



THEY

WILDLIFE IS DESTROYING MY YARD!

STORY BY
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CONSIDER THIS: A FAMILY MOVES TO A COMMUNITY IN THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY FROM A NORTHERN STATE. THEY PLANT THE PLANTS THEY ARE ACCUSTOMED TO SUCH AS PANSIES, TULIPS AND PETUNIAS. THEY MANAGE A BEAUTIFUL LAWN. THEN SOMETHING STARTS DIGGING HOLES IN THE LAWN. FLOWERS DISAPPEAR OVER NIGHT.

WELCOME TO TEXAS WILDLIFE!

Living in an urban setting with rangeland, open land, and "ranchette" type developments surrounding has been interesting. Deer, vultures, snakes, armadillos, raccoons, feral hogs, coyotes and more wildlife visit regularly or occasionally eat the newly planted flowers, dig in the lawn for grubs and earthworms, dig up the yard (or even the golf course), get hit by cars and many other events can get folks rather upset. One resident group wants the critter removed while another wants them left alone. Tempers flare, lines are drawn and the community gets divided. State and Federal regulations come into play, city ordinances place limits on what can be done and more constraints limit management options. So what can be done?

The above is the situation of Sun City Texas by Del Webb, an active adult community within the City of Georgetown. What has happened and the approaches used in managing the situation may help understand how wildlife impacts the urban environment. It is a combination of bringing together the appropriate knowledge and education to help the residents understand the situation and then explaining the management options available and their limitations.

SUN CITY TEXAS BY DEL WEBB

Sun City Texas by Del Webb is a 4,100 acre subdivision started in 1995. It is being developed on what were parts of ranches on the edge of the Hill Country. As of late 2011, there were about 6,100 houses with a population of about 11,000 people. At build out, there will be 7,500 houses with an estimated population of 13,500 people. The Sun City Texas Community Association manages the amenities which include three golf courses, a social center building, a fitness center with two buildings and five swimming pools, a craft center, wood working shop, meeting room building, and other facilities. There are about 850 acres of open or common area land that will remain in native vegetation. All of this is within the city limits of Georgetown.



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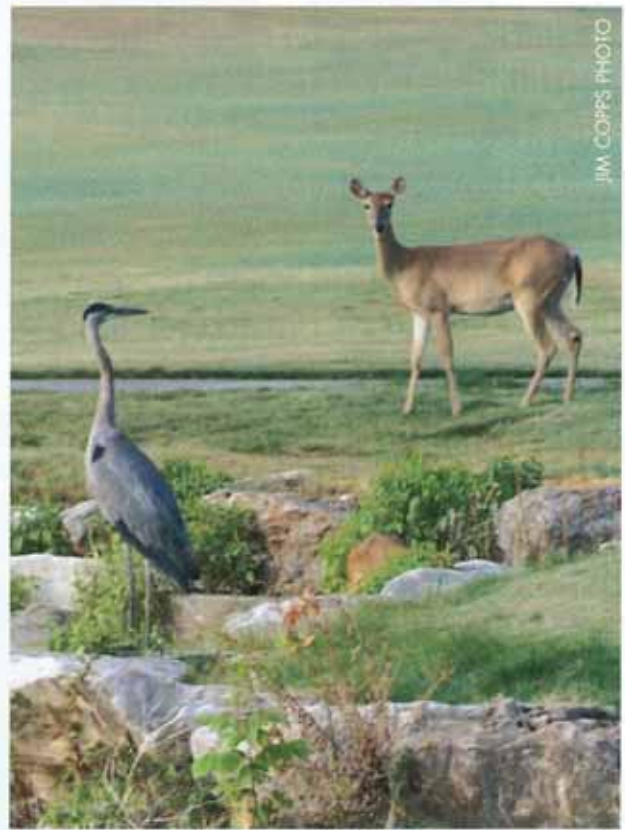
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THE PROBLEMS DEVELOP

Sun City has developed several significant wildlife problems and developed management programs to manage them over the years. Many urban areas have similar situations.

As time passed, problems started to develop. As an example, as the number of houses in and around Sun City grew, and deer adapted to the new and available vegetation. Conflict between vehicles, including golf carts, and deer increased. Deer began to



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ignore residents and changed their behavior. The deer found out the flowers and shrubs in the yards were good for foraging.

In 2004, complaints from residents reached the point where a task force was appointed by the Board of Directors to evaluate the situation and provide recommendations on management options. As the task force worked, two groups began to emerge, those who wanted the deer controlled and those who wanted them left alone. After the management recommendations were presented, the task force was changed to a committee to advise the Board of Directors on managing wildlife and their habitat. The new committee, using consultants and agency input, provided residents with factual information on the whitetail deer, their biology, habitat requirements, habitat quality and condition, and management options. A long-term management plan was developed and implemented. As a result, the management plan, in cooperation with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, uses an annual deer census to remove over 100 deer each year and either transplant them to approved ranches when available, or process them and donate the meat to food banks and other charitable groups. Even with the removal, drought has added deer to Sun City. An interesting observation, one can easily tell the difference between deer that have been in Sun City a long time and those that have come in for water during the drought. If they ignore you, they are Sun City Resident Deer!

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OTHER PROBLEM WILDLIFE

Feral hogs made their presence known by damaging one of the golf courses overnight. Then, they hit some backyards, even rooting up and chewing on irrigation systems. A program was started to trap the hogs, and later combined with snares. After about 15 months of trapping and snaring, feral hogs have not returned in damaging numbers. Occasionally, some damage appears, but traps are placed and appear to quickly control the situation. Moral, managing feral hogs in an urban setting requires patience plus continual management.

Vultures, both turkey and black, increased in numbers over the years. In 2009, a large roost along the creek running through Sun City grew to over 1,500 birds. The birds began to roost on houses, damage patio furniture, and even become aggressive toward people. Information on the biology and behavior of the vultures was developed to educate the residents. A program compatible with city ordinances and state and federal regulations was developed and implemented that has disrupted the main roost. The birds, now, are spread out over a larger area. The vulture populations and behavior are continually monitored and action is taken when needed.

Coyotes are an increasing possibility because the deer are



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concentrated within Sun City. Residents have been seeing and photographing them more often. Recently, a resident let his cat out as usual. He heard the cat howl and looked out to see a coyote with the cat in its mouth. He quickly caught the coyote and threw it to the ground, but the coyote bit him. The cat did not survive and the resident had to take rabies shots. The wildlife committee is monitoring the coyote population and behavior to determine if a management program is needed. Information on coyote biology and behavior with how to respond to coyotes that approach a person has been provided to the residents.

Other nuisance wildlife such as armadillo, raccoons, cotton rats and opossums are regular visitors to many yards. Damaging yards digging for grubs and worms, digging a den, taking up residents in ornamental grasses or shrubbery, and other normal activities are a problem for residents. It doesn't help that residents keep their yards in good condition either. Combine these critters with snakes, and you have some interesting results. The only venomous snakes found in Sun City are the western diamondback rattlesnake and coral snake. A resident managed program is in place to capture and remove snakes. It has helped educate on what are good versus dangerous snakes.

LESSONS LEARNED

Managing urban wildlife requires several key ingredients to be effective. Much is similar to managing wildlife in other areas.



JIM CORPES PHOTO

Knowledge of the biology and behavior of the species, habitat requirements, habitat quality and conditions, management options and having individuals with the desire and knowledge to make, develop and implement the long term management plan. The need to develop, implement and maintain long-term programs requires an educational program together with a well-thought-out program to reduce the wildlife damage. The final point is to be aware that the wildlife will adapt to their changing conditions. Adjusting the program over time will be necessary. *!!*