

## In struggle to control geese, fewer holds barred

Some office park property managers and homeowners associations pay the pair up to \$25,000 a year to keep away the geese.

"We had such a goose problem here that they would come up on the parking lot and chase people," said Rob Dickey, who manages two Extended Stay Hotel locations in Chantilly near a retention pond where full-grown geese and their goslings are known to congregate. "These geese are a mess."

The 20-pound birds can produce up to two pounds of feces a day, creating a nasty problem for golf courses, office parks and public ponds. Geese mate for life, and their life spans reach 20 years.

"There's a bit of irony to it, because these birds were brought back intentionally in the 1950s and '60s. Science is always moving forward," said Nick Throckmorton, a spokesman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "But no one back then realized that when you put the birds on the ground, that they would stay."

More than two years ago, Fish and Wildlife eased restrictions on how residents get rid of geese, including creating a special hunting season in parts of Virginia. The hunts have become popular; the season now lasts for 70 days, from November to mid-February. During the proper season, licensed hunters in Maryland are also allowed to kill

Canada geese.

But hunts have made only a small dent in the problem. In fiscal 2008, Agriculture Department officials chased away 9,500 geese in Virginia and killed 2,000, but that's a relatively small number in a resident population estimated at 145,000. In Maryland, 610 geese were dispersed that fiscal year and 94 killed out of a population of at least 74,000.

### 'An overabundance'

Bannerman, the Agriculture Department spokeswoman, said the numbers show that communities are struggling with what to do with the elegant-looking but troublesome waterfowl. "They're beautiful birds," she said. "They're an image of wild America, and people want them in the community. The problem arises when there's an overabundance in suburbia."

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## The Washington Post

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That overabundance, left unchecked, can be damaging. Fairfax County's Environmental Quality Advisory Council issued a report last year that said the county's goose population was increasing by 15 percent a year, putting geese on a par with deer as the county's most troublesome noninvasive species.

Animal rights advocates insist that killing the geese is the wrong solution. "The bird that is dead tells no tales," said David Feld of Fairfax, who runs the wildlife education program GeesePeace. "I bet you the birds will be back."

Canada goose lovers say the birds aren't that much of a nuisance but are landing in inconvenient places.

"It's really unfair to plant all these beautiful parks and build all these bodies of water and kill the geese because they're attracted to it. That's just plain cruel," said Sharon Pawlak, the national coordinator of the New York nonprofit group the Coalition to Prevent the Destruction of Canada Geese.

For the Marcks brothers, who started a Geese Police franchise two years ago, the goose problem couldn't have come at a better time. Despite the downturn, Dave Marcks said, the operation can expect to pull in \$100,000 per year per dog. The brothers' uncle in southern New Jersey founded the company 15 years ago; it now has nine franchises across the country, including three in the Washington

region.

"It's a growing industry," said Dave Marcks, who quit a bartending job to start his goose-chasing operation. "There will always be geese."

In the end, the geese can't even get love from the nearby church. The senior pastor at Fair Oaks Church, across the street from where the geese nest on West Ox Road, said any church goodwill toward the birds is used up.

"We're a church, so we believe in compassion, but we also believe in common sense," said David R. Stokes, who has been a pastor at the Baptist church for 11 years. "The geese are a mess. They have to go."

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