

It was like a scene out of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. I was walking toward the front door of the *Golfdom* office when a Canada goose swooped from its flight and tried to take my head off.

I backpedaled to avoid the sinister bird — its wings flapping, eyes bulging and beak hissing. But the goose knocked me off balance, and I fell into the mud. "Expletive! Expletive! Expletive!" I yelled. Then the goose landed nearby and began to charge me.

Hell yes, I was scared. I picked myself up and scurried to the door. I flung it open and hurried inside. I stood there for a few seconds — caked with mud, out of breath and shaking.

Then I realized that people — my co-workers — were watching me. They howled when I told them what happened.

A month later, I'm still living down the goose jokes. That dang bird bought me a lot of flak.

So you might think I'd be happy that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently proposed a new regulation to possibly give states more authority to kill geese to control their population. Well, I'm not.

This is going to sound strange, but I forgive the goose that attacked me. I now know he did what he did because I was treading on his territory. The walkway leading into our office door is close to the goose and his mate's nest, which happened to contain several eggs. The goose was only protecting his family. How can you fault him for that?

Yeah, there's a chance I could have been hurt during the attack. I could've sprained an ankle while tumbling to the mud, or the goose could have made like Mike Tyson and champed part of my ear off. (Thank God I wasn't hurt or I never would've been able to live it down!) But I figure getting beat up by a goose is a long shot.

The goose and his pals have been hanging around here for several years. Nobody has much good to say about them. They're not cute, and they doodle all over the place. In the spring, when their eggs are ready to hatch, they become so protective of their young that they turn as surly as Albert Belle.

I know superintendents who also have problems with geese nesting on their golf

I'm Siding With the Geese on This One

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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courses. The geese eat turf, harass golfers and leave a trail of dung. The superintendents battle back with border collies and other humane means to get rid of the birds.

I feel for those superintendents because they have enough to do without having to tend to pesky geese. But I still don't agree it's right to give them the freedom to kill geese. Yes, I'm siding with the animal activists on this one. No, I'm not a vegetarian and have been known to eat three Whoppers (with cheese) at a sitting.

I can't help but realize that geese, as nasty as they can be, possess a few endearing qualities. Did you know they mate for life? Did you know they constantly look out for one another during their lives? In fact, one goose will stay by its mate's side if it's injured or dying.

Let's face it: A lot of human beings don't possess those character qualities.

Reportedly, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants to eliminate about 25 percent of the roughly 3.5 million Canada geese that nest in the United States. Don't get me wrong: I'm all for controlling geese, especially at airports, where flocks pose clear danger. Let's just not take the easy way out and conveniently and inhumanely waste them. Let's be more tolerant in our approach. Let's make sure the geese problem is as big as we want to believe. (It's not just the poop, is it?)

First and foremost, you need to ask yourselves a few questions: Have you exhausted all nonfatal remedies to control geese? Have the border collies, plastic alligators and artificial distress calls stopped working?

If the answer is no, then do the right thing.

Finally, I remind you that this column is written by someone who was attacked and humbled by a goose — and lived to tell about it.

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