

Goose Facts

For many centuries, Canada geese have passed through Massachusetts in great migratory flocks to and from their Canadian nesting and breeding grounds. However, in recent years, populations of non-migratory, “resident” geese have developed from descendants of captive hunting stocks and introductions earlier this century. Although they can fly long distances, these birds have no learned migratory patterns. In mid summer, during molting, they are unable to fly. Their populations have since drastically increased in number in response to abundant food sources and few predators, especially in urban areas.

Geese prefer to mate, nest and forage near water bodies. Many people find geese to be a nuisance due to their droppings, large presence in recreational areas, and occasionally aggressive behavior. Left unchecked, their populations can grow rapidly and can create human-wildlife conflicts and competition for resources within goose populations.



What is Brookline Doing?

The Town of Brookline implemented an integrated goose control program over five years ago. Although no single strategy will eliminate goose problems, our program employs multiple strategies to try and minimize goose issues in our parks and open spaces.

❖ Population Stabilization

Each year, the Town obtains a permit from Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife for population stabilization. Trained Town staff inspect water bodies and parkland in early spring to determine the presence of geese and possible nesting locations. Once the geese have paired off and laid their clutch, the team proceeds to oil, or addle, each egg and replace it in the nest to prevent it from further development. Simply removing the eggs would only encourage the goose to lay more. This tactic has had positive results.

❖ Landscaping

In more wooded areas, such as Olmsted Park and Hall’s Pond, the Town has strategically installed plantings around the water bodies that provide a perceived hiding place for predators. Geese prefer to be able to see completely around them, so this encourages the populations to seek safer places to feed and reside. This tactic has had mixed results. It is still used where appropriate, but as the geese have begun to adapt to a more urban environment, they appear to be less concerned about predators in this area.

❖ Repellents/Exclusion Strategies

The Town has tried several other strategies to discourage geese from congregating or settling in parks. One strategy is a non-toxic grapeseed extract repellent that discourages geese from eating the grass. Another is cardboard or plastic coyote decoys, moved periodically to appear more real, which the geese perceive to be a threat. Both have had mixed results. Finally, the Town uses the services of trained border collies to deter geese with good success.

❖ A No Feed Policy

Feeding waterfowl is prohibited in Brookline since it encourages geese and other birds to stay and concentrate in certain areas. It also changes the birds’ natural foraging behavior and can lead to aggression and disease spread.

❖ Park Maintenance and Cleaning

Parks crews have regular maintenance schedules for all of Brookline’s parks. Geese produce a large amount of droppings making it challenging to remove them, however cleanliness in areas with high numbers of geese, particularly on park paths, is a priority.

❖ Monitoring/Education

Parks staff, including our seasonal rangers, regularly patrol parks and communicate problems regarding geese and cleanliness to other staff. The Parks Division works to educate people about the geese, our efforts, and the no feed policy. Brochures and park signage about this policy assist in our efforts. We are hopeful that our integrated approach will help to enhance the overall user experience in Brookline’s parks.

FAQs

Q: Why are there more geese here now than in the past?

A: Resident Canada geese have proliferated in Massachusetts due to abundant food for grazing (lawns, open parks, golf courses, etc., especially if well-watered, fertilized, and mowed), few predators, and restrictions on hunting in many towns.

Q: Are goose droppings a health hazard?

A: Brookline Public Health officials have researched the available literature and found that geese/geese feces do not present a significant public health risk at this time, and have not led to any human disease outbreaks related to casual/recreational exposure. However, it is safest to avoid ingestion/inhalation of droppings. Health inspectors are also monitoring any issues.

Q: Is goose control humane?

A: The Humane Society of America, the MSPCA, and other organizations feel that adding eggs by oiling at the appropriate stage of development is one of the most humane options for controlling goose populations.

Q: How can I get more information?

A: In addition to the Parks and Open Space Division, you can find useful information from www.masswildlife.org, and from www.geesepeace.com. Some information in this brochure came from these sources.

How Can I Help?

➤ **Don't feed the geese, ducks or other waterfowl**

Feeding encourages animals to stay in one area, is not healthy for them, and can lead to more aggressive behavior and conflicts. They do not need our help to find food.

➤ **Make some noise**

Many geese will naturally avoid humans, but scare tactics such as loud noises or flapping your arms or a blanket can discourage more persistent geese from using an area. At home, scarecrows, flags, or aluminum pie plates strung outside can help, as well as tall vegetation around water, fencing, and ground cover instead of lawn.

➤ **Don't move eggs or nests**

Federal laws prohibit tampering with goose eggs and nests without a permit. In addition, this will not necessarily cause an adult to leave the area or stop a female from laying more eggs. Contact the Parks Division to report new nests.

➤ **Remember geese live here too**

Although geese may sometimes be a nuisance, this is also their home. We can control their populations and discourage them from using high traffic areas, but ultimately we must share our open spaces, with these birds as part of our ecosystem.

➤ **Educate your friends & neighbors about our efforts and how to help**

Town of Brookline

Goose Information & Integrated Control Program



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