



They're back!
They arrived early one evening, as dusk was settling its shadows over the meadows. Sounding their unmistakable, trademark honks, the geese sailed in over the maple trees, circled around the bottom cornfield and splashed-landed on the big pond, where warming temperatures had wiped out the shallow ice cover.

What a racket—calling and flapping and splashing and paddling around—these seven full-grown, beautiful Canada geese created. You could almost make out their gleeful announcement, like children arriving home after school, shouting "We're home!"

Though we can't be certain, we suppose at least several of the

arrivals are part of last spring's hatch from the mid-pond goose nest. They seemed familiar enough with the surroundings to move in closer the next morning, easing into the little pond which is just a few steps below the house and dairy barn. In the thick cattail growth along the water's perimeter, the geese find all sorts of gourmet goodies to fatten upon.

After dining among the cattails, they move up onto the pond bank to graze the sheltered spot beneath the willow tree. Here, the grass is already pushing tender, green sprouts—a late winter delicacy. Then, when their bellies are full, the big birds plop down on the soft grass to snooze in the sun, while at least one of the larger males stands

watch.
Occasionally, the little flock will edge its way up the slight hill toward the dairy barn, where there are always bits of corn scattered about from hauling feed to the cows. As brave and relatively tame as these geese already are, it would not be much of a surprise to find them strolling into the barn to snatch corn from the cows.

Several days after the geese returned, a few pairs of mallard ducks arrived. While the geese routed another small flock of their own kind that attempted to land on the pond, they've tolerated the mallards so far.

This peace and calm is expected to last just until a mature pair of geese decides to nest. Then, we'll endure a couple of days of honking, chasing and general water-fowl warfare, until only the toughest, most persistent pair wins the territorial squabble and nesting rights.

Also returning—just when, where and how it pleases, thank you—is our semi-resident great blue heron.

Elephants aren't the only animals that never forget. The tall, lanky and leggy bird promptly upon its return took up watch on the bank of the little pond, where it could be found hanging out a couple of hours every day last fall.

Object of the heron's stalking is our growing school of colorful goldfish, offspring of a pair released into the pond a few years ago by a friend. Brilliantly colored, with a tendency to lounge about near the top of the water, these few-inch-long fish make easy pickings for the heron's

appetite for sushi.
While weather predicting has traditionally been the responsibility of the groundhog population, around here, we're more likely to put stock in the return of the geese. And they seem to be staking out territory early this year. Start oiling your lawnmower.

Apple Tree Grafting Workshop

WYOMISSING (Berks) — Have you ever wanted to reproduce a good old apple tree that you have now or remember from your past? Join Wayne Myers on Saturday, March 18, beginning at 12:00 p.m. at the Berks County Heritage Center barn to learn how to reproduce that old tree.

This workshop will begin with a slide presentation on grafting, orchards and backyard tree growing. Then Myers, owner of Faith Orchards in Douglassville, and members of the Backyard Fruit Growers will instruct participants on how to graft. Each participant must bring along a 12-inch by 3/8-inch round piece of last year's growth wood and a very sharp knife. There will be 30-40 modern and heirloom varieties to choose

from.
Each participant will go home with two rootstocks and choice of wood, plus hands-on help and lots of useful information.

Registration is required by Monday, March 13, and prepayment of the \$12 fee is required. For more information or to register, please call the Heritage Center office at (610) 374-8839 or by sending your name, address, phone number and check, made payable to Wayne Myers. Mail to Berks County Parks & Recreation Department, 2201 Tulpehocken Road, Wyomissing, PA 19610.

The Berks County Heritage Center, operated by the Berks County Parks & Recreation Department, is located on Red Bridge Road, 1 mile north of the Reading Airport off Rte. 183.

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