

## Washington State Lake Protection Association, *Waterline*, June 2005

*This is part of a series of articles addressing the top areas of concern identified by lake residents in the WALPA survey.*

### **Nuisance Waterfowl**

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Geese and other waterfowl love to feed on the succulent grasses of well kept lawns and other landscaped areas. Although most people enjoy seeing the birds and feeding them is a favorite family activity, waterfowl have become a nuisance for many lakeside residents. Nuisance waterfowl create problems for lake users when flocks of Canada geese and other waterfowl congregate along the shores of lakes and other waterbodies year-round.

### **The problem with Canada geese**

Canada geese are big birds that eat a lot and defecate copiously. They denude grassy landscaped areas located near waterbodies, erode shorelines, and trample vegetation by frequently entering and exiting the water. Excessive goose droppings have led to the closure of some swimming beaches due to high bacterial counts. Their droppings also contribute to nutrient enrichment problems in lakes and ponds by stimulating algal growth. Many parks post signs that warn people against feeding the geese.

Canada geese can be aggressive and may harass humans in defense of their nests. Geese attracted to the mowed grassy areas at airports present a more serious problem. Airplanes taking off and landing are faced with the threat of collisions, which can damage and even disable a plane. Most resident geese live in areas with relatively stable breeding conditions and low numbers of predators. Additionally, Canada geese are long-lived geese. Resident geese tend to reproduce more rapidly than migratory populations thus leading to larger flocks.

### **Canada geese live in the U.S.**

The abundance of food and shelter in many areas has encouraged geese and other waterfowl populations to remain year-round. In the Puget Sound area, the native migratory populations of Canada geese were once in decline. In hopes of providing more game birds for hunters the US Department of Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with state wildlife agencies, introduced the resident population of geese we have today. Imported Canada goose eggs were placed in incubators until they hatched, and then reared by humans until they were old enough to survive on their own. These young transplanted geese lacked parental goose guidance and did not learn to migrate. This subspecies now known as the Common Canada Goose remains in the Puget Sound area year-round. Canada geese and all native waterfowl are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and by state laws. Under this act it is illegal to hunt, kill, sell, purchase or possess migratory birds except as permitted by regulations that are enforced by the US Department of Fish and Wildlife Service. Hazing and harassment techniques are typically used to deter nuisance geese however these methods can't be used on nesting birds, eggs, or the young. The US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant

Health Inspection Service has a Wildlife Services program that works to alleviate wildlife damage to agricultural, urban, and natural resources. This program provides free technical advice and/ or fee-based services upon request to individuals, groups, and governmental agencies working with problem wildlife including nuisance waterfowl.

### **How to discourage the geese**

Several non-lethal methods available to discourage nuisance waterfowl from settling into residential areas include landscape modifications and repellants. Geese prefer to rest and feed on open, grassy areas that allow them easy access to the water and clear sight lines to spot approaching predators. Maintaining grass height at 10 inches rather than two inches is one way to discourage these birds. Geese prefer not to walk through tall grass and this vegetative buffer has the additional water quality advantage of filtering runoff before it enters the waterbody. Replacing lawns with more environmentally-friendly wildflowers, or adding areas of native groundcover to break up the expanse of lawn will also help to deter geese.

There are several commercially available chemical repellants (e.g., ReJeXIT<sub>TM</sub> or Goose Chase<sub>TM</sub>) derived from grapes that are effective at keeping geese away from large expanses of grassy areas by making the grass unpalatable to geese. The use of border collies to drive geese away has had some success at city and county parks. Individuals can also make areas inhospitable to geese by stringing low wires or fishing line (firmly secured to avoid entanglement) in areas frequented by the birds; or use mylar tape or flags that flash and make a noise in the wind.

No one method will solve the problem of nuisance waterfowl because these birds quickly become accustomed to any single technique; however, these techniques work best when used in combination and in a consistent manner.