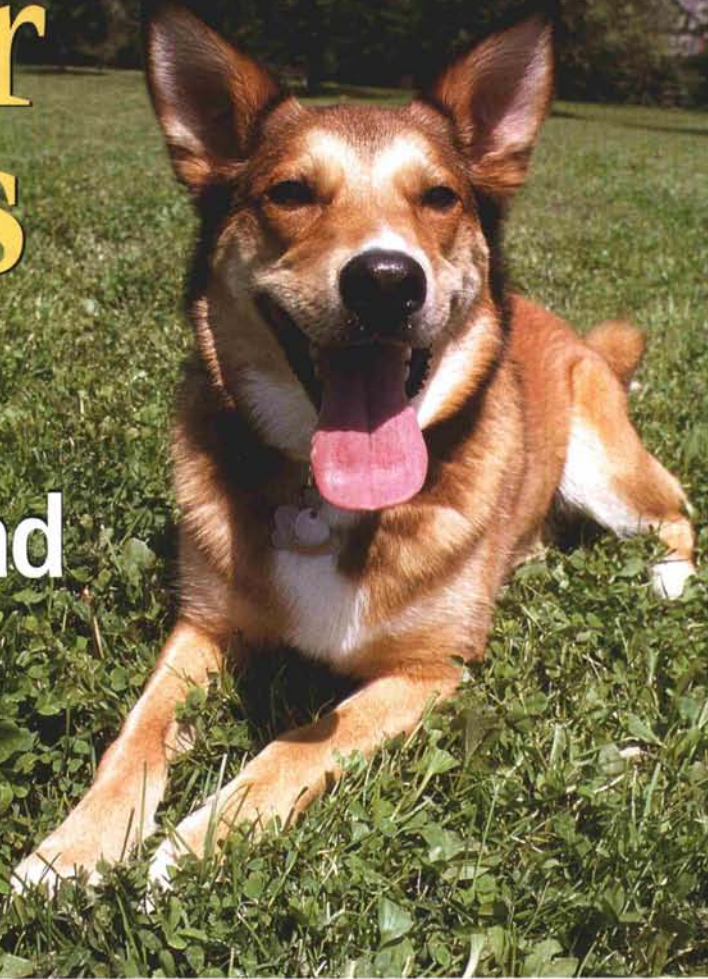


Super Dogs

Man's Best Friend at Work



File photo.

By Sharon Laidlaw

If you were to ask superintendents what the number one golf course maintenance headache is, they would all respond in unison—Canada geese. Whether it is a picturesque ocean-side golf course in British Columbia or a tourist hotspot in Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.), geese—and their droppings—are making unsightly impressions on the greens.

As most superintendents know, one way of solving this problem is by investing in a canine goose hunter. However, as these superintendents will tell you, they are more than just geese chasers.

Take for example, Sullivan, a German Shepherd mix, who resides with Nancy Pierce, the superintendent for The Links at Crowbush Cove in Morell, P.E.I. At Crowbush, Sullivan chases squirrels off the premises and is the course's official environmental watchdog, a position he takes very seriously. He can often be found sitting on a mound overseeing all of the day-to-day operations. Although Sullivan is in his senior years, his passion for the golf course still remains strong, says Pierce.

Dogs are often appreciated for much more than the work they do on the course. They are great for enhancing staff morale and camaraderie as Pierce can attest to.

"Some golfers want to know as soon as they walk into the golf shop if Sullivan is available for a pat or a photo," she says. "We've even named the 11th hole after him—Sully's Run."

A natural predator

Geese love to inhabit open spaces that provide them with water and food, such as short, tender grasses, the main reason they love to traverse golf course greens. Border Collies are a natural in driving geese away, which is what Bob Burrows, master superintendent at Rosedale Golf Club in Toronto found out.

"I fondly remember bringing home our first crazy canine, a Collie puppy we aptly named Storm and subsequently teaching him to ride in the golf cart, not to pick up golf balls and to gently chase all things natural on the property," he says.

Although Border Collies were originally trained and bred in England to be sheep herding dogs, their instincts are to herd any group of animals such as cows, sheep and even children. The dogs work by giving a predatory stance towards the animals. The geese view this as an act of aggression and will immediately flee.



Huskies like Wascana Country Club's Sheena thrive at being kept busy.



Sullivan is the environmental watchdog at The Links at Crowbush Cove.



Skyler has become an informal mascot at Rosedale Golf Club.

Many golf courses with high populations of geese have opted to purchase a working breed to help them successfully deal with this problem. When Storm passed on, Skyler, named after the Isle of Skye off the West Coast of England, became the next addition to the turf team at Rosedale. Apart from his usual tasks of rounding up his feathered friends, Skyler is also a public relations specialist, who serves as a great icebreaker among golfers, Burrows explains.

"He has become an informal mascot around here," he says. "Dogs are also appreciated for frequently convincing you to step out of the office, take a walk on the course to get some fresh air and exercise. They also help you to inspect how little dollar spot you have on the fairways."

Supers deserve super dogs

Not one to brag about his beloved friend, Rhod Trainor, superintendent at the Hamilton Golf and Country Club, in Ancaster, Ont., says his job is a whole easier and more enjoyable because of his dog Bogey, an 11-year-old Border Collie.

Bogey, who has been part of Trainor's family since she was a puppy, has undergone several levels of obedience training. She does not have formal training in geese chasing, as she instinctively chases anything that moves claims Trainor.

"The obedience training is to get her to come back, and behave."

Bogey has been instrumental in ridding Hamilton of its pesky geese population. Now that she is older and not as energetic, she is still very helpful around the course.

"We consider ourselves "geese free" but we have to work at it regularly and Bogey still does her thing," says Trainor, who adds Bogey is well known by the members at the club. "She's a regular around our maintenance facility, which is where she lives year round."

Barking out the cost

Trained dogs can save superintendents thousands of dollars in prevention of turf damage compared to conventional methods. Superintendent Paul Robertson of the Victoria Golf Club in B.C., soon found out after having spent \$1,000 per month for goose patrol services, that purchasing and training his own dog would be a more cost-effective alternative. Belgian Shepherds are well known for their speed, intelligence and insatiable prey drive, creating an absolute love for chasing geese, says Robertson.

So after much consideration, Robertson purchased Divot, a Belgian Shepherd, from a local breeder. According to Robertson, there are multiple benefits when choosing to purchase a dog from a breeder, the least of which is the cost. A pure-bred Belgian cost only \$750 and requires very little training or retraining over time, since their natural prey instinct is inherently part of their personality.

A natural addition to the groundskeeper staff, Divot even has a special 6 m (19 ft) spring-loaded tether, that allows Robertson to put him in a sledding harness as she runs freely in front and around the cart chasing her wild prey.

"The tether prevents Divot from running out into traffic or out into the rip tide," he says, adding he cannot imagine life without his furry friend.

"She patiently waits for me in the kitchen in the morning, and we have breakfast when the rest of my family is still sleeping. She is always ready to go to work at a moment's notice."

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Photo Mike Van Sickle.

Royal Ottawa's Denver and Brodie are part of the course team.

In return, Divot receives unconditional love and adoration. After all, it is not everyday a dog can boast of a 34-ha (85-acre) playground, a parking spot converted to a luxury outdoor kennel and every treat and toy their heart desires.

Gone to the dogs

Every year, hundreds of geese attempt to reside on the picturesque grounds of the privately owned Wascana Country Club in Regina, Sask. Sheena, an energetic purebred Siberian Husky, quickly thwarts these attempts. Patrick Legg, assistant superintendent at Wascana and Sheena's owner, says she has been part of the team since she was 10 weeks old.

Huskies by nature are working dogs, explains Legg, and they thrive in keeping busy. Sheena's primary task at Wascana is to deter the geese population from taking residence on the course. With the help of Sheena and other conventional methods, such as bangers, adding eggs and an annual goose roundup, Wascana has experienced a substantial reduction in its goose population.

Chasing geese is not Sheena's only task. She is also trained to dig irrigation breaks, detect diseases by smell and contributes to reducing the gopher population.

Huskies are extremely social and enjoy being in close contact with humans and other dogs, "a lot of our members bring their dogs for off-leash walks, allowing Sheena to assume the role of greeter and playing with other companions," says Legg.

Royal service

Dogs and superintendents often go hand in hand, some would even say they are inseparable. Many dogs can be found fulfilling a variety of roles, such as

swimming the pond, treeing the squirrels or chasing the sprinklers in the wee hours of the morning. Training a dog to work on the course requires team effort by family members, golf course staff and an acceptance and appreciation of the latter by golf course members.

Enter Denver, a six-year-old Border Collie, and Brodie, a six-year-old Labrador Retriever. Both dogs stem from championship lines and were adopted

by assistant superintendent Mike Van Sickle and wife Jessica Coulson. The dogs, fully trained, joined the staff at the Royal Ottawa Golf Club when they were both one year old.

"Introducing dogs to a private club was a delicate task," says Van Sickle. "However, over time they gained acceptance and more than their share of attention from the members and the guests."

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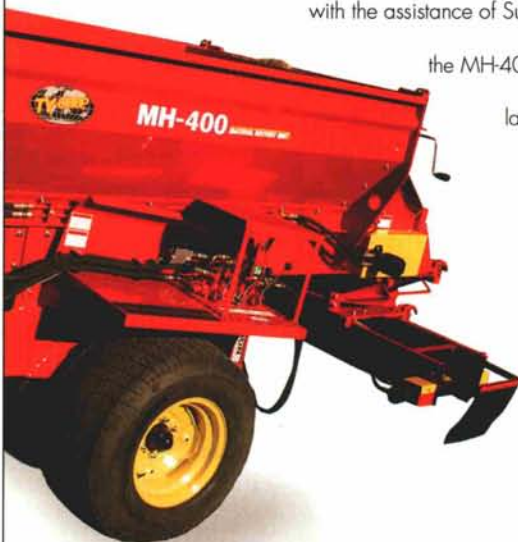
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Hamilton Golf & Country Club superintendent Rhod Trainor patrols the course with his Border Collie, Bogey.

Their daily duties include public relations with members, guest appearances in golf tournaments, including the Canadian Guide Dog Association Tournament and rodent and pest control on the course.

"The constant interaction with the dogs on and off the course has given me two great working companions," says Van Sickle. "They really are fun-loving dogs."



Divot receives unconditional love and adoration from both staff and family members at the Victoria Golf Club.

A man's best friend? Clearly. Super dogs? Without a doubt. Their value on and off the course is priceless. Bob Burrows puts it best, "Our Collies have intuitively proven to be an oddly valuable judge of character, as we've witnessed when Skyler sits in on the occasional job interview. When he likes someone, it clearly shows, they don't teach that in human resources seminars do they?"

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