



THE USE OF TRAINED BORDER COLLIES TO DISCOURAGE GEESE

Trained border collies are an effective means of discouraging geese from settling on golf courses, parks and other large tracts of land. There are now 14 border collies in the metropolitan area, and a total of 22 in the U.S. By summer, it is expected that 30 dogs will be working in the area.

Richard Marcks, superintendent at the Fairview Country Club, Greenwich, Connecticut, was the first to use a border collie to herd geese at his course. Marcks enthusiastically endorses their use and said that goose control at his course is 100% effective.

Will Heintz, of Hampshire Country Club, Mammaronneck, NY, purchased a dog in early April and has had great success at ridding his course of its population of 45 to 70 geese.

Both Marcks and Heintz are very happy using dogs as their solution to the goose problem. The geese are not injured in any way by the dogs. Neither has heard complaints from the community around them about the influx of the displaced geese.

Border Collie Schedule

According to the superintendents, when controlling geese, it is best to start working with dogs very early in the spring before goose pairs have landed (Feb,Mar). It takes quite a bit of effort, going out 4 to 5 times per day to discourage them. It is also important to go out at dusk, when a few geese try to return. Most geese leave within 3 or 4 weeks. Within a few weeks there may be just a few nesters, and these too can be convinced to move, with persistence. After that, it is usually necessary to chase new arrivals intermittently, once a day to once every few days.

The dogs can clear the course of geese while golfers are there, since it requires less than 60 seconds of interference. Usually, the geese see the dog and start honking - signalling others to fly. The dogs will go into the water to chase the geese if necessary.

Info on the Border Collies

The dogs are being trained by and purchased from Barbara Ligon of Shipman, Va for \$2000 each. Her dogs are trained to herd sheep first, then geese. The dogs don't touch the geese, but round them up in a protective manner.

The dogs are trained to commands and will respond to more than one person, although they tend to be one person dogs. The border collie is a working dog. It needs to work and is hyperactive if left alone and may dig in the lawn and chew flowers. This is, therefore, not a viable option for the average homeowner. Heintz exercises his dog by running him every morning along side his golf cart.

The dogs are popular on the golf course, but are not overly friendly. They don't run up to everyone. Heintz keeps his dog in a kennel when not working at the course and takes her home at night. The dog sleeps in the garage or is tied outside. Although border collies are reported to be good with children, there is the possibility that a dog will try to herd children.

Marcks said that he purchased a border collie because other dogs have been tried and most don't listen well. Heintz found regular dogs caused geese to just fly away and then settle on opposite side of the pond. There is also a danger of some injury to the geese by dogs that have not been professionally trained.

Possibilities for Rockland?

Since purchasing a trained border collie is not inexpensive, it might be cost effective for a town to purchase a dog to use on a golf course and in other parks as well. Arrangements would need to be made for handling, housing and caring for the dog.

Another option would be to encourage a private individual to purchase a dog and go into business on a fee for service basis in the same way that nuisance wildlife officers now respond to complaints about nuisance wildlife. Since multiple visits would be necessary, the economics and affordability of this kind of service would have to be investigated carefully.

Heintz surmised that a dog could manage two or three parks and a couple golf courses. The Westchester Parks Dept. is using one dog on four golf courses.

Prepared by Dr. Ann Herriott, based on several conversations and references from the Cornell University Veterinary Library.