

# Yes, You Can Control Canada Geese On Your Golf Course

by Patrick Lucas, Innis Arden Golf Club, Old Greenwich, CT

The purpose of this article is to discuss some of the problems Canada Geese are causing and to share some of the lessons I've learned in controlling them. With the onset of fall, their migration south will commence once again. Originally, most Canada Geese were migrators, using corridors or flyways for travel, going south in winter and coming back north in the summer. We here in the Northeast are located on the Atlantic Flyway, where some one million birds migrate annually.

Today, Canada Geese can be placed in two categories. The first are the migrators, or those geese which still migrate annually. The second category, "resident" geese, are those geese who have stopped migrating and stay in one location year-round.

The numerous problems caused by large flocks of Canada Geese include eating fine turf to a stubble, making reseeding necessary; the droppings they leave behind are unhealthy, ruin the grass, pack mowing equipment, and make putting impossible; and, they leave feathers in the water. If the lake or pond they are inhabiting is used for irrigation purposes, eventually their feathers can clog irrigation suction line strainers.

Why are Canada Geese invading our golf courses and public parks? To answer that, let's look at some of the basic requirements of Canada Geese or what I refer to as their "drawing cards." The first is **FOOD** and what could be more tasty than our fine turf? The second requirement is **WATER**, needed for drinking, landing, protection and sleeping. And the last requirement is **PROTECTION**, or relative safety from being hunted.

Does your course offer these "drawing cards" to Canada Geese? If the answer is yes, than your course can become a resort . . . for Canada Geese.

Your geese removal program must concentrate on altering these conditions which brought geese to the area in the first place. The most important factor in your geese removal program will be **TIMING**. The longer Canada Geese are allowed to inhabit an area, the more comfortable they will become and the harder it will be to get them to leave.

Let's look at water, remembering that water is necessary to Canada Geese for: a. drinking, b. landing, c. protection, d. sleeping.

Your goal will be to make your lake or pond look unwellcome from the air. Some of the ways in which this can be achieved are:

**WIRE GRIDS:** Wires can be strung across the lake in a grid-like pattern about 14 to 18 inches above the water level. This will effectively deprive Canada Geese of using the water. If the span is great, use floats as needed for mid-way support.

**ROPE OBSTACLES:** Yellow rope can be strung between high trees, across favorite flight paths near the body of water. Keep the ropes somewhat loose to sway in the wind. This will create obstacles in what used to be favorite landing or taking off flight paths.

**BLACK FLAGS:** The Fish & Wildlife Service reported on the use of a flag-like device made from a black plastic trash bag fixed to a tall pole to deter geese from feeding at their ease. It is said to work especially well in grain fields in the midwest. The Service notes that geese don't like to feed in areas where they sense a threat from overhead, which is what the fluttering "flag" represents to them. These could be installed in and out of play areas, or even in the pond itself.

**SWAN SCARECROWS:** Swan families and their babies (or cygnets) are vicious to Canada Geese and most geese are aware

of this. Consider using replicas of swan families as "floating scarecrows" to deter geese from landing.

Lastly, consider the aspect of safety and security. Canada Geese are smart, staying close to metropolitan areas to avoid being hunted. This protective "comfort zone" which they enjoy must be removed.

If you have Canada Geese, you can remove their "comfort zone" and get them to leave at the same time by using what I call the **HUNTER AMBUSH APPROACH**. Your goal is to make the Canada Geese feel they are genuinely being hunted and that their welfare is being threatened. A point to remember: this is **not** a form of harassment which probably the geese have had to contend with in the past. This is an entirely different approach which makes them feel their very survival is threatened. Here's how to do it:

You will need a loud blank gun and a trusted member of your crew as your "hunter." Have the hunter stalk the feeding geese either early in the morning, or at dusk, slowly creeping up on them, inch by inch. It may take the hunter 15 or 20 minutes to cover say about 200 yards as he approaches the flock, during which time several things will begin to happen.

The first and most obvious is that the sentinel or lookout geese will begin to look in the direction of the approaching hunter. Next, the majority of the flock will begin to stop feeding and "aim" in one direction. All this time the hunter is getting closer to the geese. As they become more nervous, the geese will begin to squawk and flap their wings, because someone or something is approaching them in a way which is strange and unfamiliar. It is exactly at this point that they are ready to go and the hunter (very close now) should begin firing. Or, at any time during the day that the geese are observed attempting to land, the hunter should begin firing when their wings are locked-in on their approach.

The library of Natural Sounds, Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. has available a cassette audio tape of Canada Geese distress call. Consider using it in conjunction with your "**HUNTER AMBUSH APPROACH**" for greater effect.

Once properly done, you will receive another bonus besides getting the geese to leave. Research has shown that Canada Geese are unlikely to return to a spot where they have been ambushed.

Remember, when geese fly over they look for "signs", signs below telling them everything is all right, it is okay to land. Other waterfowl (ducks, egrets, kingfishers, etc.) are such signs and must be frightened away. We want our lake or pond to look unwelcome from the air.

Clean out all brush areas which have been favorite nesting grounds in the past. Once the geese have nested in the spring, it is very difficult to get them to leave.

In closing, success can be achieved by a combination of understanding the basic requirements of Canada Geese and implementing a program of action.

## Meeting Schedule 1986

September 9 — Falls Road G.C., Ralph Strouth, host  
October 14 — Hidden Creek C.C., Dick Gieselman, host  
November 11 — Diamond Ridge G.C., Howard Gaskill, host  
December 9 — Green Spring Valley Hunt Club, Grant Pensinger, host