

# Geese – in or out of the ballpark?

The mere mention of the word 'Egyptian Goose' serves to raise the blood pressure of golfers, estate managers, sportsfield groundsmen and many others (not least those who enjoy a lie-in in the morning). In recent years, these geese have become increasingly common in urban and suburban areas, a trend already recognised as early as the 1960s. Indeed, they have become highly successful human commensals. Nowhere is this more evident than in the lowlands of the Western Cape, and especially in the Cape Town, Somerset West and Paarl areas. Marinas, golf courses and estates, sportsfields and artificial wetlands have all become magnets for these birds, which bring with them the problems of damage, fouling and noise.

The Fitztitute already has an Egyptian Goose programme in place, but its primary aim is to determine the patterns and causes of the birds' movements, rather than address the 'nuisance factor'. A new project will tackle the latter, but we don't expect it to be easy. Geese have been a problem on North American golf courses for decades, and it doesn't look as though any 'final solution' is yet in sight.

Because they experience varying levels of problems with Egyptian Geese, we have decided to start the local study with a cross-section of golf courses and estates, in the expectation



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that principles derived from these sites will be applicable elsewhere. Across the Western Cape, various control measures for geese have been tested, ranging from dogs to guns. None has proven particularly successful and all have the drawback of not providing a long-term solution.

It certainly is not surprising that golf courses experience problems. There are three things in the world that Egyptian Geese really like: grass, water and trees, pretty

much the same three things favoured by golfers. And all together in the same place? Goose heaven! The problem the Fitztitute and its collaborators are trying to tackle is how to turn goose heaven maybe not into goose hell, but at least into goose purgatory. This is going to require careful study of exactly how and why geese are using the golf courses, and under what conditions they feel most and least vulnerable.

The logical objective of this project will be to provide guidelines that can be implemented during the design phase of golf courses – how can they be made less goose friendly? But that's still a long way off. Meanwhile, we need to establish protocols that will help reduce the problem on existing golf courses and, most importantly, provide

**Forward march! Geese at Steenberg Golf Estate in Cape Town step out on a foraging and fouling mission.**

a long-term solution, not a short-term stopgap.

Making this project a success will require not only scientific acumen, but also imagination – the ability to think out of the box and assess whether these lateral thoughts can be tested (or are worth testing) in a scientific manner. This is where you, the reader, can become involved. If you have any ideas that you think may contribute to the project, or even know of examples where goose-control measures (whether intentional or not) have been effective, we would be pleased to hear from you. E-mail your ideas to [fitz@uct.ac.za](mailto:fitz@uct.ac.za), with 'geese and golf' in the subject line. □

Visit the FitzPatrick website: <http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za>

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