

Golf course goose IPM

These “birdies” were unwelcome visitors, until the GooseBuster came on the green

CLOSE UP

Dovecote Bird Control Services, Edmond, OK

■ <http://dovecotebcs.com>, 866/348-4118

■ Been in business since 2001

■ **Fun facts:** Owner Jim Orebaugh came to the bird industry quite by accident. After taking early retirement from the information technology industry 12 years ago, he began a business selling wireless phone headsets (which he still does online at www.dovecoteglobal.com). When a stockbroker client casually complained of a bird problem at his building, Orebaugh recommended his longtime (actually, his first-ever) client, Bird-X. He ended up doing the installation himself, and the rest, as they say, is history.

■ Orebaugh's business name has a double meaning: “Dovecote” can mean a pigeon home or a harmonious organization. With his dabbling into all things both business supplies and bird control, Orebaugh jokes that “we're aiming more for the latter.”

PROBLEM

Bird control on a golf course

SOLUTION

Solution: A tandem approach, using Bird-X's GooseBuster unit and the GatorGuard

The Lincoln Park Golf Course is a city-owned and -operated 300-acre, 36-hole course in Oklahoma City, OK. About 100 Canada geese had infiltrated five different locations on the course, including several greens. It was not a new problem, and it was worsening.

“The geese had been an ongoing



Dr. Phillip “Dr. Goose” Whitford notes that a lot of research went into the design of his GooseBuster system.

problem for five years,” says Steve Carson, head golf professional and general manager of the course. “They returned to the same location and perpetuated themselves. The population expansion was an unending progression.

“The issue is not unique to us,” Carson continues. “It’s a big problem at many courses. Geese like to feed and roost in open areas where there are few predators, so it’s a natural place for them to feel safe.”

Golfers were getting perturbed when they vied with geese for position at the tee. But the biggest complaints were lodged by Lincoln Park’s maintenance crew members, who had to remove goose droppings from greens and tee boxes before mowing. They blew it off with air hoses on the greens and water hookups on the fairways. It was not a pleasant task.

“We inquired about trapping the

geese, but the Oklahoma Wildlife Department told us we had too many geese to use that method,” Carson says.

Ideal candidate for help

Then in the fall of 2002, Jim Orebaugh, owner of Dovecote Bird Control Services in Edmond, OK, contacted Carson, who has been with the Lincoln Park facility for 13 years. He knew television station KOCO-Channel 5 in Oklahoma City was interested in how the newly introduced GooseBuster noise repellent system worked, and he also knew Lincoln Park would be an ideal candidate.

Orebaugh suggested using the GooseBuster in tandem with placing a floating GatorGuard resin alligator head in the water hazard. Carson eagerly agreed and selected the course’s highest-profile area with the heaviest concentration of geese and droppings. (For an

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Just ducky



Jim Orebaugh notes that he has sold a lot of GatorGuards to homeowners as an add-on service for ducks that are swimming in their pools. "I don't know if the ducks up north know enough to be scared of a gator," he laughs, "but it sure works down here!"

overview of the history and science behind the GooseBuster unit, see "Dr. Goose to the rescue," September 2002, page 20.)

"One week after the GooseBuster and GatorGuard were installed, the geese relocated to a different part of the course — an area that was out of the mainstream and much more acceptable," Carson says. "I'd love to be able to send them 10 miles away, but we must be practical. It is such a marked improvement. They stopped congregating and dispersed. They did not return, even after we turned off the GooseBuster."

"The course was basically goose-free for the first time in years," confirms Orebaugh, who oversaw the strategy. However, two or three months later, the geese slowly and warily returned a couple holes down because there was nothing to disturb them there.

"That's when we reinstated GooseBuster and purchased a portable unit," Carson says.

He and his crew are now following a phased relocation of the geese: "We don't want to hurt them; just discourage them."

Ideally, Carson hopes to move them to little-used areas of the lakeside city-owned park nearby. "I'll have happy geese and happy golfers!" he proclaims. And happy grounds crew, too.

"In five years," predicts Orebaugh,

5 steps to success

Jim Orebaugh, Dovecote Bird Control Services, uses one basic plan for relocating geese. While implementation varies with the site conditions, the principles remain the same:

- 1. Observe the situation** — Orebaugh sets up two digital cameras, one equipped with binoculars, to observe geese patterns, timing and activities. Are the geese loafing, roosting, nesting? Where do they look for food, and how does this affect their congregating?
- 2. Consider relocation implications** — If you disrupt the current gathering of geese, where will they go? What is their most likely resettlement option? Do you need to disrupt them from that area?
- 3. Develop a strategy** — What comforts (like food sources) can you take away from the geese? How many ways can you disrupt their sense of well-being and disturb their routines?
- 4. Install alarms** — What's the best placement of the four speakers to yield the greatest impact? Experiment with the timing, sequence and volume of the alarm/alert system. In some situations, it is possible to bounce the signals off buildings to expand its reach. Add "reinforcements" as desired — for example, dogs, rubber alligator heads, balloons and shaking the eggs of nesting birds.
- 5. Continue the campaign** — Be vigilant, active and unrelenting in using tactics to keep the geese from returning. Never let them get comfortable or complacent.

Goose behavior 101

Dr. Phillip Whitford, inventor of the GooseBuster unit, has factored the habits of geese into a comprehensive system of deterrence. Here is a sample of his observations:

- **Female geese are the ones you need to move.** If they leave, the males go, too.
- **The longer geese sit on the nest, the more defensive they become.** Begin harassment early in the nesting cycle, such as when the first egg is laid, for maximum disruption before they are fully invested in the nest.
- **In deterring geese, use more than one element.** An integrated approach ensures they don't habituate and return when they think the coast is clear.
- **Strictly visual harassment doesn't work well with geese.** Add other sensory stimulants like sound to dislodge them.
- **Geese are not stupid.** If the timing and duration of harassment methods are totally consistent, they learn when it's safe to return.
- **Don't stop the harassment.** Follow through long enough so the offending geese relocate elsewhere. If a few return, step up deterrence measures immediately.
- **Ideally, begin disrupting geese in the fall when the first migrants arrive to scout the territory.** Deterring them early is easier than later, when they've become attached to and comfortable in an area and the infestation has had time to multiply.

"geese will be a huge problem in many more places. No single product alone will resolve it. GooseBuster works best in combination with other methods. Then," he adds, "you must stay on top of the situation to reinforce the geese's uneasiness, uncertainty and reluctance to return."

Philosophically, Orebaugh defines the problem and the solution: "Canada geese, like any other creature, have the right to exist — but not in my yard and not in commercial spaces frequented by humans. There are appropriate places for geese, and we focus on training the geese to stay away from our interests."

GooseBuster is an electronic product used to re-educate the geese about where to be and where not to be.

"Essentially," Orebaugh summarizes, "we're moving them where they belong." **PC**

For more information about the GooseBuster and GatorGuard technology, contact Bird-X at 800/662-5021 or www.bird-x.com.

For more goose management strategies and tips, please visit www.pestcontrolmag.com.