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Canada Geese

Written by: Blake Moore, Natural Resources Extension Agent

Reviewed by Dr. Chris Williams

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Biology of Canada Geese

Canada geese are highly recognizable waterfowl which can be identified by their black head, tail, and necks with a white chin and black bill. Their wings are a dark grey and breast a lighter grey or brown. Males are slightly larger than females and they range in size from two to three feet in height and weigh between seven and fourteen pounds. The calls of the Canada goose are a variety of "honking" sounds. Migratory and resident Canada geese are found in Delaware.

A history of the Canada goose population may be reviewed in [this article](https://www.udel.edu/udaily/2016/october/canada-geese-population/) https://www.udel.edu/udaily/2016/october/canada-geese-population/ by Adam Scott, which shares the results of the studies of Dr. Chris Williams, Professor and Director of the Waterfowl and Upland Gamebird Center, University of Delaware. Resident geese will breed in Delaware while the migratory populations do not. Geese tend to graze in flocks, sometimes reaching up to 100. Canada geese mainly feed on vegetation to include grazing mowed grassy areas, which make HOA open spaces a prime target for these populations.

Resident Canada geese begin nesting in early spring or late winter and generally choose an area that has a bit of concealment but has a good view to watch out for predators. They will normally be found near a body of water, such as a stormwater pond. Each clutch of eggs averages four to six and are cream colored. The nests are tended by the female and guarded by the male. These interactions can be intense as the male will hiss, bite, and use his wings to defend the nest. Goslings hatch 25-30 days after the eggs are laid. They leave the nest within a short period of time to begin feeding but stay with their parents for up to a year. Again, only resident geese breed in the continental U.S.

Resident Canada geese will nest around stormwater ponds but a bigger and taller buffer will help reduce populations of Canada geese since they do not like to enter the water body through buffers.

Management of Canada Geese

There are several ways that Canada geese have been managed over the year,s including hunting, addling eggs, monofilament exclusion around water bodies, and changing how community open space is managed. It is difficult to deter resident geese, but they generally exist in small enough numbers that it is easier to coexist with them. Canada geese flocks whose numbers are high enough, will create issues such as agricultural damage, damage to community open spaces, and an enormous amount of excrement. Goose excrement is unsightly and can cause community open spaces to be unusable. High numbers of Canada geese may also cause water quality issues in smaller bodies of water due to increased nutrient loads from their excrement. Changing the

way community open space is managed is the best way to help manage Canada goose populations.

Canada geese are wary of predators both from the air and ground and tend to use sight as their best defense. Thus, they choose to use areas that have an open grassy landscape. They will graze these spaces and congregate there to rest. They will also use stormwater ponds to rest in and avoid terrestrial predators. Reducing the amount of mowed grassy areas in communities will make them less inviting to Canada geese but more inviting to pollinators and beneficial predatory insects. Stormwater ponds with a robust riparian buffer are less likely to have Canada geese present. Open spaces with meadows and trees are less likely to have these populations as well. Buffers, meadows, and trees have benefits for water quality, wildlife, and climate resiliency to go along with helping manage Canada goose populations. There are a few other options for management but are less effective.

Monofilament exclusion has shown a minor reduction in Canada geese but is labor-intensive to install and requires constant maintenance. There are also unintended consequences, such as injury to geese and other wildlife. Broken or cut monofilament lines have damaged aeration devices as well. There are chemicals commercially available that are applied to mowed grassy areas, which aim to cause geese to have upset stomachs. This method has varying levels of success. Hunting is generally not an option in most areas where Canada goose and humans have negative interactions. For reducing resident Canada geese, landowners can work with APHIS Wildlife Services to contract licensed biologists to addle eggs. Addling can be effective but requires yearly efforts to target new nests. Scare tactics may also work, especially goose-chasing dogs, but this must be done consistently to be effective.

It is necessary to share our spaces with Canada geese but changing the way we manage our community open spaces will help establish a more tolerable coexistence.

Canada geese congregating in mowed grassy areas in a community open space. This space would be less attractive to geese if there was a meadow with mowed edges and other cues of care.

References

Canada Goose Ecology and Impacts in New Jersey – Brooke Maslo, Extension Specialist, Wildlife Ecology at Rutgers

Chloe Lewis, Technician, Ecology and Natural Resources at Rutgers

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