

# ***Getting Rid of Geese for Good***

***By R.W. Delaney, Business Writer***

Imagine a golf ball glued to the green with goose gunk. Unacceptable! -- especially in a country-club setting. Yet, that was a real threat at Yankee Hill Country Club in Lincoln, Nebraska. Furthermore, the invading Canada geese were doing significant damage to the course, says Jay Smith, assistant superintendent at Yankee Hill.

## **Geese Score with Destructive Habits**

"The geese came in and made ruts and holes on the greens as they pecked away at the savory short grass," Smith reports. "Due to insufficient snow cover, we had a problem with geese during winter and early spring." The problem was exacerbated, he says, by adjoining private property. To attract waterfowl, the neighboring owner kept his three-acre lake agitated so it wouldn't freeze.

The geese came in flocks ranging from 20 to 50 birds, and they were notoriously messy, with their unsightly waste and toxic droppings highly visible. "We couldn't go out and chase the geese off the greens every morning," says Smith.

It just wasn't practical. "We tried blasting a shotgun over their heads, but it didn't deter them," he adds.

The owner of Yankee Hill had read about GooseChase, a liquid concoction made by Bird-X, Inc. in Chicago to keep geese away. "We ordered a gallon and experimented," Smith says. GooseChase is a concentrate made from extracts of grape parts found to be most distasteful to geese. A solution of one part GooseChase to 30 parts of water is sprayed on the grass and vegetation where the geese normally forage. The solution irritates their palates, which sends them away to "greener pastures" elsewhere. The biodegradable product is safe for the environment and it does not harm the birds. It simply renders food sources unpalatable to geese.

### **Turf War: Battling the Birds**

"It worked instantly -- no more pecking holes in the green," Smith says. "In fact, there was a very distinct line of effectiveness between where we sprayed GooseChase and where we didn't," he adds. The product doesn't hurt the geese, Smith says. It has a strong grape scent that seems to repel the geese, he notes.

"We've been using it since the fall of 1998 and we've not seen any of the flocks build up a tolerance for it," he says. Smith, who has been with Yankee Hill Country Club for ten years, estimates that the club spends about \$500 each

year on GooseChase. "It's well worth it," he says, "and less costly than maintaining dogs as deterrents."

### **The Expanding Domain and Infiltration.**

The nationwide increase in the goose population is not only a problem for golf courses, but also for property owners and managers. Canada geese are attracted to landscapes that offer easy access to water and abundant forage, such as grass and pond algae.

Jim Bland, owner/director of Integrated Lakes Management in Gurnee, Illinois, reports that a single 100-acre lake in northern Illinois was home to an estimated 12,000 Canada geese as part of a wintertime "superflock." Bland doesn't mince words. "Lawns can be carpeted with feces," he says, noting that clean-up costs can be substantial. And, adds Bland, the geese are stubborn, territorial and aggressive. Their interests can conflict with human interests in urban and suburban settings.

He recalls that a single pair of geese took up residence near the entrance of a stylish corporate center. The geese, classically territorial and assertive, were chasing employees and visitors away. It wasn't especially good for business or for employee relations.

The issue is intensifying as suburban and rural areas collide. The detention ponds built by developers to handle storm water run-off and control flooding are often

irresistible attractions to a flock of geese seeking breeding grounds.

Besides the obvious problems of excrement and odor, the big birds also raise health issues. Geese are known to harbor various disease-bearing parasites and bacteria.

Bland tells his clients up front: "There's no surefire method that works all the time in all places." In addition to physical deterrents like fences, visual scare devices like fake alligators, and various methods of birth and death control (heavily regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), he cites the use of goose repellents such as GooseChase, which have proved to be effective deterrents. "Geese find it noxious," Bland summarizes.

Bland, who founded his consulting and lake management business in 1987, recommends using a backpack sprayer to distribute the GooseChase solution evenly and widely. "It produces better distribution over the lawn." He says it costs about \$140 in materials and \$160 in labor to cover an acre of grass. "This is a good product," he continues. "It works. But," he adds, "it is water-soluble, so it must be reapplied every two to four weeks, depending on rainfall." (According to GooseChase directions, repeat applications can use a more diluted solution of 60 to one.) "It can be relatively expensive over an entire season," Bland says, "but not when you compare it to the cost of cleanup."

## **Protecting Lawns**

Gordon Young, owner of Greenville Feed and Seed Supply company in Greenville, South Carolina, knows firsthand about the aggravation resulting from an unwanted goose population. "My customers were looking for anything that would work," he says.

Geese were a widespread town nuisance. "Greenville is a wealthy community," Young explains. "A few years ago, one homeowner began raising Canada geese on his property. As the flock multiplied, the geese began to fly from pond to pond." And Greenville is dotted with small lakes and ponds among upscale housing development and golf courses.

The geese were gathering in homeowners' backyards, creating what Young calls a "Big-time mess." Unacceptable. "Through my research, I came up with GooseChase," he says. It was easy for his customers to apply. "They just follow the package directions." Word spread quickly. "Half a dozen homeowners have bought GooseChase," Young says. "I've had no feedback at all, which tells me it's working," he says. "The only time I get feedback is when a product doesn't do what it promises," adds the savvy owner, who has operated the Greenville Feed and Seed Supply business for 20 years.

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