

SHOW CANADA GEESE THE GATE



BY MICHAEL VON KAITZ

PRACTICE GOOSE MANAGEMENT TO RID YOUR PLANT OF UNWANTED LOITERERS

The Canada goose is a growing avian populous, active in the 13 Canadian provinces and two territories and 49 of the 50 United States. In the past 50 years, the Canada goose population has greatly expanded, and many geese are year-round residents that no longer migrate. In fact, to deal with the expanding goose population, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service relaxed federal regulations on Canada goose control in 2005.

Why should you be concerned about Canada geese? In numbers, geese can cause a very real threat to health and food safety. The average Canada goose consumes approximately four pounds of well manicured turfgrass each day — 2 pounds of which they promptly “rede-

posit” around your plant. These droppings carry a number of pathogenic bacteria, including *E. coli*, according to a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

If your property includes an open, grassy area, especially near a water source, you are a sitting duck — so to speak — for an unwelcome Canada goose invasion, and should take precautions. If your plant is already home to unwanted geese, the challenge will be getting rid of them.

ASSESSING THE PROBLEM. If you already have geese on the property, the first step is to assess why the geese are there in the first place. Work with a goose management professional to determine the “bird

pressure” at your facility by answering the following questions:

- Are they feeding around your facility? If so, what are they eating and how much?
- Are there any “safety zones,” such as ponds or lakes that could attract the geese?
- How many geese are at your plant? How long have they been there?
- Are there any natural predators (e.g., foxes, dogs) nearby that could control the population?
- Are the geese nesting? Is there evidence of a clutch (number of eggs) or young geese?
- What is the daily routine for the geese?

Next, make a list of any control methods that have been used in the past as well as

INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

any limitations on control methods. For example, if your plant is situated near a residential area, noise controls might not be an option.

MONITORING THE SITUATION After completing your initial assessment, you will have a better understanding of your goose problem and will be ready to begin the next step: Monitoring.

Though your monitoring program should begin as early as January, before geese begin to mate, you need to be particularly vigilant during March and April. During this time, Canada geese will begin to pair up and nest. If they establish nests, the bird pressure increases since the geese will have a definite reason to stay and will defend

the nesting area. Keep track of many of the questions answered during the assessment. The more you know, the better you will be able to determine the best control methods to use.

TAKING CONTROL. Since it is difficult to force geese to relocate during nesting and because control of goslings is closely regulated, the best goose control method is to prevent adult geese from establishing nests altogether. Control methods are most effective when used prior to nesting and molting periods. For a list of Canada geese behavioral activities, please see the goose behavior calendar (see graph below).

Which techniques are best for your facility? The truth is, most goose problems

can't be solved by any one method. Most professionals suggest using a combination of methods, or an "integrated" program, to capture the full benefit.

Your goose management professional can help you determine the best techniques for your site. Some of the control methods your professional might recommend include egg and nest depredation; habitat modification; canine control; predator decoys; physical relocation; and integrated hazing control. One of the most popular control methods, a hazing program, uses laser light, distress calls, canine control, and limited pyrotechnics to discourage birds from living on your property. In the various states where registered, effective taste deterrents can be applied to turf areas. This will help lessen the bird pressure by eliminating the geese's food source.

When exploring these options, keep in mind that many of these control methods can only be implemented by a licensed professional.

DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT. It is important to properly document your goose management program. Make sure your documentation includes preliminary bird counts to the site, results of control methods used and dates implemented, as well as the number of nests and eggs destroyed (if any). Canada geese may be a natural part of the environment, but with a proper goose management program, they won't be a fixture at your plant. **QA**



Want to know when a Canada goose does what? The above calendar shows a list of Canada geese behavioral activities, which is helpful with management efforts.

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