

Goose Tactics Tried and Untrue

by Tony Rzdzki, CGCS
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After attending the C.A.G.C.S. Forum recently and listening to almost every speaker complaining about our feathered friends, I decided that now is the time to relate my experiences and opinions about goose control. You and I deal with this problem daily, and as yet, no one has come up with a solution. To be honest with you neither have I, but I am constantly experimenting with different methods to rid of this scourge ... the resident Canada goose.

The following is a list of all of the methods that I know of that have been used to chase, scare, or eliminate the goose from our properties. The list reads in order of least effective to most effective. This is my opinion and I am sure may cause a stir amongst us, but here goes.

1. Yelling, waving and flailing arms, throwing rocks.

Result: You look like a maniac or may be perceived as a superintendent that has been spraying chemicals just a little too long.

2. Swinging golf clubs or chasing geese with your golf cart and swinging a club at them.

Result: A nesting goose might bite you in the butt, once again you'll be perceived as a maniac, and the geese get used to your behavior and crap even harder before they honk (laugh) and scoot 5 feet out of the way only to dump again on another spot.

3. Installing plastic alligators/swans.

Result: The perception is lost — you are a maniac that definitely needs help. Plastic or foam animals placed in ponds don't last long. The geese quickly destroy them while playing their version of johnnie cross tackle with them. If you ever get on I-88 east bound off of the Route 59 ramp you will see a deflated alligator in the corner of the pond. The geese now use him as a diving platform for their Olympic games.

Live swans, from personal experience, do nothing to frighten or chase geese off of a pond. Yes, they are beautiful birds and they may aesthetically enhance a lake, but they dump as much as a goose, they need extra veterinary care, and they need to be fed, which attracts other wading birds ... which attracts more geese.

If I could develop a hybrid gator that could survive our winters and could be trained not to eat junior golfers or small adults I might be on to something.

4. Flags, tape, and owl balloons.

Result: Too psychedelic. If you watch them too long you won't need to spray your turf to alter your mood.

5. Greenscovers.

Result: Finally something that is very effective in deterring geese on putting surfaces. It's too bad that we can't leave them out year round. But to those who can afford them in the winter time they work great.

6. Pond Aerator (just a reminder: shut them off)

Result: If you have bubble aerators on your course, it's great to keep your stagnant areas moving even in the winter time. But our feathered friends love open water and they will add their own fertilizer in that open hole in the ice as they play their version of ice hockey on your pond.

7. Irrigation control.

Result: Quite effective at scaring geese off of a particular area of your course. I have yet to be lucky enough to have a sprinkler head point directly at a goose when I turn my heads on. I would really like to get lucky and have one sitting on a head when I detonate. Maybe I would literally scare the -hit out of him and he would die on the spot.

My usual result with the irrigation control is that the geese take off, circle around, then land on the next green just as a player is trying to can a 60 footer. Then I have to go over, apologize, and launch them again. Hopefully they'll leave or land in a lake this time.

All joking aside, this is a pretty good harassment tactic. It's too bad we can't leave our irrigation systems charged year round, it could be very effective at this time of the year.

8. Bombs and Rockets

Result: I personally have not used this tactic, but I have talked to others who have. Once (if you can) you gain permission from your neighbors to use these devices, I have heard that they can be very effective ... if you are persistent and use them before play begins. One problem I imagined is that during the day when geese often flock in, I wouldn't want to be bombing geese, especially when that same player is in the backstroke of that 60 footer that he's sure to sink.

9. Goose grid

Result: They work. I have personally seen them and last week a couple of the speakers at the Forum showed some different methods of installation to protect various wetland management crops until they are large enough to withstand a feeding frenzy from the honkers.

I understand that the goose grid is a temporary guard installed for the protection of wetland crops until they mature, but during that time they look quite unpleasant, especially when the water level goes down on a wetland and the algae hangs off of the strings. It takes a silver-tongued superintendent to explain the benefits of this ugly situation to his committee and that it will remain that way for a few years.

10. Buffer zones around lakes

Result: According to many wildlife biologists, including The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System, this is one of the best ways to keep geese on the water and prevent them from walking out on to the turf. I have yet to hear of anyone having any positive results from this management practice. If any of you have, please call me.

I believe that the theory is great, but to put it into practice is rather difficult on a golf course. Most of our club's committees demand that 'clean cut look' on lake banks. Once again to convince them that this method will work is very difficult especially when they pose this question, "can't the goose just fly onto our turf?" Duhhh!

I was able to persuade upper management here not to mow our lake banks this past season, one positive point is that it reduces labor costs and time. Next season I hope to extend the buffer zone further up the bank, then I will be able to see for myself if this management practice really reduces goose fertilization on my fairways.

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(Goose Tactics continued)

11. Grape juice

Result: The jury is still out and the scientists, I am sure, are feverishly working to discover if this will work. Millions of dollars are at stake. They could test it here if they like. If it fails I'll just add some ice cubes and have a cold drink.

12. Eggs. Removal/spraying/shaking

Result: Removal and/or spraying with some sort of oil based product are very effective, but ... very illegal! \$500 per egg if you are caught molesting a federally protected bird. I would not suggest either one of these methods. If anyone of us were caught Paul Harvey and the environmentalists would light the powder keg to the already unstable, volatile situation that exists.

Egg shaking is legal. We were able to obtain a permit from the Department of the Interior; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This method is very effective with one caution; timing. The egg needs to be shook at the proper time of development within. You need to place the egg in a bucket of water. When the egg reaches a certain stage of development it floats in a certain manner depending on it's age. When the egg reaches the proper age shake it vigorously and be sure to replace it in the nest. Mother goose will continue to sit on them and her nesting urge will be satisfied.

I was not aware of the proper timing for shaking eggs this past spring, so some birds did hatch. Next season I will be sure to float test each nest and shake the eggs at the proper time. The phone number for permit application is 612/725-3775. The office is located in St. Paul, Minnesota and call between 7:30 and 3:00.

13. Remington's cure

Result: Very effective. A 12 gauge shotgun can solve many problems and create many as well. I don't believe that the 'nuisance season' for removing geese is available in Illinois at this time. I didn't give it much regard since we did not want to start any problems with our neighbors. I am sure that many of you would share this same concern.

14. T.R.'s cure

Result: Very satisfying and somewhat effective.

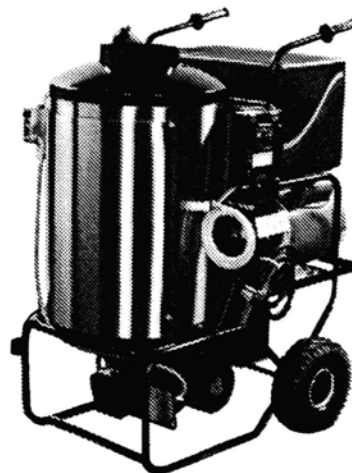


No, I have not yet discovered a cure to eliminate resident geese on golf courses, but I am actively working on a couple of ideas. But I do use one more tool that some of you already have, and I would like to narrate some of my experiences with this, my most valuable tool, my dogs.

Nothing works better than a well trained dog in chasing geese off of a golf course, nothing!

Make sure that you read the key words in that past sentence 'well trained'. You need a dog that will: a) ride on a golf cart, b) sit still when approaching golfers, c) not bark around golfers, d) sit quietly on a cart or leash if you need to talk to someone, check a green, or go in the clubhouse for a cup of coffee. You need a dog that will mind your commands when she is working (chasing geese) and a dog that is determined to get the job done. (continued page 12)

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(Goose Tactics continued)

In my mind, there is no dog better suited for this type of work than a Labrador Retriever. I've read about the Border Collie and I also believe that a Chihuahua could spook geese as well as a Great Dane. But a water dog, bred for swimming will go out on that lake and chase a goose off of it's greatest sense of security; the water. To me this is essential in controlling geese.

The best method that I have found when chasing geese out of a lake, especially a larger lake, is to use two dogs. One will spook the geese to the far side of the lake, they usually swim there. If she is by herself often times it is difficult to flush them out and this takes a lot of time. If you can start one dog at the near side of the lake where the geese are located, then drop the other one in at the far side of the lake where the geese are heading ... duck your head or make sure that you have a rainsuit on, because they'll soon be bombing you as they take off.

Not to worry about the legality of a dog 'catching' a goose. It is almost impossible. I have had ganders on numerous times intentionally swim slowly in circles just 6 feet or less in front of my dog for a half an hour at a time ... jeez I thought that my dog would die of exhaustion, but she wouldn't quit until I was hoarse from screaming at her and she finally scrambled up the bank. That gander swam away waddling it's tail, taking a dump, and rejoining his new family of goslings and mother.

The dogs can't catch them on land either. A goose's eyesight is very keen. They see you at 200 yds., and a guardian

goose is always watching. They fly well before you can get near enough to them to get caught. One other phenomenon that I have discovered is that sometimes when I don't have my dogs, the geese recognize me on my cart, especially the resident geese. Many times they flee when I don't have the dogs tagging along ... chalk one up for our side!

A goose, aside from it's nasty characteristics is a marvelous animal. I am continually amazed at it's tenacity, beauty in flight, wariness of predators, and survival instincts.

Another thing that I have discovered especially these past two seasons is that dogs are a great public relations tool. People love dogs and they love to see them perform. Nothing beats watching a dog in full stride dive into a lake. A great Labrador doesn't look beautiful until her chest is heaving, pink tongue lolling out, eyes alert for action, and her coat soaking wet from working the water. God I love that. These past two summers I had the opportunity to train two Chocolate Lab puppies ... talk about a PR tool! Golfers flock around your cart and conversations are immediate.

One other thing that a dog can do for you, once it is trained, is reduce stress. Early in the morning, making the rounds, breathing in the fresh air, and watching the dog work; some days it makes me feel that everything is right with the world and the responsibilities that I am charged with. Some days might just be bad, everyone has a bad day. Then that goofy dog might just chase away an aerosol salesman. Maybe she might just sit with her head on your lap, golden eyes sheepishly looking at you and saying 'I'm your friend, your best companion, everything will be all right soon.' You scratch her

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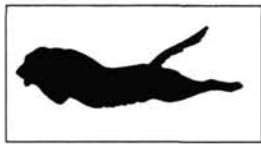
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on her head and smile to yourself ... 'yeah, everything will be all right.'



From this bounty of knowledge that I have just bestowed on all of you, what have we learned? For now the goose is here to stay. Our best solution at this time I believe is to use a combination of the better tactics that I described above. One thing is for sure, whatever methods that you should decide to use, you have to be persistent, as persistent as that gander was with my dog. These geese are now living in what they may consider their ... heaven, and they won't give up paradise any easier than we would. Good luck!



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