

TURFGRASS MATTERS

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A Year in the Life of a Golf Course Dog

by Clay Craft

Golf courses face a number of challenging maintenance tasks. One problem that has drawn the attention of golfers is the mess left by Canada Geese. Populations of federally protected Canada geese have become a major topic of discussion. Recently, a short resident Canada goose hunting season has been implemented in Delaware, but this has done little to curb populations on many local golf courses. There are several management techniques that are used for combating goose problems, and none are absolute. I will focus on the use of dogs, especially Border Collies, to chase off Canada Geese on the course. The purpose of this article will be to inform you of what is involved in the care and training of a Border Collie in your quest to manage goose problems at your facility. I can provide a first hand view of what I have gone through in caring for and training my 14 month old Border Collie, Marley, at Cripple Creek Golf and CC near Bethany Beach, DE.

The Problem

Increasing resident Canada goose populations at our facility forced us to devise a management plan to reduce their numbers. There are many reasons that they are not a desired wildlife on the property. The first reason is the incredible amount of waste that they produce. The average Canada goose will deposit one and a half pounds of waste per day. You can only imagine the amount of goose waste produced daily, even in a relatively small population of 20 to 30 geese. The second problem is the fearlessness of the resident birds. With very few natural predators and a limited hunting season the geese will continue to stay in the same place



and nest year after year. The offspring called "goslings" then stay on the property and produce offspring of their own the following year. If left unchecked only a few Canada geese will become many in just a few years. This problem is compounded by the abundance of green foliage to eat on the course, and the compulsion of some people to feed them.

The Solution

Several approaches can be used to manage these birds. Use of repellent sprays will work, but this can be offensive to golfers, especially in this age of pesticide paranoia. Superintendent Bob Collins, CGCS tried the rope around the pond method with little success. After discussing the option of a Border Collie with Bob, he gave me the OK in March of 2000. I had little trouble finding a nine week-old pup within a few days, and named her Marley. Marley began coming to work with me immediately and going home with me at night. I paid for the dog,

because if I ever leave the facility I will take her with me. These are loyal and extremely social dogs that need human interaction at all times. If their master ever leaves them there is a good chance that the dog will become worthless for work. Some courses will provide a nice place for the dog to stay in the shop or a well insulated dog house. This is the case when the golf course budget is used for the purchase and care of the dog. In my case I purchased the dog and paid for vet bills as the initial startup costs. My golf facility now pays for the food and some other small costs associated with her upkeep.

Training

Some training should begin immediately if you are to train the dog yourself, although some people find it easier and more convenient to send the dog off for training. In my case I trained the dog by myself. I did attend a basic obedience training class, which is usually available through local kennel clubs or private trainers. The Border Collie

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