

A Giant Canada Goose is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, against a background of a snowy, hazy landscape. The goose has a dark head and neck with a white patch on its throat, and its body is covered in brown and grey feathers. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

Giant Canada Geese

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Giant Canada Geese--General

The Giant Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) was once near extinction, back in the 1920s and, in some places, into the 1950s. But now they've become a nuisance in many places. Many flocks are no longer migrating; instead, they form resident populations that stay in the same general area the entire year. Even if they do migrate, they tend to return to the same areas each year.



G.C.G.—General--2

This goose species grows up to 25 inches tall and can weigh up to 25 pounds. They live up to 20 years.

The pairs mate for life, unless one dies, starting at 2-3 years old. At least 4 to 7 goslings are produced each breeding season.

Adults have few natural predators. Hawks, owls, skunks, turtles, snakes and some other terrestrial predators do attack goslings or forage eggs.

Canada geese are grazing birds with a varied diet. The most common times for them to feed are early in the morning and late afternoon. Not only do they eat turf grass, but will also eat growing garden and farm produce like lettuce, corn, beans and grains.

These birds, their nests & eggs are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Large fines may be imposed for disturbing or destroying them without a permit.

G.C.G.--Feeding



To the left, you see an example of the favorite habitat area of the Canada Goose. They prefer open water with open shorelines and an expansive view to keep safe from predators. They like long sight lines for taking off and landing. They love fertilized grass, especially new shoots, and Kentucky Blue Grass is one of their optimum choices.

G.C.G.—Feeding--2

This means is that many lake properties, especially those with traditional cultivated lawn to the shore, provide ideal habitat for the Canada Goose—and the more open space, the higher the number of Canada Geese on the property tends to be. These geese spend about equal time in the water and on land.



G.C.G.--Problems



Large numbers of Canada Geese can cause many problems around a lake.

First, they can be aggressive, especially when nesting or protecting gosling babies.

At the left, you see geese attacking; at the right bottom, you see the results of one attack.



G.C.G.—Problems--2

Second, because they pull up plants and eat them, Canada Geese cause damage to lawns and landscaping. On the upper right, you see some garden plants eaten off (and some removed) by Canada Geese. On the bottom right, you see a test lawn—the area (red) outside the pickets is denuded of grass by the geese that inside was protected by the sticks.



G.C.G.—Problems--3



Third, and perhaps most important for our purposes, Canada Geese negatively impact water quality. As seen on these slides, a large loss of vegetation near a shore is possible due to geese damage.



Bare soil like that shown in the photos erodes more easily; it also tends to have more runoff, since there is no vegetation to catch & hold runoff. Pollutants and contaminants, including soil & items in runoff, can cause water clarity & water quality to decrease.

G.C.G.—Problems--4



In addition, one Canada Goose eats up to 3 pounds of vegetation per day and unloads up to 2 pounds per day as feces. Not only are these feces unpleasant to smell and walk in, they are very high in phosphorus & nitrogen. These are the two elements most related to excessive aquatic plant growth and excessive algae growth. As these feces are washed into the water, they add to the phosphorus/nutrient load of a lake, increasing the likelihood of excessive aquatic plant growth and algal blooms.

G.C.G.—What can be done?

Steps in dealing with a population of Canadian Geese include:

- Defining the extent & specifics of the problem(s).
- Recognizing that an ultimate goal of removal is unlikely once a population is established.
- Knowing that once they've successfully nested in an area, the issue becomes active management, not removal.

As is true in many potential damage situations to our environment, prevention is the best (and cheapest in money and time) option. Since there are so many of them now, prevention requires a coordinated concerted effort to make your property (or body of water) unattractive to the geese by having habitat they don't like and/or vegetation they aren't attracted to.

G.C.G.--Management

There are three categories of management measures:

- (1) Alteration of habitat;
- (2) Scare tactics;
- (3) Intervention.

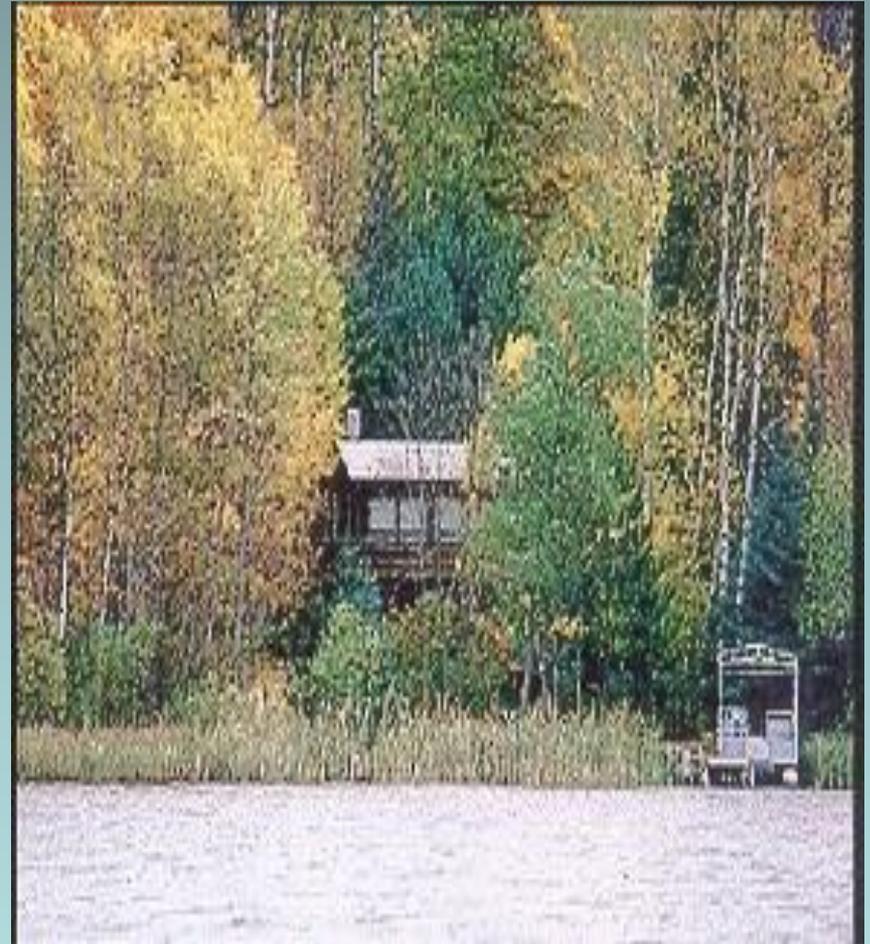
The most likely measure to succeed is a combination of measures. (3) requires more money, permits and personnel.



G.C.G.—management--2

Alteration of Habitat

(1) Installation of a vegetative barrier at lake edges can be successful. This disrupts their expansive view, provides a physical barrier to entry/exit, and provides habitat for more desirable wildlife. Plants up to 30” high, in a strip at least 20’-30’ landward from the ordinary high water mark, is most effective.



G.C.G.—management--3

You can also:

- Allow grass to grow at least 6” high
- Reduce amount of grassy area in a lawn
- Reduce new shoot growth by eliminating fertilizers
- Use vegetation not palatable to the geese, such as fescues or pachysandra (or any vegetation that is taller than 6 inches and dense
- Use boulders at least 2’ in diameter as a barrier to geese
- Use some of the products meant to make your vegetation less attractive to the geese
- Install a line or wire or fence at the shore that is at least 6” above the water. A second line 2’-3’ into the water increases effectiveness.
- Plant trees or shrubs. New plants will need to be protected from the geese during their establishment.
- **DO NOT FEED THE GEESE!!**

G.C.G.—management--4

Scare Tactics

Scare tactics can be visual, audio, or both. Visual scares include streamers, flags, decoys, scarecrows, etc. Audio scares cover activities like sirens, banging on pots or metal items, playing distress calls, etc. Dogs, especially border collies & English setters, or swans will scare these geese.

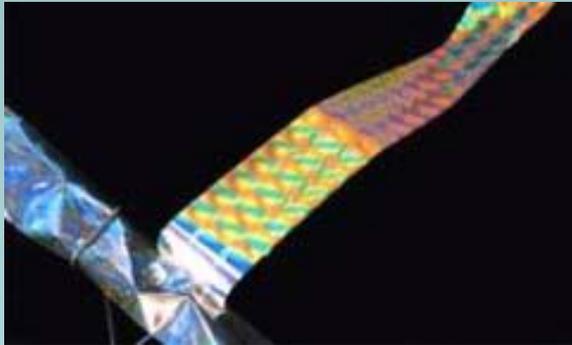


G.C.G.—management--5



A pressurized water hose that operates by a motion detector has also been used with some success.

Geese are allegedly among the smartest birds. This means that any of the scare tactics used have to be on a varied schedule and alternated to prevent the geese from becoming used to them and no longer being scared or repelled.



G.C.G.—management--6

Intervention

Intervention—which involves interfering with reproduction, nesting, hatching or movement--generally requires a permit from the federal (and perhaps state) government, a fair amount of money, several people, and long-term involvement. It thus tends to be used only in extreme cases.

All the interventions require permits so as not to be in violation of the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty.



G.C.G.—management--7

Intervention methods include:

- Shaking the eggs (addling), coating them with mineral oil, or smashing them to kill the embryos
- Destroying or moving the nests (doesn't usually work once nesting has occurred at least one time)
- Rounding up the geese during molting & transferring them to a different site (usually needs to be done more than once and is often not successful)
- Using “birth control” in the form of pellets fed once per day. It interferes with the ability of eggs to hatch. Currently it costs over \$200 for a 30-pound bag.

G.C.G.--close

For further information, contact:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wisconsin Department of Natural
Resources

Adams County Land & Water
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