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## The Untouchables

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**the UNTOUCHABLES**

**by Karl S. Monroe**

*Uncounted molehills  
scarring the shaggy greensward  
still not a mountain*

Nobody ever comes to Juanita Bay Park to see the moles.<sup>1</sup> They are vermin, fit to be drowned, poisoned, or smashed with the flat of a shovel.

Have you ever seen a mole at Juanita Bay? No, really—have you? I've started asking people, frequent visitors to the park. None has ever seen a mole here, but then, they are not looking. Surprisingly, some of these gentle folk volunteer that they have killed a mole, though not in the park. I'll bet no one has ever seen a mole at Juanita Bay.<sup>2</sup> All we see are the small piles of fresh earth, literally hundreds of them, heaped upon the long-abandoned fairways.

The photographers of Juanita Bay never erect their tripods amid the molehills, hoping to capture a spot of action with their 600-millimeter lenses. They live for the eagles, grebes, and beavers—even the basking western painted turtles. We visitors do not embrace the idea that moles enjoy the protection of the wildlife sanctuary. And Juanita visitors are not alone. Google the word “moles” with “National Geographic” and you'll find no encomia to the endearing qualities of these hardy insectivores. We are a mole-hating nation.

At Juanita Bay Park, the moles have built a stronghold on an upland south of the main path. Well, maybe not a stronghold—how do we know the piles are not decoys against humans, so treacherous for their hacking, flooding, and poisoning? There are benches in this area, but they are intended for taking in the vista of the wetlands and the glistening inlet. You will never see a bench-back memorial to:

*Justin Myopia  
Greatest Friend Ever  
To the Moles of Juanita Bay  
Man, We Really Dig You*

I never met Justin, but you know what they say about his enchantment with moles. It began quite by accident. He was walking in the park when he dropped his glasses, and he fell to his knees to search for them. He found them atop a molehill, where he came face to face with a mole. They found each other entrancing, though Justin later admitted that if he'd been wearing his glasses, he might have thought the mole repulsive. Eventually he was able to distinguish more than 6,000 individual moles from at least 30 generations, entirely by posture, breathing pattern, and body odor. This is what they say, although the story could be apocryphal.

If you can't muster any affection for the moles at Juanita Bay, you could at least try feeling gratitude that they don't increase the foot traffic. Imagine how crowded our park would be if the upshore grassland were occupied by a prairie dog colony! Maybe I could do something to help the moles. I used to think that someday I would count the molehills in the park. When I posted my census, people would begin to take the moles seriously. But I'm too random to carry out such a task. Precision is the watchword:

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<sup>1</sup>Juanita Bay is a small inlet on the eastern shore of Lake Washington, opposite Seattle, and the site of a small nature preserve.

<sup>2</sup>On reflection, I realize I may have been asking the wrong people if they've ever seen a mole at Juanita Bay. The park has a strict leash law, flouted by a few neighbors who slip in via the back entrance to run their dogs on what used to be the ninth fairway. (For about 40 years, this was the location of a nine-hole golf course.) Guess what—that area is relatively free of molehills!

You can't just wander from hill to hill with a tally sheet. Wait a minute! Have I already counted this one?

For awhile I thought the park could be divided into sectors, like a potential subdivision. A high school biology class could count the hills and try to establish a ratio of hills to population. That poses problems too. An adult mole can create between 50 and 100 new hills a month. As I examine the molehills, I see that only a few consist of fresh earth. Most are in some state of degradation. Any proper census would have to develop a system of grading hills by age. And it couldn't be done in one dramatic visit. After you take your initial count, you'll have to make frequent visits, hoping to calculate the rate of new hill formation so you can extrapolate growth of population. As a biology teacher, how would you like to explain that even if your students flunked the latest standardized test, their knowledge of moles is unprecedented?

So my plans for a census have fallen into a deep sand trap. But I want to do something for these harried little creatures, because their hills are under attack. Flattened by huge waffle stompers. Branded by large canine paw prints. Bisected by mountain-bike tire tracks. Kicked and scattered. Alone among the creatures in this park, moles are responsible for their own protection.

People, this is a nature preserve! These are not pests; in some regions, they are relatively rare.<sup>3</sup> They are insectivores, but they favor earthworms and enjoy vegetation. And they're busy, consuming 70 percent of their body weight daily to maintain that frame of seven to nine inches. They have a name—they're Townsend's moles. They're named for a 19th-century naturalist-explorer, John Kirk Townsend, who joined an 1834 trek to the Oregon Territory. Eight birds and mammals are named for Townsend. I guess that would make the mole kissing cousins with Townsend's warbler, also seen at Juanita Bay.

I've wracked my brain to come up with an idea that could work even a small change in the hatred our species harbors for moles. My friends—even my family!—dismiss my ideas as laughable, but in the spirit of moledom, I remain undeterred. Some of my ideas are whimsical, but whimsy is off the mark. We need seriousness of purpose, a sense of discipline. And a card that people won't be ashamed to carry. Please see the next page to find out how you can join us.



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<sup>3</sup>In 1999, the British Columbia Ministry of Wildlife published a paper on threats to an isolated population of Townsend's moles in the province, lamenting the cost of protecting the creatures and the challenge of educating the public to respect them.

Membership Application

Justin Myopia Tunneling Brigade

Mole name<sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

Post Office Box No.<sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever killed a mole?<sup>6</sup> Under what circumstances? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(Use additional pages if necessary.)

List your three favorite mole traits.<sup>7</sup>

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

How will you act to improve mole habitat in your neighborhood?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteers are urgently needed to further the brigade's work. So far we have two action companies, both nonviolent and anonymous. Please check one or both.

\_\_\_\_\_ **The Picket Fence Company.** Post cute, tiny (and biodegradable!) picket fences on neighborhood molehills, with banner: *Home of Mr. and Mrs. Mole.*<sup>8</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_ **Dam the Hose Company.** Deposit bright-colored, biodegradable plugs in garden hoses, with streamer: *Save the moles!*

Please complete and mail to:

Justin Myopia Tunneling Brigade  
P.O. Box 8" Under  
Kirkland, WA 98033

<sup>4</sup>Anonymity should be our watchword. Always, always test the air, like a mole reaching the surface.

<sup>5</sup>No street addresses, please! Must we elaborate on the obvious? We must avoid retaliation!

<sup>6</sup>We wish you no pain. But remember—confession is the best way to rid ourselves of shame.

<sup>7</sup>If your answer is "I don't know," don't worry. Developing affection for our beneficiary can take time. The most popular choices so far: myopia, industriousness, native species, no ridiculous gender specialization, and humility.

<sup>8</sup>Banners distributed by our LGBT subgroup say: Home of Mrs. and Mrs. Mole