly wildflowers is an ideal solution. Areas of neat groundcovers like creeping juniper, pachysandra, and vinca can be used to break up the expanse of lawn. They could be interplanted with daffodils for spring color and day lilies to bloom through the summer. Or they could be used to avoid mowing where flowering shrubs or trees are planted.

Another way of dealing with the problem in particular areas is to use border collies to drive geese from places where they are causing problems. This method has been used with some success in city and county parks.

A harmless repellent (ReJeXIT™ or Goose Chase™) derived from grapes is effective in keeping geese away from specific areas like golf courses, parks, and lawns because they apparently don't like the taste of it.

Other methods individuals can use to make areas inhospitable to geese include stringing low wires or firmly secured (to avoid entanglement) fishing line on their landing sites (good for airports too); mylar tape or flags that flash and make a noise in the wind; and noisemakers. All such methods are most effective if begun in the spring before geese get in the habit of grazing where they are not wanted.



– Information for this factsheet by Bina Robinson.