

Problems and Solutions

Why are Canada Geese protected?

Canada geese are just one of the species we hunted to near-extinction, yet stopped short of completely wiping out. By 1960, they were truly endangered and repopulation efforts began. They are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which means they cannot be hunted outside of designated seasons and without the permission of state wildlife agencies. (In our state that is the MO Department of Conservation.) While the national program to save the Canada goose from extinction may have been prompted in part by a sincere desire to save a dying species, the real impetus was to provide a flourishing population of game birds for hunters.

What are problems geese usually cause?

As with most (if not all) human-animal conflicts, the cause of any problems associated with urban geese populations falls squarely in our laps. Their numbers increased due to our own repopulation program, and our ill-conceived green space design. (Detailed below.) We invited Canada geese into our parks, golf courses, office commons, and condominium grounds by offering the ideal living environment, and by feeding them. People used to love to sit and watch the geese with their little goslings...until we tired of their natural behaviors.

- 1) Geese defecate (as does any animal, including humans), and people don't like having to watch their step.
- 2) Geese defend their homes and their young (as does any animal, including humans), and people resent being approached by an angry gander.
- 3) Geese occasionally strike aircraft while flying and have become the scapegoat for this danger. The trouble with blaming Canada geese for these strikes is that evidence has shown they are not the only "culprits." Gulls, turkey vultures, eagles, starlings, owls, pigeons, crows and a dozen other bird species have been proven to have collided with planes mid-air. Is the answer to exterminate all of these birds?

How can we curb the population to decrease the problems?

There are two ways to curb goose populations in unwanted areas. First and foremost is designing green spaces with wildlife in mind. If your goal is to prevent the nesting and egg-laying of Canada geese, the last thing you want to do is clear out all the native growth from the area and put a pond smack-dab in the middle. This is like Disneyland to a goose. Waterfowl are prey animals and need to be able to see when a predator is approaching; therefore, a body of water with an unobstructed view of the surroundings is ideal for their purposes. Designers should take advantage of native grasses, shrubs, and other plants to produce a variety of levels and dimensions. Not only would this discourage geese, it would also result in a more appealing landscape for humans.

The second, more hands-on, way of population control is egg replacement or oiling. These methods involve preventing already laid eggs from hatching, and the choice between replacing and oiling is individual preference. If replacing the eggs, care must be taken to use stand-ins that closely resemble the real thing in both size and weight. (Geese can tell the difference.) GeesePeace St. Louis is lucky to have a craftswoman whose wooden replicas are second to none.

Do the ways of discouraging nesting and gathering work? If so, do they do more harm than good?

Discouraging future nesting and the above-mentioned egg replacement/oiling are the only methods that do actually work. When we encounter a problem with wildlife, too often our knee-jerk reaction is to kill the offending animals. Not only is this quick-fix unethical, but it is a shortsighted solution, as well. Rounding up for slaughter, trapping, poisoning, shooting, and other lethal wildlife control practices only rid an area of that one flock or group of animals. Without addressing what conditions attracted the animals to that location in the first place, there is no reason to believe another population will not move in once the present residents are gone. And, this is, in fact, what occurs. It makes far more sense to critically look at what can be done to prevent habitation. This is where the use of dogs and the overall design of the environment come into play.