



TURFGRASS MATTERS

Mid-Atlantic Association of Golf Course Superintendents

November/December 1996

Volume 1, Number 5

Taking the Nuisance out of Nuisance Wildlife Control

By R. Tucker Mostrom

Now that the grass has stopped growing, the leaves have fallen, and the fruit bearing trees and shrubs are for the most part bare, the very species of wildlife that we work so hard to protect turn on us. They develop seasonal behavior that can truly ruin a golf course superintendent's whole day. By providing greenspace, preserving woodland and tall grass habitat, and maintaining healthy groundcover, shrubs and ornamental trees, superintendents have crafted the perfect wildlife magnet to draw deer, crows, 'coon, fox, squirrel, groundhog, goose, et al onto the golf course from surrounding properties. Golfers and superintendents alike enjoy glimpses of these furry and feathered neighbors throughout the warmer months. In the late fall and winter months, however, the young leave there nests, dens, and warrens and strike out on their own. Hibernating species gorge at ground level to fatten up. Migrating birds settle in the open areas near water and forage, and larger herbivores tromp all over the golf course in search of the soft succulent ornamental shrubs and trees that will sustain them until the spring greenup. Much of this behavior results in damage to the golf course at a time when it is incapable of healing itself. What is a superintendent to do?

Nuisance wildlife control is not an arcane science, does not require tremendous investments in time or money, and does not necessarily result in pathogen death. Nuisance

wildlife control is a simple, sometimes protracted effort to counter the seasonal forces of nature. This process is effective in dealing with the scattering of trash, the trampling of turf in delicate, sometimes frosty areas, the natural pruning of the foliage, the dropping of guano, and sundry gnawing, scratching, scraping, and burrowing. To start this process, take a few easy steps on your own toward understanding these natural forces. The answer to your problem may even become almost self-evident.

- 1. Understand the Damage:** Is the hole on your green from the pecking of a bird, the digging of a squirrel, fox or rodent, or the footsteps of a deer or large dog? Does it occur nocturnally or diurnally? Are there any tracks in the area for identification?
- 2. Understand the Behavior Behind this Damage:** Is the animal looking for food—what is this animal's food and is there a source nearby. Is the animal hiding food (squirrels burying nuts in your USGA green rootzone)? Is the animal a permanent resident or a passer-through? Why is the animal crossing the property in this particular place? Is there evidence of predators that might be following or stalking this animal?
- 3. Create a Plan of Action:** Determine whether to protect the affected area, prevent the damaging behavior, or act against the animal(s) itself. Ensure that this plan is in compliance with all local, state, and

federal regulations and carries the blessing of the course owner or governing body.

- 4. Implement, Evaluate, Adjust & Reevaluate:** Trial and error are still the best method. Remember that animal behavior changes to adapt—your control may also need to evolve to remain effective.
- 5. Seek Advice, Especially Professional Advice:** Don't be a prisoner of your ignorance. Golf course superintendents are not zoologists by nature. There are naturalists, conservationists, private enthusiasts and government agencies whose expertise can give you a real boost up the learning curve. Try:
 - Local chapters of the Sierra Club and the Izaak Walton League, hunting and conservationist groups, and animal rescue shelters
 - Other local superintendents, InAgOnline, GCSAA and other

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Published by the
Mid-Atlantic Association of
Golf Course Superintendents



Wildlife

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internet sites where your concerns can be posted and responded to by others in our profession who have been in a similar predicament before

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal Damage Control Pro-gram Nuisance Wildlife Information Line @ (800) 442-0708
 - Your state's agency for natural resource preservation (Maryland's Dept. of Natural Resources, Virginia's Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries, etc.) in the governmental "blue" pages of the phone book.
 - Your local or county animal control office ("dog-catcher").
- The USDA Nuisance Wildlife Information Line specialists can refer you to a local contractor who works to control your type of damage. Your state agent must issue permits for any animals confined or removed by you or your contractor out-of-

season. Your local agents will be most conversant with any statutes that might prevent certain actions against specific species or in specific areas.

6. **Hire a Professional:** Local nuisance wildlife contractors or "cooperators" specialize in identifying damage, excluding or removing the culprits, and recommending ongoing actions to control or prevent wildlife damage. They have the equipment, expertise, and vaccinations to safely, intelligently and humanely decrease your golf course losses due to nuisance wildlife. They can be contracted case-by-case or perhaps on an ongoing basis depending on your needs. Since some of your nuisance species are desirable furbearers (fox, raccoon, muskrat, coyote, bobcat, ...), you may be able to lower the price of their work in return for access to some of your pond shores, out-of-play woodlands and transition areas during furbearer season.

The environmental movement in the 1990's has veered somewhat away from protecting each and every animal, plant, tree and snail-darter toward establishing some sort of natural balance. Man must be figured into this balance as the protector and disrupter that he is. The government desires to protect birds, furbearers and game alike, but not to the exclusion of all other concerns. Damage to your course is expensive and not always in the best interest of the species involved. Build an ongoing relationship with your wildlife specialists as you would your turf extension agent. Educate them about what you do to impact the local wildlife positively. Your willingness to work within their guidelines can only enhance their enthusiasm to educate you and help you with any further or recurring damage down the road.

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