

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



A strange contest takes place here every morning.

The activity kicks off about daybreak, with the high-pitched "cock-a-doodle-do" of a rooster ushering in the morning.

And, almost as if in echo, a more deeply-pitched crow bounces off the still, quiet air.

Our local Crow-Off has gone into another round.

Until recently, only one rooster voice greeted the dawn's coming. Then a newcomer stalked into the wooded housing development which adjoins our pasture. A sort of diminutive, half-pint chicken, this boisterous fellow is probably at least partial bantam lineage. What he lacks in size he makes up

for in vocal ability.

None of our good neighbors seems to claim him. We suspect his original home was on an adjoining farm, where the small, pet flock gradually diminished in number to this lone rooster. Seeking companionship to his lonely life, he came scouting out the few remaining chickens -- like two -- still pecking around our place.

Our own old, tough, but still very handsome rooster hasn't taken kindly to this neighborhood newcomer. As they both get to crowing insults at each other every morning, our golden-feathered fellow edges farther and farther out into the pasture, hurling chicken-type insults toward

his challenger.

"Just try and move in on my territory!" he seems to be daring the smaller bird.

Now, he has even more reason to defend his turf, with the hatching of a nest of a half-dozen fluffy baby chicks to our sole hen. That's what remains from a flock that ten years ago numbered some three-dozen assorted hens, chicks and roosters.

Until a week or two ago, there was a second hen. She, too, rose to the seasonal instinct to nest. It was her choice of site that probably ended her life.

This hen squatted down to hatch in a round bale feeder on the sun-baked west side of the old bank barn. Cows and heifers tearing the bales apart to eat continuously covered her with hay and munched their way around her. And, she was repeatedly evicted by The Farmer, who removed her every time he refilled the feeder with another bale.

The unseasonably hot, dry weather which has continued to plague our area the past two months finally took its toll of at least one chicken. Steadfastly, with single purpose, this hen simply refused to move to a more sensible spot, or even to leave long enough to eat or drink. She literally baked herself in the

dreadful heat.

Much as we praise and admire Mother Nature, instinctive behavior is not always pretty, or even sensible. Sometimes it seems downright cruel.

For instance, we recently intervened in another very natural, but un-pretty, instinctive behavior that threatened this year's Canada goose hatch at the pond.

Most farm ponds offer hospitable living conditions for snapping turtles. Over the years, friends and relatives have occasionally caught some whopper turtles from ours. These snappers boast nasty, beak-like "choppers" that reportedly can bite through a decent-sized stick and do major damage to a finger or toe -- given the opportunity.

One of their favorite meals is newly-hatched ducklings and

goslings, which they grab from underwater and pull under to drown and down. When turtles snagged two of our five baby geese, within mere hours of their hatching, we decided the pond's balance of nature was hanging lop-sided against the geese. There is plenty of other stuff for those turtles to eat besides the baby geese.

Of the two turtles we snagged, one was moved to another body of water and the other ended up in a soup pot. More remain.

I suspect, if he could pull it off somehow, our resident rooster would figure out some way to introduce his crow-off challenger to the remaining snappers.

But when roosters swim, we'll know the balance of nature has gone completely wacko.

Contestants Needed For Poultry Queen Pageant

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — The Pennsylvania and Lancaster County Poultry Association seek contestants for the annual Poultry Queen Pageant scheduled for August 2, at 6:15 p.m.

Applicants must have a knowledge or sincere interest in the poultry industry, have finished their junior year in high school and be unmarried. Contestants must be willing to participate in parades, banquets, and school promotions.

In addition to being the Lancas-

ter County Poultry Queen, the winner also will be crowned Pennsylvania Poultry Queen. She will receive a \$500 scholarship or \$300 in cash, a \$150 wardrobe fund, and numerous other prizes. The alternate queen will receive a \$300 scholarship or \$150 in cash. All contestants will receive a watch from Koser Jewelers, Mount Joy.

For more information, call before July 12, Debra Wolgemuth, (717) 653-1249 or Bev Ginder (717) 367-3833.

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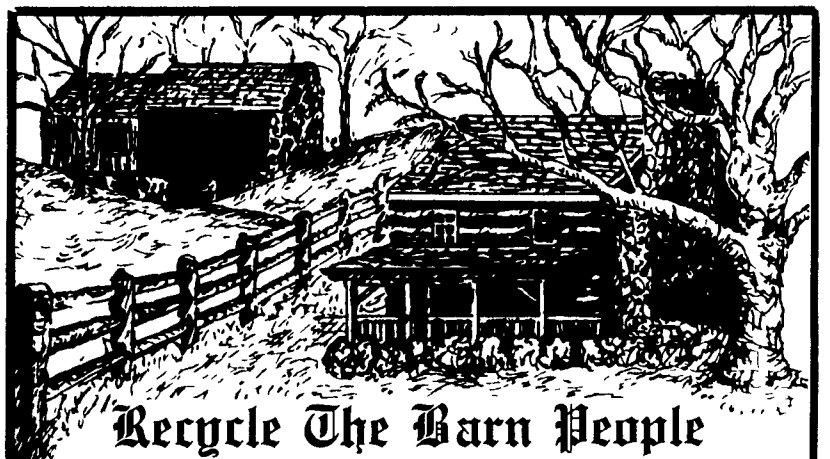
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