

Peafowl trapper willing to flap

By Mary Jo Hazard



*Photos by Ivy Faulkner



Mike Maxcy constructs a peafowl trap in Rancho Palos Verdes

When Mike Maxcy sets out to trap peacocks, the feathers he ruffles aren't on the birds; they're on the people.

"That's the toughest part of my job," he said.

On Monday, Maxcy began setting up traps in Rancho Palos Verdes, which recently [approved the trapping and relocation of up to 150 birds a year](#). Maxcy will work until he catches 150 peafowl or March 31, whichever comes first.

He hopes to smooth the feathers of concerned residents by explaining how humane his traps are and demonstrating how they work, and he plans to clear up misconceptions that he euthanizes birds by assuring residents that the peacocks will be relocated somewhere safe.

Feral Indian Blue peacocks are not indigenous to Palos Verdes. They're native to India and had long been a symbol of wealth and nobility in Europe. Affluent Americans took note.

In the early 1900's, Lucky Baldwin, a shrewd investor and real estate speculator in California, imported peacocks from India to grace his Arcadia estate. When his friend, Frank Vanderlip, complained about his "too quiet" estate in Rancho Palos Verdes, the Baldwins sent him 24 birds.

Over time, the peacocks multiplied and flocked out over the Peninsula, delighting some residents and dismaying others. Each of the four cities on the hill has a different approach to their peacock population. According to a census conducted in 2014, RPV's peacock population surged from 123 birds in June to 285 birds in October. The city

contracted with Mike Maxcy, owner of Wildlife Services, to remove the birds from five areas, Vista Grande, Crestridge, Grandview, Sunnyside and Portuguese Bend.

Maxcy is the curator of the successful California Condor Breeding Program at the Los Angeles Zoo.

“I’ve worked with many different species at the zoo during my 27 years including elephants, rhinos, bighorn sheep and marmosets,” he said. “But, I’ve always had an affinity for birds.”

Maxcy’s career was born out of necessity. In 1999, the zoo’s peafowl population grew out of control, forcing Maxcy to capture 20 birds, which he relocated to a Buddhist monastery in Fresno. His career as a trapper had begun.

A few years later, La Canada Flintridge’s peafowl population exploded, and the city contacted the zoo for help. Not only did Maxcy capture and relocate La Canada’s birds, he also helped the city implement a peafowl management plan.

Back then, traps for peafowl didn’t exist. Traps to capture raccoons, skunks, and possums were too small for peacocks.

“I had to create my own,” Maxcy said.

Over the years, he’s improved the design for his traps, changed the bait, and included a perch where the birds can roost at night. He covers his ten-by-ten-foot traps with shade cloth to protect the birds from the sun, and he makes sure there’s plenty of food and water. The cages can hold as many as eight birds, but usually only three at one time, Maxcy said.

“The traps are very humane,” Maxcy said. “But, I still wake up in the middle of the night with new ideas for them. You can always build a better mousetrap.”

On Monday, Maxcy and his assistant, Jonathan Gonzalez, set up traps at five homes in RPV. Residents were instructed to call Maxcy when a peacock became trapped. The birds are then relocated within 24 hours. Maxcy moves the traps to a new location every two weeks.

The city canvassed residents in the designated areas, offering to trap peacocks on their properties, said Ara Mihranian, RPV’s community development deputy director.

“We’ve received over 80 positive responses so far, and every day we get more,” Mihranian said.

The city budgeted \$34,015 to trap and relocate 150 peafowl as well as five new peacock traps, which would be used for future trappings, Mihranian said.

Maxcy insists he'll have no problem finding appropriate homes for the Rancho Palos Verdes peafowl. Wineries, monasteries and ranches call him regularly requesting birds.

"The best part of my job," Maxcy said, "is taking the peacocks from areas where they're being harmed and putting them where they're wanted and prized."

Copyright © Mary Jo Hazard 2015. All Rights Reserved.