

Canada Goose - These “Honker’s” Ain’t Leaving

By Bob Peterson QUWF Missouri State Regional Biologist

“What is a person to do with all these resident geese? They poop all over, they congregate near the shore, they won’t leave the yard, and they have just become pests!”

Interesting question (problem), but certainly NOT a new one. This lingering “honky-tonkin’ song” has stumped the band for many years across the Nation. As tidy landscaped yards have become a thing, so too has the domesticated goose populations and goose/people conflicts.

This article is not meant to be an all-inclusive guide or how-to, with respects to resident Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) management, but simply to inform and educate a bit on the topic.

As many well know, the Canada goose is federally protected. So, the solutions with which to remove them, are few. In short, the birds can't be shot or poisoned, their eggs or nests can't be handled (or messed with) if the birds are actively nesting or chicks present, and the geese cannot be harmed.



Some Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) populations have become ‘resident’ birds, that frustrate landowners to no end. Photo 2021 © R.L. Peterson

The Canada goose is considered a migratory bird. Therefore, all rules of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918 apply. The Act is intended to ensure the sustainability of populations of all protected migratory bird species. The total number of species protected by the MBTA is 1,093.

Several booklets on the topic of resident Canada goose problems, already exist which attempt to address the pest issue as humanely as possible. Since it is a federal legal matter (protected bird), almost no one is willing to advise how-to properly manage the birds. A little bit of "danged if ya do, and danged if ya don't" exists with respect to the handling of this 'sensitive' topic.

To drive this point home, I've inserted two different scenarios – brief news articles, below. In each case, individuals came to the table with what seemed to be the optimal and most humane solution to the problem of too many resident geese however, each situation had two vastly different, and unanticipated, outcomes.

In New York City, the National Park Service was allowed to capture their non-migratory Canada geese (pests), and served them up (fed them), to the unfortunate individuals who had found themselves in homeless shelters:

(<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/canada-geese-dc-homeless-1.4235802>).

This next article discusses the surprise reactions of certain individuals upon realizing the geese were actually removed – even when done so to feed homeless people:

(https://www.cnhinews.com/cnhi/article_411f704a-8da5-11e7-b52a-47cc7e8b493c.html)

As part of my internship at the Noble Research Institute, I was asked to provide solutions for one of their Cooperators to the all-so-common resident goose problem. Other than physically capturing the geese with nets and releasing them elsewhere (with a proper permit), persons are allowed to harass geese with dogs - making geese feel less secure. Harassment during Nov-Feb, prior to mating season by chasing them off every single time they land, can also help break-up their reproduction cycle. Also, during Mid-June thru Mid-July, the geese are molting and cannot fly well - this is a good time to harass or catch and release elsewhere (again, with a proper permit). The aforementioned options are quite labor intensive and might even occur late at night.

One other viable option which remains to urban or suburban landowners struggling with the problem of "domesticated" geese, is for them to make their home or lake-front property less attractive to the geese; i.e., leaving little or no habitat which would be desirable for geese to nest, waddle, or congregate – the setting would not have low-cut or golf-course-like grasses, or park-like features in the yard or around the pond/body of water. These options appear to be some of the most-often recommended. Even the "think tanks" of conservation, haven't come up with a better solution.

I certainly wish we could offer more meaningful solutions which differ from the novels which have already been written on the subject of resident Canada goose pest removal, but the truth is, beyond what is written herein, we simply don't have any other answers. Sometimes, ya just can't change a dollar bill.

That said, below is a list of the most often asked key questions which clarifies the federal stance on the issue of the Canada Goose:

1. What is Depredation?

Depredation is damage or loss caused by birds. Depredation includes agricultural damage, private property damage, threats to human health and safety, and threats to recovery of protected wildlife.

2. What is a Migratory Bird?

Almost all birds, including their nests and eggs native to the United States are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Protection is not limited to only individual birds or species that migrate. In this fact sheet, "bird" refers to any bird species protected by the MBTA. A list of protected species is published in the Code of Federal Regulations at 50 CFR 10.13. View the list at: <https://www.fws.gov/birds/management/managed-species/migratory-bird-treaty-act-protected-species.php>.

Nonnative species such as European starlings, rock (feral) pigeons, house sparrows, and mute swans as well as upland gamebirds such as grouse, turkey and quail are NOT protected under the MBTA. (See 70 FR 12710 for a complete list).

3. What activities can I do without a depredation permit?

A federal depredation permit is NOT necessary to simply harass or scare birds (except eagles and federally listed threatened or endangered species).

4. Do I need a federal permit to destroy bird nest?

A permit is not needed to destroy inactive bird nests, provided the nest is destroyed and not kept. An inactive bird nest is one without eggs or chicks present. The Nest Destruction Migratory Bird Permit Memorandum provides additional guidance on nest destruction (<http://www.fws.gov/policy/m0407.pdf>).

A permit is required to destroy an active bird nest (one with eggs or chicks present). A different permit is required to disturb or destroy nests of Bald Eagles or Golden Eagles and birds listed as federally threatened or endangered. A list of threatened or endangered species can be found at: <https://www.fws.gov/endangered/>

For official USFWS information regarding Canada goose depredation management activities, landowners can access the USFWS Most Frequently Asked Questions here: <https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/policies-and-regulations/3-200-13FAQ.pdf>

And for additional consideration of permits which address the problem geese, please use the link to the USFWS' FEDERAL FISH AND WILDLIFE PERMIT APPLICATION FORM Migratory Bird Depredation: <https://www.fws.gov/forms/3-200-13.pdf>

Keep a good thought! Bob

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