

From the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Water Management

Management of Canada Geese in Suburban Areas

A Guide to the Basics

(www.state.nj.us/dep/watershedmgt/DOCS/BMP_DOCS/Goosedraft.pdf)

Introduction

In many locations along the Atlantic Flyway, which extends from Hudson's Bay, Canada south to Mexico, Canada geese are not abundant. But in New Jersey and several other northeastern states, times have changed. In many areas, resident or non-migrating Canada goose populations are increasing dramatically. In fact, some population projections indicate that the numbers of non-migrating Canada geese may double in the next six years.

Many people enjoy the sight of a few geese. The problems begin when the numbers of non-migrating birds increase, including:

- overgrazing of turfgrass, which impacts aesthetics and creates an erosion hazard;
- degraded water quality, from fecal bacteria and elevated nitrogen and phosphorous;
- accumulations of fecal material on land, creating a health risk;
- hazards to aircraft at airports;
- grazing of cropland, increasing erosion hazard and crop losses;
- attacks on humans.

Many people do not realize that Canada goose populations were nearly non-existent by the early years of the 1900's because of unrestricted harvesting of eggs, draining of wetlands for crop production, and commercial hunting. Strict harvest regulations were enacted, refuges were established, large acreages of turfgrass were established through human sprawl, and goose populations recovered rapidly and dramatically. It is ironic that we did our job so well that now reducing the populations of Canada geese is a critical water quality concern.

Many people are completely unaware of the environmental degradation that can result from dense non-migrating Canada goose populations.

The NJ DEP is working to reduce the amount of pollution that flows into our waterways.

Info link: <http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/pdf/managingcanadagoosedamage.pdf>

WHAT IS STORMWATER POLLUTION?

Water from rain and melting snow that flows over lawns, parking lots and streets is known as stormwater runoff. This water, which travels along gutters, into catch basins and through storm drain pipes and ditches is not treated and then flows or is discharged into local waterways. Along the way, the stormwater picks up trash (fast-food wrappers, cigarette butts, styrofoam cups, etc.) and toxins and other pollutants (gas, motor oil, antifreeze, fertilizers, pesticides, and pet or wildlife droppings). The polluted stormwater can kill fish and other wildlife, destroy wildlife habitat, contaminate drinking water sources and force the closing of beaches because of health threats to swimmers.

Everything that is put on the ground or into the storm drain can end up in our water. Each of us has a responsibility to make sure these contaminants stay out of our water. Whether we have clean water is up to you.

"New Jersey is home to two populations of Canada geese: resident birds that live here year-round and migrants that breed in sub-arctic regions of Canada during summer and travel south to spend winter in mid-latitude areas, including New Jersey," said Division Director Bob McDowell. "Resident Canada geese cause considerable problems on a nationwide scale due to their overabundance. **Damage from resident geese includes pollution of waterways, public health concerns and nuisance problems associated with grazing and goose feces**, risk of collisions with aircraft, and agricultural damage.

Most Canada goose populations are migratory, wintering in the United States and migrating north to summer breeding grounds in the Canadian arctic. But a large availability of habitat, especially in urban and suburban areas where there are park-like open spaces with short grass adjacent to small bodies of water, has resulted in growing numbers of locally-breeding geese.

These places provide geese with relatively stable breeding habitat and low numbers of predators. In addition, hunting is not allowed in urban and suburban areas, restricting the authorities' ability to control populations using traditional methods. Those resident populations that do migrate often fly only short distances compared to their migratory relatives that breed in Canada. That is why resident Canada goose populations enjoy abnormally high reproduction and survival rates.

The USFWS estimates that there are now 3.5 million resident Canada geese in the United States. Resident Canada goose populations in the Atlantic Flyway (where New Jersey's birds are located) now exceed 1 million birds, and have increased an average of 14 and 6 percent per year, respectively, over the last 10 years.

Large flocks of resident Canada geese can devastate grassy areas, including public parks, golf courses, lawns, and other landscaped areas where there are streams, ponds, and other bodies of water nearby. At airports, resident Canada geese have become a significant safety threat, resulting in dangerous takeoff and landing conditions and costly repairs to aircraft. Excessive goose droppings are also a health concern, and have contributed to the temporary closure of access to waterways and public beaches by local health departments in several states. In addition, agricultural and natural resource damage, including ***degraded water quality***, overgrazed pastures, and depredation of grain crops have increased as resident Canada goose populations have grown.