

All in a day's work

Check out three jobs only a dog could do.

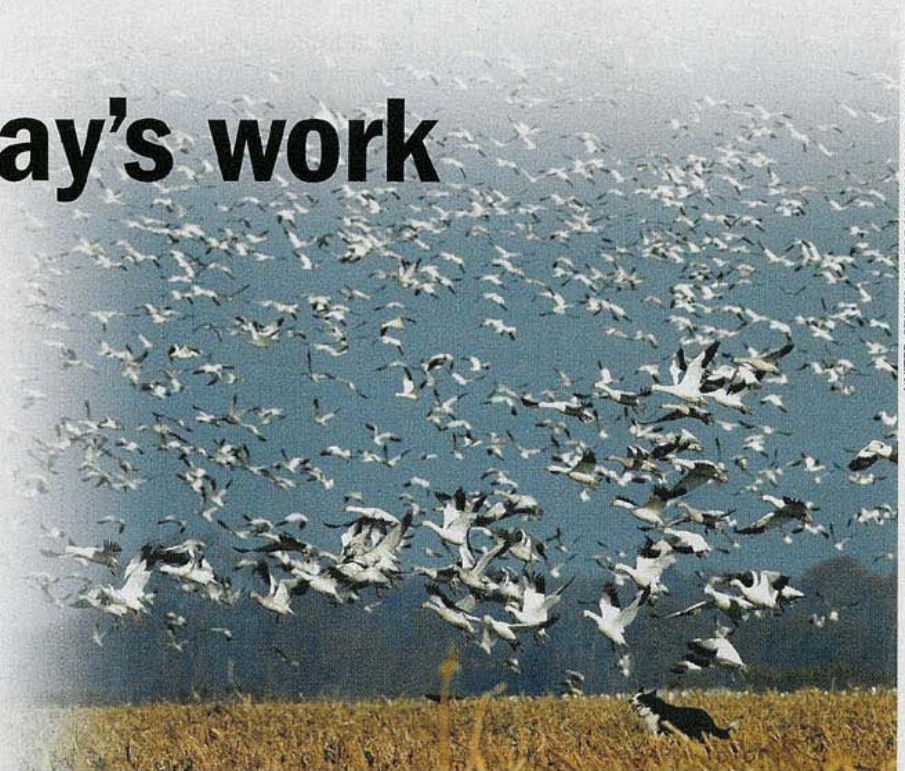
By Nikki Moustaki

We know our dogs make great companions, but we often forget that many developed as workers, too. Beyond the familiar roles as assistance dogs, farmhands, and bomb- and drug-sniffers, dogs continue to use their unique talents in useful — albeit strange — modes of work.

Shoo, goose!

A flock of 400 geese circle the runway at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, ready to land and feed in the crop fields adjacent to the airstrip. Suddenly, a black-and-white flash on the ground scatters the geese, who take off for a safer landing spot. They won't come back today, thanks to Trixie, one of Flyaway Farm and Kennel's trained geese removal dogs.

Flyaway Farm's Border Collies keep geese away from the airfield to prevent them from flying up into a plane's engine and potentially causing a crash. Each year, they protect the base from an estimated 400,000 geese. Other Flyaway Farm Border Collies perform the same task at civilian airports, golf courses, and parks.



UNITED STATES AIR FORCE PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL PLATE

Bill scatters geese in a corn field by Dover Air Force Base.

At sunrise, Karen Voltura, Ph.D., a wildlife biologist and the Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard contractor for Dover Air Force Base, takes the dogs, who travel to the base each day from Flyaway Farms, to find geese landing around the base. When she spots them, she contacts the base and gets permission to remove the geese from the area.

"Once we have permission, the fun starts," Voltura says. "Depending on the size of the field and the number of geese, we use up to four dogs at a time. Our

best dogs know their job and understand that they're not done until all the geese are gone."

Six-year-old Trixie is one of the more experienced dogs at Flyaway Farm. Voltura says that Trixie seems to get personally insulted when geese try to land again in a field she just cleared.

"She's so excited about chasing geese that she starts to whine in the truck as soon as I turn onto our patrol route. One day, I was coordinating with the control tower at the airfield, and they stopped to ask if I had a dying goose in the truck. I told them, 'No, that's just the goose dog.'"

While bird or guard dogs might seem better suited to this task, Rebecca Ryan, owner of Flyaway Farm, insists that Border Collies are perfect for the mission.

"Birds and wildlife are born with a fear of predators, and [any dog] is a wolf or a fox to a bird," Ryan says. "[But] Border Collies are silent workers, adding to their predator presence. It's like bringing in a wolf and controlling where, what, and when it hunts. The only difference is that a Border Collie does not want to hurt the wildlife, but just herd what it sees as its stock."



COURTESY KAREN VOLTURA

Trixie "swims like a fish and uses her half-tail as a rudder," handler Karen Voltura says.