



GeesePeace Seasonal Community Liaison/Site
Aversion Manual



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GeesePeace Seasonal Community Liaison/Site Aversion Manual for Lake Barcroft

History and overview of program: The problem with resident Canada Geese at Lake Barcroft and other suburban areas stems from the purposeful introduction of birds by state and federal wildlife officials in the 1930's to thwart their rapid decline. Unlike their cousins nesting in Canada and wintering in the southern U.S., introduced birds in the temperate climates of the eastern U.S. did not know how or need to migrate. Wildlife specialists clipped their wings rendering them unable to return to their place of birth for nesting. Subsequent generations with the same strong urge to nest where they were born, never needed to leave Virginia...and they never did. They became year round residents. And, as generation after generation made Lake Barcroft their year round home, their numbers began to grow.

Growth of Canada geese is estimated at 15% a year and beginning about 8-10 years ago, their numbers reached levels that became a nuisance to many golf courses, parks, schools, recreation areas and private property owners throughout the four flyways. Reports indicate that problems with Canada Geese were noted at Lake Barcroft in the early 1980's when federal wildlife officials attempted to do a round up without consulting community leaders but were thwarted by Stuart Finley. Our current program to combat the problem began with a call to round up and kill unwanted geese in the late 1990's. Traditional methods for dealing with the issue have been frustrating for the suburban communities where the birds reside because hunting is not allowed or is extremely controversial. The "round up" alternative which can only take place when the birds are molting in July, requires that communities tolerate the birds and fecal matter through the spring and one half the summer and then after they are rounded up, other birds simply fill in the biological vacuum.

GeesePeace programs use a holistic approach to management that identifies and incorporates the behavior of the birds into the management and is non-controversial and humane. The program has been successful in Virginia, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Missouri, Massachusetts and even in the United Kingdom. The GeesePeace program requires addling (oiling eggs) in the spring to prevent future births. Oiling one nest results in an estimated 58 fewer adult geese over an eight year period. The numbers of nests at Lake Barcroft is stagnant at around 22 each year. GeesePeace protocols encourage the nesting of geese in Lake Barcroft each year. Although this may seem counter-intuitive, because geese have such a strong instinct to nest where they are born, and because a significant reduction in goslings is important to the site aversion program, the harassment of geese off our sites during nesting will only result in them nesting in a place near by where they will then walk in to the Lake, with their off spring. At Lake Barcroft the WID has taken responsibility for this program and has been oiling eggs for almost 15 years. This has resulted in hundreds fewer resident Canada Geese at Lake Barcroft and surrounding areas.

The program also includes a site aversion component during the spring and summer. This component uses a trained Border collie and handlers to re educate birds to believe that their roosting and possible molting places (such as Lake Barcroft) are no longer safe. The birds learn quickly to find other less intrusive habitats. The birds have many places to go where they are not a nuisance such as storm water detention ponds, industrial sites and less urban water bodies. Lake Barcroft has had a successful Site Aversion program for over 6 years and has been a laboratory for the development of new techniques and tools that have then been successfully used throughout the United States and in the United Kingdom.

The GeesePeace program is approved by Humane Society of the United States, PETA and Doris Day Animal League.

The Site Aversion Program: Encouraging Canada geese to move to another site is accomplished by using a trained Border collie with an aptitude and interest in herding under the control of the Border collie's handler. The Border collie is on a lead or under the voice control of a handler. At times the Border collie will be let off leash to flush geese from land to water. The Border collie at Lake Barcroft (Dakota) is one of the best trained goose dogs I have worked with in the many programs we have started throughout the United States. Because she has been working the Lake for 6 years, she is really in a position to lead the team. She knows the properties at the Lake where the geese congregate, knows what to do on the boat to identify geese, hops off the boat unaided when given a command and returns to the boat immediately after flushing birds off properties. She works well with a wide variety of handlers and requires little supervision.

Here is how the program works.

Geese need water for safety. Geese on land are vulnerable to predators. Water is their safe haven, their sanctuary. When there is grass near the water body, they feed on grass knowing that they can run or fly to the safety of the water body to escape a land predator. Although a Border collie is not a predator because he/she thinks he is simply herding, he still looks and acts like a predator to the geese. The Border collie is a natural born herder and is usually trained to refine his instincts to herd sheep or cattle. His natural herding instinct can also be directed to encourage the Border collie to want to flush geese. Other working dogs, such as Labradors, are usually not successful partners in the program because their goal is to retrieve, not to herd. A trained Border collie with a strong herding instinct is rewarded by the satisfaction of moving the birds to a position where they eventually take flight. This sense of accomplishment does not diminish, but rather is reinforced over time. Border collies are very fast on land and relentlessly pursue the geese until they fly. When the geese fly to their safe haven, the lake, the Border collie pursuit continues.

Geese can out swim any land predator including a Border collie. That's why in the GeesePeace program the Border collie always wears a floatation jacket to improve his endurance. Also the floatation jacket identifies the Border collie as a working dog for our

neighbors and the general public rather than unauthorized pet harassing geese. After the program has been initiated, the geese will also begin to recognize the floatation jacket from the air.

For Lake Barcroft we use a motorized boat to move the dog, boat captain and handler around the Lake. During the intensive phase 2-3 days in mid May, we use 2-3 boats and several volunteers. During the maintenance period we use one boat, driver, handler and dog. One trip typically takes less than 2 hours start to finish, and although frequency declines as the season goes on, the coordinator should plan for 3-4 sessions a week at the beginning of the season.

During the intensive phase, the geese will first move down the Lake from Holmes and Tripps Run. They will usually congregate near the dam. The goal is to push the geese into flight and over the dam area. During the intensive phase, the birds will fly and roost up and down both fingers of the Lake and take several runs to convince them they need to locate elsewhere. This is why it is much more successful to have 2-3 teams working in the first few days. Once the geese understand we are not going away (after 2-3 days), they will leave the Lake and return less and less frequently. Eventually most of the geese learn that the site is not a safe sanctuary and find another place to roost and forage. We have a group of approximately 12 geese who are extremely committed to the Lake. Depending on the numbers of volunteers, frequency of runs and interest of property owners, these geese have either been accepted as a reasonable number for the summer or, with an intensive program, moved out prior to the molt.

Care must be taken not to release a Border collie against goslings or geese that cannot fly during the molting period. After the molt there may still be geese that cannot fly. In these cases, the geese that cannot fly are separated from the flock. The Border collie harasses only the geese that can fly.

Lake Barcroft provides training for both boat captains and dog handlers at the beginning and through out the season. All volunteers must be registered with the treasurer of the Board so that she can notify the insurance company. All volunteers must wear PDF's and use the boat in a manner respectful of the culture and expectations of lake residents. This means that the boat is operated at ½ speed or less unless the boat is in pursuit of birds in the air and only used at a high rate of speed in an open area with limited chance for wake to disturb the shore line and with full attention to safety concerns such as swimmers in open waters.

GeesePeace Program Strategy-Site Aversion- Intensive Period

Introduction: The GeesePeace intensive model for Canada Geese Site Aversion employs different strategies and requires additional resources than the maintenance program that follows. The purpose is to follow up on a successful egg oiling program

with significant pressure for the adult geese without goslings to leave the area prior to the molt.¹ By placing significant area-wide pressure on the birds and giving them no sanctuary over a period of a few days, GeesePeace has found that the birds leave the entire area more quickly and return less frequently than programs that begin with one team and one dog and slowly work the birds from site to site. This is because the birds are prevented from hopping from site to site where they believe they may be safe and instead are confronted with a foreign “predator” (Border collie) that follows them as they move. This is a significant incentive leave the area especially when they do not have goslings.

During the intensive period, the program at Lake Barcroft requires 2-3 gas powered boats- 2 people per boat- 2-3 dogs and 6-8 hours of work per day. If the birds learn that the dog has the ability to move three hundred yards quickly (because of a fast moving boat), they will use their flight response more quickly and remember this lesson. Once the fact that the dog can quickly move to their side has been established, handlers can downsize to one boat 2-4 times a week, for 2 hours a run. Because our birds have been exposed to the program for several years, they relearn the lesson in a fraction of the time that communities new to the program must invest.

Although the intensive period requires more resources in the short run, it significantly reduces the time and effort required to move birds from an area during the maintenance period. The GeesePeace program does require a long term commitment to an ongoing program as the geese will continue to test the area, new geese will attempt to move in and the geese that have left will return each year for nesting.

One consistent message in contacts with the community is that it is a maintenance program. To be successful it must be implemented and tuned every year during the spring and summer seasons.

¹ The molt is the time of year when adult geese lose their flight feathers and are unable to fly. This takes place at the same time of year but on a bell curve. The first geese to lose their feathers will do so around Memorial Day, with the majority losing feathers the last part of June. The molt lasts 6 weeks. If the birds have been successfully flushed from a site, they will be gone all through June and July as they will be unable to return. In August they will slowly begin to return as their feathers grow in and they begin pond hopping.

INTENSIVE PERIOD: Personnel and Equipment:

2-3 teams of two people and one trained Border collie²

Each team:

- Lifejacket for dog
- Water dish and fresh water
- Long retractable lead
- PDF's for boat captain and handler
- One set of walkie talkies, compatible with all other sets
- Clip board with map of lake, brochures on program and Community telephone directory.
- Extra property access flags

Pre- intensive assignments:

1. Identify volunteers and date for training.
2. Identify number of boats needed and notify WID and beach manager.
3. Dog related equipment ordered and delivered.
4. Supporting Intensive Period handlers and dogs identified and notified as to date, times and places.
5. Flags and letters delivered to Lake Front property owners by volunteers.
6. Walkie talkies identified and collected.
7. Duplicate Lake maps produced with all properties identified that do not wish dog on sites, launching areas marked and meeting points identified.
8. List of cell phone numbers for participants.
9. LBA treasurer contacted by all volunteers with name, address and VA drivers license number.

Intensive Period:

Day One: (6 hour day- 3 hours 8:30- 11:30, 1-3, 6-8 pm) 6 volunteers, 3 boats, 3 dogs)

1. All teams should meet at one site.
 - a. Review Plan overview.
 - b. Ensure all releases are signed.
 - c. Assign walkie talkies and test.
 - d. Provide documents with phone numbers, brochures for public etc.
 - e. Make morning assignments
 - f. Identify meeting place for lunch or break.

² Each site should have at least one trained team member and one Border collie. The lead team, at the site where the pressure is targeted needs to have experienced dog handlers and trained experienced dogs. If 3-4 experienced teams are not available, the outlying sites can use one handler and one untrained dog on a lead. However, the only purpose of these auxiliary teams is to spot birds as they leave the original site and discourage them from landing. If the program focus shifts to the outlying site, the teams need to be reassigned so that the experienced dogs and handlers are moving the birds. At no time should an inexperienced handler and/or and inexperienced dog be working with the dog off lead or in the water outside a boat.

- g. Ensure all dog teams are briefed and have all necessary equipment.
- 2. Identify first focus site.
 - a. Identify site leader. This person is responsible for coordinating strategy at the site, moving the focus site and for resolving issues as they arise with the teams.
- 3. Review protocols
 - a. Safety- kill switch on motor, swimmers, PDF's, other
 - b. Identify forage properties- we do not release a dog on properties that have requests that we leave the birds alone. There are approximately 4 of these at the Lake. Maps should identify these properties and volunteers should be briefed not to enter or allow the dog to enter these properties.
- 4. Bird counts
 - a. If the LBA requests bird counts, the data sheets should be provided and data entry requirements reviewed.

Day 2 (4 hour day- 2 hours 9-11, 3-5, 7-9 pm) 4 volunteers, 2 dogs, 2 boats)

- 1. All teams meet at central location.
- 2. Begin flushing at first site and move to other sites as birds move from area.
- 3. Leave one team at each flushed site to report any birds returning and to attempt to encourage the birds not to land by encouraging the dog to focus on the birds (on lead) as they attempt to reenter the site.

At the end of day 2 the Lake should be flushed of all birds that are without goslings and can fly. They will return and they may return that evening, but the program has begun the process of educating the birds that the Lake is not safe and may be a bad place to molt.

GeesePeace Program Strategy-Site Aversion- MAINTENANCE PERIOD:

Personnel and Equipment

This is the period after the intensive and before the molt when the volunteers reinforce the idea that the geese may not roost at the Lake.

Schedule: The coordinator should make up a preliminary schedule for the 6 week period before the July 4th weekend. Ideally the community should have 4 teams each taking 1 run a week. I suggest that the coordinator identify 4 team leaders and they then are responsible for coordinating their team. The volunteers should all give the coordinator their email address. For the first week, the schedule should call for 2 evening runs, one morning run, one mid day run. (If possible). As the teams report back (e.g. "we didn't see any", "there are always 30 on Mrs. Davis's property when we start") and/or the coordinator gets community feed back ("I always see 60 at beach 4 when I walk my dog at 7:30 pm"), the schedule times and days should be revised to target the geese and their behavior.

Note: the numbers of runs and the length of time per run will decrease through the summer. However, the numbers of runs should be kept at a number to ensure that most if not all birds are kept out of the Lake area from mid to late June. The reason is that if they fly in and are allowed to stay for 2-3 days, they may lose their flight feathers during this time. If this occurs they will be unable to fly and will remain at the Lake through the summer. It is critical that the program be attentive so that a flock does not fly in after one run, and another run is not scheduled for 4 days. At the time of molt, this could be disastrous for the summer. Conversely, if they are moved from the Lake consistently, they will molt elsewhere and we will have 6 weeks without needing to move them as they will have no ability to return.

After the molt and beginning at the first of August, the program should begin again. Only 2 runs a week should be needed during this period and up through mid-September to keep the flocks at a non-nuisance level.

Appendix A



At Lake Barcroft, 2006

Border collie Info Sheet for Lake Front Property Owners

Copy 2 sided and deliver to door knob in plastic bag to each lake front property owner.



At Lake Barcroft, 2006

Border collie Info Sheet for Lake Front Property Owners

1. Border Collies are noted for their ability to herd. They do so by driving the geese towards their handlers. The Border collies are always under the control of their handler. They are usually off-leash and are known for their responsiveness to the commands and obedience to the instructions of the handler. They do not bite the geese they herd, nor do they bark at them. They simply continuously move up to the geese, making them nervous until the geese fly off. At first a few feet then farther away until they fly out of the area.
2. The Border collies will operate primarily on our boat and in the water. They are excellent swimmers. At times the geese will try to escape the pressure of the Border collies by flying onto waterfront property. The strategy is then for the Border collie to be brought on land by the handler to circle behind the geese and drive the geese back into the water. The Border collie then reenters the boat to catch up to the geese. The geese then finally take flight moving farther away from the Border collies.
3. The Border collie handler will be in a boat so that he/she can quickly collect the dog and drive to the part of the water body where the geese have moved. At that time the handler will reintroduce the Border collies in the vicinity of the geese. There will be up to two handlers working with the Border collies.
4. The Border collie always wears a floatation jacket (land and water).

What you should do:

Please Place a GeesePeace Flag marker in your waterfront yard. The intent is for the handler to know that it is OK to allow the Border collies to herd geese that may walk or fly on your property back into the water. Place the flag approximately in the center of your waterfront property, near the water edge so that it can be clearly seen.

Those of you who do not have a geese nuisance problem now on your property, please allow the Border collie access to your yard by placing the marker so that we can reduce the geese numbers. This will mean we will have cleaner beaches and cleaner water.

If you absolutely do not want the Border collie on your property at any time, please contact the LBA office, so that we can also mark on a map that you do not want the Border collie to herd geese off your property. This is a double effort to assure we comply with your wishes.

Some Questions you may have.

- *I have a dog; won't that be a problem if the Border collie enters my property?*
No problem at all. If the handler sees a dog on the property he or she will not allow the Border collie onto the property even if you have placed a flag marker. Also, if your dog is outside it is very unlikely that geese will move on your property to escape the Border collie.
- *I am afraid of dogs. Are Border collies dangerous?* Border collies are not dangerous. Even though the Border collie is off-leash, Border collies are highly trained and do not attack the animals they herd and do not attack humans. They are trained to herd geese without biting or barking. They are always under the control of their handler. If a goose is in your yard, the Border collie will be focused on moving behind the goose and herding the goose back into the water. If you are still concerned, remove the marker when you are in the yard, but remember to replace the flag when you leave.
- *If we are having a party, we do not want the Border collie herding geese on our property.* Again, this is no problem. If you are having a party, it is very unlikely that there will be geese on your property and there will be no need for the Border collie to enter your property. Also, the handler will be close by and will know that there is a party going on and will not allow the Border collie to enter your property. And, you can always remove the marker while you are having the party.
- *What can I expect the Border collie operation to be like?* All you should see will be the Border collie swimming towards the geese and the geese trying to move away, first by swimming, then by taking short flight, then by taking longer flight and then out of the area. You will also see the handler using hand motions to maneuver the Border collies, calling their names, issuing commands by voice and whistle. Sometimes the handler will place the Border collie on land so that the Border collie can herd the geese back into the water.
- *My children play in the yard, will the Border collie pose a threat to them.* Again, Border collies are highly trained and will be focused on herding the geese. If you have a sea wall, the only way the Border collie will be able to leave the water and onto land will be if the handler lifts the dog from the water and places the dog on the property. If you still have a concern, we recommend that you observe the operation of the Border collie and the handler to see for yourself that this is a very safe operation. The intent is to move the geese from land onto the water. This will usually take place when there is no one in the yard.
- *I like geese and do not want the Border collie to chase them off my property.* The object is to move the geese away from the area so that the numbers of geese that remain are at the non-nuisance level. If you do not have a marker on your property, the Border collie will not be allowed to enter your property. However, the geese learn that a Border collie approaching in a boat has the ability to herd them on land and will leave your property on just seeing the boat and the Border collie coming close to shore. From time to time geese will fly our area and you will still have the enjoyment of seeing these geese. But as the numbers reach the nuisance level we will reintroduce the Border collie so that our lake is no longer attractive to them or a safe haven for roosting and the geese will leave.