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|  | Pleasanton has a growing number of Canadian Geese (Branta Canadensis). Ranging from 25"-45" in height, they are our most common and familiar goose. The Canada Goose is characterized by a black head and neck, marked with a distinctive white "chin strap", stretched from ear to ear. In flight, they show large, dark wings, white under tail coverts, white U-shaped rump band. Flocks usually migrate in V-formation, stopping to feed in wetlands, grasslands, and cultivated fields. One of the fastest growing populations of these birds occurs in Shadow Cliffs Regional Park. The food of this individual population of geese consists primarily of plant material including stems and shoots of grasses, aquatic plants, seeds, and berries, depending on availability. (Enc) Usually these geese feed on short-mowed turf grass since it is low in fiber, high in protein and carbohydrates, and is readily available year round at the regional park. In addition, park visitors frequently bring food for animals or distribute unwanted excess picnic food to these geese, adding to the abundance of food. Food is not the only factor geese use when selecting a nesting site. The ideal goose habitat is "grass, adjacent to lakes that provide a landing and take-off site, drinking water, and a place to escape from dogs and humans."(anc). Also a lack of predators has aided in the Canadian geese habitation of the park. They have open grass areas where they can see potential predators from afar, along with a secluded island in the "back lakes" where they lay their eggs and raise their young. The Canada goose forms mating pairs that may last for life. The female builds the nest on slightly elevated dry ground near water. The nest is a slight depression made of sticks, grass, weeds, and mosses, lined with down. The female geese produce 4-7 eggs on average in their "clutch", laying one every-other day until their clutch is complete. When complete the female will begin incubating, or warming, the eggs by sitting on them for 25-28 days, while the male stands guard nearby. Both parents tend to the young, even though they are able to feed themselves (water foul)(enc). All of these habitat characteristics factor into the ideal environment for the Branta Canadensis. In this near ideal urban environment, the park�s geese have developed sedentary, non-migratory flocks that are permanent residents throughout the year.(Fremont). Without the natural controls of predation and food competition, urban geese can have a higher than natural rate of breeding success and greater then normal longevity, up to 30 years. A single pair of urban geese can, in 5-7 seven years, easily become 50-100 birds (water foul). These statistics present a real problem. Wild Canada Geese are naturally secretive and nest in isolated pairs, but these urban geese have adapted to increasing flock population density by forming semi-colonial nesting groups. The large flock nesting on the island in the Regional Park is the perfect example of this adaptation. By gathering and breeding at these unnatural flock densities, Urban Canadian Geese can cause substantial damage. (Fremont)  In the protected environment of Shadow Cliffs, the flock has increased to a point where they are now creating both an economic damage to their assets as well as an aesthetic degradation of the park environment (Fremont). The damage the geese cause can effect multiple areas of the park, one of which being the recreational water area. "Areas in the regional park with dense concentrations of waterfowl have bacteria levels, which exceed state primary contact recreation standards for swimming at certain times during summer."(Anchorage) The park must be closed down in its peak season because of bad water quality due to geese fecal mater in the water, which causes loss of income for the park.  Canadian Geese release 1-2 pounds of fecal matter a day affecting water quality by adding nitrogen and phosphorous which encourages algal growth, resulting in turbid, foul water and additional risks of disease transmission to other birds and mammals, including humans (Anchorage). This nutrient enrichment can also cause algal blooms. Excessive algal growth exhausts much of the oxygen in the water, which can lead to the suffocation of marine life. This lack of oxygen and light can inhibit the growth of other aquatic organisms as well.  When algae dies, it sinks to the bottom of the lake and decomposes, leading to the consumption of even more oxygen. Goose droppings can also increase fecal coliform bacteria levels in Regional Park areas. Dense concentrations of geese can trample lakeside vegetation, which can eventually lead to an increase in soil erosion and sedimentation of water bodies. The goose fecal material also poses esthetic damage to the park landscape. Droppings on the beach, water, grass area, and paths, as well as on park facilities such as, picnic tables, grills, buildings, and sports fields, discourage guests from coming to the park. The geese themselves pose a threat to park patronage. Canadian Geese often exhibit aggressive behavior patterns during their mating seasons, which can cause harm to curious people. Canadian Geese are easily tamed and often approach people for food. "Hand-feeding waterfowl contributes to health and safety problems by causing birds to become less wary of people, and by concentrating birds in unnaturally high numbers at certain locations."(Anchorage). Such scenarios are dangerous to people and greatly concern the park staff. Along with deterring visitors, the resident geese are also destroying the grass areas. Large numbers of geese on a central grass area can quickly damage the lawn, forcing the parks district to spend money on turf repair.  We approached the regional park about projects that they were currently undergoing. They told us about their geese problem which was explained in detail above. We were only too happy to help them out. Their problem was, how to get rid of the geese in a non-lethal way. After looking into many methods of population reduction, such as: explosion of artificial noise devices to harass, and displace foraging or nesting geese, addling the eggs to prevent hatching, relocation of the geese, destruction of the geese, constructing barriers to discourage roosting, chemical repellants, hiring dogs for harassment, and other various visible deterrents, the park district decided on a course of action. They were going to first apply a chemical repellent to the grass, which the geese ate. The taste repellent, ReJeX-iT, was to be tested as a repellent sprayed directly onto the turf grass. In addition, the park staff was going to actively harass the geese with visible and audible deterrents. To prevent further population growth the eggs were to be addled to prevent them from hatching. | |
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