

The best way to live in harmony with Canada geese

by Nicole Rivard

Earlier this year, Connecticut State Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff introduced pioneering legislation that would declare Norwalk's Calf Pasture Beach a wildlife refuge where waterfowl hunting is banned.

While Friends of Animals, which is headquartered nearby, was elated, the pro-hunting community cried foul, claiming the area would be overcome with Canada geese feces.

That's absurd. Perceived conflicts like this with resident and migratory Canada geese are all too familiar for Friends of Animals.

We get many calls in the spring and summer from concerned members who are upset that their condo complex, retirement community or lake association are approving egg addling, other harassment measures and even worse, geese roundups and slaughter because they believe there are too many in their respective areas.

These places don't have a Canada goose population problem—the problem is intolerant people who have an issue with cleaning up after wildlife. But as humans continue to encroach on wildlife habitat, they need to learn how to live in harmony with the waterfowl.

Friends of Animals believes habitats in parks can be modified creatively to make them less attractive to Canada geese, which is why we developed our Canada Goose Habitat Modification Manual, available on our website.



But since Canada geese have a remarkable ability to adapt to human settings, special attention to cleanup has become essential. And the truth is, these days it's easier than ever to institute clean-up programs that rid an area of goose droppings. For instance, in the U.S., Georgia-based manufacturer Tow and Farm offers different size pieces of equipment—its Tow and Collect series— that provide an efficient method of collecting goose feces.

SPEEDY SOLUTIONS

In Ontario, Canada, Paul Elliot was in demand cleaning up poop. He says he was the first one to use the Tow and Collect mini 700 to pick up goose poop from a 15-acre municipal park along Lake Barrie. The township of Oro-Medonte, between Barrie and Orillia, employed him two days a week for approximately seven years before the municipality decided to buy its own machine for its workers.

Elliot was a popular guy during that time, he recalls.

“Whoever is doing the cleanup of the geese will never have a bad word said to them. You are only helpful. You are very much appreciated,” Elliot recalled.

What Elliot was doing for the township was even appreciated by surrounding cities, like Toronto, which is about an hour away. Residents would make specific drives up to the park because it was so clean and their own parks were littered with goose feces.

Elliot said the township used the non-resident park usage fee to defray the costs of paying him for his services. He said it would take him about 2 ½ hours to do the entire park.

“The sweepers are fantastic. They do the job simply, quickly, efficiently. It’s just a marvel to work with them. No problem at all,” he said.

Not only do sweepers provide a humane solution for maintaining grounds where Canada geese like to gather, Elliot points out cleanup is an investment that makes the most sense. He witnessed the park trying other expensive methods like garlic spray, dogs and black powder guns, all to no avail.

The mini 700, which costs \$4,495 features no engine, so servicing is very quick and minimal. The wheels drive the brushes, which flick the feces into the catcher as you drive the ATV. The Pro 1500, which costs \$7,915, has a key-start seven horsepower engine that drives the brushes for constant collection—whether you’re travelling at two miles per hour or eight miles per hour. This is helpful if you have varying surfaces and grass length. Because of the 60-inch wide pickup of the Pro 1500, you can completely cover ½ acre in just over 10 minutes.

In early 2018, the City of Windsor in Ottawa approved \$75,000 worth of equipment to clean up goose droppings from riverfront paths.

“Clearly we see all of council gets calls and we see that there is an increased issue over the last several years with respect to Canada geese and the droppings that they leave along our riverfront paths in particular,” Mayor Drew Wilkens told a local radio station.

A HOME RUN IN BOSTON

Goose feces became an issue at Teddy Ebersol’s Red Sox Fields, located in the Charles River Esplanade in Boston, despite egg addling, sheepdogs and fencing, so a friends group took matters into its own hands and purchased the Tow and Collect’s mini 700.

“We had parents/kids all turned off by an extraordinary amount of goose feces,” said Edward Fleck, a member of the friends group that is dedicated to the maintenance and stewardship of the athletic fields, which include three baseball/softball diamonds, a T-ball diamond, five youth soccer fields and a regulation-sized soccer field.

“The sweeper is a nice bomb-proof piece of machinery. It kind of sold itself in terms of its rigor and quality,” Fleck said.

The friends group raised the money by approaching city school groups that don’t pay anything to use the complex because they don’t have their own athletic facilities. Fleck said they gladly pitched in. They didn’t purchase the larger model with the gas engine because of the emissions.

“State workers pull it out of a garage a couple times a week, hook it to a tractor, and an hour later the fields are squeaky clean. It’s very effective and efficient in removing the poop,” Fleck said.

EDUCATION IS KEY

In addition to cleanup and habitat modification, a continuing public education and outreach campaign is also necessary. People need to learn about the natural conduct of nesting geese and the importance of giving them ample space to mitigate conflict. Geese deposit eggs in their nests between early April and mid-May. After their eggs hatch, adults care for their goslings during May and June.

After nesting, geese undergo an annual “molt,” a four-to-five week flightless period when they shed and re-grow their outer wing feathers. Molting occurs between mid-June and late July, and the birds resume flight by August. Lethal responses and harassment methods are not only unethical, but they offer only temporary answers. Elliot pointed out that geese are smart enough to figure out what humans are doing and ignore harassment efforts.

“Canada geese aren’t going away,” Elliot said. “The only thing to do is clean up after them.”

[Click here to read our “Canada Goose Habitat Modification Manual”.](#)