

I am sitting typing this in the sunroom, which at the moment is better described as the overcast room, as rain is falling outside for the third consecutive day. I am surrounded by sleeping cats and as I look out the window over the house paddock I see roosters, guinea fowl and peacock sitting inside their homes sheltering from the rain. As I scan down to the left former battery hens have just run inside their house as the rain gets heavier, they will re-emerge when the rain tapers off to a light drizzle to dig up the softened earth to discover some delicacy. Beyond the hens I can see ducks dabbling in the many puddles, which have resulted from the on-off rain, having the best time. I'm into my third week of leave and feeling a tad guilty that the "to do list" remains in tact as I have not made any impression on the many tasks I've set for myself during my current leave from my paid work. I console myself by remembering I still have another six weeks before I return to work to tackle those chores and that the rain is much needed given how dry the year has been thus far.

It's been a while since I had the time to sit back and reflect on what has been going on here at A Poultry Place and in a way I'm happy that the current rain, which is predicted to continue for the rest of the week, has 'forced' me to relax a little. There's always something which needs to be done running an animal sanctuary and it's often only when things, such as rain, forces me to find other activities to occupy myself that I reflect on what has happened here during recent times. Since the last update in May, I've spoken at Wollongong and Macquarie Universities about the sanctuary; I've conducted a sustainable activism workshop at the inaugural Oceania Institute for Critical Animal Studies Conference (see picture right); hosted two open days at the sanctuary, which attracted a combined attendance of close to a hundred people, the majority of whom were first time visitors here; and, on Monday just gone was visited by members of the University of Sydney Animal Welfare Society. And in between all this and work there has of course been new residents to welcome and settle in.



Each of the new arrivals has his or her own story, some of which involves an act of kindness by a human. Back in May I received an email from a woman who had won a lamb in a raffle at a sustainable farmers dinner.

Her email read:

"I think the idea was that he would be eaten but as I'm almost a vegan and certainly not a meat eater I said I'd rather give him a full and happy life. It's now the morning after and I don't think Petersham is the best option for my lamb (nicknamed Lucky). The lamb is still on the farm whilst I try and organise for somewhere that he can live out his life happily. Do you know of anywhere?"

Without hesitation I said Lucky could come join the woollies in residence here. When I went and collected Lucky the farmer was amused by the outcome of his donation to the raffle and even more so when I asked him to help me put Lucky on the back seat of the car for the trip home. On the way home Lucky (pictured on previous page) managed to amuse some passing motorists as it's not everyday you see a sheep lounging in the back seat of a car. Unfortunately given he didn't have human contact when he was a tiny bub, like most of the other sheep here, Lucky is a little stand-offish with me but I can genuinely say that as he sees the others come running towards me each time I enter the sheep paddock he is beginning to trust me more.

Another amazing effort was an activist who drove four bantam roosters to safety here from Victoria. It is the second time this guy has made the trek, which involves a six-hour each-way drive, to give some roosters (who in my humble opinion seem to be amongst the most disliked animals on the earth) a second chance at life. These guys had been handed over to a local vet to be euthanased because they were roosters and of "no value". Thankfully the activist was alerted to their plight and began finding safe refuge for these guys.

Another rooster tale. I was also contacted by a young mum who, as a school holiday activity for her kids, had taken in a dozen fertile eggs from a hatching project organisation. Eleven eggs hatched and as the chicks began to mature it was obvious that some were roosters.

She emailed me:

"The lady who does the program said she would come back when the chicks are 5-6 weeks old and take the roosters to a new home. I contacted her yesterday to ask where the roosters would go and she told me they would probably end up as dinner. My family and I are heart broken as we have become really attached to all our chicks, they have names and are constantly cuddled, they have become really affectionate. I am desperately trying to find a good home for them to live their lives happily. If I am not able to find a home would you be able to take them? We are happy to make donations whenever we can to help out."

By her experience this woman has now learnt what really goes on in these schemes and is now an advocate against them. The four young roosters (pictured right) I took in from this family are now settling into life here.



I enjoyed another little victory over hatching projects last week when I was able to offer refuge to four large roosters - a father and his three sons (pictured right) from a local high school. I was originally asked to just take in the sons but managed to talk the teacher, who contacted me, into handing over all the roosters. The adoption means that one local high school will no longer be producing chicks. It is a small victory but a win nevertheless!



Circumstances also meant that I was able to help out a fellow activist, who because of her stance against pro-developers and support for protection of local environmental zoning in the town where she lives was ordered by her council to "get rid" of the 11 roosters from various hatching projects she had given refuge to on her property because of complaints from a neighbour (who is the developer

she just happens to be opposing). Her request came at the right time as I had just integrated some other roosters, which meant I had an empty shed which these guys could claim as their new home. Having just written and re-read this, I again realise that there will eventually become a time when there will be no more room here at A Poultry Place to offer sanctuary for roosters and I can't help but wonder what will then happen in situations such as those just recounted. One of the jobs I have to do in the next few weeks is the construction of a new rooster area up in the section of the sanctuary I refer to as Roosterville. It basically involves rebuilding a shed, which has been donated, and constructing a predator-proof fenced area around it. It will mean I won't have to face the ultimate reality of the rooster situation for a little while yet. Again I encourage everyone to speak out about hatching projects and to discourage family, friends and colleagues from participating in such schemes. Feel free to email me directly if you want resources and information about how to go about this.



Speaking of hatching projects seven muscovy ducklings arrived here from “an accidental hatching”. I'm not quite sure how one has “an accidental hatching” given that it would involve either a duck sitting on fertile eggs for a few weeks, or a human putting fertile eggs into an incubator, but I have heard so many stories over the years nothing surprises me anymore.

These seven little ones were ‘adopted’ by some pekin ducks, who arrived around the same time, having been dumped on Sydney waterways. On the weekend just gone all have been integrated with the larger flock of pekings already here and all are getting along swimmingly. It is actually this flock of ducks I am currently watching enjoying the puddles.

Another new comer is a free loader, one of those who comes and goes as they please. One evening, a few weeks back, I saw an owl sitting on the roof of my house, it was my first sighting of an owl here. A few mornings ago I was outside in the early hours when it was still very dark and had the experience of seeing the owl swooping down from the trees obviously after something he/she had spied in the dead of night. The knowledge of yet more wildlife who are comfortable calling A Poultry Place home pleases me. It is an honour to know the environment I have created is helping some of the locals continue to exist.

Earlier this month I was pleased that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) confirmed what most logical, rational people already know — that chickens kept in sheds are not free to roam!

The Federal Court found Baiada Poultry and Bartter Enterprises, the processors and suppliers of Steggles branded chicken products, engaged in false, misleading and deceptive conduct in describing on product packaging and in advertising that its meat chickens were ‘free to roam’ in large barns. The Australian Chicken Meat Federation, the peak industry body for Australia's chicken meat industry, was also found to have engaged in false, misleading and deceptive

conduct, by claiming on its website that chickens produced in Australia were 'free to roam' or able to 'roam freely' in large barns. The ACCC instituted proceedings against the companies and the peak body in September 2011. The Court found that the ordinary and natural meaning of the phrase 'free to roam' is "the largely uninhibited ability of the chickens to move around at will in an aimless manner." In contrast, Justice Tracey found that at times in their growth cycle the chickens "could not move more than a metre or so (at most) without having their further movement obstructed by a barrier of clustered birds". Steggles statistics indicated consistent stocking densities of between 17.4 and 19.6 chickens per square metre. The ACCC alleged that at these densities each chicken, on average, had access to floor space which was less than the size of an A4 sheet of paper and that this was contrary to the representation that they were 'free to roam'.

While the court ruling does not mean that the intensive farming of chickens for their meat is going to stop anytime soon, it does provide more ammunition for those of us campaigning against the mass exploitation of chickens. For many years me, like many others, have been telling people about the conditions these birds are kept — this court ruling validates and legitimises our claims as being factually correct and not just the hysterical rantings of animal lovers and lies.

Finally, I recently received what has to be one of the most touching email I have ever got:

Hi Bede,

My name is Amanda and I am 12 years old. My family and I have been Vegan for about 18 months and I read your story on the Cruelty Free Shop website. I would love to donate my pocket money, which I have been saving for a while, to your Poultry Place. Can u please let me know how I can make a donation as I was very touched by all the lovely work you do to help animals.

Amanda's words and actions brought tears to my eyes and I look forward to meeting her and her family when they come to visit A Poultry Place later this year. ●

**TO VISIT A POULTRY PLACE EMAIL
freechook@bigpond.com**

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