

GOOSE TRACKS



Status Report on Humane Canada Goose Management from The Humane Society of the United States

Controlling the Hatch May Open New Doors

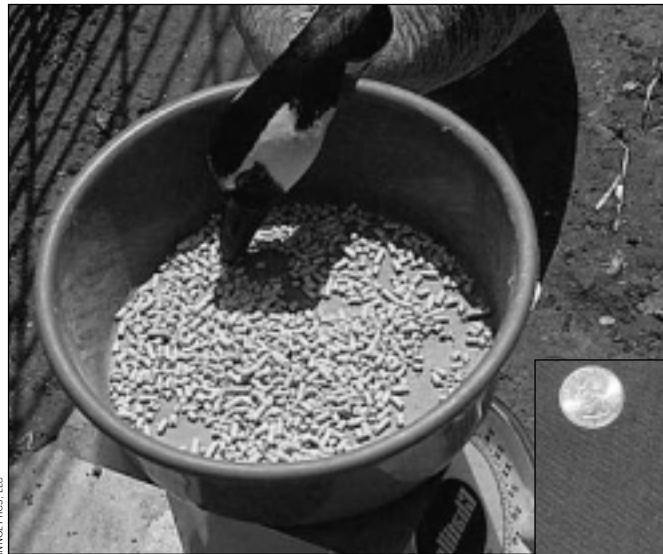
WOULDNT IT BE WONDERFUL if there were a birth control pill—or, more correctly, a *hatch* control pill—for resident Canada geese? The only way to limit reproduction now is to addle eggs, which can be difficult at some sites. A drug might be more practical and convenient than addling, and more sites might try it. Is this a real possibility?

Chicken, chicken, goose

Since 1955 farmers have treated chickens with the drug ncarbazine for coccidiosis, a disease caused by intestinal protozoa. Farmers handle ncarbazine carefully because if breeding or laying hens accidentally ingest ncarbazine-treated feed, their eggs will be ruined. But this unwanted side effect in the poultry business has the potential to *help* other birds, such as resident Canada geese, whose safety is threatened by their ability to multiply and thrive in suburban and urban areas. And now a new company, Innolytics, LLC, is seeking federal approval to use ncarbazine as hatch control for wild birds and to market the approved product.

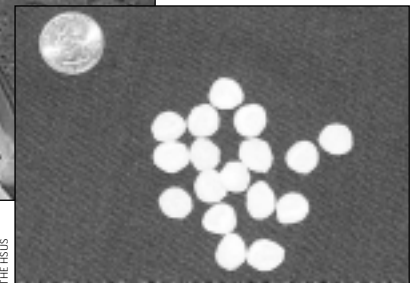
How it works

Ncarbazine renders eggs infertile by disrupting the membranes surrounding the egg yolks so embryos can't develop. (In a sense, the egg is addled inside the goose.) The drug may also keep cholesterol out of the yolks, limiting energy so that embryos won't completely form and the eggs won't



Left: Before the Oregon field study on ncarbazine bait, the NWRC tested baits on geese to find out what they liked and how much of it they ate.

Below: Bait samples included corn flour molded into breakfast cereal shapes.



hatch. At very high doses, a third mechanism may cause the yolks to be very small, leading to incompletely formed eggs that the geese reabsorb.

The story so far

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services's National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) in Colorado began studying ncarbazine for bird reproduction control in 1997. First, the NWRC proved that ncarbazine acts on the eggs of birds other than chickens, including Canada geese. Next, it established the dosage needed to render eggs infertile.

Once researchers determined how much ncarbazine to give and when to give it, they worked on how to get wild geese to eat the required dosage, trying a number of drug-treated baits on a panel of Canada goose taste testers. The bait samples included corn flour molded

into breakfast cereal shapes, bread balls, and whole kernel corn coated with a waxy layer containing ncarbazine.

Around the same time, Italy's Acme Drugs was using ncarbazine bait to control wild pigeon populations. An eight-month study in Modena, Parma, and Porli, Italy, found pigeon numbers declined approximately 48 percent with daily doses of ncarbazine.

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Where Are Things Happening?

Contact Names and Numbers

State of Delaware	Robert Leonard , Delaware Action for Animals 302-368-0136 robert.leonard@comcast.net
Rockford, IL	Janet Herbert , GeesePeace of Rock River Valley 815-969-4499 marketj@aol.com
Montgomery County, MD	Maggie Brasted , The HSUS 301-548-7753 mbrasted@hsus.org
State Parks, MD	Bob Beckett , Maryland Department of Natural Resources 410-260-8182 bbeckett@dnr.state.md.us
Boston, MA	Stephanie Hagopian , Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 617-522-7400 hagopian@mspca.org
Detroit, MI	Linda Reider , The HSUS 419-352-5141 glro@hsus.org
Kanas City, MO	Susan Dobbelaere 913-441-9541 dobbeg@swbell.net Kelly Beard-Tittone , People for Animal Rights (PAR) 816-767-1199 parinfo@parkc.org
Mission Lake, MO	Marianne Lumpe , Peaceful Kingdom Inc. 816-941-3940 marelaw@aol.com
St. Louis, MO	Nancy Schnell , GeesePeace of St. Louis 314-567-2081 info@geesepeacestlouis.org
Morristown, NJ	Barbara Dyer , The HSUS 973-927-5611 maro@hsus.org
Brighton, NY	Jo Ann Arcarese , Town of Brighton Task Force 716-442-7594 jarcare@earthlink.net
Nassau County, NY	Doreen Banks , Nassau County Department of Recreation, Parks, and Museums 516-572-0254 nassaucountyparks@mail.co.nassau.ny.us
Lumberton, NC	Wendell Staton , Lumberton Recreation Department 910-671-3869 wstaton@ci.lumberton.nc.us
Toronto, Ontario	Claire Tucker-Reid , Toronto Parks and Recreation 416-392-8182 ctucker@toronto.ca
Beaverton, OR	Kyle Spinks , Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District 503-644-8469, Ext. 32 kspinks@thprd.com
Portland, OR	Bob Sallinger , Audubon Society of Portland 503-292-6855, Ext. 122 bsallinger@audubonportland.org
Seattle, WA	Jennifer Hillman , Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) 425-742-4009, Ext. 259 jenniferh@paws.org
Milwaukee, WI	JoAnne Rosenfeld , The HSUS 630-357-7015 jrosenfeld@hsus.org
Whitingham, VT	Linda Huebner , The HSUS 802-368-2790 nero@hsus.org
Northern Virginia	David Feld , GeesePeace 703-354-1713 dfeld@erols.com

Commonwealth Lake and Feeding the Geese

COMMONWEALTH LAKE PARK IS ONE of the most heavily used community parks in the Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District in Washington County, Oregon. The centerpiece of the park is a 16-acre lake with year-round bird watching opportunities. But the lake and surrounding mowed grassy areas now suffer the impacts of duck and goose overpopulation because people have abandoned their “pet” domestic and hybrid waterfowl and have acclimated other birds to regular handouts, making them year-round residents.

In 2002 the district’s Natural Resources Department began a program to educate park users about the wildlife issues at Commonwealth Lake. Staff placed signs at the park, asking people *not* to feed the ducks and geese at all, and designed the signs to look inviting, with an informational rather than regulatory message, briefly giving a couple of reasons for the policy.

Even before placing the signs, staff began visiting the park a few times a week, and they continue visiting, talking with people about why they’ve adopted a no-feeding policy. This effort has had a double benefit—helping educate park users and showing the department’s willingness to be directly involved at the park.

Staff contacted local pet stores and asked them to remind customers that pet ducks and geese



Oregon’s Commonwealth Lake Park has successfully begun a proactive waterfowl management initiative with signage, park visits, outreach to local businesses, and a park watch program.

shouldn’t be released at parks. And local bakery outlet stores have cooperated and stopped labeling day-old bread as “bird food.” Lastly, the department started a volunteer park watch program in which neighbors walk the park regularly, continuing the outreach program.

Staff realize this program will entail ongoing effort by everyone involved so that the ducks and geese at Commonwealth Lake continue to provide enjoyment for all park visitors. But these combined efforts—signage, park visits, outreach to businesses, and the park watch program—have resulted in a successful beginning to a proactive waterfowl management effort at Commonwealth Lake Park. ■

—Kyle Spinks, Tualatin Hills Parks and Recreation District

Delaware Doings

DELAWARE ACTION FOR ANIMAL’S (DAA) GeesePeace in Delaware found fewer nests and treated fewer eggs in 2003 than in earlier years at the same sites. Bob Leonard of DAA credits this success to progress in controlling flock size at treated sites combined with an unusually severe winter.

Preseason mailings encouraged early site sign-up for the 2003 season. GeesePeace in Delaware plans to continue early mailings and other administrative steps, including contacting properties holding control permits and coordinating with Delaware’s Parks and Recreation Division, to bring the program to more sites this season. GeesePeace

in Delaware is also urging the state to promote the program outside the urban and suburban northern areas where most activities have been concentrated.

When visiting nests, GeesePeace in Delaware volunteers often bring their family dogs. Leonard reports that dogs get geese off nests quickly and keep them further away, making it easier for volunteers to work well-defended nests, to finish faster, and to work in smaller teams. Leonard notes, “Most dogs, even ones who don’t like to swim, will wade in the water at a bank nest” to keep geese off nests during oiling. “We don’t have a lot of people who are willing to do that.” ■

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Spring in Oregon

The NWRC and Innolytics recently began a field study at multiple sites in Oregon to determine the effectiveness of nicarbazin bait as an oral infertility agent for resident, free-ranging Canada geese. The study is also looking at the potential for nicarbazin bait to harm nontarget species. The NWRC expects to have results on this study by the end of 2004.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must approve nicarbazin bait before property owners can use it. If all goes well, the Oregon field study will be the last major research needed to make a decision.

Humane considerations

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) uses an addling protocol that only oils or removes recently laid eggs to avoid harming goslings near hatching. Not all addling programs follow this protocol—some oil or remove eggs right up to hatching. Since nicarbazin prevents embryos from developing right at the start, the drug can’t harm them. In studies so far, when nicarbazin failed to make eggs infertile (because geese didn’t ingest enough of it or injected it too late in the laying cycle), normal chicks and goslings hatched. It looks like nicarbazin will be as humane as addling and could be even *more* humane than some addling.

Will nontarget species eat the nicarbazin bait and be harmed? The extensive data on this drug from its years of use in poultry production suggest there’s little to fear except for the reproductive effects on eggs. But since reproductive effects could cause real harm to some wildlife populations, the NWRC is checking on this in the Oregon field study.



These quail eggs show how nicarbazin affects eggs. On the left is a normal egg from an untreated hen. On the right is an egg without a separate formed yolk from a treated hen.

People and video cameras are watching to see if nontarget animals eat any of the bait. The Oregon study will use bait too large for most other birds, particularly songbirds. Commercial formulations will likely also use size- and flavor-selective baiting to attract only target species. However, we don’t yet know whether or to what extent nicarbazin used for goose hatch control may affect the reproduction of nontarget birds.

Environmental safety

What may come—good or bad—from real-world use of nicarbazin on wild geese is uncertain. After the Oregon field study results are in, it will be up to the EPA to decide if it needs a formal environmental risk assessment to approve nicarbazin bait.

Will nicarbazin enter the environment and cause harm? Spilled, uneaten feed and undigested drug in goose feces could introduce the drug into the environment. The poultry industry also studied this issue. What is known after more than 50 years of use in chickens doesn’t indicate any strong potential for environmental hazard.

Another tool for the toolbox

If proven effective and safe, nicarbazin bait could be a valuable addition to the toolbox of humane strategies for dealing with resident Canada goose conflicts. It won’t be a magic bullet to solve all goose problems—like addling, it will work best in integrated programs of multiple strategies tailored to specific site conditions. At many sites, addling will probably be the easiest way to limit reproduction. At sites where addling isn’t practical or convenient, or where large flocks make drug treatment more economical than labor-intensive addling, nicarbazin bait may offer the best tool to limit reproduction.

For more information

For more information, contact Innolytics, LLC, at 858-759-8012 or visit www.innolyticsllc.com. For details on past and ongoing research, contact the NWRC in Colorado at 970-266-6000 or visit www.aphis.usda.gov/ws/nwrc/. ■

Avoiding the Devil on Long Island

THE DEVIL IS OFTEN IN THE DETAILS. WHETHER or not people try a goose hazing technique ideally suited to their site depends on availability, convenience, and costs, among other things. Whether or not the technique works also depends on several factors—most especially how people actually use it. Working out these details can mean the difference between a successful goose control program and a devil of a problem with geese.

Working with GeesePeace's David Feld and Holly Hazard, the county of Nassau on Long Island, New York, began a comprehensive program to address widespread human-geese conflicts. The program began in 2002 at Eisenhower Park, the largest park in the county, and expanded to additional areas in 2003.

In addition to egg oiling, Nassau's program features strong nuisance abatement efforts with trained dogs to convince geese to leave areas of heavy human use before the molting season. Before GeesePeace's involvement, Nassau used dogs on golf courses, but the dogs stopped at the water's edge, and the geese simply moved into the ponds. GeesePeace explained the importance of dogs working onshore *and* offshore to deny geese *any* haven on the site. According to Doreen Banks, county commissioner of Recreation, Parks, and Museums, this detail significantly increased the dogs' success.

Nassau property owners get dog services in different ways. Eisenhower Park is larger than New York City's Central Park and has plenty of work to keep a dog busy. Park staff learned to handle their own dog who lives at the park. The



Doreen Banks, Nassau County commissioner of Recreation, Parks, and Museums, oils eggs in Eisenhower Park.

village of Lake Success owns a Border collie who is available to work any property in the village. The Jericho school district hires a Border collie service company for school properties. Neighbors can add their properties to the schools' by paying only the additional cost, which is cheaper than contracting for individual service.

A cluster of communities in Southwest Hempstead originally leased a dog and saw how well this form of nuisance abatement works. They won grant funds to purchase a Border collie, Willow, and hired her handler through a joint funding agreement. Willow lives with Lynbrook's recreation department director and works sites throughout the cluster.

With the success in the Southwest Hempstead cluster, the Nassau program plans to spread this method of delivering dog nuisance abatement to other community clusters in the county. ■

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES **GOOSE TRACKS**

John W. Grandy, Ph.D., Senior Vice President,
Wildlife Programs

John Hadidian, Ph.D., Program Director,
Urban Wildlife

Maggie Brasted, Assistant Program Director,
Urban Wildlife Conflict Resolution

Paula Jaworski, Creative Director

Michael Blankenship, Managing Editor

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