

When Geese Become a Problem



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Managing Nuisance Canada Geese in New York

Canada geese are a valuable natural resource that provide recreation and enjoyment to bird watchers, hunters, and the public throughout New York State. In recent years, flocks of local-nesting or “resident” geese have become year-round inhabitants of our parks, waterways, residential areas, and golf courses, and too often, they are causing significant problems.

In urban and suburban areas throughout New York State, expanses of short grass, abundant lakes and ponds, lack of natural predators, limited hunting, and supplemental feeding have created an explosion in resident goose numbers. Problems develop as local flocks grow and the droppings become excessive (a goose produces about a pound of droppings per day). Problems include over-grazed lawns, accumulations of droppings and feathers on play areas and walkways, nutrient loading to ponds, public health concerns at beaches and drinking water supplies, aggressive behavior by nesting birds, and safety hazards near roads and airports.

This document describes the most effective methods currently available to discourage geese from settling on your property and to reduce problems with geese that have already become established on a site.

Resident Goose Biology

Resident Canada geese are long-lived in suburban areas- some will live more than 20 years. Geese lay an average of 5-6 eggs per nest, and a female goose may produce more than 50 young over her lifetime. Adult pairs of Canada geese return to nesting areas in late February or March. Egg-laying (1-2 weeks) and incubation (about 4 weeks) generally extend through April, with the peak of hatching in late April or early May, depending on location in the state. Geese will aggressively defend their nests and may attack if approached. After nesting, geese undergo an annual “molt”, a 4-5-week flightless period when they shed and re-grow their outer wing feathers. Molting occurs between mid-June and late July, and the birds resume flight by August. Severe conflicts with people often occur at this time of year because the geese concentrate on lawns next to water and can’t leave during that period.

Legal Status

All Canada geese in New York are protected by Federal and State regulations and laws. Permits may be required for some of the control methods discussed.

In New York State, management responsibility for Canada geese is shared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). It is illegal to hunt, kill, sell, purchase, or possess Canada geese or their parts (feathers, nests, eggs, etc.) except as permitted by regulations adopted by USFWS and DEC.

Methods Used to Discourage Geese

Persistent application of a combination of methods is usually necessary and yields the best results.

- **Discontinue Feeding:** No permit needed
- **Allow Hunting:** Federal, State and Local laws may apply
- **Modify Habitat:** State and local laws may apply
- **Install Grid Wires:** State and local laws may apply
- **Install Fencing:** State and local laws may apply
- **Visual Scaring Devices:** No permit needed
- **Lasers:** Local laws may apply
- **Noisemakers:** Local laws may apply
- **Dogs to Chase Geese:** No permit needed but should be timed appropriately
- **Apply Goose Repellents:** Federal, State and Local laws may apply
- **Control Goose Nesting:** Federal registration required: <https://epermits.fws.gov/eRCGR>
- **Capture and Remove Geese:** Federal and State laws apply (permit needed)

Discontinue Feeding

No permit needed. Feeding may cause flocks of geese to congregate in larger numbers than natural habitats would support. Well-fed domestic waterfowl often act as decoys, attracting even more birds to a site. Feeding usually occurs in the most accessible areas, making a mess of heavily used lawns, walkways, roads, and parking areas.

Geese that depend on human handouts are less likely to migrate when severe winter weather arrives and are more vulnerable to disease. Once feeding is discontinued, some geese will disperse and revert to using higher quality natural foods.

Supplemental feeding should be stopped as a first step in any control program. Wild geese are very capable of finding other food and will survive without handouts from humans. Some success in reducing goose feeding may be achieved through simple public education, such as posting of signs. DEC can provide examples of signs to help with this technique.



Allow Hunting

Federal, state, and local laws may apply. Hunting in urban-suburban areas is often limited by lack of open spaces and local ordinances prohibiting discharge of firearms. However, open shoreline areas, reservoirs and large private properties where access can be controlled (such as golf courses) are good places to try hunting.

Hunting can help slow the growth of resident goose flocks. Hunting removes some birds and discourages others from returning to problem areas. It also increases the effectiveness of noisemakers, because geese will learn that loud noises may be a real threat to their survival.

Goose hunting is permitted in most areas of New York State during September, when few migratory geese from Canada are present. Hunting is allowed also in fall and winter, but regulations tend to be more restrictive than to protect migratory geese that may be in the state at that time. To hunt waterfowl in New York, a person must have a state hunting license (which requires a hunter safety course), a federal Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp, and be registered in New York's Harvest Information Program. Hunters should check local laws regarding discharge of firearms.

Landowners concerned about potential conflicts can limit the number of hunters, where and when they allow hunting on their property. For more information about goose hunting regulations or setting up a controlled hunt, contact your regional DEC wildlife office.

Modify Habitat

State and local laws may apply. Geese are grazing birds that prefer short, green grass or other herbaceous vegetation for feeding. Therefore, well-manicured lawns and newly seeded areas provide excellent habitat.

Wherever possible, let grass or other vegetation grow to its full height (10-14") around water bodies so that it is less attractive to geese. In time, most geese will stop feeding in those areas. Instead of grass, plant or encourage native shrubs or less palatable ground cover, such as ivy, ferns, or junipers, around the shoreline of ponds and along walkways where geese are a problem. You can also plant grass species that are less palatable to geese, including some that go dormant in the winter. For example, geese tend to prefer Kentucky bluegrass and are less attracted to fescue.

It is very difficult to eliminate goose nesting habitat as they are very adaptable and nest in a variety of habitats, including wetlands, woodlands, ornamental gardens, and even rooftops. Typically, nests are built on the ground close to water and hidden by vegetation. Geese rarely nest in open lawns or fields where protective cover is not present, so keeping vegetation short may discourage nesting. Islands and peninsulas are preferred nesting sites and often support many more nesting geese than mainland shorelines. Avoid creating such features during landscaping of ponds in problem areas. Local zoning regulations may be a way to discourage habitat developments that favor geese.

Install Grid Wires

State and local laws may apply. Geese normally rest on open water or along shorelines to feel safe from predators. They also tend to land and take off from open water when feeding on adjacent lawns. Where practical, construct a system of suspended wires over the water to deny the birds access to such areas. Single strands of #14 wire or 80-100 pound test monofilament line can be arranged in a grid with 10-15 feet between wires. Each wire must be secured so that it remains 12-18" above the water surface, and perimeter fencing may be needed to keep geese from walking under the grid. To reduce the risk of birds flying into the wires, attach brightly colored rope, flagging or other markers to make them more visible.

Install Fencing

State and local laws may apply. Fencing or other physical barriers can be effective where geese tend to land on water and walk up onto adjacent lawns to feed or rest.

Fencing works best during the summer molt, when geese are unable to fly and must walk between feeding and resting areas. In these situations, fencing, dense shrubbery, or other physical barriers installed close to the water's edge are effective ways to control goose movements. Fencing may also be used to block aggressive birds on nests near buildings or walkways. Although birds can get around most fencing, direct attacks may be prevented.

Goose control fences should be at least 30" tall (48-60" to block aggressive birds) and solidly constructed. Welded wire garden fencing (2" x 4" mesh) is durable and will last years. Less expensive plastic or nylon netting is effective but will have to be replaced more often. Snow fencing or erosion control fabric may be used as a temporary barrier to molting geese. Fencing made of two parallel monofilament fish lines (20 pound test) strung 6" and 12" above ground and secured by stakes at 6' intervals can work, but is less reliable. Some success has been reported with low voltage electric fencing.

Visual Scaring Devices

No permit needed. Various materials may be used to create a visual image that geese will avoid, especially if they are not already established on a site, such as newly seeded areas. Geese are

normally reluctant to linger beneath an object hovering overhead. However, visual scaring devices are not likely to be effective on suburban lawns where trees or other overhead objects exist and where geese have been feeding for years.

One inexpensive visual deterrent for geese is Mylar tape that reflects sunlight to produce a flashing effect. When a breeze causes the tape to move, it pulsates and produces a humming sound that repels birds. This product comes in 1/2"-6"widths. To discourage geese from walking up onto lawns from water, string the tape along the water's edge. To ensure maximum reflection and noise production, leave some slack in the tape and twist the material as you string it from stake to stake.

Another visual scaring technique is the placement of flagging or balloons on poles (6' or taller) or other objects in and around an area to be protected. Flagging can be made of 3-6' strips of 1" colored plastic tape or 2' x 2' pieces of orange construction flagging. Bird-scaring balloons, 30" diameter, with large eye-spots and helium filled, are sold at some garden supply stores and can be found from online retailers. Numerous flags or balloons may be needed to protect each acre of open lawn. Life sized decoys of predators can also be used to deter use by geese.

These materials should be located where they will not become entangled in tree branches or power lines. They also may be subject to theft or vandalism in areas open to the public. If geese become acclimated, frequent relocation of the materials is recommended.

For small ponds, remote control boats have been used to repel geese, and these may be practical if staff or volunteers are available daily to help out.

Lasers

Local laws may apply. Handheld or automated lasers can be used to discourage geese from an area and are very effective under certain conditions. Lasers are not effective against nesting birds, goslings, or birds that are molting and cannot fly, but can be used at other times to encourage birds to leave an area.

Lasers are available in red and green colors and at different strengths. Generally, stronger lasers are more effective (and can be used at a longer distance), and red lasers are less effective than green lasers when used during daylight hours. Automated laser repellents sit on a low stand and shine a laser along the ground in a random pattern, and can work well for larger areas needing control.

Lasers must not be shone in a goose's eyes- this may harm the bird and is not legal. Geese can be effectively harassed by shining the laser point or beam on the ground or water, several yards away from the bird, and slowly moving it towards the bird. Geese will usually take flight before the beam reaches them, but it can be shone on their belly or sides and will startle nearby birds, and then the whole flock, into moving.

When using a laser, you should be aware of any nearby people or buildings and how the beam may reflect off of water.

Noisemakers

Local laws may apply. Geese may be discouraged from an area with various noisemakers or pyrotechnics. Shell crackers are special shells fired from a 12- gauge shotgun that project a firecracker up to 100 yards. Other devices, such as screamer sirens, bird-bangers, and whistle bombs, are fired into the air from a hand-held starter pistol or flare pistol. These devices generally have a range of 25-30 yards.

Automatic exploders that ignite propane gas to produce loud explosions at timed intervals are effective for migrant geese in agricultural fields but may not be suitable for residential or public areas.

Noisemakers work best as preventive measures before geese establish a habit of using an area and where the birds are too confined to simply move away from the noise. At sites with a history of frequent use by geese and people, the birds may become acclimated in 1-2 weeks.

Noise devices are often not effective on nesting geese.

Before using any of these techniques, check with local law enforcement agencies (police) about noise control ordinances, fire safety codes, or restrictions on possession and discharge of firearms. In some areas, starter pistols are considered a handgun, and their possession and use may be regulated. Federal and state permits are not necessary to harass geese with these techniques, as long as birds are not physically harmed.

Where discharge of firearms is allowed, occasional shooting of geese can increase the effectiveness of noisemakers, as geese associate the sound with a real threat. Special Federal and State permits are generally needed to shoot geese outside of established hunting seasons.

Trained Dogs

No permit needed but should be timed appropriately. Use of trained dogs to chase geese is among the **most effective** techniques available today. It is widely used to disperse geese from golf courses, parks, athletic fields and corporate properties.

The dogs must be closely supervised during this activity. Initially, chasing must be done several times per day for several weeks, after which less frequent but regular patrols will still be needed. Geese will not become acclimated to the threat of being chased by dogs.

This method is most practical where the dog and handler are always on-site, or where daily service (as needed) is available from private handlers. Another approach is to allow dogs to roam freely in a fenced (above ground or “invisible” dog fence) area that is not open to the public, but this may be less effective. Dogs generally should not be used when geese are nesting or unable to fly, such as during the molt or when goslings are present. Use of dogs may not be practical near busy roads or where a property is divided into many small sections by fences, buildings, or other barriers. Also, dogs cannot easily repel geese from large water bodies but may be able to keep geese off shoreline lawns or beaches. Although this technique has proven effective, it can be expensive and labor intensive.

Apply Goose Repellents

Federal, state, and local laws may apply. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and DEC have approved a handful products that can be applied to help repel geese from lawns. Geese will feed less often on treated lawns because they dislike the taste. However, geese may still walk across treated areas to get to adjacent untreated areas.

Several applications per year are usually necessary. Therefore, it is most practical and cost-effective for homeowners with only small areas of lawn to protect. Follow all application directions on product labels for best results; if too dilute, it won't work, if too concentrated, it can kill the grass.

Examples of Products based on NYSPAD advanced search are Avian Control, Avian Migrate, EcoBird 14.5, Liquid Fence. Label instructions must be followed when applying any of these products. Product availability and legal status may change over time so if interested in this management approach folks should reach out to their local DEC Wildlife or Pesticide office.

Control Goose Nesting

Federal registration required. Geese usually return in spring to the area where they hatched or where they nested previously. Over time, this results in increasing numbers of geese in areas that once had just a few birds. Local population growth may be controlled by preventing geese from nesting successfully. Although it is difficult to eliminate nesting habitat, harassment in early spring may prevent geese from nesting on a particular site.

If nest prevention fails, treating the eggs to prevent hatching is an option. This can be done by puncturing, shaking, freezing or applying 100% corn oil to all eggs in a nest. The female goose will continue incubating the eggs until the eggs would normally hatch, and will then abandon the nest and potentially move out of the area. If the nest is simply destroyed or all the eggs are removed, the female may re-nest and lay new eggs.

Federal and state regulations apply to any disturbance or treatment of Canada goose nests or eggs. However, federal rules only require that persons register on-line at: <https://epermits.fws.gov/eRCGR> before conducting this activity. This website is also a good source of information about egg treatment.

Egg treatment helps in several ways. First, it directly reduces the number of geese that will be present on a site later in the year. Second, geese without young will be more easily repelled from a site after the nesting season. Finally, if conducted on a large enough scale (throughout a town), it can help slow the growth of a local goose population, and over time lead to stable or declining numbers. Egg treatment may be necessary for 5-10 years before effects on goose numbers are evident.

Capture and Remove Geese

Federal or State permit required. An effective method of relief for sites with problems during the summer, or to help reduce year-round goose numbers in an area, is capture and removal of geese.

In large areas, it may be necessary to remove geese for several years to get maximum results. After geese are removed, the capture site will have substantially fewer geese for the rest of the summer or longer. Over time, geese from surrounding areas may move in if preventive measures are not in place.

Geese removed from problem areas can be processed and donated to charities, if properly handled by a licensed poultry processor.

Relocation of geese is not an option. Relocation of geese is also less effective than permanent removal. Banding studies have shown that some relocated geese return to their initial capture locations by the following summer. Some have returned to New York from as far away as Maine, South Carolina and Oklahoma. Geese taken short distances (less than 50 miles) may return soon after they are able to fly. Adult geese are most likely to return, whereas goslings moved without parent birds will often join a local flock and remain in the release area. Birds that don't return may seek out areas similar to where they were captured and may cause problems there too.

Many wildlife and animal health professionals agree that relocating problem wildlife increases the risk of disease spread, to domestic stock and wildlife.

Methods not Recommended

The following methods are not recommended currently for various reasons:

- Use of swans (real ones create other problems; fake ones don't work)
- Bird distress calls (effective for some bird species, but not proven for geese)
- Scarecrows or dead goose decoys (ineffective for resident geese)
- Use of trained birds of prey to chase geese (labor-intensive, generally not available)
- Sterilization (very labor-intensive for surgery, no chemical contraceptives currently available)
- Fountains or aerators in ponds (not effective, may even attract geese)
- Introduction of predators (already present where habitat is suitable, and none take only geese)
- Disease (impossible to control and protect other animals)
- Poisons (illegal)

“Community-based” Goose Management

DEC and USDA encourage local governments and landowners to work together to implement comprehensive management programs that include a variety of techniques. Control measures will be most effective if coordinated among nearby sites in a community.

While some measures can be tried at little or no cost, others are more costly and beyond the means of some property owners. In these instances, local governments may want to hire a local “goose control officer” to work throughout a community, like other animal control work. Duties could include posting “no feeding” areas, installing fences, handling dogs, treating eggs, and removing geese. This way, the cost

of goose management would be shared by all the residents of a community, including those who benefit from the geese as well as those who may experience problems.

Permits

Federal and State laws and regulations govern the capture, handling, or killing of Canada geese, including disturbance of goose nests or eggs. Permits are required for some activities, but there are exceptions. For more information, see the DEC publication “**Permit Requirements for Take of Canada Geese in New York - Questions and Answers**,” available at <https://dec.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2025-04/nygoosepermitinfo.pdf>.

Plan Ahead

Property owners and communities that have experienced problems in the past can expect geese to return unless control measures are implemented. The best time to act is in late winter, before nesting begins, or as soon as geese show up where they are not wanted. If any permits are needed, allow plenty of lead time for processing.

For More Information

If the techniques described in this document are unsuccessful, or if you want more information, contact USDA-Wildlife Services or your DEC regional wildlife office for assistance.

USDA can provide information by phone or by email and will conduct site visits in some cases. USDA also can provide control services on-site underfunded cooperative agreements (for a fee). For help in New York State, contact:

USDA APHIS - Wildlife Services 1930 Route 9
Castleton, NY 12033-9653
Phone: (518) 477-4837

DEC can provide technical information, advice, and refer you to licensed wildlife control specialists who can help. **DEC generally does not provide field assistance** to landowners with goose problems but can work with local governments to help develop community-based management programs. For assistance, contact the nearest DEC regional office, and for other DEC publications, go to: www.dec.ny.gov.

An excellent reference for goose control planning is “**Managing Canada Geese in Urban Environments: A Technical Guide**,” available at <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/918dbe4e-6a34-4eef-beb4-5818e59e762b/content>. This manual, published by the Jack Berryman Institute and Cornell Cooperative Extension, provides details for selecting and implementing various techniques to reduce conflicts with geese.