

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 state'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.



'When they landed, and then seemed to forget about going home, we started to call them just plain foul.'
— George Thompson

them just plain foul."

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

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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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