

BY MARISA PALMIERI

# Into the wild

Todd Voss shares his approach for controlling nuisance wildlife at Double Eagle Golf Course

**S**ituated on land that abuts a 4,630-acre state park, Double Eagle Golf Course – with 450 acres of its own – is in a position to have more than enough animals here and there, says golf course superintendent Todd Voss.

Voss has been at the 18-hole private club in Galena, Ohio, since it opened 1991. He started as an assistant and then took the reins as superintendent in 1996.

In central Ohio, where Double Eagle is located, geese, deer, rabbits and small animals, such as raccoons and skunks, top the list of wildlife concerns. The most severe wildlife-

control situation Voss handled was almost a decade ago when skunks infiltrated the facility and folded up the grass like carpet, he says.

Because skunks eat insects, many golf courses have this problem in the fall, when skunks hunt for grubs.

Voss hired licensed professional trappers, who had to prove the pests were causing damage and obtain permits before eradicating the skunks. This service, which is offered by professional trappers and some traditional pest control companies, starts at about \$100 per pest. Voss said the trappers removed about 50 animals from Double Eagle.

Though it was a pricey service and the turf damage occurred only on the out-of-play areas near the clubhouse, it had the potential to develop into a bigger problem for the members and guests staying at the club's overnight cottages.

"The last thing you want is a guest to run into a skunk at night," Voss says.

## GEESE BUSTERS

Other wildlife aren't as threatening to guests but can wreak havoc on a golf course. When it comes to turf, geese are enemy No. 1, Voss says. Geese cause all kinds of problems, includ-

Double Eagle Golf Course deals with all kinds of wildlife, thanks to its location next to a 4,630-acre state park. Photo: Todd Voss



ing turf damage caused by nipping, aesthetic concerns associated with droppings and slippery walkways.

Voss has a two-pronged strategy to control geese, which strike the hardest in the spring. First is his pair of Golden Retrievers, Bunker and Nittany (Voss is a Penn State grad).

"I'm lucky enough to live on property, so I can get them any time there's a problem," he says of the two dogs, who are Voss's pets first and the course's geese chasers second.

His second tool to combat geese is a gun similar to a starter's pistol that launches "crackers," which scare off problem birds when they explode about 100 feet down range.

Again, living on the course is an asset, Voss says, joking that firing crackers is his full-time job in the spring. He points out this method wouldn't work for facilities surrounded by homes, which Double Eagle isn't.

#### OH DEER

Deer are another animal that primarily damage out-of-play areas, feasting on ornamental shrubs and trees during the winter and perennial and annual gardens in the spring. Though the turf doesn't sustain much deer damage aside from occasional footprints, deer are a problem for Voss because he maintains the facility's landscaped areas, too. Out of an operating budget in the \$500,000 to \$1-million range, Voss spends about \$5,200 on landscaping each year.

"Deer are definitely one of our challenges because we have so many and because they eat everything," he says.

Throughout the years, Voss has learned to deter deer by maintenance practices, careful plant selection and applying repellents.

Because leaves, stems and buds of woody plants are a staple for deer, Voss makes sure all trees are trimmed up to 5 feet.

"Anything that's low to the ground gets munched on quite a bit," Voss says.

He's right. Deer consume between 2 and 4 percent of their body weight in dry matter daily, according to the nonprofit Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management. Bucks consume the greatest amount in the spring – as much as 6.4 pounds of dry food per day. Does' greatest daily food consumption occurs in early fall, just before breeding season.

Starting in November, when Double Eagle closes every year, the lack of people on the course and reduced maintenance activities al-

low free access for the deer, Voss says.

By the time spring rolls around, Voss is selective when it comes to the annuals he plants in the flower beds. And perennial selection now is much different from when the course opened almost two decades ago.

"We stay away from tiger lilies," Voss says. "Forget hydrangeas and tulips."

Rabbits, too, eat many of the same flowers as deer. Voss has learned to plant later than he used to and to select annuals that don't bloom until May. Impatiens and snapdragons are two annuals that remain on his list, after ruling out many others throughout the years.

In addition to avoiding deer-attracting plant material, Voss protects Double Eagle's landscaped areas with winter applications of a repellent product called Liquid Fence Deer & Rabbit Repellent.

"It's one of the only products I've tried aside from some of the cayenne pepper products, but if you keep it sprayed on, the deer stay off," Voss says.

His staff makes about seven or eight applications – in backpack sprayers – during the winter.

"It takes a good four hours to spray everything," Voss says, noting the staff covers all the shrubs and beds in the areas around the clubhouse, guest cottages and the main entrance.

In addition to what Voss describes as a slight rotten egg smell (the product is made of about 25 percent putrescent egg solids), the downside is reapplication is necessary after it rains and every several weeks.

"I go through a lot of it, but I'm smart enough to buy it during the auction at the Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show every year," he says, estimating he acquires the product at about 50 percent off.

The product is listed around \$125 per gallon of concentrate on Liquid Fence's Web site.

"Every year I get about 10 gallons, and that's enough to last me for the year," Voss says.

Voss, like most superintendents, does what he can to rid a facility of nuisance wildlife while maintaining the natural beauty of a course – one of the reasons so many people are attracted to the game of golf.

"The bottom line is, as suburbia keeps growing, homes and courses are on what used to be woodlands, so there are going to be animals," he says. "It's just finding that balance. We're in the same boat as everyone else." GCI

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