

**On Being a
Farm Wife
(and other
hazards)**

Joyce Bupp



Birds of a feather flock together.

So we've been told.

Some do. Some don't. Not by our observations, anyway.

Bunches of Canada geese have been flocking together lately, noisily honking their way over the farm daily at sunrise and sunset. Numbers of these big birds have escalated locally, after a hatching season during which every little area pond and puddle hosted hatchlings.

The adults and adolescents have now clustered into large, feathered community groupings,

perfectly at home hereabouts and with no apparent inclination to winter in milder climates. Where their daily commute takes them, we're not sure. But only rarely do any plunk down on the pond to hang out before heading home to sleep nights at the municipal water supply's Lake Redman reservoir a few miles from here.

Unlike the gregarious geese, other bird regulars appear to be loners, designed by Nature to do their own thing.

One frequents the goldfish pond, standing so still and erect it blends with the rushes and cat-

tails. Fish fanatic that it is, the great blue heron haunts the water's edge, ready to plunge its sword-like bill into the first inattentive fish which meanders by. Occasionally we spot a flash of orange, as this expert fisherman swipes and swallows a good-sized goldfish.

Mid-to-late summer brings the return of a few solitary transients at the pond, green herons which usually arrive toward dusk for their catch-of-the-day dinner entree. Unlike the great blue, these little herons prefer to hide-in-waiting along the multiflora roses and willows lining the pond banks.

Sometimes we hear the guttural call of another fresh-fish fanatic before we spot its handsome blue-gray and white feathered markings. Another pond regular, the kingfisher prefers to eyeball potential dinner candidates from high up, either from the top of the martin house or in the willow tree which hangs over the water. Luckily, the goldfish reproduce abundantly, providing up plentiful supplies of "sushi" for all the fisherbirds.

Lately — and only temporarily

we hope — a flock of seven half-grown birds are hanging out in the yard. Those guinea chicks The Farmer brought home weeks ago graduated from dog-crate housing to a temporary-fenced-mini-yard to daylight freedom.

They declared their independence a little earlier than we planned, after sneaking out a corner of the fence not well closed after I fed them one morning. A brief hunt found them sunning themselves in a secluded corner of the yard under an overgrown, overhang of forsythia hedge. I scoffed, but The Farmer predicted their retreat to the fenced area come evening. Sure enough, as the sun was sinking behind the barn, all seven were scratching around the feed bits inside the fence left flung open.

Except when I headed to secure the fence against potential overnight visitors — foxes, hawks, and owls — they had vanished. While they were taking little flights, none of them had polished their airborne skills enough to escape veteran predators.

Running against a deadline to shower and head for an evening

meeting, I went guinea stalking once more. This time I found them on the other side of the brushy forsythia, preparing to roost up on the yard fence. Some were already perched there. Other were making fluttering attempts. One was plain-down missing.

A guinea call sounds like a screeching wagon wheel — over and over. While the missing one was unseen, it was not unheard. During the next 10 minutes I spent trying to corral the noisy runaway, two very interested, very talented bird-catching cats turned up to "help." Which only added to the distressed guinea's screeching. When the other six flew from the fence and fled into their pen from the commotion, I slammed the cage door shut.

Finally, the distressed guinea remembered it could fly, dive-bombed into a weed patch at the chain link fence, where I snagged it. The irate bird — the largest one of the flock and probably a rooster — continued to scream while I delivered it to safekeeping with its buddies.

So much for gratitude.

I hope these birds of a feather soon get their act together.

Manure For Your Garden

SPRINGFIELD (Delaware Co.) — Delaware County 4-H has mixed manure from horses, sheep, pigs, chickens and turkeys combined with straw and/or wood shavings. On Saturday, Nov. 11 from 10 a.m.-noon, gardeners are invited to visit the 4-H Farm and take some home. Bring your own containers (strong plastic trash bags work well). 4-H Volunteers and members will direct you for parking

and loading the manure.

The 4-H Farm is located at 395 Bishop Hollow Road, Newtown Square. From the intersection of Rt. 3 and Rt. 252, proceed west on Rt. 3 to the first traffic light; turn left on Bishop Hollow Road. Follow Bishop Hollow Road for approximately 1.5 miles. Watch for sign for Garrett Williamson Foundation — after the sign, turn right on the following driveway and to proceed to

the large bank barn. Please note — the 4-H Farm and Education Center is open to the public for specific public events only.

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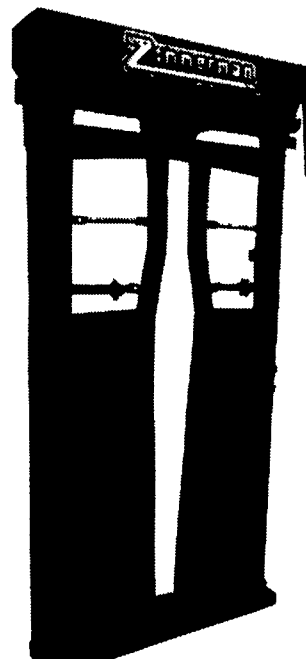
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