

## "Goose Problems? Not Here Any More!"

by George Van Haasteren CGM

As we all have probably noticed New Jersey is a pretty densely populated state and I am not just talking people. I have noticed over the past 20 plus years the growing number of geese that seem to make the Garden State their home, whether year round or just seasonal. Any place that has areas of turf, geese seem to be over running it. It's not just golf courses but parks, office complexes, residential, and athletic fields. To top it off not only are they eating the grass but they are also leaving behind a large amount of goose poop as well. I do not find it to be attractive nor fun walking in.

In my particular case I work part-time on athletic fields for Paramus Catholic High School in Paramus, New Jersey. In the area close to the school there is a community college, four golf courses, a county park with a river flowing through it and a cemetery. These are all great places for geese to settle and have a smorgasbord. Unfortunately, all of those places seem to have some type of goose control in place and guess where they were coming? That's right they were coming to where I have to take care of the athletic fields.

Each year it seemed the situation had become worse. The baseball, football, softball, and soccer fields were becoming infested with hundreds of Canadian geese that probably all knew that they were federally protected and could not be harmed. I swear that even some of them would stick their tail feathers up at me and laugh because they realized that I couldn't do a thing. Coaches, players and parents kept asking what could be done to get rid of them because they were tired of falling or stepping on the green turds of slime. In fact I was told that some of the athletes developed staph infections from the goose poop. Horns, whistles, repellents all failed. Riding equipment towards them did nothing but scatter them for a time and then they would just come back. The problem was extremely frustrating.

I knew for some time that border collies were being used to chase geese from golf courses and other areas. In fact three of my friends had purchased border collies several years ago and were having great success in keeping the geese away from their places. So, I began to do some research by asking my buddies a whole bunch of questions as well as using the web for further information. I soon found out why border collies were being used as the preferred choice of removing geese from areas.

Border collies are natural herders. They were originally trained to herd sheep in Scotland and Northern England well over a hundred years ago. Over time they made their way to other places such as Ireland and elsewhere. These dogs are very intelligent, some saying that probably they are the most intelligent out of all the dogs. They are working dogs, meaning that they prefer being outside and performing tasks.

Here in the U.S. border collies have been used for herding purposes for some time and in fact there are numerous herding competitions where border collies excel. It has only been recently (less than 15 years) that

these animals have been used for the purpose of removing geese. That handler, when having the dog go towards the geese, often uses the same commands used for herding. And, they do not harm the geese in any way. This is great since these birds are federally protected.

I had spoken to the administration at the school several times on how to best handle the increasing presence of the geese on the fields, as well as the campus. I advised them that a border collie would be the best bet solution. How much? They wanted to know. I replied that a trained dog was not inexpensive to purchase (\$3,500 and up) but over time it would pay for itself. I didn't expect that the school would be willing to pay for a dog until they decided to spend money on a new rubberized track. Of course, the question came back on how they would remove the goose poop from the track surface, especially after it became imbedded in between the rubber particles. Cleaning the track would be costly and how do you effectively control geese from walking all over the track? Again, I said a border collie. To which the president of the school gave me his blessing and purchase order.

Off I went down to Virginia on the second weekend of October last year. I called a breeder/trainer weeks earlier, who several individuals had recommended, and told her what I was looking for. She told me that she had a dog that would be ideal for my particular situation and was great with kids. Good thing since there are over 1200 kids at the school. I figured I would take the family with me and we all would spend some time together. I also thought it would be a good idea since the dog would be spending nights at our house. It would be a good way of having the dog and my family get to know each other a little better on the way back. Of course at the time there was that little problem of the sniper shootings that was occurring down through where we were traveling. No problem, I would just gas up before we left and again in Delaware. Made it without any problems with the exception that the area was going through a drought similar to ours and the kids couldn't go swimming. We went to pick up the dog the next day.

The owner came out to greet us and show us the dog she had picked out for us. He already had a name (Andy) who was just turning two years old. The owner brought us into her house where we sat down and watched a tape of Andy in action. The kids were already bonding with him. We went over a few things that would assist in Andy working at the school plus what to feed him and take care of him. It was back up to New Jersey and the next day Andy and I went to work on keeping geese away from the fields.

Andy made an immediate impact on keeping the geese off the fields as well as the campus. The first couple of weeks we got to know each other and I would work on the commands with him. My father-in-law also

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worked with him since the dog would be at the school during the day. I drop him off in the morning and he comes home with me each night. Now I am not saying things went according to plan at the beginning. There were some problems but over time they worked themselves out. Andy recognizes the commands and has bonded not only with me but also with my father-in-law and my wife and kids as well. The people at the school love him and treat him great. He's turned out to be a great employee who loves this job and takes pride in this work. Sure geese still fly over the fields daily and sometimes they still try to land on them, but only for a brief second because Andy had already seen them and is in hot pursuit.

Now, I know that there are some out there who think it might be more trouble than it is worth taking care of a border collie. After all it is a great responsibility not to mention time and commitment. Some may feel that having a company that provides a service may be a better option and I don't argue those concerns. In my case I thought it was the best solution to a problem that many of us face with our fields. As with anything, you shouldn't jump in headfirst. You should take the time and do your homework before figuring on the best course of action. ▲

*George Van Haasteren, CGM is an owner of Sports Field Management Systems, Inc.*



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## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**QUESTION:** I am currently working on a project to repair infields of various baseball fields. I was wondering if you could tell me where I could find a Spec for infield dirt. What we are trying to do is take soil samples from the various fields and have a mechanical analysis done and then compare the results to a Spec, however we are unable to find a Spec for baseball infields. Any information you could provide would be very helpful. Thank you very much.

Michael Green, Neglia Engineering

**ANSWER:** Michael, It is refreshing to see that you are looking to the Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey for direction and assistance. Hopefully other engineers will follow your lead. In reference to your inquiry, The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) has recently completed publication F2107 "Standard Guide for Construction and maintenance of Skinned Areas on Sports Fields". The standards provide a very broad specification and it is therefore necessary for you to have an understanding of a few contributing factors and how they affect the selection of an infield mix for your client. Some of these factors are:

1. Budget
2. Level and intensity of play
3. Level and intensity of maintenance

I have attached an article printed in our March newsletter that refers to publication F2107. You can acquire this publication by contacting ASTM directly at 100 Barr Harbor Drive, PO Box C700, West Conshohocken, PA 19428-2959, 610-832-9585(phone) 610-832-9555 (fax) or [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org) (e-mail); or through the website [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org)

In addition, I am very pleased to inform you that Rutgers, Snyder Research and Extension Farm in

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