

Joe Hills has found that fishing line is a great and ecological way to rid a golf course of geese **BY ANTHONY PIOPP**

Strings *Attached*



When Canada geese began taking over Blue Mash Golf Course, owner Joe Hills tried a variety of methods to

rid his layout of the pests.

Once it became apparent none of them worked, he devised his own defense system using nothing more than 30-pound test fishing line. His ingenuity earned him top prize at the National Golf Course Owners Association annual meeting's Idea Fair earlier this year and accolades from the National Audubon Society.

"We opened more than two years ago, and within a year they were all over the place," Hills says about his Gaithersburg, Md., layout, designed by Arthur Hills.

He said the favorite gathering place for the geese was his 5-acre pond. There is no buffer between the pond and the holes that wind their way around it because the course is wide open. As a result, the geese weren't just eating grass, but also wrecking fairways as well as leaving behind large amounts of dung. "They were really destroying the place," Hills says.

First he tried a remote-control car to scare

them off. Later he added a remote-control speedboat to his arsenal when the geese began to retreat to the pond. To avoid the watercraft, the geese — sometimes in flocks of up to 100 — only visited the course at night.

"I was staying after dark trying to get rid of them," Hills says, indicating a growing obsession.

But, finally, when it seemed like Hills had exhausted all of his efforts to rid Blue Mash of the dastardly waterfowl, his inventive side kicked in.

He came up with the idea of stringing clear fishing line across the pond. Using his remote-control boat to traverse the water, he placed the line in 30-foot increments with the line attached to the shore by sod staples.

Within a few days the geese were gone. On one occasion, Hills saw a pair of the birds land in the water and start swimming. One lightly bumped into one of the strands, and the pair turned and left the property.

The method did not work quite as well on a half-acre pond, so Hills added a second row of fishing line in the opposite direction. This created a grid, and the geese stayed away from

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BLUE MASH GOLF COURSE

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the small pond as well.

Hills also perfected his method of distributing the fishing line when he added a second layer to the larger pond. He now secures the ends to one side of the pond, places three or four spools on a pipe and walks the lines to the other side of the pond where they are again fastened with sod spikes. His total cost was \$75.

Greg Butcher, bird conservation director for the National Audubon Society, called the method "novel" for golf course use. He said the same strategy is gaining favor as a tactic in keeping nesting birds, such as pigeons, off buildings.

The use of the monofilament line is successful because Canada geese prefer to take off from and land in water. It is also their favorite place to sleep, says Audubon spokesman John Bianchi. He surmised the extra line was needed for

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JOHN BIANCHI
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

the smaller pond because the geese were landing on the ground and walking to the water.

To make the lines even more effective, Butcher suggested Hills try attaching markers near the center of the pond.

This will not only remind previous visitors of the problem, but also serve as a warning to newcomers.

Sharon Pawlak, of the Coalition to Prevent the Destruction of Canada Geese, also did not object to Hills' method. She did, however, caution that the golf course could have problems if birds were injured by the monofilament. According to Pawlak, the best way to rid of any geese is through a variety of methods such as floating alligators, balloons and dogs.

"Geese will seek the least resistance," she says. "They will rehabilitate to an area where there is no harassment."

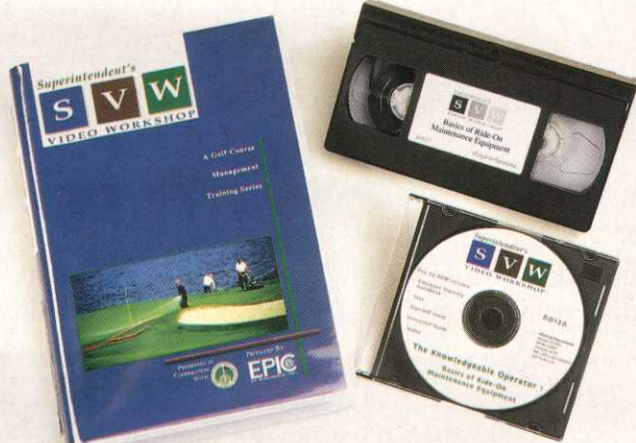
Pawlak said she would not be surprised if the geese returned to Blue Marsh, this time landing on the fairways, eating for a while, and then leaving. Golf courses are hard to resist for Canada geese. "We're creating a habitat they love," Pawlak says. "You're literally setting out a dinner table for them." ■

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