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The Charlotte Observer

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Posted on Sun, Feb. 20, 2005

Unwanted waterfowl hard to net

Rescuers will find birds better homes than park

FRED KELLY
Staff Writer

Want a duck?

Mecklenburg County's fight to rid Freedom Park of geese has left a wildlife group with a dilemma -- where to find permanent homes for more than a dozen domestic ducks abandoned by pet owners.

Members of Carolina Waterfowl Rescue, along with two county parks workers, spent Saturday morning casting nets in the park's pond to remove the ducks.

The effort was part of the county's \$84,000 plan to keep dozens of Canada geese and their droppings off the grounds.

Officials want the ducks out because they attract geese to the park and leave their own mess. And officials say a park plan to ban people from feeding the birds and put repellent on grass to stop geese from eating it would leave no reliable source of food.

As a result, organizers of Carolina Waterfowl Rescue are trying to place the ducks with people who have ponds. They are keeping the ducks at Possumwood Acres Wildlife Sanctuary in Hubert and have identified 10 potential placement homes.

"A lot of these ducks are Easter gifts people just left here," said Jennifer Gordon, director of the group.

County park officials have tried for years to get the waterfowl out of Freedom Park. They have moved them to Mississippi and even brought in swans and decoys. About 160 geese are in Freedom Park on a given day. The county says it spent \$34,000 last year cleaning up behind them.

The 2 pounds of poop that each goose leaves behind daily is the subject of frequent complaints from walkers and joggers.

Al Christensen lives near the park and uses it to walk his dog.

The ducks add to the charm of the park, but the poop is too much to bear, he said.

"If you want to find a place to sit in the grass that isn't covered in feces, you can't," said Christensen, 52. "The park can't handle it."

About 10 volunteers holding fishing nets and pet carriers tried to gather the more than a dozen domestic ducks they identified.

A county worker riding in a small boat steered the ducks toward a large net that rescuers held from the banks. Other times, rescuers lured ducks by offering bread and then grabbed them.

Many birds they caught were ill. Several were suffering from frostbite, bone infections and staph infections in their feet.

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Domestic ducks cannot fly and are generally mild-mannered, but catching them was not easy, officials said. It took them more than four hours to round up the birds.

When rescuers hid behind trees to catch two ducks on land, the ducks stood still briefly before darting into the water.

Susan Griffin, 39, of Harrisburg was one of the rescuers.

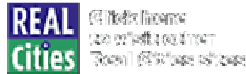
"They call it a wild goose chase for a reason," she said.

Adoption

Anyone interested in adopting a duck can contact Carolina Waterfowl Rescue at (704) 668-9486 or via the Internet at www.carolina.waterfowlrescue.com.

Fred Kelly: (704) 358-5027; frkelly@charlotteobserver.com

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