

Running an animal sanctuary and having responsibility for more than 250 residents it is sometimes easy to overlook the constant breakthroughs which take place on a regular basis. Recently, a visitor asked me what was the most memorable thing which had taken place during the existence of A Poultry Place. I couldn't answer because there are way too many memorable happenings in the almost 10 years history of the sanctuary, but it did get me thinking and made me a little more alert to the changes which take place during the space of a few weeks, so I thought I'd share some.

So far this year the rain gods have been very generous and we have received more than three times the amount of rainfall we had to the same time last year and are well above the average rainfall to date for this time of the year. It is has been a huge relief to have had such a great wet start to the year after so many dry years. I can't remember a time when I had to dig channels to divert water flow in order to prevent flooding, as I had to do one Sunday afternoon in early March. Of course as can be seen from the pics below the ducks and geese have been really enjoying themselves.



Almost all the goose inhabitants are now living together. The only exceptions are the inseparable pair — G1 and G2 — who, while happy to share the house paddock with the 35 other geese during the day, prefer to maintain their own night quarters. The others all now go into the same night shed each evening — it's only taken two-and-a-half years to achieve this level of tolerance.



Meanwhile, down in the duck paddock the past few months has seen the introduction of a smaller flock of 11 ducks into the main duck population. This flock was made up of ducks who arrived here through various means in smaller groups of twos, three and four. Having got them all to live together I hoped they would easily assimilate into the main duck flock and so far so good. Three of them now go in with the main duck flock at night, the others preferring to maintain their own night quarters but during the day happily share the same paddock without any squabbles. They have even accepted Ruben, a recently arrived rooster, who has decided he likes to roost in their shed at night.

Another revelation is Kirri cat's beautiful voice, which she is no longer afraid to hide. After a little more than two years here Kirri has really made some major progress in recent times. Not only is she now happy to talk to me she has decided she also likes pats and head rubs. While hugs are still not on the agenda her interactions with me have come a very long way. Indeed, I have also notice a willingness by her to interact with some of the other members of the Poultry Place pride. She and Jasmine cat will now engage in nose rubbing come feed time and she will happily share a feedbowl with others. Previously, she would rarely engage with anyone but Couchy cat, whom she arrived with.

I'm hoping the Kirri cat breakthrough is contagious given the spare room has (unexpectedly) been converted into a cat nursery in the past fortnight.

While A Poultry Place is primarily a sanctuary devoted to assisting poultry (chickens/roosters, ducks, geese, turkeys, guinea fowl, peacocks) on occasion situations arise that sees me coming to the aid of other animals, which is why there are residents sheep, goats and guinea pigs — and of course cats.

Three weeks ago, one of my volunteers at my paid work, Dorothy, arrived on her designated day in the office worried about the future of a cat, who had appeared on her doorstep a few weeks previously. Having lost her husband a few years ago,

Dorothy is in the process of downsizing from her family home of decades into a retirement villa. The arrival of a pretty cat, who had been carelessly dumped by someone had caused Dorothy some concern as she was due to move out shortly. When, a few days after, the cat turned up one evening for its feed with three kittens in tow Dorothy's consternation got worse. Dorothy rang various organisations for help and was told she could hire a cat trap to trap the cat and her kittens. At 83, Dorothy wasn't keen on this option and knowing about my involvement in the animal rights movement she asked me for suggestions. Dorothy has been a long-time volunteer and I felt I had to try and help, despite knowing this would require me taking in the feline family, as everyone I know locally who does cat rescue and fostering care had full houses. Of course it was all dependant on whether we could catch them but this task was made easier when mum cat moved her three bubs into a neighbour's garage where they could be contained.

It is not the first time the spare room has been a cat/kitty training ground. Shortly after I moved into the house in 2002, the room became temporary shelter to Sox and her five kittens. Sox has stayed on and is now matriarch of the pride here, which had, until the recent arrivals, numbered five.



Almost immediately mum cat calmed down and seemed to realise life was on the improve, as she allowed me to pat her within hours of her arrival — another indication that somewhere along the line she had been someone's "pet". Her bubs were more hostile, hissing and spitting at me for the first few days but I am slowly winning over their confidence. The plan is to tame them, get them desexed and hopefully rehome them. I have already accepted the fact that mum cat will probably remain here long-term and join the Poultry Place pride as few people want to adopt an older cat. As a result I have called her Patches. I am trying to resist naming the bubs for fear of getting too attached and being unable to part with them.

The five existing Poultry Place pride members — Sox, Couchy, Kirri, Sasha and Jasmine — are either ignoring the newcomers' presence, or really haven't noticed they are encamped in the spare room, as they haven't been at all alarmed by their presence leaving me to wonder whether this is the calm before the storm or acceptance.

Of course all this action has managed to distract me from the disappointment experienced on learning that I was one of 90 animal activists denied the opportunity to be part of the Sydney Mardi Gras parade this year. Not only was it disappointing that Animal Liberation had been denied marching rights after a long association with Mardi Gras, but this year's float was going to highlight an animal rights issue very close to my heart and indeed a major contributor to why I created A Poultry Place in the first instance — the plight of the battery hen. My personal disappointment aside the rejection did generate a lot of media attention and therefore battery hens and a variety of other animal rights issues received some unexpected media attention.

This weekend brings more change as we finish daylight savings and all have to adjust our routines to accommodate for fewer daylight hours, well at least until it all starts again later in the year. ●

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