

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Most days, life here is a bit like living on the animal planet TV channel.

Our shows are predominantly black-and-white, with Holstein cows scattered at various places around the farmstead. Mostly, that's the barns and pastures, but sometimes the backyard, or out in the middle of a field, strolling down the road or trashing the alleyways in the calf pen. Their care and feeding, milking and cleanup, vet care, health maintenance, breeding, and various-related chores are all-consuming.

While the cows are the backbone of our animal planet life, it's the bit players that often provide the most entertainment.

Parked on the bird feeder one

morning early last week was a squirrel, hunkered down and stuffing sunflower seeds into its fuzzy gray face with a vengeance. It's the first squirrel to frequent the feeder in nearly a year, when the prior resident bushy-tail had a run-in with one of the barn cats. And lost.

While the squirrel was stuffing its cheeks, the two hen "wild" turkeys scrounged around under the feeder, pecking up dropped seeds. Each sat on a nest of eggs for several weeks, with no results, so The Farmer shooed them out of the hatching pen, back to a life of free foraging. They promptly showed up the next morning outside the calf barn. Foraging for calf feed.

While the hens tried their best

to do the mothering bit, the gobbler suffers with an identity crisis. Despite having been penned with the hens for a couple of weeks, he returned to his old haunt after release. A weedy patch between the barns, lounging around with a couple of ancient chickens, is where the gobbler prefers to spend his days.

Sometimes the hens buddy up with the pair of guinea fowl. But turkeys are much too slow and plodding, and get left in the dust by the hyperactive guineas. The guineas also spend a good bit of time cozied up to the pickup top-per currently parked on the ground outside the shop. Apparently they enjoy socializing with the two identical guineas they see in the reflective windows.

Guineas are our animal planet comedians.

Daily, I've been shooing out of the yard two dozen Canada geese that shinny up over a large wooden beam edging the lawn from the sloping pond bank, cross a flower bed and graze on the grass. With a meadow and several ponds available, these birds insist on lounging, lawnside, under the big willow tree. A goose "fence" I put there of brush and limbs deterred their crossing. By at least a minute or two.

Along with all these is the crew of assorted barn cats that keep us company doing chores, a slew of backyard songbirds including cardinals, blue jays and several scrappy doves, whose behavior is more like the hawk that lives high above the woods. There's even a good-sized snapping turtle that parades around the farm and a fat rabbit in the back yard, our own tortoise-and-hare pair.

While we generally co-exist with all our animal planet cast, we do have an occasional close encounter of the scary sort.

Foxes are a familiar sight, finding easy living on the plentiful roadkill along the interstate highway cutting through the farm. Spying one poking around the backyard on a recent morning, though, is unnerving. Soon after, our daughter reported that a fox had been sitting on her patio, where their little children regularly play.

We agreed that this fox was getting far too familiar, and likely had a problem. Erratic behav-

ior and loss of fear by normally-wild animals are often symptomatic of rabies.

As we enjoyed a snack on the porch that evening, the fox suddenly came trotting into the yard. The Farmer is a fair shot, and moments later, ended the strange fox's invasion.

A bit later, I found a phone message left earlier by a neighbor, alerting us to the bizarre actions of a fox that had been roaming the yards of our wooded development next door, peering in glass doors and generally acting aggressive. Police and wildlife officials had told them to have someone shoot the fox and dispose of it. Could we do that if we spotted it?

A quick return call thanked her for the warning and assured her that the fox was already history.

All of us in our local animal planet neighborhood rested easier that night.

Mercer County Grange Fair Offers Variety Of Activities

MERCER (Mercer Co.)—This year at the Mercer County Grange Fair activities include the Annual Guys and Dolls Contest, Monday, July 7 beginning at 6 p.m. The judges will select a girl and boy for first and second place in four different age groups: toddlers, ages 3 thru 5, ages 6 thru 9, and ages 10 thru 12. The Little Girls should have with them a doll and the boys a stuffed animal. All winners will receive engraved trophies along with prize money. Judging will be on charm and composure of the child. The child may wear

must be one page submitted from the Official Mercer County Grange Fair Coloring Book. Entries will be received for this contest on Monday, July 7 from 10 a.m.-8 p.m. in the exhibit building.

On Wednesday an Animal Dress-Up Contest will be conducted at 6 p.m. in the Horse Show ring. This contest is open to livestock exhibitors of fair animals to include cattle, sheep, goats, and rabbits. Prizes will be awarded in six different classes: fastest time, most original, prettiest, ugliest, funniest, and most creative.

place winners must be able to ride in the Fair Parade on Tuesday evening.

The Fun and Safety Poster Contest is open to three different age groups: age 8-11, age 12-14, and age 15-18. The theme of the poster must be "Fun and Safety on the Fair Grounds." Students should use this theme on their poster and illustrate the interdependence between riders and rides. Poster size must be 14 1/2 x 22 inches, equivalent to one-half of a standard poster board. Posters will be evaluated on use of the theme, visual appearance, and creativity in relation to exhibitor's age.

The winning poster of each age group will be entered in the Fun Safety Poster Contest at the Pennsylvania State Farm Show, January 2004. Entries will be received for this contest on Monday, July 7 from 10 a.m.-8 p.m. in the exhibit building.

There are four age groups in the Coloring Book Contest: ages 2-4, ages 5-8, ages 9-13, and ages 14 and up including adults. Coloring books are available from any member of the Fair Board or by calling (724) 748-4007. Entries

The Annual Pet Parade will be conducted Thursday, July 10 in the Horse Show ring. Only children 12 years and under are permitted to enter. Prizes will be awarded in three different divisions.

Bring your family to the fair on Saturday afternoon from 2 p.m.-5 p.m. for contests such as the Pie Eating Contest, Apple Peeling Contest, Cow Chip Toss, Potato Relay Contest, Baled Hay Stacking, Little Tractor Pull, Egg Toss, Football Throw, Milk Chugging Contest, Watermelon Eating Contest, Treasure Hunt in Sawdust Pile, Baby Photo Contest, and the Pet Photo Contest. If you are really lucky you will win a \$50 gift certificate from Reyer's Shoe Store by being the winner in the Stinky Sneaker Contest.

The Mercer County Grange Fair is July 6-July 12 at the fairgrounds one mile east of Mercer on Route 58.

For additional information please call Virginia Richardson at (724) 748-4007, Bill Straub at (724) 588-6134, or Bert Montgomery at (724) 376-3546.

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