



TattleTails & Tidbits



Spring Farm CARES Animal & Nature Sanctuary Journal

Volume 2, Issue 4, July/August 2023

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Left: Smoke filled sky on what should have been a blue sky day. Right: A clearing two days later.

Smoke and Mirrors

In Central NY for several days we were inundated by the smoke from the raging wildfires in Canada. And our hearts certainly do go out to our Canadian friends whose lives have been so seriously affected by those fires. Here, the blue sky which we take for granted was suddenly gone. In its place was an eerie orange glow and a fog that was smoke, blanketing our entire region. Breathing while outdoors became a problem. Animals grew anxious. People grew anxious. None of us had ever experienced such a thing before.

After three days, the smoke drifted away and the blue sky and bright sunshine returned. It was a moment of relief, yes, but, very importantly it was a time to reflect. A blue sky and bright sunshine are such blessings! What gratitude we should feel and display each day, as we go about creating our lives and shepherding the conditions on this planet on which we live.

"Breathe deeply and be grateful," the animals kept telling Dawn as the smoke cleared. We should, they said, let our gratitude for returned clear skies and fresh air, and Love for this planet, flow freely from each of our hearts. And we should send that Love to all around the Earth.

"You are as a mirror," they told Dawn. "Become what you want to see around you and that is the reflection that you will find."

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The Spring Farm Ghost Brigade

by Bonnie Reynolds

In the early days, we at Spring Farm CARES Animal and Nature Sanctuary used to dread hunting season. Despite having fulsomely posted our 250 acres, each year we would have to stop turning our horses out into their pastures, forbid visitors from walking around on the acreage, and cross our fingers, praying for the wellbeing of our wild animal friends. Because, in those early days, it was only Dawn and I. Hunters knew that we two women could not come rushing out at every gunshot, policing and protecting the place. So that certain among them invaded at will. Our hearts broke as, day after day, helpless, we had to listen to the shots.

Enter The Unsinkable Buckwheat Hayman.

Buckwheat was a big boy, the natural leader among the horses in our stable...buckskin, 16 hands, a Percheron/Quarter Horse cross.

We called him the John Wayne of horses. Had John Wayne been a horse he would have looked, talked, and acted exactly like Buckwheat. Time and again Buckwheat had survived problems that would have killed any other horse... hence the "Unsinkable" title. He had even been shot in the shoulder by a hunter's stray bullet, out of season, while peacefully grazing in his pasture.



Bonnie and Buckwheat

At last, at the age of 37, old for a horse, especially for a big horse, Buckwheat gave up the ghost. But only his "living" ghost. Because soon after his death I got a message from him. (My main talent in animal communication has been getting messages from recently deceased animals.) He told me that, in order to protect Spring Farm, he was organizing and would lead the Spring Farm Ghost Brigade, composed of all of the animals who had ever lived and died here at Spring Farm.

Which was comforting. In the future, whenever things got tough around here, we would be able to just raise our eyes to the sky and call out..."Buckwheat!" And we would hear that John Wayne drawl. 'Don't fret, Little Ladies. I'll fix things for ya.' Then, 'Y-oooh-ooohh! Peel out!' And the hoofbeats and patter of paws and flapping of wings as the Buckwheat Brigade moved smartly off to set things right.

And that seems to be what happened. Because after Buckwheat's death we stopped hearing shots on our property during hunting season. According to another horse, Deeteza, "A few hunters came on at first. But Buck and the brigade met up with them. I doubt that they'll ever be back."

Yes, pity the poor hunter who met up with a Brigade Boss who had been shot by an irresponsible hunter, and out of season at that.

Since then we know that, each time that one of our animals passes over, the brigade comes to meet them, and welcome them into the corps. Fairly recently we were poignantly reminded of that fact. One of our horses, Viva, had just had to be put down, out in his pasture. His pasture mate, Belle, had come to his side to say goodbye. She was standing looking down at him when, suddenly, her head whipped around. She then stood staring fixedly at the top of a nearby hill.

And we knew that she was seeing what we could not see. The Spring Farm Ghost Brigade, come to collect its new member.

We were happy for Belle. Because she, herself, was unwell, with not much longer to live. She knew then, however, that she had not been left alone. The brigade was watching, They would be there for her when her time came.

And we humans can know as well that... ..."Ya got no cause to fret, Little Ladies. We'll always be here for Spring Farm."

When "Nothing" Is Something

by Christine Schneider, DVM, cVMA, CHPV

Our resident population at the sanctuary consists mostly of animals with chronic medical or behavioral issues. Frequently, choosing the best pharmaceutical or surgical intervention for an animal is easy and straightforward. However, a small percentage of our population is averse to handling or human interaction, which makes administering treatments difficult. And it is often harder on us, their veterinarians, their caretakers, or their owners, to accept that not pursuing further diagnostics or treatments is truly the best option. Often it feels like we are choosing to do nothing. But are we really doing “nothing” by choosing to do nothing?

Camille was a very large, extremely personable, cat, who adopted Bonnie as a kitten and lived with her for the rest of his life, until he developed a health issue that required extensive treatment. Those treatments were quite involved and necessitated a team of people to help administer them. So Camille moved up to the small animal facility where he could get lots of help. He enjoyed the company of his caretakers, still got to see Bonnie every day, and was blessedly compliant about the many medications and procedures. Having already been treated for many years with insulin for diabetes and oral medications to help regulate his digestive system, it was even easy to make the decision, when he was diagnosed with a severe liver condition, to insert a feeding tube.



Camille

Staff fed Camille multiple times daily via his feeding tube, and he was examined daily by me. He still had quality time with Bonnie, and he relished all of the attention that he was getting. Quickly he recovered. But then he developed a severe--ultimately fatal--blood disorder. There were more medications, more intense treatments until he passed. And all the while he soothed his caregivers with his purrs. With Camille, we were confident that the decisions we had made for his care were in tune with Camille's own wishes.



Meia

Meia, on the other hand, is a shy cat who will tolerate gentle petting but becomes easily stressed and nervous when any further handling is attempted. Recently, she developed multiple skin masses. Thankfully, we were able to perform sedated biopsies on-site at the sanctuary so she did not need to go to an outside clinic. Unfortunately, the masses came back as metastatic lesions, meaning she had a primary tumor internally, likely in her abdomen. This would require sending Meia to a specialty clinic for imaging, for another surgery to remove the primary tumor, and then intensive follow-ups for chemotherapy and uncertain total recovery. We elected not to pursue further diagnostics or treatments for Meia. In her case, the medical benefits would not outweigh the negative impact on her quality of life. We will, instead, continue to monitor Meia and supply palliative care for any pain or discomfort that she experiences, while allowing her to live out her life stress-free in the room where she is comfortable, with the cat friends who she loves.

Although the medical decisions for Camille and Meia were drastically different, we valued each of their lives and based our decisions on what was right for each of them individually. We make decisions for each animal based on how those decisions will affect their well-being and happiness. We are here to ensure that each resident is fully content, not just medically healthy. And sometimes that means doing nothing, even though it doesn't mean that we are doing nothing.

Anglewing Butterflies

by Matt Perry



Mourning Cloak, underwing

Anglewing butterflies, generally, are a robust group that can put up with cooler temperatures than most other butterfly species. Some are the first to show themselves in the spring and occasionally even earlier if they become inspired by a prolonged winter thaw. Anglewing species belong to the brushfoot family, which is one of six families of butterflies. The name "brushfoot" comes from their underdeveloped, brush-like front legs. Like all true insects, butterflies have six legs, but if you examine one of the brushfoots, you wouldn't be penalized if you count only four.

Anglewings are characterized by their jagged or "angled" wing edges. This adaptation allows them to mimic the irregular contours of leaf edges. The illusion is further accentuated by the cryptic coloration of their outer wings, which emulate the muted colors of dead leaves. Even if the tops of their wings are colorful, like those of the orange and black Questionmark Butterfly, when they close their wings, they blend seamlessly into their surroundings. Becoming essentially invisible is a good trick, especially early in the season when there are hungry predators on the prowl, and you might be one of the few active insects around.



Questionmark Butterfly, underwing

Many of the anglewings over-winter as adults. In the fall these butterflies will insert themselves into tree crevices. The behavior could be compared to a letter being pushed into a mail slot. And they are, in effect, mailing themselves to Spring. While in the tree crevice they remain dry and relatively safe. The cold temperatures force them into a dormant state, in which they will remain until warm weather returns. When the anglewings first come out of their hiding place, they're apt to run into a problem. They may be all dressed up with nowhere to go, or more accurately, nowhere to feed. There may be very few flowers open and therefore few available nectar sources. With energy reserves garnered from the previous season, they can last a little while, but the more active they are, the more acute their need for nourishment becomes. Fortunately, anglewings and some other early emerging butterflies can avail themselves of alternate food sources including rotten fruit, tree sap, and animal droppings. Their early emergence sometimes coincides with the return to the region of a woodpecker called the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. The sapsuckers make their living by drilling small holes into the bark of trees and then harvesting the sap that wells up at the base of the hole. Butterflies in search of flowers seek out these sap holes and are quick to exploit the sweet rewards. I sometimes see anglewings representing several different species all drinking to their hearts' content – courtesy of the accommodating neighborhood sapsucker.



Mourning Cloak

The Mourning Cloak butterfly is one of the more common and widespread anglewings, and it has the distinction of being our longest-lived butterfly species. They can live up to a year in their adult stage. Of course, a fair portion of the year is spent being immobile inside a tree cavity. The Mourning Cloak has velvet-like, reddish-brown top wings which are bordered by a thick gold band. Next to the band runs a row of blue spots. The overall effect is quite regal. In contrast, their underwings are dull and sooty-colored with a pattern that suggests a rough bark-like texture. The male Cloak can be overly aggressive on its breeding territory. Normally, he will stake out an area of the forest and assume a favorite perch; there they will lay in wait, ready to chase off rival males and invite in females to mate. An overzealous individual may chase away other species of butterflies too. He even may try to chase off more formidable intruders like people. It always makes for an interesting experience, to be run out of town by a butterfly.

Lessons From The Animal Teachers

by Dawn E. Hayman

In our thirty-two years at Spring Farm CARES, we have seen a lot of souls come and go--both animal and human--in the case of animals many hundreds of them. Every one of us is here in this lifetime for a reason. Each of us came to accomplish something on our soul's journey. That goes for animals as well as for humans.

Every animal who has passed through, in some way, touched the hearts of other animals and of humans during their stay. Some of them stayed with us for years, some for days, and some for mere hours, but all of them live on in the fabric of this farm and of our mission. Each of them taught us something. Each of them refined our mission. Every single life makes a difference.

I want to share with you just a few of the amazing souls who enriched Spring Farm CARES.

Sugar

To tell Sugar's story properly would take an entire book. Sugar was a beautiful Shetland pony. Back in 1991, she was our first animal cruelty case, taken in at the request of our local humane society. She had been badly neglected and had become severely disabled. But disabilities did not deter Sugar from finding joy in life. She was, in fact, a Master Teacher, who taught all of us so much. One particular lesson stands out. It is a lesson that shapes our understanding of the matter of animal abuse to this day.



Sugar

Sugar's neglect had happened not just because someone fell on hard times. Sugar was the last of a herd of over 10 ponies who succumbed to the systemic neglect of their owners. Sugar had watched each of her friends die and then been put out alone into a field, day and night, winter and summer, for years. Her owners expected her to die. Sugar refused. We at Spring Farm were incensed by all that had happened to Sugar. Admittedly, we wanted to see revenge visited upon the humans who had been arrested for such cruelty. We were in the barn with Sugar when the animal cruelty investigator arrived after the court appearance. She was visibly shaken. "The judge let them go without anything but a slap on the wrist telling them not to do it again."

We were all livid. I looked over at Sugar. She stood looking directly at me. Her message is still as fresh in my heart as in the moment that she delivered it.

"Don't be angry on my behalf, please. I'm not wishing those humans any harm or ill-will and you shouldn't do so in my name either. That's not my thing."

I was stunned. "If you had to punish them for what they did to you, what would you do?" I asked her.

"I would lock each of them up alone for months, so that they could understand what being alone feels like, and so that they could think about why they have such hurt inside of themselves. Then I'd send them best wishes for healing." With that she walked to the other end of her stall and continued eating.

Most of the farm animals in our sanctuary came here as the result of cruelty cases. Yet when you enter our barn,

you will meet the most loving, tolerant, and forgiving souls you could ever meet. And it is Sugar who taught us that we can't be angry in their names when they themselves hold no ill-will and wish no harm to those who hurt them. Thanks to Sugar, we know that the best way to help these animals heal is to let them settle into the safety and comfort of their new home, putting angers and desires for retribution behind them. And with them we wish healing to those who abused them. It's the way that animals live and operate. And it's a way that humanity can benefit by emulating.

Mack

Mack was a dog who literally had his paws in every aspect of the running of our daily farm operations. A border collie with a huge mission, Mack lived a life that was far from "normal." He had been a stray in the Adirondacks. People had seen him wandering for over 6 months and tried to catch him, to no avail. Then one day a woman involved with a border collie rescue--who knew nothing about his story--saw him running in a field. She pulled over and called to him. And he came right to her and jumped into her car. That was Mack. He made his own decisions in life. Unfortunately, he had evidently been hit by a car somewhere during his time on the run. He had a vertebral injury resulting in nerve damage to his back end. He was unable to move his tail and he was bowel and bladder incontinent...which meant that he couldn't be placed in a home. Mack, though, was nowhere near ready to end his life. He could run and jump and play like any healthy border collie, and we offered him a place where he could live out his life with the care that he needed.



Mack

Mack loved to run the show. He was a herding border collie in every way. He herded people. He herded the tractor. He herded ducks and chickens. And we had to think outside the box to create a space that was right for him. It took us a while to get it right. But Mack kept on working with us until we understood what he wanted and needed.

At first, we gave him his own nice large room. He literally ran the walls, ricocheting around like a bullet, with urine and feces flying everywhere. He wouldn't stop. He made it obvious that the space was too big for him. So we got him a 6' by 10' kennel and put it in our main hall. There, he was in the hub of things. He could see everyone coming and going. He could see cats moving about. He could see deliveries arriving. People could stand outside the kennel and converse with him. He had a job. Overseer. And he was finally content. We were sometimes criticized by visitors for keeping a border collie in a kennel...normally a fair criticism. But Mack had chosen his own solution. Though it didn't look ideal to us, it worked just fine for him.

Mack also chose his handlers. We couldn't assign just anyone to be a "Mack Walker". He would growl and snap if someone not on his personally chosen list of walkers tried to attach his leash. If you were one of the chosen, however, you found yourself in a very special relationship with Mack. We came to realize that he was choosing people who he felt he could help. It was deliberate and precise. And it was always very clear. There is a group of people out there in this world who were Mack Walkers who benefited enormously from the heart and soul of this very special border collie.

He taught us to listen to what the animal thinks is important in its life, not to what we think its life should look

like. Mack's life looked like that of no other dog who ever lived here on the farm. But he sculpted every aspect of it himself. And, once we learned to listen to him, his world was expansive. This entire farm ran off of Mack's schedule. He went on long walks, and during Mack Walks the tractors couldn't be driven, as he'd truly only focus on herding them. There were Mack playtimes--ball games out in the dog yard, and hide and seek in the hall when, at closing time, the staff would lock the doors and let him run free. Some of them would hide, and he would find them. Oh how he loved that game.

Every morning for years there was also a routine with Bonnie. As she did her chores before the rest of the staff arrived, she would throw a ball for him, then he would just hang with her as she worked. He loved his life here. People from outside and even some caretakers who were not Mack walkers thought his life was limited. But his life knew only the bounds that he, himself, had chosen.

He'd look me in the eye sometimes and say, "Just keep listening to me. No matter what others say. I am who I am."

I should note that I was a Mack Walker at the very beginning. Then one day I went to take him out and he growled deeply as I walked toward him. I was so hurt. I got out of his kennel and looked at him from the outside. He came over and gently leaned into me through the chain link. "It's ok," he said. "We are finished for now. Now I need to work with someone else." And he did. Over and over and over again. Generations of Mack Walkers were helped to heal something deep inside of themselves – whether they know it or not.

So that my hurt turned into admiration and joy as I watched a master at work. Mack was the last dog in our sanctuary. He will always be remembered and his lessons will remain.

David

David arrived at the farm in a humane trap during a feral cat TNR spay/neuter event that we were hosting. The person who was trapping a colony in her neighborhood said she had never seen him there before. And he was badly injured. There was nothing left of his tail but bone. It would need to be amputated. David, however, was feral, not handleable. If there was nerve damage he might be unable to empty his bladder without assistance, in which case handling would be essential. I was called in to make the decision as to whether to euthanize him or to send him to a clinic for surgery, bring him back to the farm for recovery and then deal with the problem of handling him. The most important question to me, however, was...what did David want?



David

David was clear with me that he wanted to live. And so he was sent for the amputation surgery. Unfortunately he did have severe nerve damage. He could not fully empty his bladder without assistance. And so, since he wanted nothing to do with being touched, we had a dilemma.

Once he had recovered from his surgery, we put him in one of our cat rooms, hoping that he would come around and allow himself to be handled. After several weeks of medications and healing, however, he was still incontinent and still untouchable. It was a no-win situation. All the while he had kept telling me he wasn't ready to die. But he couldn't live the way that he was. Sooner than later his bladder would become badly infected and kill him. Again the question of euthanasia arose, And the decision between yes or no again landed squarely on me.

Having come down to the wire, I went to his room. He was sitting in a corner high up on a shelf. I sat down against the lower shelf with my back to him.

"David, this is it," I told him. "We have to make a decision. If you want to live, you're going to have to let us help you. You need to let us hold you and squeeze your bladder. If we can't do that, you will die. We can't go on like this, David."

He was silent for quite a while. I didn't know what to expect from him, and my heart was aching over what we were going to have to do. As I sat there in my own pain, however, I was suddenly aware of David's pain. His own grief filled my heart. There were no words. I simply acknowledged his grief and sat with him, being totally present with him. More minutes passed. Then he opened up to me.

"I once lived in a house with a wonderful woman. I sat on her lap. She petted me. She fed me. I purred for her. I loved her. One night, she fell and would not respond to me. People came and took her away. I was alone in the house for a day until a man came. He had visited my person at other times before. He picked me up and set me outside and shut the door. It was raining. He left. I waited there for days for my person to return. But she didn't come back. I had no food. There was no shelter. So I went to the house next door. They chased me away. A dog chased me. I ran through several yards. I found some other cats and there was food. I ate. Then I got chased away again. I had given up. It was at night when I was trying to find some food when I didn't see a car coming and got hit. I hurt really bad. I hid under a deck for days. But then I just had to find food. I went looking and found that cage. There was food in it. But then it caught me, and it brought me here. I thought I was going to die. I had no hope left."

As he told me all this, he had moved closer to me. He was now on the lowest shelf and close to my arm. I very slowly held my hand out to him, without looking directly at him. "I'm so sorry David. I'm sorry that happened to you. It sounds like you loved your person very much. I want to help you. You can stay here if you desire. But we need to help you to be able to pee." As I was explaining this, he suddenly stretched over and put his head in my hand. I began scratching his head. He leaned in even more.

"This was her favorite time of year," he said. "I loved when she put up the twinkling lights and the smells of all the things she cooked. I miss that." He then moved closer to me, rubbed up against my arm and allowed me to thoroughly pet him.



The Christmas season view from David's Room

I left it at that for the day. But I asked one of his caretakers, who loved to decorate for Christmas, to grab some decorations and put them in his room. She did so before closing that afternoon. And the next morning when his first caretaker arrived, David ran to the door to greet her, rubbing up against her legs. They called me to come over. And when I sat down in a chair, David jumped into my lap and began to purr.

From that point on he let us squeeze and empty his bladder 2-3 times a day. While, every Christmas season, he would sit and look out at the tree and lights in our main hall...while his caretakers made sure that there were extra decorations especially for him in his room.

David reminded us that, rather than making snap and broad judgements about our animals, we must always talk to them and then listen to their answers. Our "unlistening" judgement, that David was feral, rather than heartbroken and shut down, would have cost him his life. Listening rewarded all involved...rewarded both caretakers and a now happy cat with petting and purrs, trust and love...and wonderful senses of fulfillment all around.