

The day Sarge saved Milwaukee's field from seagulls

Grounds manager Dave Mellor 'went to the dogs' to save his Milwaukee County Stadium turf. Brewer fans applauded the effort.

When seagulls threatened major league baseball in Milwaukee, David Mellor and his grounds crew solved the problem with well-trained dogs.

Mellor is grounds manager at Milwaukee County Stadium, home of the Brewers. To his knowledge, this is the only time dogs have saved baseball. And, not just a single game, but two weeks of baseball by the American League Brewers.

Mellor told *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT* magazine about an incident after reading our January article about the growing popularity of using dogs to chase geese off golf courses and other fine turf areas.

The problem began after a June 1993 concert by former Beatle Paul McCartney at the stadium. Warm temperatures and persistent rains during the week of the concert prompted hordes of cutworm moths in trees surrounding the stadium to hatch.

Stadium lights drew the moths to the ballpark.

Mellor says that as he and his crew deep-tine aerated the field at the conclusion of the concert, just before midnight with the stadium lights turned off, he saw moths landing on the turf.

Because the Brewers hosted the New York Yankees the following night, he and the crew returned the following sunrise.

"I saw a couple of seagulls on the field. They ate a few moths, and flew away. We didn't think anything about it," recalls Mellor.

But an hour later the gulls returned; they brought friends—maybe 600. By mid-afternoon, after feeding, they left the field. But, an hour before sundown, they returned. This time as the Brewers and Yankees played.

"We thought, 'Oh, No!'. By the fifth inning we had several hundred seagulls on the field again," says Mellor. "The birds wouldn't leave. The ball would be lined within two feet of them and they'd take off a little bit and land right back down.

"The Yankees were complaining; they wanted to protest the game, and the umpires were asking, 'What can we do about this?'"

They managed to complete the game, but there were more to play on consecutive nights. And, shortly after sunrise the following day, the gulls were back—more than 800—estimates Mellor.

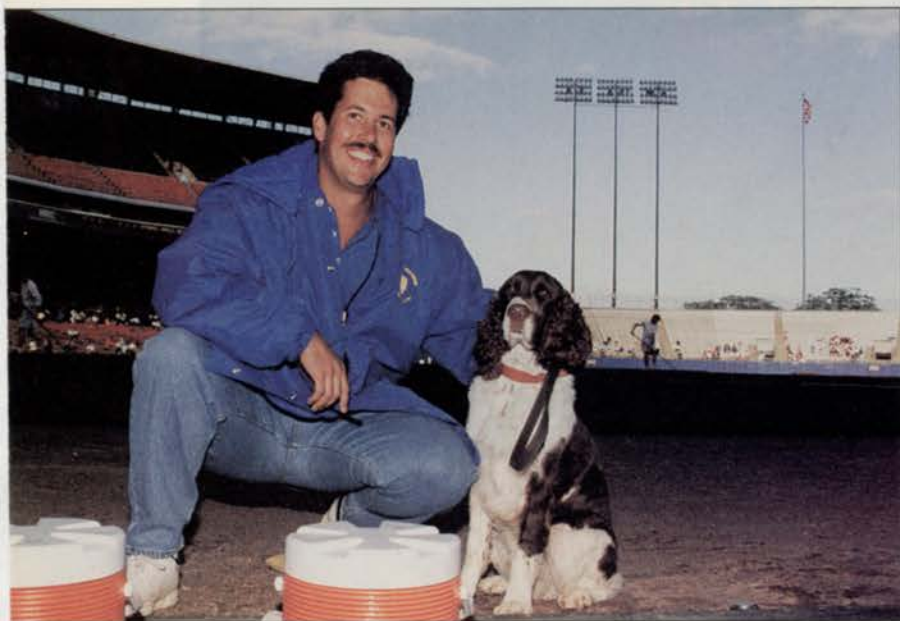
"They were just kind of walking around making a big mess," he says. "They had already eaten most of the moths but they were used to coming there, and we couldn't scare them away."

They had developed a landing habit pattern, believes Mellor, a pattern that had to be broken.

The Department of Natural Resources suggested loud noises and, indeed, the crew had some success

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Dave Mellor with Sarge, the Springer Spaniel that saved Milwaukee's turf from a horde of seagulls.





Milwaukee County Stadium ground crew kept shovels and buckets handy for dog emergencies.

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using bottle rockets which they shot out of starter pistols. Also the bomb squad of the Milwaukee County Police set off several detonations.

But Mellor knew he couldn't keep up this barrage during a game. Harming the gulls was out of the question, too. They're protected by the Migratory Bird Act.

Finally, Mellor called his wife's boss, a member of the Wisconsin Waterfowl As-

The Yankees were complaining. The umpires didn't know what to do, says Mellor.

sociation. The hunter suggested well-trained dogs.

Immediately, the call for dogs went out. In fact, the grounds crew held impromptu auditions that very day, and found some likely candidates.

"The dog had to be able to run out onto the field, chase the birds so they would fly up into the air, and come right back to the owner in time so we didn't delay the game.

"There are only 120 seconds between the last pitch of one half-inning and the first pitch of another," says Mellor.

That night, and for the remaining

games of the extended home stand, Mellor and his crew sat one dog in the stands near the right field foul pole and another near the left field foul pole. Then, as the inning ended, or there was a pitching change, the dogs raced onto the field and harassed the gulls.

"The dogs were having a great time. It was like playing for them," says Mellor.

The handlers would call the dogs back at exactly 90 seconds. Not once did the dogs create a problem, in fact the fans loved them. Some of the ball players offered to buy several of them.

"One of the best dogs was Sarge, a Springer Spaniel," says Mellor. "His owner could not come to every game so Sarge came home with me at night and came to work with me the next day."

The Milwaukee grounds crew used fireworks and dogs for several weeks, even after the Brewers went on the road, before it finally convinced the gulls to leave the turfgrass for good.

"The dogs saved major league baseball here in Milwaukee for about two weeks," says Mellor, who also credits his boss Gary Vandenberg and assistant Troy Smith who, he says, helped him at every turn. □

