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UCT researchers find ways to reduce goose poo on golf courses

Goose poo on golf courses is a headache for many golfers. A recent study by University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa has found that manipulating the golf course through design, making it less attractive to geese, is the trick to making them stay away from it.

Many methods that have been used in the past to control goose populations on golf courses due to their undesired “dropouts” have not been effective and some have been criticized for being unethical, says Doctor Rob Little, Manager of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology Centre of Excellence at UCT.

The recent study found that golf courses offer areas of safe foraging and seclusion which are particularly attractive to geese and which can be modified to be less attractive. This can be achieved by increasing the birds’ perception of predation risk. Since open water features and large patches of lawn are attractive safety features for Egyptian Geese, a guideline for golf course designers is to restrict each fairway to less than one hectare (2.4 acres) in size. Fairways and ponds on existing courses can be modified by planting tall grass and shrubs around them to reduce their openness – and thus their security as perceived by geese. Such clusters of natural vegetation have the added advantage of potentially increasing biodiversity on the golf course and attracting other bird species.

Researchers at the institute have recently embarked on a study to assess the effectiveness and response of harassing Egyptian Geese with falconry. They will be measuring both the response of the course population numbers and the vigilance levels of the geese before, during and after the harassment pressure from the raptors.

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