# [***A mild goose hunt***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:47MH-GDS0-00BV-02NJ-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

FERGUS FALLS, Minn. -- It was just after 9 a.m. and the geese were finally coming out of town, exactly as Mike Jacobs predicted.

We were out of bed at 5 a.m., setting decoys by 6 and ready to shoot by 7:30. But December geese often keep banker's hours, and we hadn't seen a bird in the air.

We were discussing whether to sneak back to town for a quick breakfast and some hot coffee. But that changed just after 9 a.m.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of big Canada geese were leaving their water roost in the city and heading out to feed in farm fields on a blustery December morning. And a big bunch was headed right at us.

'When they come up over the hill from town and out of that gap between those two telephone poles, that's our zone. Those are the ones we want,' Jacobs advised.

Jacobs should know. He's shot hundreds of geese in this field over the past decade or so. Jacobs, who lives in Royalton, Minn., grew up in the Fergus Falls area, where his parents and brother still live.

'Those are in the zone. Start calling!' Jacobs said. 'And keep flagging.'

So we blew into our short-reed goose calls with gusto and waved goose 'flags,' T-shaped black cloth on a stick that's supposed to look like a goose landing.

Skeins of geese, V's of geese, pairs and unorganized flocks -- all of them seemed to converge on us at once. At one point we had more than 100 geese within 100 yards, many seeming to hover just outside our decoys. Just as one group was about to land, another would cross its path. It looked like a disorganized air show.

That's when Eric Jorgensen's ***cell phone*** rang.

'I can't talk now, man. We're under attack,' said the hunter before quickly hanging up.

But amid the clamor of geese and three hunters calling from inside a pit in the ground, no one fired a shot.

Amazingly, no one said 'Take 'em.' None of us called the shot. Maybe we were too mesmerized by the number of birds in the air. Each of us probably had decent shots to take but we waited too long for the perfect shot that never came. The geese slipped away to feed somewhere else.

'I can't believe we didn't get a goose out of that,' Jorgensen said.

'There were too many of them,' Jacobs said.

But it didn't matter. In the next hour or so, dozens of geese would come well within range -- some of them just a few feet from our faces -- their big wings set, gliding into our decoys.

And so we readily obliged the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' goal to reduce the growing flock of geese that spend the entire winter in Fergus Falls.

By the time we picked up our decoys at 1 p.m., the dogs had retrieved 14 geese, just one shy of our daily limit.

Large stretches of the Ottertail River remain open in and near Fergus Falls, even through the coldest winters, thanks to a local power plant, dams and fast-moving water.

All that open water has, over the past 20 years, become a magnet for increasing numbers of giant Canada geese that nest across the farm ponds and wetlands of western and northwestern Minnesota. When other lakes and swamps freeze, many of those geese head to Fergus Falls instead of migrating south.

By early December, more than 10,000 geese are spending most of their day in the city. After they run out of grass, they have to head out of town to feed in farmers' fields. Another 15,000 geese still are keeping the nearby Orwell Reservoir ice-free as well, making for a high concentration of huntable birds.

Duluth army heads west

This is the second year that a group of Duluth area hunters has joined Jacobs on his annual trip home for the December goose season.

Jacobs, who lived for a short time in Cloquet, hosted eight of us. Together we shot 45 Canada geese in a day-and-a-half.

But it started slow.

A few geese came close enough to look at our spread but veered off without landing. They apparently saw or heard something they didn't like.

While these may be tame-looking critters in town, the birds quickly regain their keen instincts to avoid trouble when outside the city limits. These geese are hunted hard for four months each fall -- during a special September season, during the regular October-November waterfowl season, and now for eight days in December. They wise up fast to mediocre calling, poorly placed decoys or hunters who aren't concealed.

But not all of the geese snubbed us. The action never got fast that first day, but enough geese flew to keep us busy calling and flagging, especially around 11 a.m. That's when a flock of five big geese circled our massive spread of fake geese, their necks craned, searching for the source of our goose calls below.

This time, we must have done everything right. The geese answered our calls. We were well hidden in our camouflage-covered blinds. The dogs didn't move. And the five geese set their wings to land.

They made the mistake of flying directly in front of all nine of us as they came in to land. And nearly all of us sat up to shoot.

One-by-one, all five geese folded and fell.

Sunset came with no big flurry but at least one last surprise. Just as we were about to pick up decoys, a group of five huge trumpeter swans flew past our decoys just a few feet off the ground. As most of us stopped to admire the big birds, a few noticed a lone Canada goose following in formation at the end of the group.

Someone grabbed a goose call and gave a few clucks. Someone yelled for anybody with a loaded gun to shoot. Even though several of us were standing in the decoys, the goose was coming in to land.

Duluth's Mike Marmon grabbed his 10-gauge, rammed in a single shell and fired just as the bird figured out he was making a huge mistake.

The 11th and final goose of the day fell to the ground.

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