

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
Protecting Wildlife

Wildlife Services (WS), a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), provides Federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts that threaten the Nation's agricultural and natural resources, human health and safety, and property.

Using an integrated approach of nonlethal and lethal methods, WS helps individuals, local governments, businesses, and others manage waterfowl in ways that best balance the positive value of bird populations with the conflicts that they sometimes cause.

A Wildlife Services biologist applies corn oil to a goose egg. This treatment prevents eggs from developing and reduces the potential for re-nesting.

Factsheet

May 2010

Assistance With Waterfowl Damage



Birdwatchers and the general public enjoy watching Canada geese, ducks, and other waterfowl—all valuable natural resources. In many areas of the country, however, populations of nonmigrating, or resident, Canada geese and ducks are increasing dramatically.

These birds require fresh water for resting and nesting and tender young grass and other succulent vegetation for food. The plentiful, well-manicured lawns of residential neighborhoods, corporate business areas, parks, airports, and golf courses provide excellent habitat. Geese, especially, can easily become accustomed to people and residential areas.

Although most people find a few birds acceptable, problems quickly develop as bird numbers increase. These problems include: overgrazing of grass and ornamental plants; accumulation of droppings and feathers; attacks on humans by aggressive birds; and the fouling of reservoirs, swimming areas, docks, lawns, and recreational areas. Flocks of geese and other waterfowl also feed on a variety of crops, including corn, soybeans, rice, lettuce, winter wheat, barley, and rye. Additionally, the feeding of waterfowl by humans may contribute to conflicts with humans.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and State laws protect all native waterfowl in the United States, including migratory and resident Canada geese. Under these laws, it is illegal to hunt, kill, sell, purchase, or possess migratory birds except as permitted by regulations enforced by the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

Individuals can conduct some management techniques independently, but wildlife professionals should carry out most waterfowl management activities. Individuals should consult with WS or a State wildlife agency.



Management Techniques

Long-term water fowl management results require multiple tools, each effective for different concerns. Exclusive use of only one tool will not have a long-term impact.

Wildlife Services professionals recommend an integrated approach to discourage waterfowl from residing in areas where overabundant flocks cause problems. The following techniques should be used in combination with one another. Waterfowl quickly will become accustomed to any single technique.

- Discontinue feeding. Wild birds can find their own food and will survive without handouts. Once feeding by humans is discontinued, waterfowl will revert to better quality, natural foods. In many instances, the birds will leave.
- Remove domestic ducks and geese. Because birds may learn to locate food resources by watching the behavior of other birds, domestic ducks and geese serve as decoys to wild waterfowl. The removal of domestic waterfowl may reduce the attractiveness of an area. No Federal permit is required, but local law enforcement should be consulted about State, county, and municipal laws, and regulations before removing domestic waterfowl. Removal techniques must comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies.
- Modify landscaping. Geese and ducks, in particular, are grazers and require short, green grass for food. Allow grass to grow longer so it is unpalatable to the birds. Along water edges, plant less attractive vegetation, such as pachysandra, periwinkle, and euonymus. Waterfowl prefer nesting on islands, peninsulas, and undisturbed grounds. When landscaping, do not create small islands or peninsulas; where these features already exist, consider changes to make them unavailable to waterfowl.
- Install barriers. Waterfowl prefer to land on water and walk onto adjacent grassy areas to feed and rest. The most effective tools for controlling waterfowl movement are fences, hedgerows, and other physical barriers.
- Use scaring devices. Large helium-filled balloons, strobe lights, scarecrows with movable parts, bird-scaring reflecting tape, Mylar™ flags, screamer sirens, whistle bombs, shell crackers, and automatic exploders will help keep geese and other waterfowl from feeding and resting on property. These should be moved periodically. Before using noisemakers or pyrotechnics, check local and State regulations concerning permits and the use of firearms and pyrotechnics.
- Utilize dogs. Use dogs to keep geese out of hay, grain crops, and parks. Most effective are free-ranging dogs trained to chase birds as soon as they land, so some communities have enlisted volunteer human/canine teams of trained and reliable pets in parks for harassing waterfowl. Local leash laws may prevent such use of dogs.
- Prevent nesting. Local populations of waterfowl may be controlled if property owners prevent them from nesting. Waterfowl are protected by State and Federal laws, so a property owner must register with the FWS. See link: <http://www.fws.gov/permits/mbpermits/GooseEggRegistration.html>. Nest treatment may include manipulating eggs so they do not develop. These methods include: addling (shaking), oiling with corn oil, puncturing, chilling, or replacing eggs. The bird will remain on the nest beyond the expected hatching date and therefore reduces or prevents the potential for re-nesting. (See Nest and Egg-Oiling factsheet.)
- Use oral contraceptive bait. An oral contraceptive for use on resident Canada goose, some duck, and feral pigeon populations reduces the hatchability of eggs. OvoControl® was developed by scientists at the WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) and by Innolytics, LLC. It must be fed to the target species at a specified dosage immediately before and throughout the entire nesting season. Because it can reduce egg

An integrated approach will discourage waterfowl from residing in areas where overabundant flocks cause problems.

hatchability and production in all bird species, only licensed wildlife specialists or pest control operators are permitted to buy and use OvoControl® in those States where it is registered. For more information, please read WS' OvoControl Q&A Factsheet.

- Capture and remove. Capture and removal by humane euthanasia can allow the above management methods to be more effective in the future. Community involvement is an important part of this decision. Trained individuals, including WS, can carry out the operation only with required permits.
- Hunting. Where it is safe and legal, hunting can be used to control some species of residential waterfowl. A State wildlife management agency can provide local laws and regulations.
- Obtain depredation permit. After applying some of the listed techniques over an extended period with little to no success, a depredation permit can be requested. Shooting a few birds each day may improve the effectiveness of harassment. Shooting may be impractical and/or prohibited in most urban damage situations, due to safety concerns, local noise and discharge ordinances, and adjacent land uses. Federal and/or State permits are required. For more information on obtaining a depredation permit contact the State USDA–WS office.

Capture, Relocation, or Removal

In special instances, WS may capture urban waterfowl using live-traps or tranquilizers, such as alphachloralose, and relocate them. Many States discourage the relocation of waterfowl within their

borders because of the potential to create problems elsewhere in the State. Canada geese instinctively try to return to areas where they were born and raised and should be moved at least 200 miles away from their nesting site.

Reduction of the local waterfowl population, particularly resident Canada geese, can be accomplished by capture and removal. Federal and some States' regulations may permit the capture and removal of resident Canada geese between April 1 and August 31. Geese are most easily corralled during the molting period when they lose their primary flight feathers, leaving them flightless. From mid-June through early-July, the waterfowl can be captured with netted panel traps.

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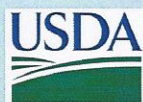
Once captured, the geese are crated and euthanized. Under permit conditions, euthanized geese are then buried, incinerated, or donated as a food source to charitable organizations. Donated carcasses must be processed according to State guidelines. Euthanization of captured geese should be conducted by trained individuals. WS follows recommendations of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

Additional Information

For more information about managing waterfowl damage and WS, please call 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297) or visit the Web site at: www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/.



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