

Canada Goose Management Guide

Resident Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) are common throughout Mississippi. Some of Mississippi's Canada goose populations are migrant, meaning that they annually migrate to Mississippi from long distances during winter; however, many remain in the state as year-round residents. Nesting Canada geese can be aggressive, and when concentrated in large numbers, their feeding habits and droppings can result in a general nuisance and can sometimes cause damage.

To effectively control nuisance Canada geese, MDWFP recommends a combination of the following actions:

- Harassment
- Nest and/or egg destruction
- Habitat modification
- Exclusion
- Lethal control

Harassment

Canada geese prefer areas where there is very little disturbance. If someone or something bothers them enough, they will typically relocate when other suitable habitats are available. Harassment techniques are most effective in January through March before breeding and nesting has begun. Persistence is important, however, they can become accustomed to some techniques, if they learn they will not be harmed. Once the geese lose their primary flight feathers (called molting) during the summer and are unable to fly, harassment is often times ineffective.

Chasing

Chasing geese on foot or in a golf cart is labor intensive but can be successful when done with persistence and in conjunction with other harassment methods. The goal is to chase geese long enough to cause them to go elsewhere.

Dogs

Using dogs to harass geese can also be successful. Some businesses use highly trained border collies, but any athletic, medium-to-large dog capable of obeying commands can be used. Control of the dog is vital because it is considered an extension of your hand and therefore cannot be allowed to catch, injure, or kill a Canada goose. **NOTE:** Dogs are not a viable option during the early summer flightless period because of the risk of physical contact.

Silhouettes

Silhouettes of coyotes (made from plywood) have shown to be an effective method of scaring geese from a location. Moving the silhouettes around periodically may help increase the effectiveness.

Other techniques

When used in conjunction with other measures, the following can help encourage geese to move elsewhere. Persistence is the key. As long as the geese are not physically harmed, these techniques are legal.

- Air horns
- High pressure water sprayers.
- Pyrotechnics (primers and/or blanks)

Nest and egg destruction

Canada Geese are federally protected and registration is required for egg and nest destruction activities. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offers free online registration for egg and nest destruction at <https://epermits.fws.gov/eRCGR/geSl.aspx>

Habitat Modifications

Habitat modification means physically altering property to make it less attractive to geese. Modifications should focus on reducing or eliminating food sources and nesting sites, as well as access between these resources and your pond or lake.

Don't feed the geese!

Canada geese tend to stay where there is abundant food and water available. Post “Do Not Feed Waterfowl” signs in public areas. Feeding concentrates geese and makes them more aggressive toward people because food is expected. They are also more susceptible to diseases when unnaturally concentrated in an area. Finally, most handouts are nutritionally inadequate and some actually cause harm to the birds.

Remove domestic waterfowl

Domestic waterfowl, including mute swans, act as decoys to attract Canada geese flying over an area. The presence of swans does not discourage geese.

Create barriers along ponds and lakes

Canada geese prefer gentle, grassy slopes that allow them to easily walk into and out of the water to feed or rest. If access to the water is difficult, adult geese may leave the area to raise their young elsewhere. Steepen the shoreline by building a vertical seawall three feet above the surface of the water, or create a 63-degree angle from the water's edge. This is most easily accomplished during construction but existing ponds and lakes can also be modified. Rip-rap, while ineffective on gentle slopes, is often effective on steeper ones.

Grass buffer strips

Allowing vegetation to grow tall along this slope will help protect it from erosion and keep the geese from walking into and out of the water. Eliminate mowing: Taller grass is less palatable and can hide potential predators. Eliminate mowing at least 20 feet from pond shorelines—or even larger areas—to encourage geese to look for safer spots with better food sources.

Plant prairie grasses: Tall, lush native prairie grass stands along shorelines provide the same benefits as eliminating mowing because geese cannot see over the grass while walking through it, and it also can act as a fence for exclusion.

Plants Canada geese do not prefer:

- Big bluestem grass
- Little bluestem grass
- Indian grass
- Switch grass
- Mature tall fescue

Exclusion

Exclusion methods prevent Canada geese from entering a specific area. Some methods are inexpensive and simple, while others are more complex and costly. Exclusion can be very effective, especially when used in conjunction with other management tools.

Overhead grid systems

A grid system above the water's surface is a very effective exclusion method. Grids work on a simple principle: Canada geese are large and require a long glide-slope to land, and a grid system denies them that. Grids work best on bodies of water less than 150 feet across, but can be used on bodies up to 300 feet across. Use nearly any type of cordage to construct the grid, from cotton kite string to plastic-coated Kevlar cord. Anchor points for the grid lines can be trees, wooden stakes, or metal fence posts.

Fencing

Because geese can fly, fencing alone may not exclude them from an area. However, fencing can barricade geese from areas of pedestrian traffic, such as sidewalks, during the nesting season. Fencing is also effective during the flightless period. For best results, the fence should present a visual as well as physical barrier that prevents geese from seeing passers-by. Fencing along the shoreline of a pond or lake will prevent geese from walking from water onto shore. Even though geese can fly over them, these short fences often work well when combined with harassment. Consider conventional woven wire, chain-link, and picket fences, single or dual strands of cord or wire, or chicken wire.

Mylar tape

Often used in conjunction with other exclusion methods, Mylar tape helps create a visual barrier. The tape is one-half inch wide, red on one side and silver on the other. To use as a fence, string one or two strands between two posts, twisting the tape two or three times as you put it up. The tape flashes in the breeze and makes the geese nervous, encouraging them to go elsewhere. The unfamiliar flash is startling to geese and makes them shy away from the area.

Lethal Control

Because Canada geese are still classified as migratory birds, they are subject to federal and state regulations. Consequently, a special permit from the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks must be obtained before taking any lethal control action outside of a Canada goose hunting season. Contact MDWFP to apply for a nuisance Canada goose control permit by calling 601-432-2199.

There are 2 methods of lethal control allowed.

Hunting

Mississippi allows for the harvest of Canada Geese during its September Canada Goose season, and MDWFP highly recommends this option for control where possible. These dates generally run from September 1-30 with a daily bag limit of 5 Canada geese. There is also a “regular” Canada goose hunting season during the fall and winter each year. All hunters must be properly licensed. See current regulations for details at www.mdwfp.com. Check with local authorities regarding the use of firearms in your area.

Nuisance Canada Goose Control Permit

Through the USFWS, MDWFP now allows for a Nuisance Canada Goose Control Permit. This permit allows individuals to remove. Permits are issued on a limited basis between March 11 and August 31. For more information on the Nuisance Canada Goose Permit, please contact MDWFP at 601-432-2199.

Methods Not Recommended

Although frequently asked about, the following methods are not considered effective methods of deterrent.

Plastic scare devices

Plastic swans, alligators, owls, and snakes are ineffective for repelling Canada Geese. Limited success has been reported with floating dead goose decoys, but effectiveness is usually short-lived.

Swans

Some communities have tried using swans to deter geese in hopes that these aggressive birds will vigorously defend their territory, especially during the breeding season, and drive other waterfowl from the area. Non-native mute swans are commonly used, but they are tolerant of other waterfowl and may only defend their immediate nesting area. Further, their presence can attract geese to a pond or lake, and it is not uncommon to find mute swans and Canada Geese peacefully sharing a site. Also, swans are sometimes more aggressive towards people than geese. The reality is that mute swans usually only add to the problem.

Capture and relocation

Capture and relocation of adult Canada geese is not viable because geese imprint on the area where they learn to fly and, if relocated, will simply return in most cases. Relocation is somewhat effective for young, flightless juveniles that learn to fly at the release area, rather than the capture area, but Canada geese already occupy virtually all suitable habitat, so opportunities to relocate juveniles are limited. MDWFP does not recommend relocation of any waterfowl.