

# Geese vs. Golf

By Doug James

It's been said that there's a goose that laid a golden egg. Unfortunately, that silly goose hasn't had the Rocky Mountains on its itinerary. So far all that's been left is a mess. With 20,000 to 23,000 geese in the Denver-Boulder area, that's a lot of mess. Granted the geese are enjoyable to watch and hear in flight, but cleaning up after them is another story. Geese are aggressive, love to eat and leave approximately a quarter pound of droppings a day. Their grazing can leave a turf barren and they will dig in turf, with no respect for a player's putting line. They have been known to chase golfers from turf that they consider home.

Colorado was not part of the original goose flyway south to their winter home in New Mexico. In 1953 the Colorado Department of Wildlife re-introduced geese into the front range for a variety of reasons. The geese like it. With the urbanization of the front range, there was plenty of open green space and water on which the geese could survive. Word got out in the goose world that they had found Nirvana. A large portion of the geese became resident geese. Being resourceful animals, finding food during the winter was not a problem. Additionally, migrating geese gaze down upon Colorado as they fly south and see the resident geese; they got the message "cool, that's a good place to be for a while." Thus thousands of geese rerouted their flyway through Colorado.

Several methods of goose control have been tried, a goose rodeo being one of them. Several summers ago the Colorado DOW began having goose roundups. The geese were

herded into cages and then transported to other locations. Thousands of corralled geese have been transported to Kansas and Oklahoma. Head 'em up, move 'em out, rawhide!

Scare-away programs which disrupt nesting have also been tried. Scare-away techniques that have been used are recordings of distressed birds have been played, cannons and shell crackers shot and balloons with spooky eyes have been flown around goose areas. All have been successful for awhile.

An interesting idea in goose control was reported in the September 1993 issue of *National Geographic*. A new product is about to get approval from the EPA, grape bubble gum. Well, not really grape bubble gum but methyl anthranilate (MA). MA is a naturally occurring chemical found in Concord grapes and citrus blossoms. A synthesized form gives grape bubble gum its flavor. Geese don't like the taste. John Cummings, of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Denver Wildlife Research Center, is working on a microcapsule of MA that can be sprayed on the grass and remain viable for forty days. A long residual is important so that both migratory and resident geese can be controlled. It is not known if the geese will become baseball card traders after the MA is sprayed.

But alas, you just can't fool Mother Nature. Being a resilient lot, there will probably always be a few geese around some golf courses. Golfers and geese will need to learn to just coexist.

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