



TURFGRASS MATTERS

Mid-Atlantic Association of Golf Course Superintendents

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Taking the Nuisance out of Nuisance Wildlife Control

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Now that the grass has stopped growing, the leaves have fallen, and the fruit bearing trees and shrubs are for the most part bare, the very species of wildlife that we work so hard to protect turn on us. They develop seasonal behavior that can truly ruin a golf course superintendent's whole day. By providing greenspace, preserving woodland and tall grass habitat, and maintaining healthy groundcover, shrubs and ornamental trees, superintendents have crafted the perfect wildlife magnet to draw deer, crows, 'coon, fox, squirrel, groundhog, goose, et al onto the golf course from surrounding properties. Golfers and superintendents alike enjoy glimpses of these furry and feathered neighbors throughout the warmer months. In the late fall and winter months, however, the young leave there nests, dens, and warrens and strike out on their own. Hibernating species gorge at ground level to fatten up. Migrating birds settle in the open areas near water and forage, and larger herbivores tromp all over the golf course in search of the soft succulent ornamental shrubs and trees that will sustain them until the spring greenup. Much of this behavior results in damage to the golf course at a time when it is incapable of healing itself. What is a superintendent to do?

Nuisance wildlife control is not an arcane science, does not require tremendous investments in time or money, and does not necessarily result in pathogen death. Nuisance

wildlife control is a simple, sometimes protracted effort to counter the seasonal forces of nature. This process is effective in dealing with the scattering of trash, the trampling of turf in delicate, sometimes frosty areas, the natural pruning of the foliage, the dropping of guano, and sundry gnawing, scratching, scraping, and burrowing. To start this process, take a few easy steps on your own toward understanding these natural forces. The answer to your problem may even become almost self-evident.

- 1. Understand the Damage:** Is the hole on your green from the pecking of a bird, the digging of a squirrel, fox or rodent, or the footsteps of a deer or large dog? Does it occur nocturnally or diurnally? Are there any tracks in the area for identification?
- 2. Understand the Behavior Behind this Damage:** Is the animal looking for food—what is this animal's food and is there a source nearby. Is the animal hiding food (squirrels burying nuts in your USGA green rootzone)? Is the animal a permanent resident or a passer-through? Why is the animal crossing the property in this particular place? Is there evidence of predators that might be following or stalking this animal?
- 3. Create a Plan of Action:** Determine whether to protect the affected area, prevent the damaging behavior, or act against the animal(s) itself. Ensure that this plan is in compliance with all local, state, and

federal regulations and carries the blessing of the course owner or governing body.

- 4. Implement, Evaluate, Adjust & Reevaluate:** Trial and error are still the best method. Remember that animal behavior changes to adapt—your control may also need to evolve to remain effective.
- 5. Seek Advice, Especially Professional Advice:** Don't be a prisoner of your ignorance. Golf course superintendents are not zoologists by nature. There are naturalists, conservationists, private enthusiasts and government agencies whose expertise can give you a real boost up the learning curve. Try:
 - Local chapters of the Sierra Club and the Izaak Walton League, hunting and conservationist groups, and animal rescue shelters
 - Other local superintendents, InAgOnline, GCSAA and other

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