

# Canada geese love to go where humans go

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Canada goose. Image credit: Wikipedia.

A Canada goose's brain is smaller than its pile of droppings, but the ubiquitous bird is no dummy.

There's a thriving market of tools and services catered to scaring them away, including lasers and an armada of highly trained border collies that love chasing them. There are even decoys made in the likenesses of alligators, coyotes and swans, a larger, distant cousin that can bully a goose. Canada geese, protected by federal migratory bird laws, catch on quick, though, and will go on pecking at grass while simultaneously pooping on it once they realize the decoys won't hurt them.

"Canada geese are smarter than people give them credit for, and they're great parents," said Lynsey White, director of humane wildlife conflict resolution for the Humane Society of the United States. "They're harmless for the most part. It's the droppings that bother people."

Charles Sabatini, an engineer who lives in a suburb just outside Atlantic City, took a different approach to his geese problem last summer with an old, faded Ford pick-up truck. He said he was only trying to scare them, but a witness thought otherwise and that's how he wound up being charged with hunting illegally.

"I was just driving around them and blowing my horn trying to get them off my lawn," Sabatini said outside his house Thursday. "I wound up getting four tickets."

Sabatini said he was not hunting and didn't kill or injure any geese that July afternoon. Charges were dismissed last month, and Sabatini apologized for directing foul language at the eyewitness who confronted him on the street, and also agreed to follow rules about nuisance geese.

"I've learned more about geese and how much they crap than I wanted to," said Nancy Adams, Sabatini's partner. "We call this experience goosegate, or geesegate."

While Sabatini's reaction may have been extreme, the Canada goose conundrum is real. Once hunted to near-extinction, the Canada goose rebounded, and hundreds of thousands make a permanent home in the Delaware Valley instead of migrating north. Millions also live in every other state in the country, besides Hawaii. In many ways, the suburbs of Philadelphia are a perfect home for the geese with ample flat, mowed lawns, golf courses, corporate parks, and athletic fields, where they can eat fresh grass and defecate.

It's the goose poop that draws the biggest complaint, as it blankets soccer fields, stains sidewalks, and, unfortunately, attracts dogs. Geese poop a lot, up to 12 times per day, according to some sources, and collectively, it adds up to anywhere from one to two pounds per day. There's a service for that, too.

"They don't play around," said Shyla Omorogieva, co-owner of the Delaware-based Goose Poop Removal Services, which employs a vacuum system to remove the feces.

A Rutgers University report about Canada geese said the birds can help the ecosystem by dispersing seeds, through their feces, and by acting as prey for coyotes, foxes, and other predators. Large groups can displace other waterfowl, however, the report found, and the feces contains "several bacteria and parasites that may be pathogenic to humans."

Still, the Canada goose is the symbol for the region's beloved Wawa, and some people can see their beauty. The website [LoveCanadaGeese.com](http://LoveCanadaGeese.com) contends that the bulk of a goose's daily dump has been exaggerated.

"Their poop smells better than ours!," one author wrote on the site.

Sabatini, who lives a block from a pond that was full of Canada geese last week, keeps a file on the bird. Included in his paperwork is the Humane Society's guide to Canada geese. One document is from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which states that vehicles are an approved method of goose harassment.

"They are one tough bird. They barely budged," said Robert Herman, Sabatini's attorney.

Barbara DiMauro, the eyewitness, said she was driving when she saw Sabatini aiming his truck toward the geese. DiMauro, who volunteers for

a bird rescue, claimed Sabatini was driving fast enough to kick up dust and doing doughnuts on his lawn in pursuit of the birds.

"The geese were in distress," she said. "He was trying to run them over."

White, of the Humane Society, said the agency supports various methods of dealing with nuisance geese that are ethical and not harmful to the birds. One method of population control is called "egg addling," and can include oiling, piercing, or taking eggs from the nest. Oiling involves rubbing [corn oil](#) on the eggs.

"The oil prevents oxygen from being absorbed," she said.

The Humane Society also supports "aversion therapy" with trained border collies that will chase the geese. Bob Young, 60, founded his South Jersey-based business—Geese Chasers—on that model when his dog was chasing geese near a golf course years ago.

"The groundskeeper asked me if I would come back," Young said.

Young, who franchises the business, said border collies work best because they will go into the water, which is important for the harassment to take hold. They also won't attack the geese, which would be illegal.

"They're herders, not retrievers," he said.

Sabatini doesn't have a dog. He's resorted to banging sticks together when the geese reappear. The truck is still on the lawn, but those [geese](#) he chased last year have likely caught on by now.

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