



## DPR Wildlife Management and Geese

In Denver, we are fortunate to live in a city with rich and diverse wildlife resources. Denver Parks and Recreation (DPR) is committed to coexisting with wildlife while ensuring parks are safe and clean for our park patrons.

DPR has dramatically increased its professional wildlife management of all wildlife species since hiring Vicki Vargas Madrid, Denver's wildlife ecologist five years ago. Vicki has a long career managing wildlife in Colorado through her work as a District Wildlife Manager with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and now with DPR. Daily, Vicki responds to numerous calls, concerns and reports of wildlife in our city. She has worked on managing beaver populations along our gulches, creeks and waterways, she has worked with community members to learn how to co-exist with coyotes by creating coyote crews in neighborhoods with coyote-human conflicts, she responds to concerns from individuals about wildlife such as bats and racoons having rabies and she has the challenging job of managing rodent populations such as rats that inhabit our parks and open spaces and can cause serious health related concerns.

Along with managing the geese population of Denver, there is another wildlife species that the department manages that can be quite contentious. DPR manages prairie dogs in our open spaces and parks. They are considered a keystone wildlife species which means that many other species of wildlife depend on them to survive. Snakes, burrowing owls and other species use their burrows as homes. Coyotes, badgers, black footed ferrets, hawks and eagles utilize prairie dogs as a major food source. As a department we manage prairie dogs to try a maintain populations that do not negatively impact the habitat or damage the more traditional aspects of our parks. An example of that would be prairie dog populations spreading into athletic fields where we have youth sports. This is a human-wildlife conflict. When necessary DPR will utilize a method of lethal control which is a PERC machine which uses carbon monoxide to eliminate the prairie dogs. To minimize the use of this method, DPR staff has recently been trained in a passive prairie dog relocation method. Pam Wanek, the founder and owner of Prairie Preserves, LLC has trained DPR staff in this passive relocation method on the First Creek Open Space prior to the coming expansion of 56<sup>th</sup> Ave. This has been a great collaboration in which DPR listened to the concerns of the Prairie Dog Coalition of the Humane Society and we implemented a compromise to help manage the prairie dogs on this property.

## Canada Goose Management FAQ's

### **What is the definition of a migratory bird and resident bird?**

DPR uses the same definitions for "migratory" and "resident" geese as other wildlife management agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, USDA-Wildlife Services, Colorado Parks and Wildlife).

Migratory Canada Geese - These are birds that nest and raise their young in Canada and Alaska. Migratory Canada geese make seasonal movements to areas that are outside of where they nest and raise their young. Hundreds of thousands of Canada geese that breed in Canada and Alaska migrate through and/or spend the fall and winter in Colorado.

Resident Canada Geese - Resident Canada geese are birds that nest and reside year-round within the Central Flyway of North America. Resident geese spend most of the year near their breeding areas, although many in the northern latitudes of the United States do make seasonal movements.

### **Why does the resident goose population in Denver grow each year?**

Denver is part of the Central Flyway for migratory birds, with hundreds of thousands of geese and other migrating birds passing through the region each season.

Urban parks are an ideal habitat for geese as they like low grass near water where they can nest and easily spot predators. Denver parks are of a traditional design consisting of Kentucky Bluegrass turf areas and bodies of water. This combined with milder winters due to climate change, results in parks infrequently covered in snow making them appear to be the perfect place to land for migrating geese. In addition, resident goose populations act as decoys to migrating geese, thereby “inviting” them to stay, increasing the resident goose population.

### **What supporting evidence does DPR have to suggest that Canada geese create conflicts?**

Denver parks have experienced over 20 years of negative impacts due to large resident goose populations. Denver parks are artificially supporting a population of geese larger than what the local ecosystem can properly support. The most challenging management effort of too many resident geese is the accumulation of feces in parks and waterways. Additional impacts include damage to traditional park landscapes, vegetation destruction adjacent to waterways, sanitation and water quality concerns, increased human-wildlife conflicts such as goose aggression during nesting season, and other maintenance challenges.

### **Do large numbers of geese affect DPR’s water quality?**

The Denver Department of Public Health and Environment tests water quality in most Denver park waters periodically throughout the year. Each body of water has its own ecological characteristics that lend themselves to be assessed and managed individually based on their specific issues.

Along with other contaminants and pollutants in the water, goose feces attributes to undesirable conditions where wildlife diseases thrive, making the water more susceptible to avian botulism and fish kill due to low oxygen levels.

### **What population management strategies does DPR use?**

DPR uses a multi-strategy approach for managing the goose population. This includes egg oiling in the spring, hazing in the fall and winter, the use of eco-friendly wildlife repellents, and most recently, culling. Additionally, work is being done to restore natural habitats along lake edges by planting native vegetation and creating visual barriers that discourage geese from nesting, while also improving water quality.

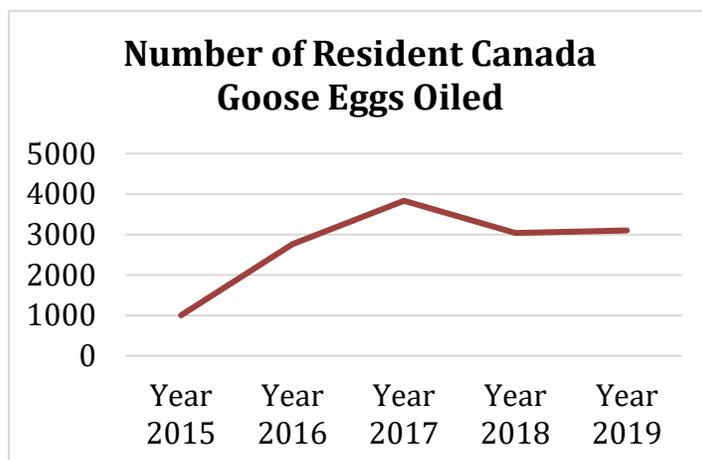
Fewer goslings have hatched in parks over the past years due to increased egg oiling, yet there continues to be a gradual increase in the city’s resident population each migration season. While oiling eggs, hazing, using repellents, creating undesirable landscapes, and culling continue to be part of the multi-strategy approach for controlling resident goose populations, on-going research on population control and best management practices will continue to be part of the Goose Management Program.

### **How many goose eggs should Denver Parks be oiling each year?**

There is no set number of eggs that DPR targets as all eggs found are oiled. The number of goose eggs found each year vary depending on the number of nesting geese in the park during the nesting season. Not all geese that are seen in a park nest in the park. Geese will nest outside of park boundaries, in

surrounding landscapes and neighborhoods, making it a challenge to locate every egg. DPR does not have the authority to go outside of park boundaries to oil eggs on private property.

DPR's Canada Goose Management Program includes the graph below identifying the number of goose eggs oiled in Denver parks from 2015 to 2019.



#### **Aren't Canada geese protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act?**

Yes, however the Migratory Bird Treaty Act does allow for the hunting and culling of Canada geese through processes regulated by the federal government. While hunting is not allowed in Denver, DPR has received authorization from both the state and federal government to manage its goose population via culling with the required permits and the use of a certified contractor to implement the culling and assist in developing long-term goose management strategies.

#### **Why is DPR culling geese?**

For more than 15 years, DPR has implemented various goose management tactics to keep resident populations in parks at appropriate levels. However, the year-round population continues to grow, resulting in an unnatural number of geese for which Denver parks provide habitat.

The expanding geese population causes increased human-wildlife conflicts in parks, vegetation destruction, sanitation concerns, poor water quality, and other maintenance challenges. Previous goose management tactics have not provided enough relief from these issues.

#### **Will culling take place every year?**

2019 was the first year of culling. DPR will assess and evaluate its effectiveness as part of the current multi-strategy approach used to maintain healthy habitats in Denver parks. Effectiveness of culling is evaluated by:

- Reduction in number of complaints received from citizens
- Reduction in the amount of Canada goose fecal droppings in parks
- Reduction in park maintenance due to goose damage
- Increase in waterfowl species richness and diversity



- Increase in vegetative growth and recovery in park locations
- Reduction in the abundance of Canada geese harassed or removed from Denver parks
- Reduction in annual occurrences of wildlife diseases in water sources (botulism and fish diseases)

#### **Will the culled geese go to waste?**

DPR will defer to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to determine whether the meat is suitable for human consumption and can be donated to charitable organizations. If it is determined to not be human food-grade, it will be donated to wildlife rehabilitation facilities and sanctuaries.

#### **Does DPR plan to eliminate the entire goose population?**

DPR's Canadian Goose Management document states, "It is not the desire or goal to eliminate all geese in an area. DPR's Canada Goose management program strives to maintain a population or a reduction in goose numbers and related problems to a level that the park habitat can tolerate and is sustainable".

#### **How does DPR define a "sustainable" population?**

In DPR, sustainable is defined as "the wise use" of the natural resource as it relates to wildlife management. A sustainable goose population in Denver parks is determined by the population of resident Canada geese in a specific park and how the natural resources of that park positively or negatively respond to the presence of a large or small goose population.

Denver parks are artificially supporting goose populations larger than what the local ecosystem can sustain. A sustainable resident goose population will reflect the goals and objectives of the goose management program.

#### **Why isn't DPR transparent and forthcoming with the public about goose management practices?**

DPR has been, and continues to be, transparent with the goose management efforts. DPR staff have attended DPR Advisory Board meetings, numerous neighborhood community meetings, conducted media interviews, presented school programs, and responded to many other requests to discuss DPR's Goose Management Program. The Canada Goose Management Program is posted on the DPR website. DPR's intent is not to conceal goose management practices. To keep DPR employees and contractors safe, DPR will not advertise details on specific management efforts. DPR remains committed to engage the public in various forums to keep them informed through education and outreach on wildlife issues. In addition, all CORA requests and general information inquiries received are responded to in a timely manner.

#### **How can volunteers get involved and be part of the process?**

DPR's Goose Management document states: "When possible, DPR will look for volunteer opportunities to increase the effectiveness of different population management strategies." DPR conducted egg oiling training for volunteers earlier this year prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic however, all DPR volunteer projects were cancelled and the volunteers were unable to assist in egg oiling operations this year. DPR will continue to look for opportunities to engage volunteers in the future.

