



Not long ago the front page of your Village Advertiser carried a photograph of a flock of geese, dead and dying, on the Osterville Annex school grounds. It was surmised they'd been poisoned.

A couple of letters to editors appeared, deploring this inhumane treatment of wild creatures being treated to a dinner of death. The daily paper editorialized, philosophically, there are too many geese and some residents don't want them around.

The fish and game enforcement officer estimates there may be about a thousand geese in Barnstable; probably it was he who pointed out goose deposits may be detrimental to shellfish and may increase the eutrophication of ponds and streams.

We should remember that before there were people dumping nitrates and bacteria in ponds and streams, the geese were there. Ponds and streams are the natural place to find geese and ducks. Shellfish managed to survive goose deposits for centuries of co-existence.

Lawns and golf courses are a more recent development and they may suffer some from goose deposits. In fact, geese could be quite a nuisance to people desiring an unmarred view of the greensward. Is this a reason, even an excuse, to feed them poison?

There are a lot of people who might be considered nuisances, too; we don't poison them though. The statement that there are no natural predators for geese seems absurd.

The ponds are well-stocked with turtles quite capable of feeding on the goslings; racoons, snakes and skunks are natural raiders of eggs before they hatch. Foxes aren't unknown in our wooded areas even though seldom seen anymore during daylight hours.

It's certainly apparent that the most deadly of the goose's natural predators — man — is still around. The only difference is, now man kills the geese purely for his own convenience.

Man isn't killing the geese for food, nor for goose down to make pillows with, nor for down to line clothing with that he may keep warm in cold weather. Man killed these geese because they interfered with his selfish pleasures.

The geese had chosen to set up housekeeping at the edge of a pond

where lawns and a golf course came down to the water's edge. The geese found a plentiful food supply there.

In winter months we saw little of them, although conservationists say they wintered over in nearby marshes. Early in the spring, however, the arrival of the geese at their breeding grounds was a welcome harbinger of the warmer weather to come.

Throughout the season, the geese were a part of the landscape. The first pair to come in March was soon joined by a dozen others. While their eggs incubated, the great birds seldom appeared, but as soon as the downy babies hatched, we watched with glee as they paddled across the pond after their mothers with the fathers bringing up the rear to protect the flock.

The goslings grew quickly and although some were undoubtedly victims of nature's weeding of the weaker ones, the geese multiplied. By Labor Day, there was always a grand crew of them, graceful in the water — clumsy on the hillside — always a delight.

It's only in recent years we've seen the re-establishment of Canadian geese in Cape ponds. Hunters, prior to the 40s, kept the population decimated; a flock of geese was a rare sight during the '30s for food was scarce, and roast goose was ideal for Thanksgiving dinner.

In those days, the idea of poisoning them wouldn't have occurred to any sane person. Geese were part of our diet; only a madman would poison his own food supply.

Perhaps that's why it seems so tragic anyone would purposely harm these handsome birds, except to help keep himself and his own family alive.

No hunter I — I'm glad I don't have to shoot the meat I serve at my table — but I see nothing wrong with using nature's bounty for food, whether fish, fowl or four-legged animal. There's no reason not to slaughter pigs, sheep or cattle for food. There's nothing wrong with raising vegetables for harvesting and eating.

There is something wrong, it seems to me, with killing a beast, a fish, or a bird, just to get rid of it. The only form of killing I can condone is swatting destructive insects.

Mosquitoes, termites, flies, aphids, ants, spiders, and gypsy moths fall into the one category of life I've yet to define as necessary to protect, even though I know they form an important link in the food chain for the so-called higher animal life.

Even with these pesty kinds of life, I'm willing to share the planet we live on. As long as they stay outside the house, they'll never be poisoned where I have control over what happens to them.

Year after year, I've watched the geese come to Aunt Tempy's Pond each spring, hatch their young, raise them, defend them, and, in the fall, lead them away to winter feeding grounds.

Seeing a flotilla of these beautiful birds swimming across the pond has given me a lift every time I've passed. This joy was mine at least twice a day, since the road home leads past the pond.

Hearing the geese in flight, calling and honking as they passed overhead, was like listening to a divine singing, marvelously like a great orchestra creating music that no man-made instrument can duplicate. I'm not alone in having loved the sound of the wild geese calling, of that I'm sure.

Now the geese are gone from Aunt Tempy's pond.

Since the poisoning of the geese which were found on the school field, not a single one has been seen at Aunt Tempy's.

Each day as I drive up Parker Road, I look for them. Even though I know they've been killed, I still look for them, as much now from habit as expectation.

And each evening as I drive home I look. The golf course is bare of them. The rushes at the water's edge shelter no geese. The pond's surface is unmarred by the wedges of ripples created by swimming geese.

Who's responsible? I don't know. Whoever is, however, wins my deepest enmity. The deed is despicable. I sincerely wish the person who poisoned those geese may someday know what it's like to die of poisoning.

There are, still, some places where geese survive. For their own safety, I hope they never again come back to Aunt Tempy's, though I shall miss them, miss seeing them there, as long as I live.

There are geese in North Bay, there are geese in Scudder Bay, there are geese in the mill pond over at Marstons Mills. Sad to say there are no longer any geese in Aunt Tempy's pond, and if that's how they're to be treated there, I hope there are never any there again.