

Canada Goose Management Series: *Harassment*



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There is a wide range of non-lethal and lethal options available for Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) management. This fact sheet, part of a series that examines goose management options currently employed, will present information on **harassment** techniques that may deter geese from visiting your property. We define the techniques and explore the advantages and disadvantages of harassment in terms of, among other factors, amount of effort required to implement, effectiveness, and cost. Please keep in mind that each particular situation where conflict exists between human and goose populations is unique and usually involves the integration of more than one management option. More importantly, resolution of the conflict often requires support from residents of the community where the problem is occurring.

Definition:

Harassment techniques such as pyrotechnics, propane cannons, properly trained dogs, and visual deterrents can be effective in deterring Canada geese from entering a particular area. Success of the technique utilized will vary depending upon location, size of the property, size of the goose population, time of year, and vigilance with which the harassment technique is implemented. Harassment techniques should be initiated as soon as geese arrive on the property. For best results, more than one technique should be used. Many harassment devices should be used at different times of the day and night, and location of devices should be changed on a random, but frequent, basis to prevent habituation. Additional factors to consider when develop-

ing a management plan are the availability of alternative loafing and grazing areas. Effectiveness of harassment techniques will be limited if several property owners or groundskeepers are scaring the geese from one area to another in the same community. No state or federal permits are required to use harassment techniques provided geese are not handled, harmed, or killed. However, in New Jersey, a state permit is required to operate a propane cannon on agricultural land (contact the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife to obtain a permit). Furthermore, noise ordinances may exist in certain municipalities. Prior to employing a noise-making device, check with your local police or municipal officials.

Pyrotechnics and Propane Cannons:

Pyrotechnics are devices that make a loud noise intended to scare geese off the property. Pyrotechnics include screamer and banger shells (shot out of a starter-type pistol) and shell crackers (shot out of a twelve-gauge shotgun). *Pyrotechnics should be treated as if they are live ammunition with the potential to cause injury or death.* Screamer and banger shells have a range of 30–80 yards and are best suited for suburban areas where there is sufficient room to prevent the shells from entering neighboring properties. Twelve-gauge shell crackers have a range of 100 yards and are often utilized at agricultural areas, airports, corporate landscapes, golf courses, parks, and schools. Before using pyrotechnics consult with your local police department and comply with all requirements regarding the use of pyrotechnic devices in your area.



Propane cannons are devices that ignite propane gas to produce a loud explosion at timed intervals. They are often used on agricultural lands that are experiencing heavy goose damage and at airports to prevent airplane-bird strikes. Cannons should be moved to different locations every 2–3 days and the timing of the explosions should be varied to decrease the chances of habituation, or geese becoming used to the cannon. As propane cannons are extremely loud, they may not be suitable or permitted in suburban or urban areas.

Properly Trained Dogs:

Trained dogs, usually border collies or Labrador retrievers, are a very effective technique for harassing geese out of an area. It is important to note that dogs must be properly trained as Canada geese are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. If a dog touches a goose, nest, or eggs, the dog owner will be in violation of federal and state laws. Dogs may be purchased, but more commonly, companies provide a dog handler and trained dogs on a contract basis. Typically, dogs are brought to a property 3–4 times per day 7 days a week at varying times during the day and night to prevent habituation to the dogs by geese. Geese often nest in the same area annually and are reluctant to leave a nesting area until goslings have their flight feathers. It is desirable to begin running dogs in late February to early March to prevent geese from inhabiting an area during the nesting period. There are several companies in New Jersey that handle trained dogs. These companies can be located via the yellow pages of your telephone book or the Internet. Free demonstrations are available and should be obtained prior to implementing this harassment technique.

Visual Deterrents:

Flagging, usually black plastic garbage bags (2 feet x 3 feet), secured to a wooden stake with staples or nails can be effective in deterring geese from landing in agricultural fields or other areas. Flags should be placed in the ground at a slight angle so they move with the slightest breeze. Prior to geese becoming

accustomed to feeding or loafing in a problem area, 3–5 flags should be placed per acre.

Mylar “eye-scare” balloons, filled with helium, have been somewhat successful in deterring geese from landing in small areas. Geese may be reluctant to stay beneath a hovering object and may move to an alternate area. Balloons should be tethered with 75-pound monofilament line and allowed to rise 10–50 feet in the air.

Other Harassment Devices:

Attempts to deter geese from problem areas using vehicles, horns, distress calls, electronic sound generating devices, and other noise-making devices have had varying levels of success. Mute swans have proven ineffective in keeping geese from using or nesting near bodies of water. In addition, mute swans are an exotic species that may attract other waterfowl to an area and may become a problem themselves.

Advantages:

Management techniques to harass or scare geese can provide short-term, temporary relief in areas where lethal methods are unacceptable or impractical. Some scare or harassment methods (i.e., visual deterrents) may be more cost-effective relative to other goose management practices like repellents depending upon the damage that is occurring, size of the area, and availability of alternative grazing areas in the vicinity.

Disadvantages:

Among the disadvantages associated with management options to scare or harass geese are reduced effectiveness due to habituation. Habituation occurs when geese become used to and ignore a disturbance. Audio or visual deterrents may be unacceptable in areas with high human population density. Detonating pyrotechnics and propane cannons, and barking dogs can be loud and irritating to neighbors regardless of the hour of the day. As with all non-lethal techniques, goose populations are not being reduced, but instead are being relocated to another area.

Costs:

The cost for many of the scare or harassment options is wide-ranging. Pyrotechnic devices such as screamer and banger shells, 12-gauge shell crackers, and propane cannons can range in price from \$70 to \$600. The cost of dogs varies according to breed, maintenance, and veterinary care. Purchasing the services of a company that handles trained dogs can range from \$100 to \$1,000 per week, depending on the size and makeup of the property. Visual deterrents vary in price from \$4/acre for flagging to \$180 for a single mylar balloon in the shape of an avian predator.

Additional Sources of Information on Canada Goose Management:

Rutgers Cooperative Extension:

- Contact your local Rutgers Cooperative Extension office, listed in the blue pages under County Government, or visit the RCE web site, www.rce.rutgers.edu.

United States Department of Agriculture-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service-Wildlife Services:

- State Director: 908-735-5654

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife:

- Principal Wildlife Biologist: 609-628-3218

Sources of Supply and Services:

Bird Barrier
300 Calvert Ave
Alexandria, VA 22301
1-800-662-4737

Bird-X, Inc.
300 North Elizabeth St
Chicago, IL 60607
1-800-662-5021

Geese Chasers, LLC
42 Broadacre Drive
Mt Laurel, NJ 08054
856-866-0640
www.geesechasers.com

Geese Police
Howell, NJ
732-938-9093
www.geesepoliceinc.com

Nixalite of America, Inc.
PO Box 727
East Moline, IL 61244
1-800-624-1189

OESCO, Inc.
PO Box 540
Conway, MA 01341
413-369-4335

Reed-Joseph International Co.
PO Box 894
Greenville, MS 38702-0894
1-800-647-5554

Sutton Agricultural Enterprises, Inc.
746 Vertin Ave
Salinas, CA 93901
831-442-9693

Wildlife Control Technology, Inc.
2501 N. Sunnyside Ave
Fresno, CA 93727
1-800-235-0262

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