



TattleTails & Tidbits



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The Colors Return

Winter is drawing to a close. The landscape turns from a frequent sea of white, then a sea of mud, into a patchwork of both pastel and vibrant hues, as grass turns a vibrant green, trees sprout delicate greens, buds spring from the earth and burst into their chosen colors, red breasts appear among returning birds, and, overhead, V-formations of geese honk a celebration of this rite of passage from winter to spring.

This winter was a light one for us here. Not much snow. Not too much arctic cold. But lots of rain and mud. The change between this last winter and winters of the past is tangible. Yet, the onset of spring remains dependable, and we happily welcome the sprouting daffodils and tulips and seas of greens, grateful for winter darkness to fade as sunshine and warmth return.

In Kigercat Hall the cats can now spend hours out on their newly renovated enclosed porches, avidly watching birds or just lounging in the sun. The horses can go out into their pastures and take energetic rolls in the great spring mud, then sport their coats of mud as they come back into the barn, signaling for sure that they had a good time. And soon green and lush grass will appear, and the horses will once again be able to contentedly graze.

As Life dependably sprouts anew around us, our hopes for the sprouting of all future seasons and all Life can sprout and grow as well. Let's all nurture the growth of seeds that have been planted, and the beauties to be found along the paths ahead of us on this our journey upon planet Earth.

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I Just Wanted To Say "Hi"

by Bonnie Reynolds

Recently we had to euthanize a horse. A gentle, elderly mare. This was done with reticence and great sadness. She had come to us with a pasture-mate after many years in that pasture, and at the pleading of a neighbor after the death of their owner. We knew after the first examination of the mare by our veterinarian that her time with us would be limited --- that, all too soon, we would be faced with the necessity of helping her cross over. Because her front hooves and ankles were virtually disintegrating – and there was no way to reverse the damage caused by years of founder or to stop the disintegration and fracturing from continuing. (The saying, “Strong as a horse,” is in many ways a real misstatement. Horses are actually among the most delicate and easily “broken” of animals. The four spindly little legs, and complicated feet composed of a whole bunch of little bones, holding up a thousand to two-thousand-pound pounds of body, are all too frequently the first things to go, condemning the horse to death.)



But we stretched out her time with us as long as possible, the staff providing special wrappings of her ankles and feet each day, and with medications to help dull the pain that she had to increasingly endure. I fed her carrot chunks each morning and evening, treats that she whinnied her excitement about each time that she saw me coming, and that caused her to gaze at me lovingly as she chewed. While Dawn, an animal communicator as you all know, paid the mare special attention and talked with her each day, monitoring the horse’s own attitudes and opinions toward her daily worsening condition and the approach of the inevitable decision time.

When that time came – when the disintegration had become so complete that no painkillers could shield from agony, and the hour was set for the put-down, I chickened out, and wasn’t there. Dawn though, stood bravely beside her at the last.

One week later, at 5 PM, I had come out of the barn, closing the barn door behind me. I had just completed my evening routine of giving special treats to Lucy Goose, the chickens and the ducks – which was also the time when I would have been doling out the carrot chunks – and, sitting there in the snow outside of the door, just about six feet from me, looking intently up at me, was a wild rabbit.

I was shocked. The bunny did not seem at all frightened by my appearance, or the clatter of the closing barn door. It just sat there, seemingly at ease, showing no intent to run away. Indeed, its behavior seemed downright friendly, and intentional. Now ... anyone who has crossed the path of a wild rabbit knows that they don’t just sit there acting as though they want to be friends with an approaching human. No. Rather, they rapidly make themselves scarce.

For some moments we remained there, staring at one another. I kept expecting the bunny to run away. Instead, it almost seemed ready to come toward me. Carefully, I backed away, and quietly got into my car. I then drove away ever so slowly, worried, by the bunny’s behavior, that it would try to follow me.

It was a few hours later, at 8 PM, after her own nightly routine of doing the final closedown of the barn, when Dawn telephoned. “The weirdest thing just happened! I had just come out of the barn and closed the door, and there sat this wild rabbit, just staring at me!” She went on to describe basically the same sort of encounter that I had experienced. I interrupted, telling her that the same thing had happened to me just a few hours before. But Dawn, you will recall, is an animal communicator. And so she had asked the bunny what it was doing there.

“I just wanted to say “Hi,” was the answer.

“And it was then that I realized who that bunny is!” cried Dawn.

Neither of us saw the bunny again. And no one other than Dawn and I saw it during or after that one appearance. No. It was a special visit of love gifted to each one of us, from a dear, departed friend.

What I did not mention to start with is that the name of the mare who we had had to euthanize the week before was Bunny.



Sometimes We Just Can't Fix Things - No Matter How Hard We Try

by Dawn Hayman

Lately, I've been getting many emails from people asking me to help place their dogs with reactivity and aggression issues. Let me first say that here at Spring Farm we are no longer taking dogs into our sanctuary, as we felt that we could not continue to meet the very special needs of dogs. But dogs are still an important part of our lives here and will always be a part of the very heart of this farm.

Because of personal experience which I will tell you about, my heart breaks each time that I am asked to help with a dog that faces euthanasia if it cannot be placed in a sanctuary. These are dogs who are otherwise healthy and most of the time are loving members of the family. But these are dogs with serious issues, oftentimes unpredictable, sometimes aggravated by known triggers, but always dangerous in those moments.

I hear the same thing each time. “We are looking for a place where he won't get triggered.” “She just cannot live in our family but she is a great dog and we need you to take her. She just can't be around kids or men or tall women.”

The reality is, even if you know what their triggers are, these dogs cannot help how they are reacting. And to think that they can live a life where a trigger will not happen is an illusion. Life is full of triggers. It is not the fault of the animal. Animals with aggression are not bad animals. They are animals with serious issues. Many of these are mental health issues. Some are genetic issues. It doesn't really matter what the cause is. But the hardest truth to face is that sometimes we just can't fix things, no matter how hard we try. Sometimes, no matter how much we love them, we cannot make them better. And this is the most heartbreaking journey with a beloved animal. While I am focusing on dogs in this article, it holds true for cats, horses, and any other animals facing this situation. Until we start understanding that aggression is an illness like cancer or any other physical illness, we will continue to stigmatize both dogs and their people, thinking that they did something wrong. This is furthest from the truth.

My personal experience with this very hard truth began in 2009 when, along with his littermate sister Grace, we adopted Tucker, a 5-week-old Golden Retriever/Border collie mix. Tucker was my heart dog. He was gorgeous, funny, loving, and kind. I swear I melted every time I just looked at him, and he knew that. He would do anything to get us to laugh and play. Life was great. Until one day when he was 6 months old, I was preparing dinner for the dogs when I heard someone growling. I turned around only to see Tucker standing a few feet behind me, glaring at me with his teeth fully bared and growling ferociously – at me! What struck me was the look in his eyes. It was as if he wasn't there. Alarmed, I yelled his name. And I watched him struggle to “come back.” The episode ended as fast as





it had begun. But in my heart I knew something was terribly wrong. I didn't have a mean dog. I had a dog who suffered from aggression. And that is a "disease" that he had no control over - and neither did I.

Things escalated with him over a few months. We frequently had to keep him in a room by himself where we knew he couldn't hurt anyone. Medical tests found nothing wrong to start with. But his aggressive behavior kept increasing in frequency. We spent one full year and thousands of dollars in veterinary consults, an MRI at Cornell University, and Neurology and Behavioral consults. I could not come to terms with the reality I was facing. I felt that if I loved him enough (and boy did I) that he would heal. We had every resource at our disposal. No stone was left unturned. And nothing helped.

The one thing I was most sure of was that I was losing my battle and my best friend. One day, at just 20 months old, he looked at me and said, "It's ok Mom. I can't do this anymore. It's ok to let me go."

That's when I realized this wasn't about me. I had no control over the outcome of this. I couldn't make it "right." I felt I had failed him. But in the end, I had to make the decision to let him go. While it was the most difficult decision I have had to make, I also knew it was the only way he could find peace in this hell that he was trapped in within his body. Tucker was pure love and kindness. He never wanted to hurt anyone ever. But whatever was malfunctioning in his brain was progressively getting worse to the point where he really had no life anymore. He could not find happiness or joy. We had to keep him locked away by himself for his safety and everyone else's. He was trapped inside his own hell that was quickly becoming ours. Healing for Tucker meant leaving the confines of the prison of his own body. He died in our arms, surrounded in the love that we still hold for him to this day. Thirteen years later, the heartbreak is still palpable. But the certainty and understanding that we have, that he found the peace he needed, is also deeply felt and understood.

If you, or someone you know, is faced with such a circumstance with an animal in their life, please be gentle and kind and understand that they are going through a grueling process in their hearts and minds. And if you are faced with this yourself, please know that this is not your fault. It is also not the fault of your animal. It's ok to love them. But it's also ok to know that sometimes your love cannot fix their situation, no matter how hard you wish that it could.

I have written an article on our website in honor of Tucker for others who are facing or have faced the same situation. I am including a link below in case it is something that can be helpful. It took me a few years before I could write it. But I knew that the amazing and special relationship that Tucker and I shared needed to be honored. Tucker loved helping others. He was such a caring soul. I needed to set the pain of his death aside so that I could let the beauty of his life and depth of his soul shine freely.

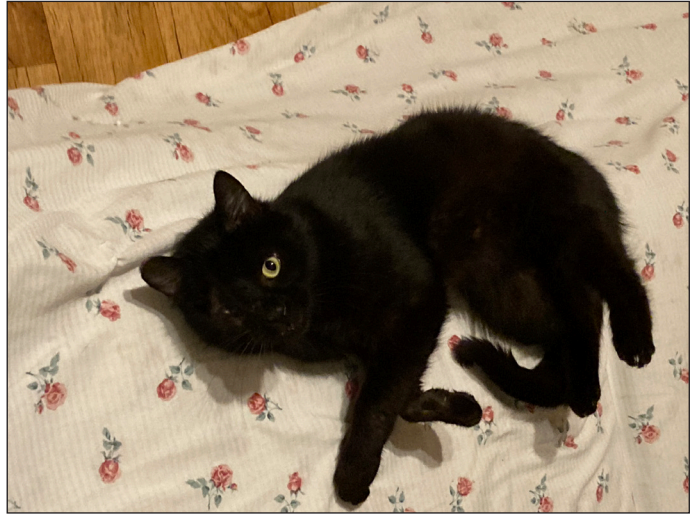
Thank you for letting me share him with you once more.

<https://www.springfarmcares.org/resources/domestic-farm-animals/when-letting-go-is-the-only-path-to-healing/>

The Story of Odin - One Cat's Journey To A New Life

by Christine Schneider, DVM, cVMA, CHPV

Cats are incredible creatures. They continually defy expectations just when you think that you have things all figured out. Odin was a feral cat brought to us by a good Samaritan who found him injured when she went to feed the colony. We took him in, temporarily we thought, in order to treat his injuries and neuter him. The intent then was, once he had healed, to release him back into his colony, as adult feral cats seldom tame down and aren't at all happy to be kept inside. Examination revealed an eye injury so severe that the eye had actually ruptured open. It would require an enucleation (eye removal). Luckily, he was so hungry that we were able to hide pain medications and antibiotics in his food to make him more comfortable until we could do the surgeries. This did not stop him from hissing and spitting and retreating into the corner of his enclosure whenever we approached, but the necessary surgeries got done and he was then kept in isolation until he had fully healed.



Odin - Enjoying his new life inside

Then came a day when that healing had progressed so well that the time to release him into his colony was close. But that morning when I went in to check on him and give him his medications as I reached down he reached out as well, rubbing his head against my hand. We spent the next few minutes in close proximity, with Odin alternating between approaching me then retreating back to his corner. The next day I brought my office cat, Toulouse, with me to visit Odin. As soon as Odin saw Toulouse he came running up to him and affectionately began to rub against him. Clearly the companionship of another cat had revealed a new Odin. Maybe releasing him back to his colony would not be the right move after all. At the least, he, and we, needed more time to see if he would adapt to indoor life.

Odin and I spent the next few days becoming friendlier, and with each passing day it became more obvious that he wasn't entirely feral. We thus integrated him into one of our cat rooms whose tenants had a long history of welcoming feral cats that, for various reasons, couldn't be released back to their colonies. Throughout the years, some of those cats became social with their caregivers, while others preferred to be left alone. But all were safe, warm and fed as long as their natural lives allowed. This room allowed Odin to be himself on his own terms, and to do whatever he decided was best for himself.

Odin instantly took to the other cats in the room, approaching them the moment he was let out of the carrier. He was hesitant about interacting with staff at first and would hide under a large chair while the room was being cleaned, but, with the help of cat treats, he became friendlier and friendlier.

It was when he stopped receiving medications, however, that another problem emerged. He suddenly stopped eating and became withdrawn. We found that he suffered from severe stomatitis, a very painful disease affecting the gum tissue. The condition had been masked by the pain medications that he had been receiving. If he had been released back into his colony with the stomatitis untreated he would surely have starved to death. We are happy that Odin got to lead a whole new and healthy life, surrounded by feline and human friends. Odin makes it obvious that he is happy, too.

Baltimore Checkerspots In Recovery

by Matt Perry

The Baltimore Checkerspot stands out as one of our Nature Sanctuary's most beautiful and vibrant native butterflies, sporting a flamboyant orange, black, and white checkerboard pattern on its wings. This pattern, adorned with circles and crescents, is strikingly bold. Notably, the orange pigment extends beyond the wings, coloring the butterfly's face, eyes, antenna clubs, and legs.

Two decades ago, we initiated a habitat restoration program for the Baltimore Checkerspot, focusing on planting its main food plant, Turtlehead, in wetland areas. The goal was to establish thriving populations of checkerspot butterflies, thereby bolstering the scant numbers produced in a few known local breeding sites. One particular floodplain area in the Sanctuary proved ideal for hosting Turtlehead plants, and last spring, I observed checkerspot caterpillars feeding on them. These caterpillars, about an inch long, sported an orange and black coloration and were covered in intimidating black spikes, each adorned with tufts of needle-like hairs. The spikes and hairs act as armor, discouraging birds and insects from preying on them.



Baltimore Checkerspot Butterfly



Baltimore Checkerspot Caterpillar

In the same habitat I also discovered over a dozen checkerspot chrysalises. They were ivory-colored, with vibrant orange and black spots, and resembled encrusted jewels. Unlike those of most other butterfly species, these chrysalises were abundant and easy to spot, almost like low-hanging decorations awaiting some upcoming butterfly celebration. Interestingly, not all chrysalises were attached to Turtlehead plants; some were found on nearby non-host plants like Joe-Pye-Weed and goldenrod, both on living and dead stems. I also observed a few caterpillars in the process of transforming into chrysalises. Perched high on plant stems, they shed their larval skin to reveal a glistening new pupal form, which eventually hardened as they entered this transformative stage.

While searching for newly emerged checkerspot butterflies, I found a detached chrysalis on the damp ground. Initially hesitant to intervene, I ultimately decided to take it home in an envelope, intending to let it emerge in the safety of my office before returning it to its habitat. The small chrysalis opened in the early morning, just as the sun rose, revealing a perfectly formed adult male checkerspot butterfly. As promised, I released him in the floodplain meadow, where I discovered at least five other freshly emerged males. Within an hour, butterfly activity peaked, with males chasing each other from their perches. Despite typically flying low, they engaged in high-altitude sparring, reaching heights of over 70 feet before returning to their territories with precision.



Turtlehead

In a sizable colony, females seeking to lay eggs are easily identifiable by their swollen abdomens. Female butterflies use receptors on their forelegs to locate host plants, drumming on them to taste their juices. The Baltimore Checkerspot's ability to find Turtlehead plants seems almost effortless, akin to magic. Unlike most butterfly species, which lay single eggs, Baltimore Checkerspots deposit large clusters of eggs on the underside of a single leaf. I once observed a female struggling to find a suitable spot, ultimately laying her eggs in a precarious location before appearing exhausted, barely able to fly away on tattered wings.



Baltimore Checkerspot Chrysalis

Shortly after hatching, a group of checkerspot larvae swiftly construct a silken tent around their food plant, often covering its flowers and upper leaves. The purpose of these tents is to offer a secure environment for the caterpillars to feed in during their earliest life stages. The caterpillars remain in their tent, shielded from predators, through several molts, until they attain the final stage (or instar) which is more capable of independence. By late July, the floodplain was teeming with so many checkerspot tents that walking through the meadow without inadvertently disturbing them became a challenge.



Baltimore Checkerspot Caterpillar on my hand

Venturing into the realm of the checkerspot isn't merely encountering a species of butterfly; it's experiencing nature in recovery. Through twenty years of dedicated habitat restoration, we've witnessed the flourishing of this amazing species, from their most humble life stages as vulnerable larvae, to the spectacle of brilliantly patterned adults engaging in high-altitude sparring. Importantly, our endeavors to safeguard these butterflies have deepened our comprehension of the ecological significance of their habitat. As we navigate the floodplains adorned with their food plants and silken shelters, we're reminded of the imperative to comprehend each facet of the myriad life forms contributing to the broader ecological tapestry. Ultimately, it's not solely about safeguarding a species; it's about fostering our connection to the marvels of the natural world, ensuring forthcoming generations can revel in the splendor of the Baltimore Checkerspot and the flourishing of the ecosystem it calls home.

In Memory of The Hawk Tree

by Dawn Hayman



I have been living on this farm now for 37 years. It is a very special place where literally every single being - human, animal, tree, plant, insect, rock etc. are honored for who they are and for what their life means to the farm as a whole. Each and every life is sacred. There are some that tower over us as giants and others who are so tiny we barely can see them. This March we lost one of our giants. We called her the Hawk Tree for she was a safe stop-over for many a passing bird of prey, including a juvenile bald eagle a couple of years ago.

In the photo on the left, there she is in her fall splendor. About 10 years ago she bedded down for the winter and didn't wake up. She suddenly had died. Her towering frame however remained a stalwart silhouette in the sky behind the farm. In the middle photo she is seen at a sunrise with a hawk perched on one of her branches. The photo on the right is zoomed in on a passing juvenile bald eagle.

In early March we had a bad windstorm during the night. I came out in our yard with our dogs in the morning only to look up and see that she was gone. Forever altering the landscape that I have known for 37 years. The end of her watch over the farm. Every day I look out and feel like someone is missing. And yet life continues on in her remaining stump. The remnants where once a great one stood.

About TattleTails & Tidbits

TattleTails & Tidbits is a free bi-monthly journal of Spring Farm CARES Animal & Nature Sanctuary. We have an amazingly talented group of Directors and Staff and we started this journal to share both creative writing, inspirational stories of the farm, educational articles, and artwork just to name a few. The purpose of our journal is to give you helpful information and to touch your heart and stir your soul.

There will be stories shared through animal communication with the many animal teacher residents of the farm as well. We hope that each issue gives you a variety of topics from both our animal and nature sanctuaries.

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