



TattleTails & Tidbits



Spring Farm CARES Animal & Nature Sanctuary Journal

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The Not So Lazy Days of Summer

As we move into the hottest two months of the year, our focus now shifts to all of the farm things that need to be done. Bringing in hay, mowing pastures, fixing fences, upgrading our pig pens, weed-eating the list is endless. But top on that list is keeping the animals as comfortable as we can.

The cats, bunnies, birds, and exotics all live in air conditioned rooms with screened in porches that they can access to enjoy the sights, sounds, and smells of nature and the farm. So they live a cushy life of summer. But the horses, sheep, goats, pigs, and poultry, as well as our barn staff, have a lot more weather to contend with. This means taking extra care and precaution that all of them, animal and human, drink enough and that the horses have extra fly protection and plenty of access to shade. When they come in the barn, we have fans running to try to cool things down. Our barn averages a good ten degrees or more cooler in the summer than the outside temperature but nothing makes the humid days easier. Our focus is on making sure that everyone is as comfortable as we can make them. And that is more than a full-time job for every one of their caretakers.

We also now turn our attention to welcoming visitors who come to the farm and get to partake in the peace and wonder of the animals, nature, and the farm herself. It is a busy season for sure. But it is also very gratifying to watch the animals at work interacting with the human hearts coming to experience that special kind of healing that animals so freely give.

We hope you are enjoying your summer!

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Watching Our Little Brother Go

by Bonnie Reynolds



Merlin and his cat friend Lewis

Among the many wonderful sorts of animals that we humans take in and hold dear as pets, parrots occupy a unique place. Various of our pets supply us with unconditional love, are wonderful companions, clown around and make us laugh, comfort us when we're sad or grieving, watch over us when we are invalids or incapacitated, make friends with individuals of other species, learn to do tricks, perform useful tasks, learn to dance, compete in contests, vocalize in their own languages or utter various sounds, and learn what we mean or command when we utter dozens upon dozens of words in our own languages. Parrots are variously champs at some of these admirable behaviors.

But parrots can also do something that sets them totally apart. Parrots talk. They speak. In our language. With varying degrees of intelligence and expertise they talk to us and with us – engage in conversation with us – make independent decisions, come up with their own ideas and share them with us, whistle and sing to us and with us. (On top of which they are long-lived in comparison to most other pet-type animals, usually living beyond 20 years and as long as 80 years.) As a result of such “human-like” attributes, parrots often come to feel to us like little human friends.

That was the way that it was with an African Grey named Merlin. Merlin came to us in the early Spring of 1994. We were told at that time that he was at least 12 years old – which now, in 2024, makes him at least 42 years old. At first, in the last few months of her life, Merlin amused my mother. After her death, when Mother's red house, the old Jones homestead, began to house Spring Farm's offices, he lived in a room where his cage was left open so that he could come and go as he pleased. Rabbits and cats also ran loose there, and there were litters of kittens, as well as a crippled duck named Phoebe. Merlin palled around with all of them, loving the tiny kittens, joining the adults on the floor at mealtime, and he was often to be found watching TV with Phoebe. When any of us walked into the room, we were greeted with “Hello! How are you?” He would whistle to those of us working in other rooms, getting us to whistle back, and he and we would then make up other tunes and whistle back and forth. He was also a fabulous mimic. One of his favorite sounds was the squeak that Dawn's sneakers made whenever she walked around in the adjoining kitchen. Whenever Merlin did those squeaks, people thought that Dawn was there in the kitchen when she wasn't. We had to be careful what was said within his hearing, however. Those who sent him to us had warned that he had been rescued from a situation with an alcoholic who had a mind-numbing vulgar vocabulary, all of which Merlin had mastered. “Don't ever utter a swear or off-color word around Merlin, “ they told us, “or you'll get an earful.” All who approached Merlin were thus forewarned. Luckily, never again, to our knowledge, did Merlin hear any naughty discourse. Obliging, he never offered any, and, instead, concentrated on whistling, inventing interesting sounds – all of which invited our responses -- and mimicry.



Along about 2015, with more changes of office locations and living arrangements, Merlin was brought from his room down in the red house up to George Kigercat Hall. There, in that 40' by 70' hall with 25' ceilings, Merlin began a new life, right out in the middle of the daily activity, interacting with our many employees. He took to the change without even a burp. Again during the day his cage was usually open. He spent most of the time on its roof, though he often climbed down to the floor to socialize with the hall cats, and, during employee meetings, he would waddle over and

join the circle (he wasn't a big fan of flying, preferring to climb up and down his cage.) When "outsiders" visited, he would be closed in his cage (for his safety and theirs.) And he would play his little joke. "Does he talk?" people would ask. "He might say 'Hello,'" we would tell them. But no matter how many hellos they gave him, he would remain silent. Only when they had walked away, were almost out the door, would they hear a cheerful, "Hello!" He also continued his mimicry. For instance one night he had Dawn and me running around for ten minutes trying to figure out which of the many smoke detectors was intermittently sounding -- only to realize finally that it was Merlin.



It was about four years ago when our avian vet found that he had a serious heart condition. A sudden shock or fright could give him a heart attack and kill him, the vet warned. We should even prepare ourselves for finding him suddenly dead. For that reason when, about a year after that, he began to develop cataracts, we opted not to have an operation to remove them. Certainly an operation could remove them, but the stress of it could kill him. It was about a year after that when we realized that he had gone completely blind. Being out of his cage now frightened and confused him. And so, after all the years of freedom, he took up permanent residence in his cage. With his usual ability to adjust, that was no problem. He knew exactly where things were and could safely get around. He continued to greet us, to whistle and to appreciate the kissy-kissy sessions that I gave him before bed each night, stroking his beak and head and singing to him. He even began talking more, but in a very foreign, deep voice, sort of a mumble, so that we could not make out the words. Except on two occasions a couple of months ago, during our pre-bedtime kissy session, he very clearly said something that he had never said before. "Am I in your way?"

And then – it seemed sudden, but it wasn't really. I found that he was less and less interested, or even responsive, to our evening bedtime-kissy communications. And more and more we all began to ask of one another, "Have you heard Merlin speak?" "Have you heard him whistle?" "Has he made any of his clicking sounds?" "Has he made any sound at all?" And the answer became repeatedly, "No." Silence was all. Complete silence. And his eyes ... his eyes went blank – empty – void of interest in anything. But, more importantly, those eyes were void of recognition. He didn't know any of us anymore.

Merlin had gone. There was still a body there. It knew when it was hungry or thirsty and went to its feed bowls with no problem. It knew when it wanted to sleep, which it did most of the time. But the Spirit that was Merlin had departed. Again and again we stood beside his cage trying, with no success, to elicit some flicker of Merlin from what was now just a body. Only then did we fully understand how dear, how beloved, our little friend, our little brother, Merlin, had been to us for 30 years.

Many people have had to live through similar loss – and are no longer recognized by a friend or a loved one. Those people know only too well what I mean when I say ... it hurt. Oh, how it hurt.

Only days after writing the above, I received a summons from a staff member and rushed to Merlin's cage – just in time to cuddle that body in my hands as it died.

And no, sweet Merlin. You were never in our way.

Loving As The Sun Sets - Noah's Story

by Dawn Hayman

One of the most common questions that I am asked is what hospice care for animals looks like. What does it mean? How does it work? What do you do?

Life is precious to every being. Animals have wants and needs and hopes and ideals just as humans do. Each one approaches life differently. Each one sees things uniquely through their own eyes and experiences. They have different pain tolerances and different thresholds of what they are willing to endure. Our motto here is – just because we can, should we? And we ask that in consideration of each individual animal when the discussion of various forms of intervention comes up.

When we get a diagnosis of something that is bound to be terminal, we deal with the facts and reality of that from a medical standpoint and then we start the discussion with the animal to see what they want. Even though animals are not “verbal” in the way that we humans are, they are very able to communicate with us if we listen closely to what they are telling us without words. Every story is unique.



Noah

In this article, I want to talk about a donkey named Noah. I am particularly connected to Noah, who I refer to as my “million-dollar donkey.” This article is hard to write because of how attached I am to him. but also because it has been our policy not to talk about animals who are going through end-of- life stages. We choose to give them the space they need without a public spotlight shining down on them and without the overlay of everyone else’s emotional reactions to their situation constantly being pushed at them. We, the caretakers at the farm, and the animals, go through this privately together as a family. They deserve that privacy. All of us need that privacy.

But I am telling Noah’s story because he asked me to. We do not know how much time Noah has left with us. What we do know is that he wasn’t acting well for a few weeks and we couldn’t really diagnose what was happening until a blood test showed a problem in his liver. We sent him to an equine hospital for further in-depth diagnosis and were stunned by what they found. Noah has a metastatic cancer that has already engulfed his spleen and has spread to his intestines and also his liver. There is nothing we can do to cure him. All that is left is to keep him comfortable. Now that we know what it is, we are able to give him drugs that right now are making him feel much better. But we also know there will come a day when the drugs will no longer work for him. It is a tough pill to swallow.

Noah is only 15 years old. We had a donkey, the flamboyant and fun “Amber Donkey”, live to be 50 years old. So that, in donkey terms, Noah is still a youngster. He is, though, a youngster who holds a most amazing heart space and exhibits profound spiritual wisdom. Many people who come to my workshops have gotten their first animal communication message from Noah. He is a gentle soul. Yet, when he first came to us, he could hardly be handled. As a matter of fact, the person who dropped him off with a horse named Ziek told us that “The two of them are great friends. The donkey will follow the horse anywhere. But I’ll pay a million dollars to anyone who can lead that donkey anywhere.”

I accepted the challenge and, after a few weeks of working with my million-dollar donkey, he was shining. We were a team. At which point he changed his name from the one that he had arrived with. “Call me Noah,” he

told me. "Yes, Noah. I like Noah." And the new Noah was easy to lead anywhere, not just for me but for any of his caretakers. We had earned that figurative million dollars.

And, though Noah did love his horse friend Ziek, we found him repeatedly gazing across the arena toward our other donkeys. When we tried to introduce him to that little herd, however, Mabel, the matriarch, would not accept him. And Noah was crushed. Each day as he followed his horse buddy Ziek out to a separate paddock, his gaze would linger longingly on the donkeys.

It was then that we had a bright idea. His foe, Mabel, had a foal named Murfee. But Murfee didn't live with Mama Mabel. Mabel had abandoned, actually viciously rejected, the foal just after his birth. (Mabel had arrived at Spring Farm pregnant. She was really too old to have been bred, and had no patience in dealing with a youngster.) Poor Murfee was put into a stall next to Mabel's. While still very small, he had been led into Mabel's stall several times a day to nurse, while we held Mabel so that she didn't attack him. He would then be returned to his stall – alone, unloved, confused, with no idea of who or what he was. And, as he grew, he became a real handful. What would happen, we wondered, if Noah became his babysitter? His teacher? His friend? It takes a special gelding to raise the young ones. Murfee, with deplorable manners and absolutely no idea of discipline, was a special handful. We didn't want either Noah or Murfee to get hurt. But we decided to try it, and, tentatively at first, we put Noah in with Murfee.



Noah and baby Murfee

What happened was amazing. Noah was fabulous with the youngster – patient but stern, exactly the friend and father figure that a budding truant needed. And, after having watched for a while how good Noah was with her son, Mabel invited that babysitter over to her stall. Through the dividing gate, she began to groom him! And Noah became a member of the family. To this day, Murfee and his Uncle Noah are the closest and most heartfelt of buddies. What Uncle Noah gave to Murfee has no price. But Murfee's love also gave to Noah what he so desperately was seeking. Now we must watch, knowing that Noah will soon be leaving us. Murfee will feel that loss beyond any of the rest of us.

Noah, however, has made it clear that he does not want sadness or pity around him. He wants to live and savor each day as it is, in this home that he loves, surrounded by those who love him, He truly found himself -- blossomed -- here. One night last week as I was tucking everyone in the barn in for the night, my nightly ritual, I stopped again at Noah's stall as I was leaving, and gave in mentally as a great sadness filled my heart. At which Noah walked to the back of the stall and turned his back on me.

"What's wrong?" I asked him.

This is what he told me.

"Please don't do that. We have a great story together. Put your sadness away for now. Don't wait to tell our story until after I leave. Let's tell it now. You can still love me just as brightly even as my light dims. That's what I want. I am me. That's all I want to be.

As the sun sets each day, you don't get sad or feel that the sun is dying. You simply understand that the sun will rise again. This is no different. The sun will still rise. And a new day will begin. For me. For Murfee. For you. It will simply look different. So let's spend the sunset just loving each minute."

The Eastern Screech Owl

by Matt Perry



At our nature sanctuary we have a diverse range of habitats that cater to the needs of five owl species. These magnificent birds of prey, known for their nocturnal habits and silent flight, play a vital role in the sanctuary's ecosystem. Their different sizes, habitat preferences, and physiologies enable them to fill their own habitat niches. Of the five, one of the most commonly encountered is the Eastern Screech Owl.

Measuring a mere six to ten inches in length, the Eastern Screech Owl may be small in stature, but its presence looms large in the collective imagination. Its rounded head, adorned with tufted ear-like plumage, gives it a distinctive silhouette against the backdrop of moonlit skies.

With plumage ranging from mottled gray to vibrant rufous, it effortlessly blends into the bark of trees, becoming one with its woodland habitat.

The Eastern Screech Owl is more strictly nocturnal than the Great Horned Owl and the Barred Owl. Like those two larger species, the Screech is a master of stealth and deception. Under the cover of darkness, it emerges from its daytime roost, its silent flight slipping through the stillness of the night. With keen eyesight and acute hearing, it hunts with precision, preying upon small mammals, birds, and even large insects that venture within its grasp.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Eastern Screech Owl is its vocal repertoire. Despite its name, its calls are more akin to mournful phrases than shrill screeches. From soft trills and whinnies to eerie descending whistles, each vocalization serves a purpose—claiming territory, attracting mates, or communicating with offspring. Courtship behavior in Eastern Screech Owls often involves vocalizations and displays by both males and females. Male Screech Owls may engage in courtship calling, producing a repertoire of trills and whinnies, to attract females. They may also perform aerial displays and present food offerings to potential mates.

Eastern Screech Owls typically breed from late winter to early spring, with nesting activity beginning as early as February and extending into May. The exact timing can vary depending on factors such as geographic location and local climate conditions. Bonded pairs are known to defend territories, especially during the breeding season, using vocalizations and displays to communicate with neighboring owls and deter potential intruders. Eastern Screech Owls are generally monogamous during the breeding season, with pairs often remaining together for multiple breeding seasons if both partners survive. They are cavity nesters, and are known to use abandoned woodpecker nests, natural tree crevices, and man-made structures as nesting sites. They will sometimes accept man-made nest boxes when sited in the right habitat.

Once a suitable nesting site is chosen, the female Screech Owl lays a clutch of eggs, usually ranging from 2 to 6, with an average of around 3 to 4. The eggs are typically laid at intervals of a few days. Incubation begins after the first egg is laid and lasts for approximately 26 to 28 days. Both the male and female Eastern Screech Owls participate in incubating the eggs and caring for the young. The female primarily incubates the eggs during the day, while the male provides food for her and helps incubate at night. After the eggs hatch, both parents feed and protect the nestlings. The young Screech Owls grow rapidly, with the parents continuing to feed and care for them in the nest for several weeks. The fledging period typically occurs around 4 to 5 weeks after hatching, although this can vary. After fledging, the young owls continue to depend on their parents for food and protection as they learn to hunt and become independent.

Luna's Legacy

by Dawn Hayman



Above - Luna at 4 days old meeting donkey Felix

Below - Luna just 5 days before her passing - saying good-bye to Felix



Good-byes are never easy and writing this today is no exception. This month we lost our dear goat friend Luna – also known as Luna-tickle, Looney-tunes, and Luna-tuna. Luna was a character who touched many lives. She had the unusual distinction of having been born right here on the farm. And she graced our lives for just shy of 16 years.

Luna's mom came here when we were helping with a large rescue that included several goats. The group of goats was here for only a few days when, much to our surprise, we found one of them going into labor. Out came this adorable, super-tiny, black-and-white kid. She was born on a full moon so we named her Luna. As she grew, her color changed to brown and white.

Luna had a strong sense of what she liked and disliked in life, and for what she wanted and didn't want in her life as well. You could say that she was super opinionated. You could even say that she was pushy. But she was also a clown with a fantastic sense of humor and just the right timing for serving up zingers. She had a way of always making her presence known. And, when she felt that things were getting far too serious, or that people were not moving fast enough -- or even sometimes just for the heck of it -- her trade mark was the delivery of a good butt to a person's behind – with a gleam in her eye.

Luna was a down to earth, practical kind of spirit, honest and true to who she was. She also had a great way of making you feel special when she liked you. Luna participated in the annual gratitude messages from the animals that Dawn publishes each year from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day. And her messages started earning her a following. One year, in the midst of a lot of philosophical answers from several of her stable mates, Luna's message was about how very grateful she was for peppermints! She stated that her deepest wish in life was to receive peppermints. It was said tongue in cheek, or peppermint in cheek in Luna's case. But people really responded. Our mail was suddenly full of

peppermints from loyal Luna followers. We received enough peppermints to supply ALL of the barn animals who enjoy them for a whole year! Luna awarded herself the title of Chief Animal Fundraiser for the farm.

It was only a week before we lost Luna that she suddenly became ill. She had had some health problems due to aging over the preceding couple of years. But this was different. Bloodwork revealed that she was in kidney failure. Our remaining time with her was going to be short. She was put on hospice care and, for her comfort and joy, given all that she wanted or needed. The day before she passed, she was reminiscing with Dawn about her amazing power to receive whatever she asked for, and she reminded Dawn about the peppermint caper. She was so proud of that. She added that she came into this life wanting to have a happy life, and that she had created happiness in abundance.

She then told Dawn that she wanted to leave a legacy. She asked that Dawn begin a fund. A Luna Legacy Fund, dedicated to helping all of the animals that we could, find happiness. "Happiness isn't always about big things," she told Dawn. "Sometimes it is just a well-timed peppermint to tell you that you're loved. Don't make it complicated. Just do what I did. Ask people to help make an animal feel loved. Because they will have great joy knowing that they did. We will go higher and farther than peppermints this time! It will be a circle of happiness. That will be my legacy."

On what became her last morning, we knew that her body could no longer serve her brilliant spirit. We could no longer make her comfortable. It was time to help her be free and move on. Her caretakers came by one by one to let her know how loved she is. At the end, Dawn, Margot, and Dr. Christine held her and told her what an amazing girl she is and how she will always be loved. We thanked her for all the good times and the laughs and even the well-placed butts in the behind. Then, as Luna was being sedated, Dawn heard her crunching on something. Her friends had been feeding her peppermints, She had saved some in her cheek. She looked up at Dawn, "Don't forget my legacy. I created a whole lot of peppermints. You can do a lot more. You've got this."

The Luna Legacy Fund

To honor Luna, we have started The Luna Legacy Fund to spread love and happiness to other animals just as she asked us to do. If you would like to contribute to Luna's fund, please follow the link below to make a donation.

[Donate Now To Luna's Fund](#)

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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