



## Frequently Asked Questions **Canada Goose Program** **June 2009**

### **What are goose-human conflicts?**

Goose-human conflict is when humans have complaints about geese. Most complaints are from residents and businesses frustrated with goose droppings, usually on specific sites, such as, lawns, beaches, docks, sidewalks, and golf courses. Occasionally geese nest in inappropriate sites, such as in shrubbery near buildings or parking lots where they become aggressive toward people who enter the territory around the nest. Canada geese may also cause damage to agricultural crops through consumption or trampling.

### **A goose on our property is very aggressive; why is that?**

Geese can demonstrate aggressive behavior toward people while defending their nesting territory. They perceive people as potential nest predators.

### **Can I hunt Canada geese?**

Yes, goose hunting seasons stretch from September 1 into early February in various locations across Michigan. Some of these seasons are set to specifically target resident geese. The annual Michigan Waterfowl Hunting Guide contains season dates and bag limits; but you should also check local township firearm ordinances for local hunting closures.

### **Why are Canada geese so often found on golf courses and lakefront properties?**

Urban and suburban developments with manicured lawns, abundant water bodies, and refuge offer all the resources that geese need to thrive. Geese are attracted to lawns mowed short, but are not as attracted to taller grasses or other vegetation; therefore, simple landscape alterations can be used to deter geese from your property by making your yard less attractive to geese. For example, an un-mowed 6-foot wide shoreline buffer of tall native grasses or a hedgerow 20 to 30 inches tall can discourage geese from visiting your lawn.

### **What can I do if I have a human/goose conflict?**

First, do not artificially feed geese or other waterfowl. Feeding concentrates geese, causes the loss of wild instincts, aggression, and can lead to nutritional imbalance. If permitted by law in your area, hunting geese is a very effective and economical tool to control goose populations. Scare devices can be a cost-effective way to repel geese when applied consistently as soon as geese arrive on your property prior to nesting. There are many commercial companies that sell scare devices such as shell crackers, screamers, bird alarms, motion detector accessories, electronic noise systems, bird bangers, rockets, and distress cries. There are also visual stimuli techniques used to scare geese such as bird scare balloons, plastic flags, and Mylar scare tape. Physical barriers such as fences can be used to exclude flightless geese from lawns during their molt. Barrier fencing works most

effectively when placed along shorelines, but it has to be used at times when young birds would not be trapped on land. Fencing may be as simple as two strands of twine at the waters edge.

Many golf courses and airports have reported success using dogs trained to chase geese off the property. Increasingly, lakefront property owners are also reporting that their dogs are effective at deterring geese. Dog service companies are available for hire. Commercially-available repellents can be applied on lawns to deter geese from feeding on the grass. The disadvantage to using repellents is that they are effective only over a short period. Rain or mowing reduces their effectiveness.

Using a combination of several different control methods and changing tactics often to prevent geese from becoming conditioned to any one of them, often has the best results. In addition, studies show that geese exposed to hunting are more likely to respond to scare devices outside the goose hunting seasons.

As a last resort, you can also contact the DNR to inquire about the Goose Roundup Program.

### **What is the Goose Roundup Program?**

Geese are corralled, crated and transported by a properly permitted private nuisance wildlife control firm at the request of property owners and/or a local unit of government, at the property owner's expense. This takes place in mid-late June when the birds are flightless. Permits issued by the DNR, enabled by a permit to the state by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are required for translocation activities. Alternate means to resolve human-geese conflicts must be attempted before roundup is permitted; for example, hunting, no-feeding bans, nest and egg destruction in some areas, habitat modification, fencing, barriers, repellents, or scare techniques such as scarecrows, flags, reflective tape, and harassment.

Humane handling is stressed throughout the program: during capture, holding in temporary pens, placement in crates or transport. When birds are handled properly, few injuries result. All licensed contractors are trained on proper handling and also are required to have crates inspected to insure they meet the DNR protocol. Geese are relocated to areas where less conflict is anticipated and there is suitable goose habitat available to sustain additional geese.

### **Is there a cost to the landowner to participate in this program?**

The DNR is working on a cost structure for the permits required by this program. Private animal control companies do charge for activities administered under this program.

### **Does the DNR promote and encourage participation in the Goose Roundup Program?**

No. The DNR encourages landowners to increase their tolerance of Canada geese to reduce human-geese conflicts in situations where there are no human safety or health threats. DNR requires applicants to attempt alternate control techniques to address human-geese conflicts before they are permitted to destroy nests/eggs or round up birds. DNR encourages homeowners to learn more about non-lethal techniques including habitat modification and scare tactics to reduce conflicts. A training session which includes information on various methods to control geese is put on every spring by the DNR.

### **Does it work to relocate Canada geese?**

The translocation program is costly and has had limited success in reducing the number of nuisance complaints. The program provides 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. Unless the attractive habitat is modified, or birds are removed from the population (via hunting), geese will return. Relocating geese is not a long-term solution, because as human and goose populations grow, there are fewer places to put rounded up geese where the natural habitat can support them and they will not cause additional conflicts.

### **How does the nest/egg destruction program work?**

Egg and nest destruction are permitted in certain areas of the state where chronic goose conflicts have not been resolved by other methods. Destroying eggs can be effective when used in conjunction with other methods, but it is a relatively inefficient way of reducing goose abundance compared to increasing mortality of adults because geese are long-lived (up to 33 years old) and you would have to destroy the equivalent of a goose's lifetime egg production to approximate the effect of removing a female from the population.

Permits are required for this activity and are issued by the DNR, enabled by a permit to the state by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Permits are issued at the request of property owners and/or a local unit of government. Nest destruction is an effective means to encourage molt migration, the northward movement of giant adult Canada geese to Hudson Bay, Canada. Breeding adults leave the nesting site and migrate to northern areas where they will molt feathers.

Canada goose nest/egg removal is currently only available in some areas of southeast Michigan, Ann Arbor, Alpena, and Sault Ste. Marie. The permittee must agree to initiate and try to control geese using alternative measures which may include hunting, no-feeding bans, habitat modification, fencing, barriers, repellents, scare techniques such as, scarecrows, flags, reflective tape, and harassment.

### **What will happen to the geese that are “rounded-up” but are not relocated?**

This year, some geese “rounded-up” during June will be killed and prepared by a licensed meat processor for distribution to charitable organizations for use in soup kitchens. Only adult geese from sites in southeastern Michigan that participate in both nest/egg destruction and round up programs will be killed. These are sites where people have attempted several control activities over a period of years and are still having conflicts. Southeast Michigan is also where the majority of human-goose conflicts are occurring.

### **Is goose meat safe to eat?**

About 700,000 goose hunters pursue geese in the U.S. each fall and many people utilize goose meat as a supplement to commercially-raised animal meat products. Each year, samples of geese from roundup sites in southeastern Michigan are analyzed for contaminant levels. In 2008, two geese sampled from two separate locations showed concentrations of PCBs that exceeded conservative screening levels. One of these geese was from a lake in Genesee County and the other from a golf course in Macomb County. The Michigan Department of Community Health advises that geese with these levels of PCBs are not suitable for consumption by a single family where children could eat a large portion of the meat, but could be safely used in a meal to be shared by many people (e.g., a soup kitchen setting). The DNR has chosen to not allow processing of geese from the two sites that

showed elevated levels of contaminants. DNR will continue to sample geese for contaminants. Goose meat from sites where elevated levels of contaminants are detected will not be distributed for consumption.

### **Why can't all the birds be released?**

In past years, the DNR has been able to relocate some geese to other states as well as to various in-state sites, based on criteria such as suitable water and food resources, legal hunting opportunities, limited proximity to agricultural crops, and limited likelihood of causing additional human-geese conflicts. However, in-state release sites are limited and no other states have requested Michigan's geese this year. Approximately 6,000 geese can be released on in-state sites that meet the criteria. Releasing more birds than that on these sites will likely lead to decreased survival and increased human-geese conflicts on property surrounding these sites.

### **Why is the number of human-geese conflicts increasing?**

There is a large population of Canada geese in Michigan. Michigan's estimated spring population of resident Canada geese has increased from 9,000 in 1970 to 201,000 in 2009. The success of wildlife management programs and the adaptability of Canada geese have brought this species back from the brink of extinction. Canada geese nest in every Michigan County, but are most common in the southern third of the state where there are abundant lakes and ponds that are suitable for nesting areas. Canada geese are attracted to areas that provide food, water, and protection. Urban and suburban developments with manicured lawns, lakes, and ponds offer all the resources that geese need to survive. Hunting closures in many of these urban and suburban areas provide geese with a safe refuge. The large amount of agricultural crop production in Michigan also provides geese with high energy foods, allowing some geese to stay throughout the winter.

### **If Michigan's Canada goose population is within the desired goal, why would birds from southeast Michigan roundup sites need to be killed?**

Michigan's statewide Canada goose population goal of maintaining 175,000-225,000 birds was established to help balance the recreational and ecological benefits of Canada geese with the potential for additional conflicts if the population goes above or below this range. DNR uses hunting as the primary tool to control the statewide goose population and conflicts are most prevalent where hunting is illegal or impractical. Although the population has been reduced and is currently within Wildlife Division's desired statewide goal, localized human-geese conflicts persist, primarily in urban and suburban areas. Human-geese conflicts are site specific and can often be resolved without actual reduction in statewide or regional goose populations. DNR will continue to address human-geese conflicts while maintaining recreational and ecological benefits of Canada geese in other parts of the state.

### **Why can't hunting be used to control goose numbers on these sites, instead of rounding them up and moving or killing them?**

Hunting is an effective and economical tool for controlling goose numbers. However, many of the southeast Michigan sites where geese are rounded up are in urban/suburban areas that have township ordinances in place that prohibit hunting.