

# Canada Geese in Southern Ontario

**Seasonal deterrent techniques for lakeside home and cottage owners**



Ian Parsons, Canadian Wildlife Service



**CANADA GEESE ARE BEAUTIFUL BIRDS** and, until recent years, the sight of a flock carving a V in the spring sky was a welcome one for everyone. But geese that breed in temperate regions, such as southern Ontario, have become unwelcome residents of some lakeside properties.

Conflicts between people and Canada Geese arise when landowners are unable to deter the birds from taking up residence each spring. Once geese have nested successfully, they tend to return to the area in future years in growing numbers.

Groups of the large birds feeding on the property may be simply inconvenient, or people may be concerned about feeding damage and an abundance of bird droppings. If landowners object to the presence of the birds, the best approach is timely, seasonal deterrence to discourage geese from settling on the property.

**Sub-arctic breeding** Canada Geese breed and raise their young in remote northern locations, stopping in southern Ontario to rest and feed during spring and fall migrations. These geese migrate between summer breeding grounds in the muskeg and tundra regions of northern Canada and their wintering areas in the United States.

**Temperate breeding** Canada Geese live and breed in southern Ontario. Most move south to the eastern United States for part of the winter period when snow and ice cover their feeding and roosting areas. Some remain year-round in southern Ontario. The expanding population and range of temperate breeding geese have led to increased conflicts with people, particularly near water bodies.



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To request a permit, contact the Permits Officer at (905) 336-4464.

## Timing is everything

THERE IS NO ONE SOLUTION to discourage Canada Geese from a lakeside property. However, timely and careful attention to deterrent techniques may be enough to encourage geese to nest elsewhere. Take the time to identify potential nesting and rearing sites on the property, and prepare to discourage the birds as soon as they arrive – as early as February. Monitor potential sites for newly arriving birds and act immediately. The birds are extremely reluctant to move on once they have begun moulting their flight feathers, in early June.

In the long term, attractive nesting and rearing habitat will continue to draw geese each year. Habitat modification may be necessary, along with seasonal deterrence, to discourage the geese more effectively over time.

**If geese successfully establish a nest, do not destroy it. It is illegal to do so, and the geese will very likely rebuild another nearby.**

### Report Leg Bands 1-800-327-BAND

Please call to report bird band numbers. The Canadian Wildlife Service bands more than 3,000 geese each year in southern Ontario. Band reports support decisions in monitoring and managing bird populations.



Eric Dresser

## Seasonal deterrent techniques

**REDUCE THE ATTRACTIVENESS** of the site for breeding Canada Geese. Grassy expanses near water provide ideal goose habitat. Canada Geese are grazers and eat mainly short grasses such as those found in lawns, parks and golf courses. Geese also prefer good visibility to detect predators. They feed in open areas with clear flight access to ponds, lakes or marshes. Adjacent docks, beaches and yards provide secure places for preening and loafing.

### • Modify the grass

It's a fact: Canada Geese prefer manicured lawns. Let the grass adjacent to the water body grow a little longer or plant coarse, tall grasses that are less appealing to geese.

### • Obstruct the shoreline

Maintain an unmowed shoreline buffer of grasses, shrubs and wildflowers. Obstruct bird access to the shoreline with low fences or rock walls. Natural barriers include trees, densely spaced brush, hedge or shrubbery near the shorelines of lakes, ponds, wetlands and streams.

### • Discourage nesting with "scare" techniques

Disturb the birds as soon as they arrive to deter them from settling on the property. Short-term techniques include noisemakers, strobe lights, recorded distress calls, and the use of trained dogs. Combine techniques (e.g., noise and light) and vary the sequence continuously or the birds will quickly

adapt to the disturbance. New technologies, such as hand-held lasers designed specifically to scare birds, are available. Landowners may wish to consult with a wildlife professional.

### • Obtain a permit to discharge a firearm

A permit from the Canadian Wildlife Service is required for this technique. Where bylaws allow, permits may be issued authorizing the use of a firearm as a noisemaker to disturb the geese. The applicant must demonstrate that other techniques were tried without success.

### • Obtain a permit to sterilize eggs

A permit from the Canadian Wildlife Service is required for this technique. If the birds have nested, use this technique within 10 days after the last egg is laid. Sterilize the eggs by coating them with non-toxic vegetable or mineral oil. Or addle (shake) the eggs to destroy the developing embryo. The goose will continue to incubate her eggs beyond the normal hatching date and will not re-nest.

### • Erect temporary barriers

Keep broods (adults with goslings) away from designated areas with temporary barriers. Low fences marked with 'Birdscare-Flash-Tape', fluttering strands of shiny Mylar tape, or other highly visible material can repel geese. Place the barrier at goose and gosling height between the water and the area to be protected. Adults can fly over the barrier but goslings will not follow – and the adults will not leave their goslings behind.

## Canada Geese: Protected by law

The Canada Goose is a migratory bird, protected under Canadian law by the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. The Canadian Wildlife Service, part of Environment Canada, manages wildlife matters that are the responsibility of the federal government, including protection and management of migratory birds.

It is illegal to disturb, damage or destroy the nest or eggs of Canada Geese. However, special permits may be obtained from the Canadian Wildlife Service to use acceptable deterrent techniques. To request a permit, contact the Permits Officer at (905) 336-4464.



Eric Dresser

## Population management

The Canadian Wildlife Service estimates that there are more than 400,000 temperate breeding Canada Geese in Ontario today, far more than would have occurred without human interference. In some areas, the expanding goose population can bring about conflicts, mess and damage for community parks, recreational or agricultural properties, and lakeside homes and cottages.

The Canadian Wildlife Service employs various measures to manage the population:

- **periodic surveys** to monitor the population size and range;
- **leg banding** to track individual survival, movements and number harvested;
- **advice and permits** to landowners to ameliorate conflicts with Canada Geese;
- **hunting regulations** (seasons and harvest limits) to provide harvest opportunities and limit population growth.



Walter B. Fechner

# Understanding Canada Geese

## A brief history

Accounts by seventeenth century explorers indicate that Canada Geese were part of the area's original fauna and were very abundant in the extreme southwest, where prairie and wetlands covered hundreds of square kilometres. Settlers in the late eighteenth century cleared most forests in inland southern Ontario – improving goose habitat – and local wildlife was hunted to support growing families. Unrestricted harvests drastically reduced goose populations and, by the turn of the twentieth century, Canada Geese had disappeared from nearly all of their former breeding range within southern Ontario.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and local conservationists reintroduced Canada Geese to southern Ontario. A combination of factors contributed to the success of this effort. Manicured parks, lawns, golf courses, and agricultural crops flanked by ponds or watercourses provided ideal breeding habitat. Few predators remained in the region. In addition, geese are remarkably adaptable. Geese have been reported nesting in trees, roadside ditches, adjacent to swimming pools, and even on flat rooftops.

## Biology basics

**BREEDING:** Most pairs of Canada Geese mate for life, but a new mate will be selected if one dies. Canada Geese usually breed for the first time in their third year. Many live longer than 10 years and some as long as 25 years. Pairs seek nesting sites during the first warm days of February. By mid to late March, most pairs have a well-established breeding territory and begin laying clutches of two to eight eggs.

**NESTING:** By mid-April, most female geese are sitting on their nests. Preferred sites are near water, such as small islands, and the shorelines of ponds and wetlands. While nesting, geese may become aggressive toward people or their pets in defence of the nest. If the nest is destroyed, geese may attempt to re-nest nearby.



The Giant Canada Goose is the most common sub-species of Canada Geese breeding in rural southern Ontario.

**REARING:** Conflicts between landowners and geese often occur in late spring and early summer, when the geese are raising their young and feeding heavily. Peak hatching occurs in May. Rearing a brood requires more security and accessible food so adult pairs often move goslings some distance. High quality sites may attract several family groups.

**MOULTING:** A few weeks after the goslings hatch, adult geese moult their wing feathers, leaving them flightless for up to six weeks. During this period, the adults are vulnerable and highly reluctant to leave the rearing-moult area. By mid-July, many goslings and adults can fly. By the end of July, most geese move to roosting areas on larger bodies of water, from which they fly daily to feed. If the rearing-moult area provides food, water and security, some family groups may remain until early September.

**FALL MIGRATION:** Temperate breeding geese are joined in fall by sub-arctic breeding geese on migration. The length of stay for northern migrants depends on weather, food availability, and local hunting pressure. Peak numbers usually occur in mid to late October. By early December, the majority of sub-arctic breeding geese have flown south. If winter conditions occur in early to mid December, many temperate breeding geese also move south to the United States, some as far as Tennessee.

### Contact the Canadian Wildlife Service

**By mail:**

Canadian Wildlife Service  
465 Gideon Drive, P.O. Box 490 (Lambeth Station)  
London, ON N6P 1R1

Canadian Wildlife Service  
49 Camelot Drive, Nepean, ON K1A 0H3

**By telephone:**

London: (519) 472-1406 Nepean: (613) 952-2405

**By fax:**

London: (519) 472-3062 Nepean: (613) 952-9027

**By e-mail:**

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