

Inflation hits The 12 days of Christmas (08, 12, 12)

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As we approach Christmas and its demanding Christmas shopping, it appears that like most other items that we pay for, the Christmas cost has sharply risen over that of last year. In fact, according to the so-called Christmas Price Index, all of the myriad items listed in the popular "12 Days of Christmas" tune now amount to a whopping \$107,000! That's enough to frighten any shopper, even those who shop online to avoid the crowds!



To be precise, there are 364 items repeated throughout "The Twelve Days of Christmas" carol, and you will pay a steep 6.1 percent increase this year. Fortunately, six items mentioned haven't gone up at all in price: maids-a-milking, ladies dancing, lords-a-leaping, calling birds, turtle doves and the ever popular partridge that lives in the pear tree. Eight maids-a-milking still cost a mere \$58 as the minimum wage has not risen. For this we can thank our conservative government, eager to keep the working class in its place at the bottom of the ladder.

Twelve drummers drumming (\$2,775.50) and eleven pipers piping (\$2,562) might also be considered bargains compared to the expensive seven swans, which will set you back \$7,000! Nine ladies dancing (if they belong to a ballet company) will amount to \$6,294.03.

Apparently, the nasty 2011 drought caused the prices of some birds to soar, partly because of corn and other feed cost escalations. The geese are up 29.6 percent, and swans 11 percent. Be thankful that the song makes no reference to Indian elephants listed as endangered species, as the population has declined by at least 50% over the last three generations. I hate to think what it might cost to feed those prized pachyderms. Fortunately the song does not refer to costly furs such as mink or ermine.

However, the price of a pear tree is now \$189.99, a huge 11.8 percent jump from last year's \$169.99. Five gold rings also jumped 16.3 percent this year, to \$750 (see earlier column about my dentist), and three French hens are now \$165 instead of \$150.

The aforementioned \$15 partridge remains the cheapest item on the list with swans comprising the most expensive at \$1,000 each. I suppose you might try an inexpensive route by taking your spouse to Stratford to take in a play and thereby merely view some pretty swans on the Avon River, as the tickets will only set you back \$200, and if you add a few more dollars for a restaurant and gas, it truly is a cheap alternative.

Last-minute shoppers on the Internet will pay a bit more for the gifts. Buying one set of the core items in each verse costs \$24,431 in traditional stores this year, but \$40,440 online. Why the big difference? Did you ever try to ship a live animal? (Aside from grandchildren) Part of that difference is the extra expense of shipping the live birds. In addition, Internet costs rose 1.5 percent compared to last year.

This valuable information comes to us from PNC Financial Services Group Inc. which regularly checks jewelry stores, dance companies, pet stores and other sources to compile the list.

As you can readily see, Christmas is rapidly getting out of reach for seniors and retirees, and it's amazing with so many people running to lead political parties these days, that we have not been offered any Christmas tax breaks.

I think as an alternative to these expensive items, the astute senior might instead



purchase the carol itself from iTunes where one might download it for a mere 99 cents. That and strategically placed mistletoe should do the trick for you and your "sweetheart." Who wants to clean up after all of those animals? Have you ever seen what Canadian geese leave behind? It's not a pretty sight.

Miriam and I have evolved into simple stocking presents at Christmas. True, my old hockey socks are full of holes, but they have been stretched nicely over the years by my shin

guards. Miriam seems to stretch matters out also with panty hose, but it's amazing how quickly they fill with a few jars of peanut butter!