

CANADA GEESE

A guide to legal control measures in the UK

Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) are not native to the United Kingdom. They were first introduced in the late 17th century as an ornamental attraction to parks and the gardens of stately homes. Although originally restricted to a few areas, in the 1950s and 60s they spread to other habitats. The increase in sand and gravel extraction resulted in a series of disused pits and lakes which provided suitable habitat for the geese. As a result the population has increased from around 19,000 in the 1970s and now exceeds 100,000.

The distribution of Canada geese is widespread in England but localised in Scotland and Wales. Canada geese favour lowland waters, including lakes, reservoirs, gravel pits and slow-flowing rivers. Restored sand and gravel pits also provide very suitable habitats for this species, with islands for nesting and grasslands for feeding.

Canada geese tend to be traditional in their choice of breeding site and females generally return to their natal area to nest year after year, irrespective of whether or not breeding in previous years has been successful. Canada geese may breed from 2-3 years of age. Most lay a clutch, which may vary in size from 3-11 eggs, in April. Incubation of the eggs is by the female and lasts for about 30 days. Overall the breeding success of Canada geese is relatively good. During the winter the species is believed to be more mobile and may range over several kilometres from lakes to feed in pastures and fields of winter cereals.

THE PROBLEM

Increased numbers of Canada geese are causing problems. The geese not only damage growing crops, but also amenity land in urban parks, open spaces, golf courses and grassed areas around lakes and ponds. They spoil grass and flowerbeds and can cause erosion of banks. A large flock, defecating every few minutes, can deposit a great deal of excreta. The geese can be responsible for extensive fouling of lawns and other grassy areas, footpaths and lakes, causing an unpleasant nuisance. The droppings contain bacteria that may be harmful if faecal matter is inadvertently swallowed. During the nesting period they can act aggressively towards humans. They have also been in collisions with aircraft.

GENERAL LICENCES TO CONTROL CANADA GEESE

The Canada goose was first added to three general licences in England by DEFRA on 1st March 2005 as provided for by the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. As of 1st January 2008 Natural England is responsible for the issuing of these licences for the following purposes only;

- to prevent serious damage or disease.
- to preserve public health or public safety.
- to conserve flora or fauna.

Canada geese were also added to three general licences in Wales from 1st January 2011:

- to prevent serious damage to agriculture or fisheries or prevent the spread of disease.
- for the purposes of conserving wild birds.
- for the purposes of air safety.

It is important to remember that these licences have clearly-defined terms and conditions. Anybody carrying out control of Canada geese under them may need to prove, if questioned by authorities, that they are fully in compliance with the terms and conditions. If they cannot do so they may be liable to prosecution.

Copies of the general licences can be found at

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/wildlife-management/licensing/genlicences.htm>

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/consmanagement/conservationbiodiversity/wildlifelicences/wildlifelicences/?lang=en>

It is recommended that before undertaking control of the geese, you familiarize yourself fully with the detail of these licences. Note you do not have to carry copies of the licences.

If you seek any further clarification please contact your regional BASC office, or see our website – www.basc.org.uk.

SPECIAL LICENCES

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, special licences are still required to control Canada geese outside of the shooting season.

Current legislation does not allow such licences to be issued if the only purpose is to prevent damage to property including amenity land.

Each applicant must justify the reasons for which a licence is required and the applicant must be able to show that other means of control, e.g. scaring, have been attempted and are unsuitable or have been unsuccessful. Licence holders must report on action taken to the licensing authority.

MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

Where a problem arises with Canada geese, there may be a number of options to deal with it. Killing birds may not necessarily be the only solution or an appropriate one in the particular situation.

It must be borne in mind that management may have to be carried out over a period of years to be effective. Measures will vary according to the site concerned, whether it is located in an urban or rural area, the number of birds present and proximity to other populations. All control measures involving the destruction of birds or eggs must be undertaken as humanely as possible. In urban areas especially, land owners, managers and gamekeepers needing to carry out control measures should be prepared to provide the information to the public on what is being done and, as importantly, why it is necessary.

OPTIONS - Not under licence control

1. Taking no action

A matter for local judgement depending on the severity of the problems. Issues to be taken into account would include local population increases, damage to habitat, competition with other birds for food and breeding sites, possible effect on water quality through droppings, erosion of grass banks, damage to turf, fouling of paths and other surfaces and aggression towards humans especially young children. Cleaning up fouling and protecting other species, habitats and humans can incur considerable and continuing expenditure. Managers should be aware that taking no action would probably mean that the local population and problems will increase.

2. Scaring

Scarers may be useful in a rural location but are often less appropriate in an urban setting. Scarers may disturb other wildlife and might be detrimental to the amenity use of the site and to its neighbouring properties. It is typically only effective for a short period. The National Farmers' Union (NFU) code of practice on bird scarers provides advice to farmers and others suffering agricultural damage. (Available online at – <http://www.nfuonline.com/x5317.xml>). Visual scaring techniques can be useful but may be unacceptable on aesthetic grounds.

3. Habitat adjustment

Removal of nesting sites, e.g. islands in lakes, may help to reduce the breeding population but there could be adverse implications for other wildlife. In agricultural areas adjustment of cropping patterns might help reduce goose damage. In both urban and rural areas altered management of feeding areas, for example allowing grass to grow and/or planting trees and shrubs to break up open vistas preferred by geese, can be effective and might have positive benefits for other wildlife. The detailed design of the water's edge can also be important.

4. Fencing

Denying access to crops or grass feeding areas by fencing along waters' edge or fencing off islands can make a site less attractive to geese and thereby reduce their numbers on that site. String/rope netting across surface water prevents access to the water. In some amenity areas these techniques would be unsightly and there would be a risk of causing injury to Canada geese and to other birds.

5. Discourage feeding by the public

This is a useful technique to help reduce goose numbers in urban areas.

6. Shooting

Permitted all year round in England and Wales under appropriate general licences and during the open season in Scotland and Northern Ireland. This can be an effective legal control technique, especially in rural areas. In most urban areas shooting will not be possible because of public safety considerations.

OPTIONS - under general licence in England or special licences in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland

It may be possible to use one or more of the following:

1. Prevention of hatching

a) Egg pricking

Is effective and humane. It should be noted that some nests can be up to 600m from the water. Successful methods are to prick all eggs or remove all eggs from the first clutch and prick all eggs in the second clutch as soon as the birds start to sit. By the time a bird gives up sitting it is too late for another clutch.

b) Use of liquid paraffin BP

100% effective in preventing eggs from hatching if done correctly and at the right time. It should be done as early as possible during incubation. For colonially-breeding Canada geese the most practical approach is treating all eggs on 3 occasions (end of March, mid-April and end of April).

c) Egg substitution

Is also effective. Various techniques include china or clay substitutes, or hard-boiling eggs.

Egg pricking, liquid paraffin or egg substitution is likely to be successful in preventing breeding success in the short term but would be unlikely to reduce a local population unless continued for several years.

2. Rounding up and killing in flightless period

This can be an effective method for the removal of large numbers of birds or selected individuals. The geese can be driven into pens whilst flightless during the moult in June and July. It should be carried out by experienced staff but it is labour intensive and expensive. It also requires the humane dispatch of birds. A range of possible methods of dispatch is available. For advice on dispatch please contact the relevant organisation listed at the back of this leaflet. Relocation of geese (normally prohibited) would not be appropriate because it would simply redistribute the population and encourage additional breeding.

3. Shooting

In the close season (1st February - 31st August or 21st February - 31st August below high water mark, in England, Wales and Scotland) may or may not be effective. It is more likely to be practicable in rural areas but can also be an effective method for the removal of individual birds in urban areas.

HOW TO APPLY FOR A LICENCE

Applications for licences should be made to Natural England or the appropriate devolved administration agriculture department at the addresses below:

Wales:

Welsh Assembly Government,
Food & Farming Development Division,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ.
Tel: 0845 010 3300

Scotland:

Scottish Government
Landscapes & Habitats Team
1-J South
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ
Tel: 0131 2447381

Northern Ireland:

Environment Agency
Klondyke Building
Cromac Avenue
Gaswork Business Park
Lower Ormeau Road
Belfast
BT7 2JA
Tel: 0845 302 0008

WHERE TO OBTAIN FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Natural England

1 East Parade,
Sheffield,
S1 2ET
Tel: 0300 060 6000
Fax: 0300 060 1622

Wildlife management and licensing internet pages

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/wildlife-management-licensing/topicmap.htm>

British Association for Shooting and Conservation

Marford Mill
Rossett
Wrexham
LL12 0HL
Tel: 01244 573016
Fax: 01244 573013
Email: research@basc.org.uk

British Pest Control Association

Ground Floor
1 Gleneagles House
Vernongate
South Street
Derby
DE1 1UP
Tel: 01332 294288
Email: enquiry@bpca.org.uk

National Farmers' Union

Head Office
Agriculture House
Stoneleigh Park
Stoneleigh
Warwickshire
CV8 2TZ
Tel: 024 7685 8500
Fax: 024 7685 8501

NFU Cymru

Agriculture House
Royal Welsh Show Ground
Builth Wells
Powys
LD2 3TU
Tel: 01982 554200
Fax: 01982 554201
Email: nfu.cymru@nfu.org.uk

NFU Scotland

Head Office
Rural Centre – West Mains
Ingliston
Midlothian
EH28 8LT
Tel: 0131 472 4000
Fax: 0131 472 4010
Email: webmaster@nfus.org.uk

Northern Ireland

Ulster Farmers' Union
475 Antrim Road
Belfast
BT15 3DA
Tel: 02890 370222
Fax: 02890 371231
Email: info@ufuhq.com

British Association for Shooting and Conservation
Marford Mill, Rossett, Wrexham LL12 0HL
Tel: 01244 573016 Fax: 01244 573013
Research@basc.org.uk www.basc.org.uk

Rec sec\publications\Canada geese a guide to legal control measures in the UK
Revised: 06 April 2011 Review date: 30 April 2012