



United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Wildlife Services

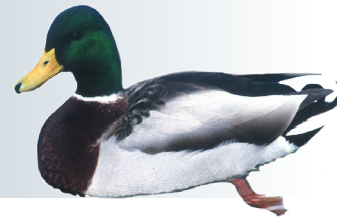
Wildlife Services, a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), provides Federal leadership and expertise in managing conflicts between people and wildlife to help protect the Nation's agricultural and natural resources, property and infrastructure, and public health and safety.

Wildlife Services biologists help individuals, local governments, businesses, and others manage waterfowl to achieve a balance between the positive values and the conflicts the birds may present.

Factsheet

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Preventing and Managing Waterfowl Damage



Birdwatchers and the general public enjoy watching Canada geese, ducks, and other waterfowl. In many areas of the country, however, nonmigrating, or resident, populations of ducks and Canada geese are increasing dramatically, leading to overpopulation of these birds in some cities.

Waterfowl need fresh water for resting and nesting, and tender young grass and other succulent vegetation for food. The plentiful, well-manicured lawns of residential neighborhoods, corporate business areas, parks, airports, and golf courses offer excellent habitat. Geese, especially, can easily become accustomed to people and residential areas.

Although most people find a few birds acceptable, problems quickly develop as bird numbers increase. These problems include overgrazing of grass and ornamental plants; accumulation of droppings and feathers; attacks on people by aggressive birds; and the fouling of reservoirs, swimming areas, docks, lawns, and recreational areas. Because fouling contaminates water used for drinking, bathing, and cleaning, it can pose a disease threat to humans. Flocks of geese and other waterfowl also feed on a variety of crops, including corn, soybeans, rice, lettuce, winter wheat, barley, and rye. Birds can even endanger aircraft on or near airports. In fact, one goose or duck can seriously damage an aircraft.

Know Before You Act

You can undertake some techniques on your own to manage waterfowl populations, but in most cases, wildlife management professionals should carry out this work.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and State laws protect all native waterfowl in the United States, including migratory and resident Canada geese. Under these laws, it is illegal to hunt, kill, sell, purchase, or possess migratory birds except in certain cases. For example, you can obtain a permit from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to remove otherwise protected birds if they are damaging agriculture, property, or natural resources or threatening human health and safety. These "depredation" permits allow the permit holder to remove a limited number of birds from a specific area. However, FWS tightly controls how many permits it issues and in what situations they're used.



Before taking any action to manage waterfowl populations, consult with Wildlife Services or a State wildlife agency. You can reach your State's Wildlife Services office by calling 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

Managing Waterfowl: An Integrated Approach

In general, Wildlife Services professionals recommend an integrated approach to discourage waterfowl from residing in areas where overabundant flocks cause problems. Using a combination of techniques is the most effective way to prevent and manage waterfowl damage. These birds quickly become accustomed to any single approach, so using only one tool will not have a long-term impact.

Below are some of the management techniques we may use or recommend:

- **Discontinue feeding.** Wild birds can find their own food and will survive without handouts. Once people stop feeding them, waterfowl will revert to better-quality natural foods. In many cases, the birds will leave.
- **Modify landscaping.** Geese and ducks, in particular, are grazers and need short, green grass for food. Allow grass to grow longer so it is unattractive to the birds. Along water edges, plant less-attractive vegetation, such as pachysandra, periwinkle, and euonymus. Waterfowl prefer nesting on islands, peninsulas, and undisturbed grounds. When landscaping, do not create small islands or peninsulas; where these features already exist, consider changes to make them unavailable to waterfowl.
- **Install barriers.** Waterfowl prefer to land on water and walk onto adjacent grassy areas to feed and rest. The most effective tools for controlling waterfowl movement are fences, hedgerows, and other physical barriers.
- **Use scaring devices.** Large helium-filled balloons, strobe lights, scarecrows with movable parts, bird-scaring reflecting tape, Mylar flags, screamer sirens, whistle bombs, shell crackers, and automatic



A Wildlife Services biologist applies corn oil to a goose egg. This treatment prevents eggs from developing and reduces the potential for re-nesting.

exploders will help keep geese and other waterfowl from feeding and resting on property. Move these items periodically. Before using noisemakers or pyrotechnics, check local and State regulations for permit requirements and any other limits on using firearms and pyrotechnics.

- **Use dogs to keep geese out of hay, grain crops, and parks.** Most effective are free-ranging dogs trained to chase birds as soon as they land. However, be aware of local leash laws, which may prevent such use of dogs. Some communities have enlisted volunteer human/canine teams of trained and reliable pets for harassing waterfowl in parks.
- **Remove domestic ducks and geese.** Domestic ducks and geese serve as decoys to wild waterfowl, since birds may learn to locate food sources by watching other birds. Removing domestic waterfowl may make the area less attractive. While you don't need a Federal permit, you do need to check with local law enforcement about State, county, and municipal laws and regulations before removing domestic waterfowl. Removal techniques must comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

- **Prevent nesting.** It can help control local populations of waterfowl if property owners keep them from nesting. Nest treatment usually involves manipulating eggs so they do not develop. Methods include addling (shaking), oiling with corn oil, puncturing, chilling, or replacing eggs. Returning treated eggs to the nest encourages adult birds to remain on the nest beyond the expected hatching date, which reduces or prevents the potential for re-nesting. Waterfowl are protected by State and Federal laws, so property owners must register with FWS before carrying out nest treatment work. To register, go to <https://epermits.fws.gov/eRCGR/geSI.aspx>.
- **Hunting.** Where it is safe and legal, hunting can help control some species of residential waterfowl. Your State wildlife management agency can advise you on local laws and regulations.

Other Options

Depredation Permits

After using some of these management techniques over an extended period with little to no success, a depredation permit can be requested. Shooting a few birds each day may improve the effectiveness of harassment. However, shooting may be impractical and/or prohibited in urban damage situations, due to safety concerns, local noise and discharge ordinances, and adjacent land uses. Federal and/or State permits are always required.

Capture and Relocation or Removal

Under certain circumstances, Wildlife Services may capture urban waterfowl using live traps or tranquilizers and relocate them. Many State wildlife agencies

discourage the relocation of waterfowl within their borders because of the potential to create problems elsewhere in the State. Since Canada geese instinctively try returning to areas where they were born and raised, they should be moved at least 200 miles away from their nesting site.

Capturing and removing birds by humane euthanasia can enhance the effectiveness of other management methods. It can successfully reduce the local waterfowl population, particularly resident Canada geese. Federal and some State regulations may allow the capture and removal of resident Canada geese between April 1 and August 31. Geese are most easily corralled during the molting period when they lose their primary flight feathers, leaving them flightless. From mid-June through early July, the waterfowl can be captured with netted panel traps. Where allowed, euthanized geese may be donated as a food source to charitable organizations.

Only trained professionals, including Wildlife Services biologists, with the required permits should carry out capture and removal work. Community input is also important in any decision to use this approach, as it can be a sensitive issue.

Learn More

For more information about managing waterfowl damage, obtaining a depredation permit, or Wildlife Services' work, call us at 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297) or go to www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage.



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