

Coots Are Back

By Pat Gross, regional director, West Region

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Over the past month, golf courses in the Southwest have seen the unwelcome return of American coots. These duck-like migratory birds have black bodies, red eyes, white beaks, and prefer to live and feed near shallow, freshwater ponds and marshes. Coots feed on grass and aquatic vegetation. When present in large numbers, coots can cause significant damage to fairways, rough and even greens. Coots can also leave behind a massive amount of fecal matter that collects on golf balls, shoes and mowers.

To reduce the mess and damage caused by coots, golf courses are using a variety of nonlethal harassment techniques to scare coots and encourage them to go



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elsewhere. Some methods have worked better than others. Here are the five most successful approaches to coot control on golf courses:

1. Dogs—Specially trained dogs are very good at chasing coots off property or keeping them in the water. The most common breeds for coot control are border collies and Australian shepherds because both have excellent herding ability. The main limitation to using dogs is that they must chase coots multiple times throughout the day and into the evening hours.

2. Fencing and monofilament fishing line—Placing chicken wire or silt fencing along pond shorelines makes it more difficult for coots to get out of the water and onto the golf course. The fencing is normally placed so that it extends 24 inches above the water line. Some golf courses have also had success by stringing monofilament fishing line in a grid pattern across ponds to discourage coots from landing.

3. Tractor-mounted blowers—A high-velocity blower mounted on a utility tractor is necessary for cleaning coot fecal matter off the turf; it is also effective for harassing the birds.

4. Remote-controlled boats, airplanes and drones—These devices can get coots in the air and chase them off the golf course, but the effect is temporary. The birds must be harassed multiple times each day for effective control.

5. Green laser pointers—Green lasers have been especially good at deterring Canada geese and are somewhat effective on coots. The key is using the lasers early in the season when the first few birds arrive; once a large population is present, the lasers are ineffective.

Numerous other techniques have been tried but have proven less effective. Noise makers and pyrotechnics are disruptive to golfers and over time the coots can become desensitized to them. Repellents have also been tried, but their effectiveness is limited by their expense and the need for frequent reapplication. While no single technique has been totally effective at controlling coots, experience has shown that a variety of methods must be employed. Most importantly, any method for coot control must be implemented throughout the entire day.

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