

A Reprint from *Tierra Grande*

CASE OF THE GOBBLED GOLDFISH

BY DAVID S. JONES

Anyone who has ever had a water feature at their home knows they require some upkeep. If it's just a plain pond with some landscaping, that's not too hard. But if you add a waterfall or fountain, you need a pump, and that increases the required maintenance. If you really want a challenge, add fish.

I've had a small pond outside my bedroom window for almost 20 years. At night my wife and I can doze off to the sound of babbling waters cascading down the waterfall. In the daytime, we can watch through the French doors as the goldfish swim in the pond shaded by the overhanging banana trees.

Generations of goldfish have raised families in my pond. Our children grew up watching and feeding the fish. Our four-year-old grandson did too until recently when something fishy happened.

When we left for vacation, there were 30 goldfish in our pond. When we returned two weeks later, there was one. I was unhappy, and my grandson asked where all the fish had gone. I decided to find out.

Thanks to the training I've received from watching episodes of CSI (Crime Scene Investigation) on TV, I knew what clues to look for.

In the cracks of the deck surrounding the pond, I found disturbing forensic evidence — fins, tails and other small body parts. I did not need any DNA analysis to realize this case was more than mere poaching. This was catch-and-don't-release on a grand scale (no pun intended).

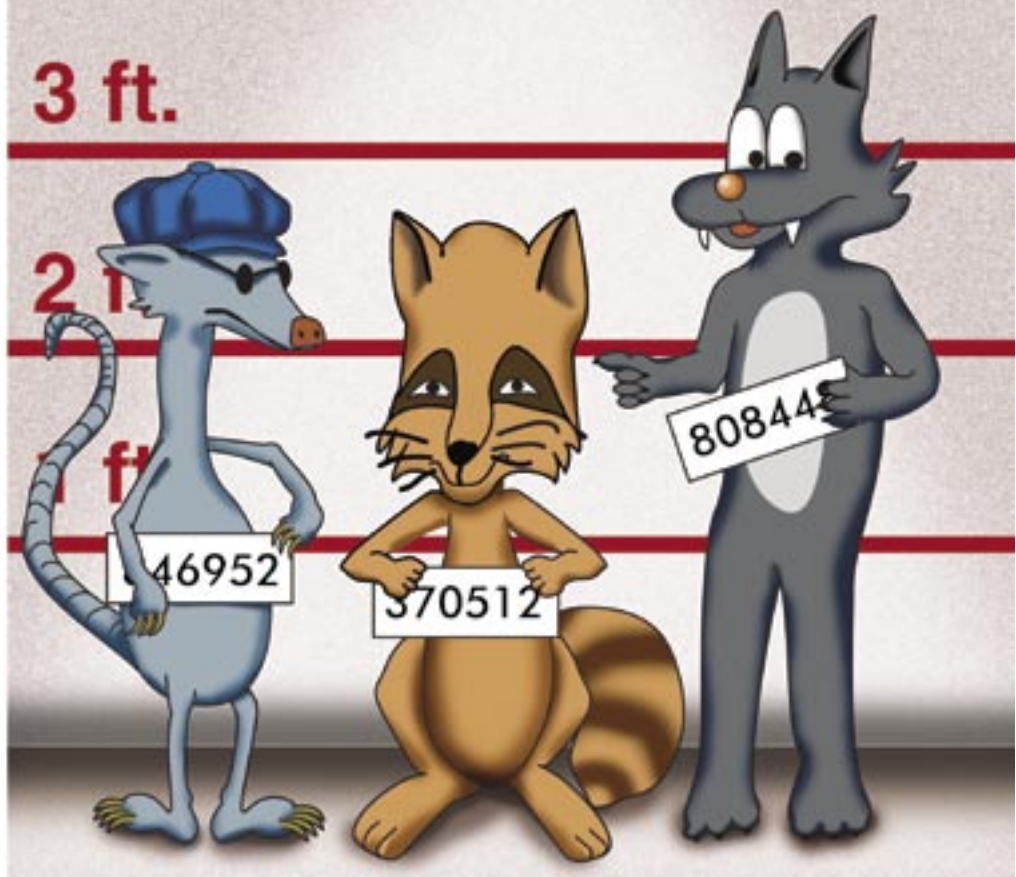
Obviously I could not restock the pond with the perpetrator still on the loose. The first break in the case came when I noticed my neighbor's cat sitting on a rock at the edge of the pond, eyeing the lone remaining goldfish.

The list of suspects grew to two, however, when I heard a noise on the deck one night and looked outside to see a raccoon prowling the crime scene. This had to be the culprit. After all, he was even wearing a mask. And the last fish was gone.

4 ft.

3 ft.

2 ft.



I borrowed a trap and baited it with gourmet chicken-pasta-cranberry salad left over from Thanksgiving. It did not take long to nab a possible "perp," but it wasn't one on the list of usual suspects. My trap had nabbed a possum.

The offending animal was transported outside the city limits and let loose. I rebaited the trap and waited. The next morning the cage held an unhappy raccoon. He (she) was relocated to a pond in the countryside where animals work for a living and don't have the fresh fish served to them.

Over the course of the next week, I caught another raccoon — a very large one and the neighbor's cat. The raccoon was reunited with its country kin, and the cat was paroled with a warning.

While this case is closed, many questions remain about what to do with a water feature that attracts all manner of unwanted varmints. (I never did tell my wife about the snake skin I found there years ago.)

My first thought was to restock the pond with fish and buy a pit bull to guard it. Instead, I plan to raise water lilies in the backyard pond and buy an aquarium for my grandson to enjoy inside.

I've added this story to my list of things-they-never-told-me-about-homownership book that I really need to write someday. ♣

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