

## **CANADA GEESE - WHERE YOU STAND**

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### **Canada Geese - where you stand**

Canada geese were first introduced into the UK in the late 1600s as ornamental attractions to stately homes and parks. The 1950s and 60s saw them spread to other areas such as pits and lakes and, since the 70s, their population has increased from around 19,000 to over 60,000 today.

They breed from the age of two or three and lay between three and eleven eggs in early spring which hatch after 30 days. During these winter months, the geese tend to be more mobile and may venture further from their preferred lakes and islands to feed on winter cereals and pastures, which is when they become a problem.

Growing crops, parkland, golf courses and flowerbeds are all potential targets for large flocks of geese and, although research is still underway to establish if droppings contain harmful pathogens, they are still a nuisance. During nesting periods, they are aggressive. They are a threat to aircraft and they compete with other wild fowl for food sources and breeding sites.

#### **Check dates**

The Canada goose is, however, protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, making it an offence to kill, injure or take, damage or destroy their eggs or nests...without a licence.

They can be shot during the open season (1st Sept - 31st Jan or 1st Sept - 20th Feb below high water mark). Canada geese cannot be sold dead or alive (unless bred in captivity under licence) and they cannot be released into the wild without a licence. The use of automatic and semi-automatic weapons, devices for night shooting, poison and stupefying substances is an offence too...unless you hold a licence.

MAFF may grant a licence to kill Canada geese or to destroy their eggs or nests if the birds are causing particular problems and if the reasons are to conserve or protect other wild bird species, to preserve public health, maintain air safety or to prevent damage to livestock, crops, growing timber or fisheries. But NOT if the reason is to prevent damage to property or amenity land.

Applicants for a licence must prove the reasons for control and should offer evidence that other means, such as scaring, have been tried. A full report must also be submitted to the licencing body.

#### **Control methods**

There are a number of control methods you can try prior to applying for a licence. Scaring may be acceptable in rural situations (rather than urban), although this could have a detrimental effect on other species and would only have a short-term success rate.

Removal or adjustment of nesting sites can prove effective but care must be taken not to adversely affect other species. Allowing grass to grow, planting trees and hedges helps break up open aspects which are attractive to the geese. Even applying an element of design to the edges of lakes and waterways can prove beneficial. Fencing denies access to crops and possible nesting sites, as can the erection of netting. Once again though, care must be taken that other species are not affected.

Shooting in the open season is OK for rural locations but probably not in most urban surroundings.

#### **Licence required**

If all else fails, then apply for a licence from your nearest MAFF office.

This will allow you to employ a number of control methods. To prevent the eggs from hatching, prick all the eggs or remove the first clutch and prick the second clutch, when the birds start to sit. Or, you could substitute the eggs for clay dummies or hard boiled eggs. This method is effective for short term control but unlikely to reduce a local population unless conducted over a number of years.

In their flightless season (June-July), large numbers can be rounded up, driven into pens and humanely dispatched, but this method requires experience and often expensive labour. And a large amount of public relations consideration.

Shooting out of season is a practical way of culling, especially in rural areas, although taking individual birds in urban surroundings can also be effective

For further information, contact the BPCA (01332) 294228 or MAFF (0171) 238 3000.