



**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** A.S.K. has provided our species specific tips based off of years of field experience and reported research; we are **NOT** in the business of wildlife damage control and are not profiting from the recommendations provided. These tips are not all-inclusive; a variety of the methods suggested should be used and alternated for the most success. You may discuss your specific issue with A.S.K.'s wildlife biologist **(877-596-7776)**, or your local *humane* wildlife damage control specialist for further details. All actions must adhere to Michigan law.

## **Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis maxima*) Nuisance Tips**

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Photo Credit: S. DiPietro



**WARNING:** Canada geese are protected by The United States Fish and Wildlife Service under **The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918** and the **Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929**. The former, the implementation of a 1916 convention signed by the United States and Canada, **prohibits** the hunting, possessing, purchasing and exporting of migratory birds "or any part, or egg of such bird." Federal and state permits MUST be secured before implementing any measures that directly involves capture or removal of birds/eggs or their nests and *only after* other methods have failed.

**NOTE:** Throwing firecrackers or chasing geese with any motorized device (on land or water) are **NOT** State authorized scare methods. If you see someone harassing *any* species of bird, please call BOTH 911 and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources at 1-800-292-7800 to report. Killing geese outside of the established hunting season and disturbing nests with goose eggs present can be done only under special permit, which can be applied for only when other techniques have been unsuccessful.

## Important Background Information

- There are “resident” Canada Geese. “Residents” do not migrate when colder weather hits.
- Canada Geese can survive Michigan weather extremes, especially if they have a food source and open water. Open water provides predator protection.
- Canada Geese are drawn to many of the same landscape features that humans like: golf courses, short, cut turf grass, **open** beachfronts/waterfronts, parks, campuses and artificial ponds, to name a few.
- Integrating a *variety* of humane techniques is the best way to mitigate Canada Goose conflicts.

**What Doesn't Work:** Round-ups. “Round-ups are not an effective long-term solution for addressing Canada Goose conflicts and have had limited success in reducing the number of goose complaints. Round-ups provide only short-term resolution of human-goose conflicts because adult geese instinctively return to previous breeding sites. It does provide property owners temporary relief, but the same or different birds move back into the area within a short time.” ***-Michigan Department of Natural Resources***

Round-ups are also inhumane. Typically geese are rounded up during their molting process, rendering them flightless and incapable of escape; in Michigan this is usually during June and July. At this time geese are also raising juvenile goslings. Geese that are trapped can be shipped out of state to hunting preserves (this is becoming rarer as most states have plenty of their own goose populations) or they are lethally killed by the round-up company. They are NOT sent to “geese or wildlife sanctuaries” to live “happily ever after” like some companies claim to suggest to make their services more marketable and profitable.

**Relocation:** Geese will instinctively return to the same nesting/breeding sites that are appealing to them. Attempts at capture and relocation are stress-causing for birds and simply do not provide relief from nuisance issues.

## Quick Environmentally-Friendly Tips: Remember, no single quick-fix will work at every site.

- **Grape-flavored Kool-Aid™/grape-flavored repellents:** dilute with water (for Kool-Aid™), but make sure product is still grape-scented. Use hose or bucket to sprinkle over turf grass areas where you want grazing to stop. This is humane, effective, environmentally friendly, and a cheap way to keep geese off your lawn! Geese have great memories and since they don't like the taste, they will avoid your lawn. Keep in mind though that a new flock of geese may also attempt to forage on your yard, but again, once they get a dose of the grape treatment, they too will find your lawn un-tasty and will not return! You will have to reapply treatment after rain and after lawn mowing.
- **Consider use of “tolerance zones”:** is there any portion of your landscape that could be “okay” for Canada Geese to browse in? If so, you can employ tactics to rid them from some areas while permitting their presence in others. Providing tolerance zones may help to ward geese off of areas that you don't want them in while providing alternative sites nearby. This tactic may be most successful when used in conjunction with grape repelling or another scare tactic.
- **Targeted Cleanup:** hosing/power washing goose feces regularly may resolve conflicts in small areas. Landscape services sometimes offer this service as well.

## Longer-term Solutions to Canada Geese Conflicts

- **Don't feed waterfowl of any species at problem sites:** If you provide bird seed and other items to waterfowl, expect ALL waterfowl to flock to your yard. If like *some* species of waterfowl, but not others, it may be best to not purposely feed/attract *any* to your yard! “No Waterfowl Feeding” signs can be posted to discourage others from drawing geese in. Note: hand-feeding geese can make them act aggressive to humans because they start expecting to be fed and may closely approach people. Further, **human food items, like bread products can cause wing deformities, rendering birds totally flightless.** “Angel wing” is common at urban parks where bread-feeding is out of control.

- **Pet domestic ducks and geese** may be decoys of *encouragement* for Canada Geese to join. Domestic breeds should *never* have access to wild lakes and rivers, not only because they are bred flightless and do not have wild bird survival skills, but they can dangerously interbreed with wild flocks creating hybrids that cannot fly. It is also illegal to dump farm animals.
- **Habitat Modification:** This works great for lakefront communities and businesses with re-occurring goose nuisance issues! If you are interested in a long-term, cost-effective solution to ridding your lawn of goose poop, you must make the site “unfriendly” to geese. The goals in “modifying” landscapes is to reduce food sites, preferred nesting and juvenile-rearing areas, and make properties less attractive to geese by reducing food sources and making them more conscious of potential predation risk. Birds simply don’t want to hang out in potential “predator traps.”

**How?** Reduce the amount of lawn near your lakefront or other problem area. We know that humans love turf grass, but the reality is that sprawling, short cut lawns actually *invite* geese. They love to eat young grass shoots, so reducing the amount of grass in your yard can reduce the number of geese that find it appealing.

- Allow grass in problem areas to grow **6 inches or higher at least 20 feet** from water shoreline, or more. Taller grass isn’t palatable to geese. Mowed lawns also make geese comfortable because they can see predators from afar.
- Stop fertilizer-use and supplemental watering; this will limit the growth of young, “goose-tasty” shoots.
- **Natural Modifications:** beautify your landscape while humanely impeding geese.

Eliminate/reduce short grass around shorelines. Instead: use decorative native grasses (Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Switchgrass, Indian Grass etc.) or shrubs (both good for bank stabilization and native songbirds). Plants that are **at least 30 inches high** and **20-30 feet wide** will reduce the habitat suitability for Canada Geese by creating a visual and real barrier. Geese will not feel “safe” if they can’t see potential predator risks. This is most effective with increasing the area of plants in the problem area. Geese will not browse native prairie grasses listed.

Hedgerows, decorative boulders and fences can also provide a barrier to your yard.

Emergent aquatic plants (**native** species, with permission) planted near the shoreline can be used alone or in combination with above mentioned options. Make sure you are choosing NATIVE plants only. Exotic plants that are sometimes desirable for decorative use can be invasive and ecologically damaging to the entire lake/pond ecosystem. See “Resources” for native plant producers.

*Note: sometimes geese adapt to plant barriers and will walk through them. Keeping a larger stand and using a variety of scare tactics will help discourage this.*

- **For Private Pond Owners/Lakefront Associations**

**Steepen pond banks/build seawalls:** Geese prefer to walk gradually out of the water onto gently sloped yards. To steepen shorelines (make sure you have permission from Department of Environmental Quality) seawalls can be constructed **3 feet above** the surface of the water or by **creating a 63 degree angle** from water’s edge.

## Exclusion

Best for small ponds or retention areas.

- Prevent birds from landing on small water sources or common forage sites. Erect a grid of overhead wire over the problem area. You may need to construct it tall enough so that it does not hinder human movement beneath. The grid panels **do not need to be closer than 25 feet apart**. Placing fencing around the perimeter may further impede birds attempting to access areas on foot.
- Pond edges can be fenced completely so that geese cannot get out of the water and access the lawn. Consider that fencing **may hinder** the movement of other species, like turtles or shore birds. You may consider **not** putting the fencing to the ground and leaving enough space so that other, non-nuisance species can still function healthily.
- Retractable 2-strand fencing is available commercially specifically marketed as a “goose fence.” This may be taken down casually.
- Other fencing types: plastic “snow”/seasonal fencing, chicken wire, traditional woven wire, chain link or triple strand electric. Electric wire should be placed 5, 10 and 15 inches above ground. Proper amperage required to keep Canada Geese away is minimal and if set properly, will **not** cause harm to them.

## Scare Devices

Note: birds will get used to the same scare device if it is used repeatedly. Try scare devices in combination with the other techniques and also make sure to stay creative and switch up your technique frequently. I.e. Do not expect a plastic scare owl (for example) to work for weeks in a row. Alternate it with other tips below and change the placement of scare devices every few days.

- Flags
- Mylar® balloons staked to the ground
- Eyespot balloons
- Mylar® tape
- Motion-activated sprinklers (if using in small area and moved around to different sites)
- Flashing or rotating battery operated strobe lights, placed out in the evening and at night can discourage night-time roosting.
- Laser beams (long wavelength) used at dusk can disperse birds (do not shine in eyes).
- Air horns, banging pots/pans

The most cost-effective and efficient method is to make the problem site un-geese friendly through habitat modification. If you are more persistent than the geese, it will pay off.

## Trained Dogs

Herding dogs, like border collies, can keep problem geese away. Dogs should be trained for this express purpose and you, the guardian, should be capable of the responsibility of dog ownership (the vet visits, the constant requirement for attention etc.). **Don't** adopt a dog for goose control if you aren't prepared or interested in caring for the dog long-term.

Dogs are not legally permitted to catch, injure or kill Canada Geese for use with nuisance situations. Dogs are trained only to run at, not attack, birds. A dog is an extension of its guardian's hand; if your dog violates the law, you are responsible for the violation of law.

## Repellents

Methyl anthranilate (artificial grape flavoring) and anthraquinone are two chemicals registered in the United States as bird deterrents. Methyl anthranilate can be used as a fogger in small areas if equipment is available for that type of dispersal. Follow the manufacturer instructions.

Common product names: ReJeX-It Migrate™, GooseChase™, Goose-B-Gone™; all makes the grass un-tasty. These products do not wash off after rain, but must be re-applied after mowing.

Antraquinone repels geese in two ways: grass consumed with the product gives geese a reportedly harmless “stomach ache” and the grass appears unnatural/fake because the product brings out the ultraviolet spectrum when applied to the turf. Product name: Flight Control™. Must be re-applied after mowing, but is rain-proof too!

Grape Kool-Aid™: a temporary, cheap fix—but it works! Most chemical repellents are grape-flavored too! Mix Kool-Aid™ with water and disperse in problem areas. RE-apply as needed!

## **Limiting Population Growth**

In areas where high-conflicts occur it is more effective to get a permit for “egg addling” versus a round-up service. Eggs are oiled or are removed from nests. To be humane, eggs should be addled in their earliest stages of development. This reduces the potential for more geese to be added to the flocks already present.

**NOTE:** Most birds, including Canada Geese, are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is illegal to disrupt nests or eggs without a permit from the DNR/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/USDA. See Resources below for more info on humane egg addling protocols.

## **Case Studies**

- **Washington: A suburb was given legal permission to use egg addling as a method of reducing the numbers of geese nesting on an island near Woodcliff Lake Reservoir. Since the program started officials report that the number of geese has decreased, over a 3-yr period in which eggs were addled each year.**
- **Allendale, NJ: This town used pistol noisemakers to scare geese off. The noisemakers are used early in the morning by sanctioned people. Reportedly this was effective at keeping geese away.**
- **Demarest, NJ: The community hung aesthetically-pleasing green flags around a public water source that was problematic. The goose population was reportedly cut in half simply because the flags make the geese nervous.**

## **Conclusion**

For most human-geese conflicts, using a chemical repellent and modifying the habitat will guarantee success. Remember, if you seek a quick, band-aid fix, like round-ups, your problem will not be solved; as long as there is enticing habitat, geese will occupy it. Round-ups (lethal removal) are also highly controversial often forcing lakefront communities in opposing directions; non-lethal strategies for keeping goose at bay have been used with great success throughout the country and can meet the needs and expectations of all parties involved. Remember, the best results are often obtained using a variety of non-lethal techniques. Be prepared to implement, observe and modify tactics as needed!

## Additional Resources:

**Great Tips Here**>>>Humane Goose Control Vendors: [www.canadageese.org/nlcontrol.html](http://www.canadageese.org/nlcontrol.html)

- Resident Canada Goose Frequently Asked Questions from Michigan Department of Natural Resources: [www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10370\\_12145\\_25065-232661--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10370_12145_25065-232661--,00.html)
- Michigan Native Plant Producers Association: <http://www.mnppa.org>
- Seasonal fencing to exclude geese can usually sold by lake management firms; the following offer kits on their websites:
  - Lake Restoration, Inc.: [www.lakerestoration.com](http://www.lakerestoration.com), 877-428-8898
  - Green Touch: [www.greentouchirrigation.com](http://www.greentouchirrigation.com), 866-401-8150
  - Aerators Aquatics 4 Lakes N Ponds: [www.virginialakemanagement.com](http://www.virginialakemanagement.com), 757-591-8780
- **GeesePeace**; a nonprofit organization dedicated to resolving human-geese conflicts on a community-wide scale: [www.geesepeace.org](http://www.geesepeace.org)
- [http://geesepeace2010.org/images/GeesePeace\\_2010\\_Model\\_Program\\_V5.pdf](http://geesepeace2010.org/images/GeesePeace_2010_Model_Program_V5.pdf)

### **\*\*Must READ!**

- Humane Egg Addling Protocol:  
<http://www.flightcontrol.com/PDF/CanadaGooseEggAddlingProtocol04.pdf>
- All Species Kinship: [www.allspecieskinship.org](http://www.allspecieskinship.org)