

Deer stands guard over goose nest in cemetery

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BUFFALO, N.Y. — A deer has been standing watch for several days over a female goose nesting in a city cemetery, a scene normally reserved for a children’s movie. “People always want to turn it into a Disney story and in this case it’s not far off,” said Gina Browning, director of the Erie County SPCA. For at least four days, the buck stood guard near the nest of a Canada goose as she sits on her eggs inside a large urn at Forest Lawn cemetery, home to the remains of President Millard Fillmore and rock icon Rick James. “He does appear to be guarding the goose, as it were,” Erie County SPCA Wildlife Administrator Joel Thomas said. “He’s within touching distance of her — there’s no doubt what’s going on.” The deer, which he said looks like a buck that has shed its antlers, has not strayed from his post. Employees at the cemetery were alerted to the situation after the animal positioned itself between the bird and an employee of a company that traps and relocates geese, which Thomas said have become a messy problem in large numbers.

“When he approached the bird with a net, the deer puts itself between him and the bird, and he’s repeated that behavior for some time,” he said.

Typically positioning himself broadside to any car or passerby who comes near the nest, the deer stares intently until the potential aggressor moves on, he said.

Why exactly the deer has chosen to champion a bird of a different feather is a complicated question, Thomas said. While interdependence among species in the wild is not unheard of, Thomas said whatever is causing this animal kingdom alliance is anybody’s guess.

“From a human standpoint we can fill in a lot of blanks but it doesn’t mean we’re right,” he said. “Does he know she’s nesting? I don’t know. Is he going to leave when the chicks hatch? I don’t know.”

One thing is clear: It could go on for some time.

The gestation period for a Canada goose is up to 31 days, Thomas said, with the nesting

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season only just beginning. While normally both the male and female share the task of keeping the eggs warm, the expectant mother at Forest Lawn appears not to have that luxury.

“If the deer is determined, he’s going to be on the job for at least three weeks,” Thomas said.

Devotion rather than emotion seems to be driving the buck.

“The deer and the goose are not in love,” Thomas said.

Courtesy: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/08/us-deer-goose-idUSTRE7374IB20110408>