## **UPDATE FROM A POULTRY PLACE**

Definitely into the cooler part of the year now, already had the first fog and the mercury dropped down to below zero the other night. The days are still quite pleasant when the sun appears but way too short. We had some decent rain in April, which has been great as it means the two sheep paddocks which are being rested have had a chance to spurt new growth. The sheep are eager to be allowed into one of them and I think by the end of this week I will have to open the gate and let them graze as they have almost devoured the paddock they are currently in. I was hoping I could hold them off to the start of winter but alas that isn't going to be the case.

It is amazing how the impact of two hot summers continues months later. It's like the way in which animals, who are bred for human consumption, can still be affected by how they were bred, even after they are rescued from the factory farms. In January, four residents marked a very special moment. The four, toms (male turkeys) celebrated two years of freedom from the factory sheds. Had they remained in the shed they would have been slaughtered after 16 weeks but they were lucky and were rescued and came to reside at A Poultry Place, enjoying 135-plus weeks of life. I still don't know how they endured not one but almost two of the most extreme summers I have ever experienced here. Eventually the stresses and strain on their lives, due to the way they are bred took their toll and over the past few months each has sadly left us. They all weighed 20 kilograms or more when they died. I'm so glad they got to have such long lives – they definitely enjoyed ruling the roost here. The house paddock is a little empty without their presence.



Two broiler boys (chickens bred for their meat), produced to be display products at last year's Royal Easter Show in Sydney recently celebrated a year of life.

Like turkeys bred for their meat, the way broilers are bred to be 'meatier birds' see them suffering respiratory and skeletal problems as well, which usually cuts their lives tragically short.

And it doesn't stop there.

A number of duck residents here, who were inmates of intensive ducks farms during their infancy, have, as they matured, begun experiencing mobility issues, a result of their size. Like broiler chickens and turkeys bred for their meat, factory farmed ducks are genetically bred to be 'meatier birds' but their skeletal system cannot handle the extra weight. There is now a designated disabled duck area here, where a number of these factory farm survivors can do what ducks do without being harassed by some of their more abled-bodied brothers and sisters. These guys and gals were recently joined by a young pekin duck with a bad leg, who came down from Sydney. She had been a beloved pet but her family were concerned about her long term safety in their backyard, along with the fact that she was a lone duck and wanted her to have some duck companions. Later this week, yet another disabled pekin duck is coming to join them from the northern beaches of Sydney.

Recently, I have been touched by the kindness of a number of people, who have gone out of their way to bring much loved feathered companions to a new life here. One young woman drove her duck, Basil, and his eight hen friends up from Victoria to ensure they had a safe forever home. These latter guys were the much loved companions but changing circumstances meant she could no longer care for them. She had read about A Poultry Place and wanted them to come here as she knew here her feathered friends would have a safe and permanent home. It was a nice compliment.

It's actually been a lot about ducks in recent times, with 18 joining the family in the week between Easter and Anzac Day. Six, all pekins (pictured right) arrived from Sydney, having been adopted as babies by a kind woman, who couldn't stand seeing the five-day-old ducklings being sold as 'meat

ducks' at a market. She had raised them for more than six months and grown very attached to them only to have her neighbour complain to the local council about their noise. Her search to find them a safe, forever home lead her to A Poultry Place. Within days they were joined by another Pekin called Tweety, who was rescued with a duck friend by a kind-hearted person after they had been dumped on the Georges River in Sydney's south. Unfortunately, Tweety's friend was injured and did not survive, so Tweety's rescuer sought about finding him a safe haven with other ducky friends. Her search ended with a phone call to me and Tweety is now happy with his new chums.



A few days before Tweety arrived I got a phone call from a contact at an animal shelter who was wondering if I had any capacity to take in some ducks. There were 10 ducks who had been at the shelter for a month or more and were still unadopted. Most of them had come into the shelter separately and were now living in two groups of four (one quartet pictured below right), as well as a pair of handsome young Muscovy drakes, I said I'd think about it and wandered outside to see if it could be managed. Thanks to some recent donations (and some time off from work) having allowed me to set up two new temporary house/yard areas I realised I could grant them all residency as they begin their integration with the larger flocks. The Saturday I collected them was a busy day but the following morning after I let everyone out and went back to observe how all the newcomers were getting on was one of those lovely little experiences that becomes a treasured memory. The two handsome black muscovies (pictured below left) quickly joined a flock of drakes happily, without the usually sparring.





The week, which will now be known as duck week, reminded me of another wonderful experience six years ago when Pat, a wildlife carer from Sydney arrived on Anzac Day with a flock of 13 ducks she had been caring for after they had been dumped on the Parramatta River. Pat had housed and cared for the ducks at an old factory site on the waterfront, where they had safe accommodation during the night and access to water throughout the day. Unfortunately the factory was sold to developers and Pat needed to rehome her flock. It was great to be taking in a group of animals who were forced to move out of necessity, rather than having been dumped by someone who didn't are or couldn't be bothered. The love Pat has for these ducks was obvious and I felt

honoured to be able to help a like-minded person solve a worrying dilemma. It was a similar feeling to that I have experienced recently when Sophie, Genevieve, Susan and Sonia delivered their feathered friends here. I just wish everyone would have such compassion for ducks, chickens, and basically all non-humans, as much as these people have demonstrated they do. It is always good to be reminded that there are others out there who want to help ensure the safety of feathered friends. It has been a truly humbling experience meeting these individuals and even more touching that they have remained in contact, making enquiries into how their feathered friends are going in their new lives.

But that isn't the only humbling experience I have recently had.

A few days back I was visited by a woman who had been to A Poultry Place some years ago. As we walked around the sanctuary she commented on how much work had been done since she was last here, which was in early 2008. She revealed that when she first visited she was a meat eater but is now vegan, a change which she in part attributes to meeting some of the residents of A Poultry Place.

Last update I mentioned some friends had begun a sanctuary, known as Manning River Farm Animal Sanctuary, in northern NSW, near Taree. I am so honoured that Sharron, Fiona, Tara and Denise decided to name one of their first residents, a rooster, after me. Mr Carmody, as the handsome feathered dude is now known had been dumped, along with a brother, on the doorstep of a vet and the gals at Manning River offered them forever refuge.

Don't forget May is International Respect for Chickens Month. Since 2005 this annual project, an initiative of US organisation United Poultry Concerns, is aimed at celebrating chickens throughout the world and protesting the bleakness of their lives in farming operations. So please try and do something for the chickens during the 31 days of May there is no end of possibilities. For example, if you are on Face Book just visit the A Poultry Place page and 'like' and 'share' some of the posts we put up during the month. You could bake something without eggs and share it with family, friends or work colleagues to demonstrate you can bake with eggs or maybe you could encourage/challenge someone you know who eats chicken to go chicken-free for the entire month. ●

TO VISIT A POULTRY PLACE EMAIL freechook@bigpond.com

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