

When a wild turkey takes to attacking neighbors in White Bear Lake, it's time to get rid of it. But how?

When good turkeys go bad



PIONEER PRESS: SCOTT TAKUSHI

Wild turkeys have taken up residence near a White Bear Lake town house complex.

By Alex Friedrich

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When the flock of turkeys arrived last fall at White Bear Lake's Park Avenue Apartments, they came as good neighbors.

They were polite. They were sociable. They didn't even mind being petted.

But then one turned bad.

It has been attacking residents, the apartment manager says — knocking down a man, chasing children, scratching and denting cars.

Residents say they're frightened for their children and frustrated by state and local agencies that won't remove the bird — but won't let them kill it themselves.

"Things are way out of hand," said Pete Wright,

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> Good turkeys go bad

the maintenance man.

In October, seven turkeys emerged from the woods to the south of the 127-unit townhouse complex on Park Street and began roosting in nearby trees.

They seemed harmless.

But it's mating season now, and a male turkey has turned aggressive.

It usually starts chasing people in the afternoon, when children come home from school, residents say.

It even prompted 23-year-old Shanay Ross to lock herself in the laundry room as it pecked repeatedly at the window. She ended up calling police.

The turkeys "are driving me nuts," she said. She said she's especially afraid for her 2-year-old daughter and other children in the complex.

Being big seems no guarantee of safety, either.

Wright, who stands 6 feet 3 inches tall and weighs 250 pounds, said the bird tackled him last week.

As Wright, 52, described it, he was at the mailbox when the turkey came by. The bird fluffed up its feathers, acting irritated. Wright turned and walked away.

The turkey charged. It pounced on Wright's lower leg and knocked him facedown.

Then the bird was all over him, pecking Wright and bashing him with his wings.

"Those wings hurt," he said.

Wright reached around and whacked the bird, knocking it back a few feet. He made it to his car — turkey in hot pursuit — and drove away.

Wright now carries a 4-foot pole to keep the bird at bay — but it keeps coming back. He once bumped it with his car — but it waddled away unfazed.

Staying clear of the darn thing is tough, residents said. It has flown over fences and onto balconies and cars.

Bryan Lueth, a state wildlife

supervisor, wondered how much damage a 20-pound bird could really do.

But he conceded a hyper-dominant male during mating season can be an ornery thing.

"The increasing day length is getting their hormones fired up," he said. "One turkey is dominant. He starts to identify people as turkeys, assigns them a ranking — and acts toward them according to their ranking."

(Don't take it personally, Pete.)

In any case, what's to be done?

Move it?

Lueth said it's unwise to transport unknown birds into the wild, where they could introduce disease or the wrong genes.

Kill it?

Perhaps. But using a gun or

bow is illegal in the city.

Apartment manager Kelly Wright has received a permit to net the bird and kill it humanely, or take it to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

But that job seems too tough for amateurs such as her and her husband, she said.

Besides, her husband said, "I don't want to be seen beating up a turkey."

They want the DNR to handle the job.

But Lueth said the DNR is understaffed. He said asking the DNR to get rid of the turkeys "is like having termites and asking the Department of Agriculture to take care of them."

He suggested that the complex's owner hire a pest-control agency.

Meanwhile, White Bear Lake Police Capt. Randy Johnson called the matter "a perplexing problem."

Police have weapons, he said, but aren't experts in dealing

with animals.

"I'd need to consult with the DNR to see what options we have," he said.

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