

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

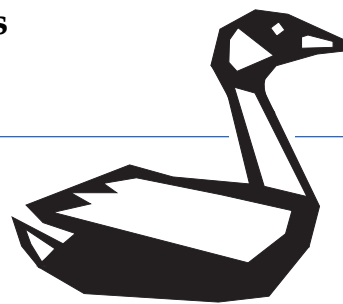


Illustration by Chris Hill

Are Your Feathers Ruffled by Waterfowl?

In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.

Issues regarding waterfowl have recently made headlines in newspapers. Their grazing on people's property does not permanently disturb or damage turf and rarely puts people at odds with these birds. But usually people dislike the fecal matter that waterfowl leave behind. Here is some information about waterfowl and how they can be managed humanely and effectively.

General Information

The general term "waterfowl" is used to describe birds—including geese, swans, and ducks—living in freshwater habitats. All species share the characteristics of webbed feet and flattened bills. Waterfowl are commonly associated with lakes and ponds, but most species spend time on land foraging and nesting. Although all are migratory birds, many remain present year-round in ideal locations. Man-made environments such as golf courses, office parks, artificial ponds and lakes, and municipal parks often provide waterfowl with irresistible grazing surfaces and an ideal habitat that can support them all year long.

The Canada goose is the species of waterfowl that causes the most conflicts with humans. Canada geese are distinguishable by their large size; black head, bill, and neck; and white cheek patch. They weigh about 12 pounds and have an average wing length of 20 inches. A strongly monogamous species, geese pair at about three years of age, have strong family ties, and often vigorously defend nests and chicks. Canada geese can often be

THE LIVING WITH WILDLIFE MISSION

The MSPCA Living With Wildlife program aims to protect wild species, now and in the future. The program promotes peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife in urban, suburban, and rural Massachusetts communities by helping to resolve human-animal conflicts in a humane, nonlethal, long-term, and cost-effective manner.

seen and heard flying overhead in a V formation, which allows each bird to fly in the wind draft of the bird in front of it, thereby saving energy. They take turns as the leader.

Possible Conflicts and Solutions

Waterfowl cause conflicts with humans primarily where landscaped areas and maintained lawns are affected. When grazing, geese do not permanently disturb or physically damage turf. Conflict

usually occurs from fecal deposits and the aggregation of a large number of birds. Tolerance, vegetation management (the use of tall grass or other naturally occurring vegetation to deter geese and ducks), fencing, harassment techniques (including the use of trained Border collies), hazing, repellents, and oiling eggs are among the many solutions available for

dealing with waterfowl. An integrated approach using a variety of these techniques is the best way to solve conflicts.

Public-Health Concerns

Waterfowl are not a health threat to humans, but large accumulations of their droppings are becoming cause for concern in water quality control at municipal lakes and ponds. The botulism strain that affects waterfowl is not transmittable to humans.

For more information about humanely solving human-wildlife conflicts or about the MSPCA's Living With Wildlife program, call (617) 522-7400, visit www.livingwithwildlife.org, or e-mail lww@mspca.org.