

Nice weather for ducks. And geese.
So I thought late one recent evening, dragging my rubber barn boot-clad feet through soggy, knee-high grass enroute to the pond. Darkness was rapidly gathering, nudged by the thickening cover of heavy, gray clouds hanging overhead. A few droplets of rain that had begun a bit earlier were multiplying into a steady, bone-chilling drizzle.
Forecast was for yet another night of rain, which would turn the cattle lots even muddier, low spots in the fields standing with yet deeper puddles and the weeds taking over the flower beds with the speed of new Mexico's wildfires enveloping whole mountainsides of brush and pines.
Ironic. If only we could share with those devastated by wildfires

our more-than-abundant moisture which has kept the manure truck, the compactor, the tillage equipment parked — the equivalent of equipment twiddling its thumbs when it should be hard at work. Yet, knowing but a few weeks can stand between Swamp City and Dust Bowl conditions, I'm hesitant to complain excessively about the wealth of wet weather.
But, this journey to the pond in the faltering remaining light was not to dwell upon the costly delays being created by the soggy of this year's busiest time of the farm year. Rather, it was to rejoice in the annual event which makes the pond a favorite destination of spare moments in late spring and early summer.
The Canada goose family was back on the pond.
Four tiny goslings had hatched

just days before, little brown and yellow bodies bobbing along the water between their fiercely protective parents. But the parents, or at least one of them, probably had hatched at the pond and grown up here, since they were quite tame. Just a day after the babies had hatched, the goose couple had brought them alongside the pier — where we waited — anticipating a handout.
Then, one day later, I glanced at the pond from the house, saw the goose pair gliding across the pond. And the wide gap of water between the two was empty. A closer look with the binoculars confirmed my dread.
The baby geese had disappeared. Probably a fox, the same sly one that has ripped off several

nests of baby guineas over the years and quite a few baby geese as well.
I stood at the back door, binoculars in hand, and fought back an urge to cry. When I relayed the sad news to The Farmer, he promptly headed to the pond, to search for possible evidence to confirm the loss. Not even a feather nor a speak of dusty-colored gosling down could be found.
Maybe it was our own fault, I reasoned. Maybe these "wild" creatures were getting too tame. A heavy-duty guilt trip.
Next morning, The Farmer II arrived to help with chores.
"Hey Mom, are you missing some geese?" he asked. "They're over at our place."
The sunny morning became

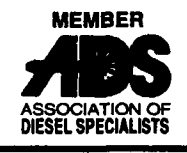
even brighter.
"We also have baby ducks," he added.
Now, on this drizzly, damp evening, we spot the pair of geese at the far side of the pond. In the vague light, the pond's surface rippled by shimmering reflections, it looks as though the goose pair has babies sheltered between them. Only two? Then, at the lower edge, we spot another pair. With four babies. Two goose families! A duck paddles away in the farthest corner, a tiny convoy of bobbing bodies behind her as well.
Our pond runneth over. And from the weedy edge of the water next to the pier, a deep "kar-uumph" erupts.
Even the bullfrogs sound pleased.



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