



Preventing and Managing Waterfowl Damage

When populations of Canada geese, ducks, and other waterfowl grow beyond what the environment or local area can support, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Wildlife Services helps communities solve the problems they cause. Before you take any action to deal with 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).

It is illegal to hunt, kill, sell, buy, or own migratory birds except in certain cases. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and State laws protect all native waterfowl in the United States, and that includes migratory and resident Canada geese.

An Integrated Approach

When managing waterfowl, Wildlife Services biologists recommend using an integrated approach—that is, a combination of techniques—to avoid waterfowl damage and discourage waterfowl from inhabiting areas where excessive flocks can cause problems. These birds quickly become habituated to any single approach, so using only one tool will not succeed in the long run.



A Wildlife Services biologist removes an egg from the nest of a resident Canada goose for treatment and return. The paddle provides a barrier between the biologist and goose.



Below are some techniques our biologists may use or recommend:

- **Stop feeding wildlife.** Wild birds can find their own food and will survive without handouts. Feeding geese can promote aggressive behavior toward people. Once people stop feeding them, waterfowl will go back to better quality, natural foods. In many cases, the birds will leave.
- **Adjust landscaping.** Geese and ducks are grazers and prefer short, green grass for food. Let grass grow longer so it is unattractive to the birds. Along water edges, plant less appealing vegetation. Consult your local or State wildlife office for native plant ideas. Waterfowl prefer to nest on islands, peninsulas, and undisturbed grounds. When landscaping, avoid creating small islands or peninsulas; where these exist, consider changes to make them unavailable to waterfowl.
- **Install barriers.** Waterfowl prefer to land on water and walk onto nearby grassy areas to feed and rest. Use fences, hedgerows, and other physical barriers to make this difficult for them.
- **Use scare devices.** Large helium-filled balloons, strobe lights, scarecrows with movable parts, bird-scaring reflecting tape, Mylar flags, screamer sirens, whistle bombs, shell crackers, fireworks, and automatic propane exploders will deter geese and other waterfowl from feeding and resting on property. Move these items periodically. Before using noisemakers or explosives, check local and State

regulations for permit requirements and any other limits on using these techniques.

- **Use dogs to keep geese out of hay or grain fields and parks.** Most effective are dogs trained (off lead) 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 used professional canine teams for dispersing waterfowl in parks.
- **Treat nests and eggs.** Property owners can limit local populations by preventing eggs from hatching. Nest treatment usually involves handling or “addling” eggs so they don’t develop. These methods include shaking, oiling with corn oil, puncturing, chilling, or replacing eggs. Returning treated eggs to the nest encourages adult birds to remain there, which reduces the likelihood they will re-nest. Because State and Federal laws protect waterfowl, property owners must register with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before conducting any nest treatment work. To register, go to [epermits.fws.gov/eRCGR/geSI.aspx](https://www.fws.gov/eRCGR/geSI.aspx).
- **Remove domestic ducks and geese.** Domestic ducks and geese can attract wild waterfowl, since birds may learn to locate food sources by watching other birds. Removing domestic waterfowl may make the area less attractive. You do not need a Federal permit, but you should check with local law enforcement about State, county, and municipal laws and regulations before removing domestic waterfowl. Removal techniques must follow all relevant laws, regulations, and policies.
- **Hunting.** Where it is safe and legal, hunting can help control some species of residential waterfowl. Your State wildlife management agency can tell you about local laws and regulations.

Depredation Permits

Wildlife Services or your State wildlife agency may suggest other options, such as depredation permits for removing waterfowl or capture/removal. Relocation is generally not recommended because the birds are likely to create problems wherever they go.

Federal and/or State permits are always required to remove waterfowl. You can apply for a depredation permit to remove a small number of birds each day. However, wildlife authorities tightly control how many depredation permits they issue and in what situations they’re used. In addition, killing birds may be impractical and/or illegal in urban areas. Check with Wildlife Services or your State wildlife agency for more information about obtaining a permit in your area.

Trained professionals with the required permits can also capture and euthanize birds to reduce the local waterfowl population, especially resident Canada geese. Where allowed, you may donate euthanized geese to charitable organizations as a food source. It is important to get community input in any decision to use this approach, which can be sensitive or controversial.

Learn More

Wildlife Services is a vital part of USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. We lead our Nation’s efforts to manage conflicts between people and wildlife so they can coexist. Our programs and research protect U.S. agriculture and natural resources, property and infrastructure, and human health and safety. For more information about managing waterfowl or about 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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