

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



You, turkey, you. That was the "gist" of the mumbling under my breath, while tossing calf feed leftovers to the hen and gobbler pair hanging around for a handout one recent morning.

Our gobbler has grown into his role as the farm's dominant fowl, in size and puffed-up self-importance. His companion hen was the bird we unexpectedly found, a few weeks ago, hunkered down in a flowerbed on a nest overflowing with eggs. Snuggled in under a wide peony clump and several tall tiger-lily stalks, her natural coloration blended in perfectly. The Farmer had noticed her slinking into the perennial patch, but not coming back out.

After hatching, we got only

perfunctory glances of her family, which she had promptly relocated to an untilled (read weedy) corner beyond the lawn. Field equipment is parked there temporarily during the busy season, along with a supply of round hay bales for heifer feeding. A small patch of sunflower-planted wild-life cover nearby enhances the site as a haven for birds, including turkey hatchlings.

However, the adventurous mother had not been satisfied to stay in that relatively safe area. Instead, in a fit of incredibly poor timing, she led her poults up the hill into an alfalfa strip, just before the tractor and haybine began cutting swaths of third-cutting hay. In the high alfalfa, of course, they were totally hidden.

By the time the hen erupted into flight right at the tractor, it was already too late for the chicks.

It was a sad day.

Still missing several days after that disappointment was our second hen, daughter of the other from her first hatch last spring. A neighbor had reported seeing a turkey in our neighboring wooded housing development, beyond the pastures, some time ago, so we puzzled if she was gone.

And so, on that morning, watching the pair picking at leftover feed, I was puzzling over the whereabouts of the absent third bird. That turkey.

Shortly after finishing calf feeding and cleanup chores, I detoured around the garden for a few tomatoes. With absolutely no warning, a hen turkey suddenly exploded up into the air from the tangled row, winging by the front of my face. She landed merely feet away, at the garden's edge, then just stood there, quietly clucking a turkey's "perking" sounds.

Several stunned seconds passed before I realized she wasn't going anywhere and was, in fact, calling a brood back together. Backtracking out of the

garden confirmed several tiny pouts milling about, promptly disappearing at the motherly instructions into a grassy strip between the garden and cornfield.

One small turkey poult had somehow managed during the flurry to land upside down on the stony field road along the garden, and lay there, tiny twiggy legs flailing at the air. Knowing a couple of cats were at my heels, I slowly knelt to the stony roadbed, leaned forward, reached out and flipped the hatchling back upright.

In that split-second of time, mother turkey launched her 10-pound or so body directly in the air toward my face. I ducked. She sailed barely out over my head, wheeled around and was almost instantly back with the chicks, indignantly leading them off into the cornfield and away from the two-legged invader and feline friends.

Though she could have very easily raked my face, my eyes, my head with her extremely sharp toenails, the hen had touched not a hair on my head. She obviously meant me no harm, but the message was clear: back off!

Spying on the little family later with field glasses, as they made brief appearances outside grassy cover areas, we got a count of at least eight. Following days of flooding downpours, the number had dropped to two.

Somehow it seems a bird aggressive enough to attack a human many times her size would also instinctively find safe, drier spots to shelter her little ones. On the other hand, we probably don't need 10 turkeys hanging out in the calf nursery — or even backyard birdfeeder they love to frequent.

You, turkey, you.

Brown Bag Alert

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — If your child chooses to carry a lunch to school this year, you may be interested in knowing the results of a study done by the eighth grade nutrition classes at Lebanon School District.

In class discussion the Department of Health guidelines stated that refrigerated foods can develop harmful bacteria if left out of the refrigerator for more than two hours. Students voiced a concern about their lunches which were stored in lockers all morning. They knew that refrigerated food should not be left in the "danger zone" (40 to 140°F) for more than two hours or bacteria develops causing minor to serious stomach upsets. They also knew that most lunches were made by 7:30 a.m. and not eaten until 11:40 a.m. or later, a span of well over four hours.

Armed with thermometers, the students recorded temperatures

of "study lunches" that had been placed in various lockers on the sixth floor. Half of the lunches tested included a frozen drink box with the sandwich.

The study lasted five days and showed that the sandwich lunches reached the internal locker temperature of 70°F by about 9:30 a.m. The sandwich and frozen drink lunches in most cases did not go bad by 11:30 a.m. Though this was still in the "danger zone," the inclusion of the frozen drink box made a significant difference in the amount of time the sandwich was at the higher temperature.

Use of a cold package, a plastic bag filled with ice, or an insulated bag is another way to keep a lunch temperature low. Some brown baggers freeze certain kinds of sandwiches which then thaw just in time for eating.

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