

Canada Geese are just plain foul for superintendents

*Head 'em up,
round 'em out,
goosehide*

By Peter Blais

You name it, he's tried it—wire, pyrotechnics, swan decoys, dogs, round-ups.

"There are no cut and dried solutions, but there are many little things you can do to successfully eliminate Canada geese from your golf courses," Country Club of North Carolina superintendent George B. Thompson said at the United States Golf Association seminar during the GCSAA Annual Conference in Las Vegas, Nev.

What's wrong with geese? And why would you want to remove them from your course, anyway?

The wild goose is an honorable bird, Thompson admits. It mates for life and will give up that life to protect its mate from predators, such as the white fox or man. It feeds on grains and grass, but never kills small birds or animals for food. When people think of Canada geese they generally picture a V-shaped formation of birds flying thousands of feet overhead.

That's the image Thompson held for years. But that changed when the annual visitors started landing on his course, multiplying, and then refusing to return to Canada's Hudson Bay come spring. The birds adapted to the warm weather. The CC of North Carolina's goose population grew from two to more than 100 in a few years.

Many of the geese were migratory. But a growing number made the Pinehurst estate's 100 acres of water their year-round home. They became part of the Piedmont area's ever-growing population of 15,000 non-migratory birds.

"When I used to see them passing 3,000 to 4,000 feet overhead in that V-formation, I thought they were pretty neat," Thompson said. "But when they landed, and then seemed to forget about going home, we started to call



Canada geese are rounded up (above) at the Country Club of North Carolina for shipment to another state. The map (right) shows the flight corridors the birds use during their yearly migration down the East Coast.



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— George Thompson

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The main problem was goose droppings. Thompson's crew had to clean the unsightly, foul-smelling mess off three to four greens every morning before golfers' nostrils were offended and putts pushed awry.

"If you have played golf through their excrement or have had to chase them off the fairway in order to make a second shot, then you realize what a dirty, disgusting polluter they have become," Thompson said. "These birds don't have the instinct to fly to Canada because they have never been there. They are golf course birds. A golf course environment has plenty fresh water for drinking and roosting, verdant grasses to graze upon and no natural enemies."

In addition to their droppings, the birds also create sanitation, noise, water pollution and lost turf problems. Members tired of the geese by 1990 and Thompson contacted the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal Damage Control specialists.

In late June, Thompson's crew and the government employees rounded up the flock in late June while the birds were molting and incapable of flight. They were easily herded into a funnel-shaped net and placed in boxes for shipment to a state 700 miles away.

The club paid the Department of Agriculture \$1,110 to remove 89 birds. Members considered it a bargain. Nearly a year later the birds had not returned, Thompson said.

Members were also happy Thompson's crew didn't kill the birds during a special non-migratory nuisance goose season. The local media harshly criticized a nearby club that shot some birds, Thompson said.

Courses with large lakes are the most susceptible to goose problems. The CC of North Carolina has a 60-acre and a 30-acre lake. Because of that, the growing non-migratory population, and the many requests for bird removal sitting on U.S. Department of Agriculture desks, Thompson expects to be

Continued on page 61

Goose repellent may soon be available

By Peter Blais

A repellent may soon be available to keep Canada geese away from shore and off the golf course.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and LESCO, a manufacturer and distributor of golf course maintenance equipment and turf products, are working on such a product.

The food-grade powder can be mixed with water and sprayed along shore.

"The initial test results have been encouraging," said a LESCO spokesman. "Something could be available in the next few years."

The repellent appears to be environmentally compatible, which should be helpful when the Environmental Protection Agency decides whether to approve its use, according to the company spokesman.

"It has extremely attractive toxicology characteristics," he said. "A similar product is used as a food and drug additive. A lot depends on the EPA. But we don't anticipate any major problems."

LESCO is doing extensive field testing this year. "We need to improve the formulation to make the mix more accommodating for application on turf," he said.

Most of the government work has involved testing in standing water near airports where birds occasionally venture and interfere with flight patterns, and in taling ponds containing toxic chemicals, he added.

"The USDA has looked at it for other uses, but we think it could work on golf courses," he said.

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189	Anderson Instruments	61	143	Kalo	43
118	Andersons, The	21	174	Kenova Construction Co.	59
109	Aquatrols	12	133	Lebanon Turf Products	33
128	B.H.Sales	27	132	Lebanon Turf Products	32
122	Barebo, Inc.	24	139	Mach IV Productions	39
180	Bell Turf Equipment	59	181	Markers, Inc.	60
179	Bloch & Co.	59	190	Master of the Links	61
103	Ciba-Geigy	4	182	Mike Young Designs	60
108	Ciba-Geigy	10-11	194	Milona Turf Products	61
106	Ciba-Geigy	7	145	New Golf Concepts	43
153	Ciba-Geigy	54-55	144	Par Aide	43
146	Ciba-Geigy	44-45	119	Partac Peat	23
178	Continental Bridge	59	186	Pavelec Bros. Construction	60
130	Cushman	31	123	Perfection Sprinkler	24
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152	Cushman	52-53	120	Precision Laboratories	23
107	Cushman	8-9	125	Precision Laboratories	26
138	Dispro Display Products	62	116	Precision Small Engine	21
188	Excel Bridge Mfg.	60	171	Precision Tool Co.	59
113	Flowtronex	16	173	Precision Tool Co.	59
155	Formost Construction Co.	35	183	Quail Valley Turf Farm	60
126	Golf 2000 Pavers	26	104	Ransomes	5
187	Golf Course Company	60	129	Regal Chemical	27
112	Grace-Sierra	15	140	Regal Chemical	39
114	Grace-Sierra	17	148	Rhone-Poulenc	47
110	Grace-Sierra	13	151	Rhone-Poulenc	51
156	Grace-Sierra	63	134	Rhone-Poulenc	36-37
101	Grace-Sierra	2	166	Roots, Inc.	7
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196	Homotech Industries	61	154	Toro Comm'l. Prod. Div.	56-57
142	ISK Biotech	40-41	115	Toro Comm'l. Prod. Div.	18-19
111	Jacklin Seed Co.	14	136	Total Turf Care	38
147	Jacklin Seed /International Seeds	46	185	USA Golf	60
157	Jacobsen	64	121	Valent USA	23
191	Jesco Products	61	175	Warehouse Radio	59
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Geese

Continued from page 62

dealing with the goose problem for years. But there are other means he has used successfully and will continue to use to discourage geese from calling his course home.

According to Thompson:

- Dogs are the most effective way to discourage geese from taking up residence. Dogs chase the birds away from shore and into the water.

"Geese will feed a little on aquatic vegetation such as milfoil. However, they are grazers and if they can't get on the turf to feed, they will go elsewhere," Thompson said.

English setters, springer and Brittany spaniels, golden and Labrador retrievers have all worked well on golf courses. Patrolling the course early in the morning or whenever large concentrations of geese are in the area has worked well. Bringing it back to the kennel rather than leaving it on the course after the job is completed helps keep the dog's interest level high. The morning ritual should also be treated as a job, not a lark.

Superintendent Bob Phipps of Shorehaven Golf Club in East Norwalk, Conn., uses Betsy, a 1-year-old Labrador retriever mix to patrol his courses mile-long stretch of Long Island shoreline, 40 acres of salt marsh, five ponds and four brooks.

"The geese have been driving me crazy," Phipps said. "The dog works great until she runs out of gas chasing them through the water. We keep her inside the maintenance building at night. She's a great watchdog, too. I wouldn't want her to catch me trying to break in here."

- Pyrotechnics work well if used immediately when geese try to land on lakes or ponds, Thompson said. Banging, screaming or whistling shells can be fired from pistols or shotguns. They are loud, so check with local authorities regarding noise ordinances and warn nearby members and residents.

"Have someone assigned to monitor your golf courses on a daily basis," Thompson said. "In most cases, if the screamers will do the job. However, if the geese refuse to leave, get two or more pistols, or shotguns, and stalk the birds in the early morning or evening and shoot the crackers or bangers over their heads."

- A single strand of wire placed about six inches above the water line near heavily played areas can force geese into less-used areas.

- Styrofoam swans placed in family groups of two adults and several young per surface acre can discourage geese from landing. Swans are very territorial. While live ones chase geese, they will also pursue golfers who venture too close. That's why the Styrofoam models are preferred. Swan families should be placed along the main flight lines where they are easily visible by flying geese.

- Obtaining permits to shake or freeze the eggs of nested birds helps control goose populations. Birds will re-nest if the eggs are simply removed or broken. A goose will sit on the frozen or shaken eggs for several weeks before realizing they won't hatch.

Repellents may be available soon, Thompson added. The Department of Agriculture is working on a product made from the essence of grapes. The dye can be mixed with water and sprayed along the water's edge. Lesco Inc. has experimented with it and reported some promise.

Thompson said he has talked with superintendents throughout the country about Canadian geese. Those along major flyways have all reported problems.

"If you have excellent conditions for them, they will return," Thompson said. "So it is important to be diligent and persistent in your quest for a goose-free environment."