



# Resident Geese... What's the Big Deal?

*April showers will bring May flowers, but the month of March, with warmer temperatures and increased daylight, will also bring lush green grass, especially at golf courses that are known for the best grass available due to impeccably kept fairways and greens. What does fresh, bright green grass attract, besides numerous golfers wanting to enjoy the outdoors? Geese, lots and lots of geese. Young, healthy shoots of fertilized grass are the favorite food source for Canada geese. Combine that with the safety provided by water holes and a lack of hunting pressure, and most Midwestern golf courses double as luxury housing developments for Canada geese.*

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Once the short spring migration of February and March ends, the geese remaining in the Midwestern U.S. are considered resident or giant Canada geese. They remain close to the area in which they hatched for their entire lives and do not go through fall and spring migratory journeys. Although resident Canada geese have undergone an exponential growth in population, and are often considered "nuisance" birds, it is important to remember that they are still a federally protected species. No lethal control, including the destruction of nest and eggs, can be done without the proper permission from federal and state agencies. Effective management of nuisance geese is still possible, as no permits are necessary to harass geese, and getting the proper permission to destroy eggs can be easily attained. However, failing to get the proper permits before destroying any eggs can result in heavy fines. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a website where a property can be registered for nest and egg destruction. However, each golf course should check with their state wildlife agency for necessary state permits, as some states require both federal and state permits to perform such actions.

This entire process may sound like a big headache. So why should a golf course superintendent bother with managing the goose population? While a small group of resident birds munching on grass may not seem like a big deal for a large course with hundreds of acres of grass, keep in mind that just as the overall population of giant Canada geese is growing exponentially, so does an individual resident population. In other words, as the following graph shows,

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one successful nest of five eggs can lead to a resident population of 25 geese after five years, and 250 geese after ten years. Another important fact to consider is that one single goose can eat over three pounds of grass per day. Now imagine a group of over 200 geese munching on the grass on which you have spent thousands of dollars to maintain a level of perfection. Consider, especially, that the favorite goose dining areas typically are the greens, tees, and fairways. This quickly becomes a costly problem, particularly when combined with the one to two pounds of droppings left by each bird each day — not only an unpleasant inconvenience to golfers, but also a cause of expensive damage to maintenance equipment. In addition, during the spring season, nesting geese become very aggressive. Both the male and female will often attack anything or anyone that comes near the nest. This can be quite a distraction, even dangerous, for a golfer whose tee shot lands near a nest, or a groundskeeper whose mower gets too close to a defending male.

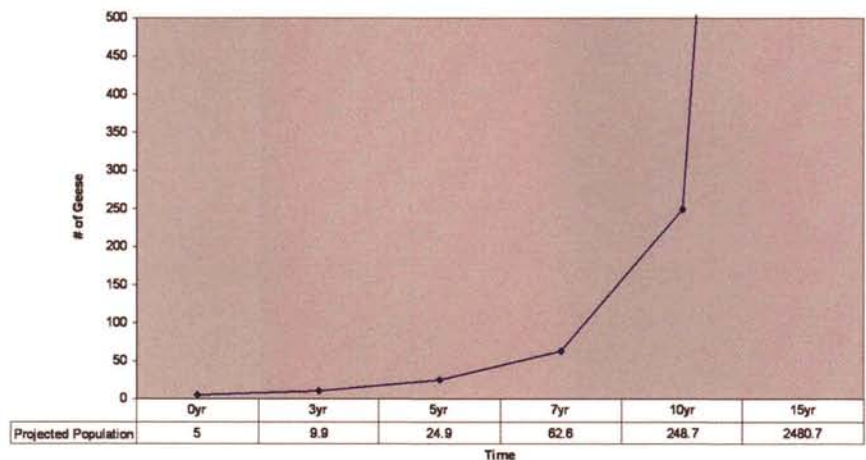
So what is a golf course superintendent to do? The most effective plan would be to employ a fully integrated management program that includes harassment with tools such

as trained dogs and pyrotechnics, habitat modification to impede a goose's access to and from water, chemical repellents, and egg depredation. Any of these activities can be contracted out to a professional, or done in-house with existing staff, however, all can be very time consuming and expensive. At the very least, each golf course with a resident goose population should employ an egg depredation program.

In the Midwest, nesting season

for giant Canada geese typically runs from the middle of March to the middle of May. It's a bit earlier in areas at the southern end of and later in areas along the northern end of the range. While it is preferable to get the application process started before the first egg is laid, in many cases permits can be obtained with short notice in an emergency. Once a full clutch or group of eggs, typically averaging around five, is laid, the clock starts ticking. The incubation

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period for giant Canada geese averages only 28 days, and any addling, such as dipping each egg into corn oil, or vigorously shaking each egg to rupture the yolk, should be done 14-21 days into the incubation process at the latest. Locating the nests is by far the most difficult, important, and time-consuming task in the entire process. Any eggs in nests found in "safe" locations such as islands should be treated and returned to the nest until after the full incubation period when they should be removed and buried. This reduces the risk of the pair renesting in a harder to find location. Any nests that pose a hazard to course patrons or employees should be removed and buried as soon as the proper permits are in place. A consistent egg depredation program, year after year, will go a long way in stabilizing your resident goose population, and over time can reduce the existing goose problem. When egg depredation is combined with a fully integrated goose management program, positive results will be more immediate, and migratory popula-

tions can also be managed to a more tolerable level.

The costs invested in a goose management program are often recovered in the form of minimized turf and equipment damage. Prior to implementing any management program, it is advisable to have a damage assessment done for your course to determine the nature, extent, and cost of damages relating to goose activity. This information can then be used to develop and justify the most cost effective and efficient management plan. For the immediate future, it is important to remember that ignoring a few geese on the course in March, can lead to having a lot of geese on the course in May, throughout the rest of the upcoming summer, and beyond.



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