

TattleTails & Tidbits



Spring Farm CARES Animal & Nature Sanctuary Journal

Volume 5, Issue 1, January/February 2026

In This Issue:

- Page 2-4. Animal Crackers
- Page 5. Horsing Around
- Page 6-7. The Serious Work Of Play
- Page 8. Goat Humor



Contributors:

- Bonnie Reynolds, SFC Pres/Co-founder
- Dawn Hayman, SFC VP/Co-founder
- Matthew Perry, Naturalist/Director of SFC Nature Sanctuary

Joy To The World - A Happy New Year

It is hard to believe that this is the start of our 5th year of TattleTails & Tidbits. As we look to the new year ahead, we choose to do so with hope and resilience to create a world and reality based on compassion, kindness, and peace. We hold the belief that humanity has the power and ability to do just that. Each one of us has the ability to hold a space of love and kindness. The animals show us this on a daily basis. They are our greatest teachers. But it's up to all of us to make it happen.

For this issue, we have decided to start the new year off with humor. We don't have to look far as the animals always remind us to laugh and lighten up. We could not survive in the animal welfare world if it were not for that gift that the animals give us continuously. They embody joy and playfulness even when things seem to be completely overwhelming. They always bring us back to the present moment and ask us only to meet them in that space. Some days, as a human, that feels hard doesn't it? But the animals teach us that even in the most serious of times, there can be joy. They are there to lighten the mood when we humans get too caught up in our heads and far too serious.

We hope you enjoy and even get a chuckle out of some of the stories we share about the animal wisdoms, stories of their sense of humor, and their need to play. Let them be a model for all of us humans.

To learn more about Spring Farm CARES, [to donate to our mission](#), to sign up for our email list, and to download a copy of any of our publications, go to www.springfarmcares.org

CONNECT WITH US:

3364 State Route 12,
Clinton, NY 13323
(315) 737-9339
office@springfarmcares.org

Visit our Website and Blog:
www.springfarmcares.org

Follow us on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/springfarmcares

Animal Crackers

by Bonnie Reynolds



Our latest book, *The Magic Years, A Thirty-Year Interspecies Conversation*, contains dozens of amusing incidents from those years. We include some here to kick off the year with laughter.

Jason, Dawn's beloved yellow lab, was with her one day when this trivia question was asked on the radio. "What's the smartest breed of dog?"

Dawn smiled at Jason. "It must be labs," she said.

'I doubt it, Mom,' said Jason. 'Because you've told me that most labs like water.' As you might guess, Jason seemed to think that he would melt if water touched him.

One day an employee noticed Freckles, a seven-toed cat, holding out his left front paw and wagging its "thumb" at her. Inspection revealed that the nail of that thumb had curled around and started to grow into the pad. The employee called Dawn, the nail was clipped, and they then stood there trying to decide what type of salve to put on the sore.

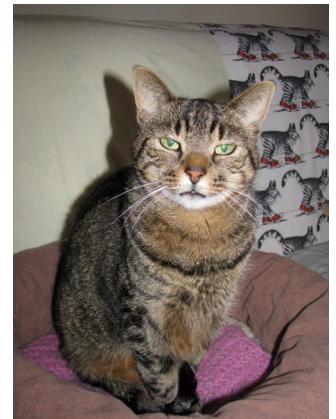
Freckles watched them for a minute and then marched over and immersed his paw in the water bowl. "On the other hand," Dawn observed, "just soaking it in water will probably be enough."

An adoption issue arose when Margot had to be away for a few weeks visiting her family in Europe. Lucia and Gabriella, the only survivors of a litter of six orphans that had been brought in with distemper, had been raised and nursed by Margot and Dawn up in their house. But just before Margot's departure they had become so strong and healthy that Dawn told Margot, "Okay, we'll be putting these guys up for adoption now."

The days of Margot's absence went on and on. And finally Lucia had had it. She came into Dawn's office one day and jumped up on the desk. 'It would be nice,' she huffed, 'if people would tell us animals something around here. You never tell us anything.'

"What are you talking about?" Dawn puzzled.

'Give it to me straight,' said Lucia. 'Has Margot been adopted?'



We had another kitten, named Tom Hanks since he was a castaway, his mother refusing to have anything to do with him when he was born.

Bonnie took charge and bottle raised him. But he had never gotten a drop of his mother's colostrum, that precious first milk that gives a kitten immunity for the first eight weeks of life, so that, with no immunities, he had to be kept alone, away from any other cats or kittens for eight weeks until he could be vaccinated.

He was a delightful child however – eating nicely, excreting perfectly (with many purrs), never crying, while, like many "only" children, he found ways to amuse himself. His favorite amusement at four weeks of age was to lie on his back with his feet in the air, playing with his toes.

And one day Dawn came to me laughing. "I think we should call him Forrest Gump instead of Tom Hanks," she said.

"Why?"

"I just walked by his pen. He was laying there with his feet up in the air, dreamily waving them around. He turned and looked at me and said, 'Life ... is about toes.'"

The bitter cold and overabundant snow of our Christmas here in central New York this year reminds us of what once happened with wild rabbits. It was during Margot's first winter with us, back in 1995. Her horses, Jeremy and Tasia, were quartered in a small paddock with a run-in shed on a slope above Kigercat Hall. Their hay and food were kept in a large service cart covered with a tarp. It had been bitterly cold and, after the first good snow, Margot saw that rabbit tracks led up the slope and disappeared under the cart. The bunnies had been dining on the chaff that floated down from the hay in the cart. Following the tracks down the slope, Margot saw that they disappeared under her horse trailer. There, obviously, the bunnies were taking shelter. Kind-hearted ex-wildlife rehabilitator Margot immediately, with her horses' evening meal, began adding bunny pellets to the chaff under the cart.



The next morning, aided by Dawn, she headed up to feed and water her horses. There had been a six-inch snowfall during the night, and they both gasped when they saw that a deep, wide path had been pounded into the snow during the night, up and down from horse trailer to cart.

"My gosh," said Dawn, "it's a bunny super highway!" And she sent the rabbits a mental query. 'Are there a great many of you needing food?'

After a beat the answer came, from an honest, embarrassed, and slightly exasperated female bunny.

'Not really,' she told Dawn. 'It was Bennie's idea. He said if we all ran up and down and up and down and made a really big path you would think there are a lot more of us and put out a lot more food!'

Whoever came up with the phrase "dumb bunny" had obviously never crossed wits with Bennie.

Everyone at Spring Farm eventually ends up communicating with animals. Maybe it's in the spring water. One day as then office manager Patricia was accessing data from the computer one of the cats, Elvis, came in and sat beside her, watching.

'What is it that you are doing there?' she heard him ask.

"Well" said Patricia, trying to figure out how to explain a computer to a cat, "I'm getting information."

'Oh,' said Elvis. 'How very strange.'

"Why? How do you get your information?"

'Through my whiskers.'

Elementary my dear Watson.

Then one day our bookkeeper laid out some work and turned to the file cabinet. Turning back, she found a cat named Tweety sprawled across the papers.

"Tweety, you are going to have to move."

Tweety stared at her for a moment then rolled onto her back, still covering the work and still staring at her.

"I swear, Bonnie, I heard her say it! 'Okay,' she told me. 'I moved.'"

We have dozens more such stories, but these few should tell us that animals are certainly not "dumb", neither in ability to speak nor in brain power. No, not at all. Just ... well, maybe just possessed of a whole lot more common sense than us humans.



Let's Play Peek-A-Boo!

Cats have a way of making any moment into a time for play. Sometimes just a plain old cardboard box will outshine the most elaborate of store bought cat toys. We often use the lids from covered litter boxes and turn them upside down to make nice little hide-a-ways.

For Ron, as you can see, it became a great way to surprise one of his caretakers with an instant game of peek-a-boo!

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.

TattleTails & Tidbits is available only in electronic form. You can [sign up for our email list](#) to receive it directly in your In box and/or you can [download your copy directly from our website](#).

[Donations](#) are gratefully accepted and we hope you will share this with those you think would be interested as well.

Horsing Around

by Dawn Hayman

Back in the old days, our horses had access to a 25-acre field which went way up and over a hill with all sorts of valleys and wild apple orchards and trees and shrubs. It was horse heaven but eventually became too large of an area for our special needs horses and we had to fence it off to more manageable pastures. But back in the days we used that whole pasture, I would often have to go round up the horses to come into the barn. It was quite a hike to find out where they were grazing. Generally, if I gave them a loud enough call, they'd all come running back in. But, now and again, they loved to pull a fast one on me and hide from me.



One day I caught them in the act of a most elaborate scheme.

They had all gone up to a side of the hill that they don't normally go to. I searched and searched for them to no avail. I was panicking as I was convinced they got out. But as I came around the back side of the hill where they didn't expect me to be, I came up on top of a hill and there all seven of them were, each hiding behind their very own tree. Their backs were to me and they didn't hear me. When I yelled, "There you are!" and probably a few other choice words, I swear I could hear them laughing as they galloped back to the barn. By the time I caught up with them, one of them asked me, 'What took you so long? We are waiting for our dinner.' Those horses loved playing practical jokes on me like that!



Charlie pony can be very cute but also is known to be very naughty. Charlie would have made a great pick-pocket thief. Couple that with his dry sense of humor and he can challenge the most patient of us. Charlie lures you in because of his cuteness. And

as soon as he knows he's got you, he makes his move. He can pull walkie talkies out of staff pockets and belt loops faster than anything. And he delights in coming over for a snuggle in the winter and before you know it he has your coat zipper in his mouth and won't let go as he slowly raises the zipper up as far as it will go. Just as the human is convinced he will choke them for sure, he suddenly unzips it as fast as he can and lets go of it. He thinks he is very clever. And, he is, but we don't want him to know we think so too.

While closing down the barn one night, I came across this pigeon calmly sitting on top of Clyde.

"What is this!" I asked.

Clyde just calmly looked at me and said, 'A pigeon. We are playing.'

"And that doesn't bother you?" I asked.



Clyde looked at the pigeon out of the corner of his eye and then back at me. 'Nope, but why does it seem to bother you? You could take our picture.'

And so I did. We often see the horses and goats interacting with the wild birds and other wildlife. We have many stories of watching the birds making up games with the horses. All of life interacts with one another. If we take the time to observe with an open mind and heart, we can learn a lot from them.

The Serious Work Of Play

by Matt Perry



It is easy to recognize play in our animal companions. Dogs bow and chase. Cats stalk invisible prey across living-room floors. Young horses buck and kick for the sheer joy of motion. These scenes feel familiar because play is woven into the fabric of life itself. Domestic animals are not exceptions. Across the wild world, play is not frivolous—it is formative. It is how bodies are built, minds are sharpened, emotions regulated, and futures rehearsed. In the wild, play is often the first classroom.

Among young animals, play most visibly strengthens the body. Chasing, wrestling, mock fighting, leaping—these are exercises that appear to us as pure joyful expression, but they are much more than that. Fox kits pounce and grapple, refining coordination and predatory skill. Young gray squirrels spiral around tree trunks in frenetic pursuit, building agility and balance that will later mean the difference between escape and capture. Otters toss stones and sticks, learning not only dexterity but something deeper: how objects behave in the world. Such play enhances spatial awareness, memory, and innovation—cornerstones of animal intelligence.

But play is not only about muscle and movement. It is equally about emotion. For wild animals living under constant threat—predation, hunger, environmental stress—play provides release. It diffuses tension and restores equilibrium. In social species especially, play acts as social lubrication, preventing aggression and strengthening bonds. Elephants mock-charge and splash water not as wasted energy, but as emotional maintenance. These moments stimulate neurochemical rewards that promote calm, confidence, and resilience—internal states essential for survival in an often unforgiving world.

White-tailed deer offer a particularly elegant example of how play unfolds across developmental stages. In their earliest weeks, fawns remain hidden, conserving energy and avoiding detection. Yet even then, play begins quietly. Gentle nuzzling and grooming with the mother establish trust and social connection. Exploratory play follows: sniffing leaves, mouthing twigs, tasting the world in small, tentative ways. This early curiosity builds familiarity with the landscape and sharpens the senses long before speed and strength are required.



As fawns grow, their play becomes unmistakable. Running erupts suddenly, often without obvious cause—bursts of speed across fields, followed by abrupt stops, then renewed pursuit. I once watched two yearlings chase each other back and forth across a reforestation field, trading roles with the fluid reciprocity of dogs at play. After twenty minutes of sprinting and dodging, they slowed, returned to each other's sides, and resumed foraging. What looked like pure joy was also training: cardiovascular fitness, coordination, and social attunement refined in real time.

Leaping is another hallmark of deer play. Fawns will sometimes bound skyward with all four feet leaving the ground—a behavior known as “stotting”. It appears exuberant, almost reckless, but it serves a purpose. These vertical launches strengthen legs, enhance endurance, and may rehearse predator evasion. They are declarations of capability, even before danger demands it.



Young bucks also engage in mock sparring. I once watched a yearling with antlers no more than two-inch pencils challenge a maple tree as if it were a rival. He lowered his head, threatened the unresponsive, bark-clad opponent, made careful contact, then bounded away—only to return and repeat the ritual. It was absurd and deeply instructive. In these playful rehearsals, neck and shoulder muscles strengthen, coordination improves, and social confidence takes shape. The tree, indifferent though it was, provided resistance enough.

Play also teaches deer how to live together. White-tailed deer communicate through an intricate language of posture, gesture, scent, movement, and vocalizations. Through play and soft interactions with their mothers and their mother's allies, fawns learn this language. They discover when to yield and when to press, how to assert and how to submit. These lessons establish social hierarchies gently, reducing conflict later in life. By learning the rules early, young deer avoid costly mistakes as adults—mistakes that can lead to injury or exclusion from resources.

Cognition, too, is shaped by play. As fawns explore and navigate obstacles, they develop spatial memory and problem-solving skills. Safe routes, escape paths, bedding areas—these mental maps are built through playful exploration long before they are urgently needed. When a young deer tests how to clear an obstacle, like a fence, or a fallen log, or weaves through dense cover at speed, it is practicing adaptability. Play is how flexibility becomes instinct.

Even adult deer, though less frequently, may still play. I once watched a young doe on a hot summer day splash repeatedly in a beaver pond—rearing, galloping, and plunging into the water with unmistakable delight. It was cooling, yes, but it was also play. A reminder that joy does not vanish with maturity; it simply becomes rarer and more precious.



Play also helps deer regulate emotion. Through playful encounters, young animals experience excitement, uncertainty, and even mild fear in controlled conditions. They learn how to recover—to pause, recalibrate, and continue. This emotional practice builds resilience. Tail-wagging, prancing, sudden bursts of motion: these are outward signs of internal balance being forged.

societies.

Play is not excess energy burned off—it is essential work. Across species, from young beavers wrestling in shallow water to fawns testing their agility in a summer meadow, play prepares animals for lives that will demand precision, courage, and adaptability. It shapes strong bodies, agile minds, stable emotions, and functional

To witness play in wild animals is to glimpse the hidden scaffolding of survival. What appears carefree is, in truth, preparation for the challenges of life. In honoring the seriousness of play, we come closer to understanding the full, complex lives of the animals who share our world—as well as the quiet intelligence and emotional complexity with which they meet it.

Goat Humor

by Dawn Hayman



Rosebud was one of the most amazing goats to ever grace our farm. She lived to be about 16-17 years old and she taught so much to so many people. She was not just a kind goat but she was also a very wise spirit or "old soul." It was easy to feel that about her within seconds of meeting her. But what was even more special about Rosebud was her sense of humor. This goat lived to make people laugh and she worked at it non-stop. Clearly this was her mission in this life.

Rosebud had the uncanny ability to move her giant ears independently from one another. She could lift them all the way up so they were standing straight up in the air. And she could hold one up and one down or both up at the same time. We have never seen anything like that. But what she truly understood was a heavy human heart. And when someone came in that she knew was struggling for whatever reason, Rosebud would set into motion her amazing ears until she finally would get that human to laugh. We watched her go to the most amazing extremes to get people out of their heads and worries and into their hearts by using laughter. And what comedic timing she possessed! She should have gotten an academy award.

Tippie was another most amazing goat who actually was born here on the farm when we took in a retired goat who we didn't even know was pregnant. Imagine coming out one afternoon to find two tiny baby goats out of the blue! Tippie was always a bit of a character and very loving and outgoing. She loved greeting all visitors and she had a very special skill that endeared her to most everyone, but especially children. One day I tossed a ball towards Tippie for her to play with. But what she did next totally stunned me. She leaped up and hit the ball with her horns and shot it back to me. That was just a fluke, I thought. So I tried it, again and again and again, while she hit it back to me every time with exact precision. Tippie loved playing a game of volleyball anytime she could find someone willing to play.



One day, years later, I came out to the barnyard to find her walking around with the ball stuck between her horns. Without missing a beat she came running up to me and said, "Have you seen my ball? I can't find my ball!" She just thought that was hysterically funny. And then she informed me this just wouldn't do and we must get her a new ball - which of course we did.

In later years, one of her caretakers taught her to hit the ball into a bucket. And I guess goat basketball was discovered and she got very good at that as well. It was so obviously clear that Tippie understood the game. It wasn't just hitting at a ball or butting something back. She clearly loved the interaction with the human and the joy it brought to them. But she also understood that making a "basket" or "hole in one" when she returned a throw and popped the ball effortlessly into the bucket, was something to be proud of. She was her own kind of sports enthusiast and I'll never forget the joy that goat experienced doing that.