



Cannon Beach resident Kelly Fitzpatrick inspects damage done by rabbits to her property.



Fitzpatrick said she has to wrap certain plants on her property in wire to protect them from rabbits.

Rabbits gather near a resident's garden in Cannon Beach.

Bunnies are a sensitive subject in Cannon Beach

By Brenna Visser
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Broaching the topic of bunnies in Cannon Beach is kind of like asking someone about their politics.

"Some you're just scared to ask," Sandy Fitzpatrick said.

Anyone who has spent time around Tolovana State Park has likely seen dozens of brown, black and white rabbits speckling the lawn around Mo's Restaurant and Tolovana Inn. They've become celebrities of sorts — often referred to as "the Tolovana bunnies" — inspiring fan pages on Facebook and even a campaign to name them as the city's official critter.

But for neighbors like Fitzpatrick, what was once a cute novelty has become a

never-ending frustration. Instead of a bunny here or there, neighbors are seeing 10 to 20 at once on their properties. Instead of grass and flower gardens, front lawns are covered in a thick layer of rabbit pellets and burrow holes.

"When it was like eight bunnies, it was still cute. It was fine. But this?" Fitzpatrick said. "It's gotten to the point where we can't maintain our yard. There's a point you have to ask are there too many bunnies?"

After years of backyard complaining, one of the neighbors, Merrie Postlewait, approached the City Council this month on behalf of the neighborhood, asking for some kind of intervention.

"This is a man-made problem, that men have the responsibility to eliminate," Postlewait wrote in a letter. "Health and safety issues, property damage issues, economic issues and property owners rights are being disregarded and ignored."

Origin story

The bunny infestation can be traced back to the 1980s, when a few bunnies given to a local family either escaped or were released, according to the Cannon Beach History Center and Museum. Bunnies did what they do best, and soon the north end of town was home to dozens of the fluffy critters. Another family wanted to join in the fun, according to the museum, and decided to release their own bunnies in the 1990s.

But in the past five years or so, the colony has moved to Tolovana, which neighbors credit to the fact the area has fewer predators. The free range, and the tendency of some neighbors and guests from surrounding hotels to feed them, has led to a rabbit invasion.

High levels of acidic rabbit urine and feces forced Postlewait to reseed her grass twice in two years, costing about \$3,800.

"It has just gotten to proportions that are unacceptable," Postlewait said.

For many neighbors, like Michael Orth, the amount of manure, which can carry a variety of diseases, is primarily a health concern.

"Lots of us like to have our grandchildren play in the yard," Orth said. "But they are young. If they accidentally ingest it? There's a lot of potential health issues."

With the neighborhood sitting on the oceanfront, residents often find beachgoers chasing the bunnies into their yards, thinking they are on public properties. Dogs do the same, though the bunnies usually don't survive those encounters.

Residents have tried just about everything: Pouring fox pee and chili powder on plants. Fencing. Live trapping and relocation.

But nothing has made a dent.

"It's just not realistic. There are so many, I could be out there every day and not make a

difference," Postlewait said. "I don't believe the satisfactory solution is homeowners to trap rabbits. I think it's the responsibility of the city to help out somehow."

'Critter of Cannon Beach'

While the overzealous bunny population has been a long-standing reality, the city has chosen not to get involved in pest control.

Wildlife feeding bans have been introduced in the past, but none have come to fruition.

"If you go into a neighborhood, you're going to find 50 percent want them and 50 percent will not," City Manager Bruce St. Denis said.

At the Tolovana Inn, the bunnies have become a tourist attraction.

"The guests love it. Some request certain rooms to be closer to 'Bunny Hill,' which is what we call the place where they hang out," said Michael Soprano, the group sales coordinator for the hotel.

Also solidly in the pro-bunny camp sits Melodie Chenevert, another neighbor in Tolovana and champion of the campaign to make the bunnies the official critter. Her love for them started with her granddaughter, who was delighted by them hopping around her yard. After a particularly rough winter two years ago, Chenevert started to feed the bunnies carrots and broccoli, and has enjoyed keeping them around her property ever since. Their constant presence in town makes them not only a novelty, but a community pillar, she said.

"I'm a live-and-let-live person," Chenevert said. "They were released here. It's not their fault they are running through Cannon Beach. They're a part of the community now." Chenevert admits the bunnies also do a number on her lawn and plants.

"But to me, it's the price you pay to have a cute neighbor that doesn't hurt anyone," she said.

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