

It's been a pretty amazing summer thus far as it has been rather mild and fairly wet, compared to the previous few years. Two months into summer and there's only been about 10 days when it has been more than 30 degrees, which is a blessing to me as I hate the heat and welcomed by my feathered, hoofed and pawed cohabitants. There's also been some decent rain, which has kept things green. The sheep and the goats are yet to go up to the top paddocks, as there is still enough feed for them in the house paddocks. This is in stark contrast to the same time last year when the top paddocks resembled dust bowls and I was hand feeding. The showers, we are probably getting a decent one every 2-3 weeks have meant that there is grass cover almost everywhere rather than dust and it is nice to see all the animals enjoying it. The geese and ducks in particular are enjoying it. Geese are natural graziers and spend a lot of their day picking at the green stuff coming up from the ground. The ducks are enjoying sitting under the fruit trees and jumping up to pick at the leaves and the fruit. They make such a show, especially when the wild birds — rosellas and cockatoos — are at the top of the fruit trees picking at the fruit, which they then drop and is rapidly jumped upon by those on the ground.

Having had some time off over the festive season, and for the first time since I've been here not having any major building projects to attend to, I managed to actually spend a lot of time just sitting outside and observing things. The thing which really struck me was the abundance of wildlife which is now utilising A Poultry Place. There are numerous native birds who visit to feed off the trees. The cockatoos and rosellas love the fruit trees — I gave up long ago trying to keep the fruit for my own consumption, I figure the free food supply serves a purpose. There have also been lots of magpies and native ducks hanging around as well. My biggest surprise was to see the numbers of superb parrots who were visiting to feast on the seed pods from the wattle trees. The superb parrot is an endangered species and Murrumbateman is one of their last habitats, so it is encouraging to see them hanging around. A single ibis has also been about and usually hangs out with the turkeys. I also discovered, when I was doing a minor fencing task, that there was at least one resident turtle. There is also a rabbit, well I guess there's probably more than one, who has taken up residence at my neighbour's place and comes over for visits.

The advent of all the birdlife has had a downside for the cats, who I no longer allow to be outside when I'm not about during the day. Sox and Frisbee don't seem to mind too much though as they have discovered new things to entertain them during the day — like finding new spots on top of furniture to sleep away the day. (You've got to love that sort of life!) They have also been getting used to having two other felines about — Kirri and Couchy (pictured below) — who are in the process of being socialised. Kirri and Couchy are two inseparable moggies who were cast-offs. They have been here for just over a month, having been in foster care for 18 months before that and we are making progress. I took them in as a way of filling the void left by Maisie and I haven't really



regretted it, they needed to be in a situation where someone had more time to spend with them. The progress is slow but they are enjoying being patted and slowly gaining the courage to explore more of the house. They are still a way off from competing with Sox and Frisbee for space on the bed, preferring the safety of their cat igloo at night!

The time off also saw me manage to integrate another bantam rooster into the main chook flock. The new boy, Claude (pictured over page), arrived on Christmas Eve. It was the same old story — a little chick who had grown up



to be a rooster and was no longer welcomed in suburbia. Claude brings to 13 the number of bantam boys I have successfully managed to get to live in harmony with each other and the ex-battery hens. I made the decision about 14 months ago not take in any more large roosters at present because of lack of space and also because they are harder to get to live with their brothers and more aggressive towards the hens. The little boys, though, aren't so at least I can offer some haven for them. It's just one of those tough choices you have to make when operating a sanctuary.

There has been a bit of sadness as well, with the passing of another character, Rudi the sheep. Rudi was one of the lambs who were rescued during a hideous storm four-and-a-half years ago. At the time of his rescue he was unconscious and probably about 10 minutes away from death. He survived to become a huge sheep with huge horns. He was definitely the leader of the pack, or should I say flock and his passing was met with some mild confusion by the other sheep for a couple of days they seemed a little lost. Coming so closely after Maisie's passing and because of the closeness I had with him in his early days it took a while to get used to not being greeted by Rudi each morning with his two front legs up on the gate. As a dear friend said to me — he had four-and-a-half years of life longer than he would have had had he not been picked up as the frozen ball of lamb he was when discovered.

But I don't want to end on a downer. Norman and Virgil, the goats (pictured below), have settled in nicely and enjoying their new pad down by the front fence. They have endeared themselves to some of the neighbours and even some of the neighbouring dogs who no longer stand at their fences barking at them constantly. Norman and Virgil have even learnt to put themselves to bed each night — all I have to do is open the gate from their paddock and the gate to their night quarters and they make their own way there. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that they know there's something there waiting for them, like fruit tree cuttings or some goodies from the green grocer. ●

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