Dear Members,

The unending plight of chickens has come to my attention again and again over recent months. WRR is asked almost weekly to rescue yet another hen, rooster, or entire flock of these wonderful birds from neglect, abuse, or simply because someone purchased a fluffy chick and now the romance with that helpless baby, no longer so adorable in their eyes, has soured. Because of all this, I want to once again tell the story of one hen and her adopted family. When I wrote this some years ago, I wanted to remind the reader of just how remarkable the often underrated chicken is. Of course, I may be preaching to the choir, but I like to think that some of my stories reach far and wide and plant seeds of animal appreciation far beyond those of us who are already so devoted to them.

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Finally, the rains have come. The spring of 2007 has been wet and cool—the welcome change we all needed after two years of drought. I am keeping my fingers crossed that this summer will follow in the moist and muddy footsteps of spring.

No doubt it was all the life-giving rain that prompted the many rescued hens in our care to be so generous in the number of eggs they decided to lay recently. I have always enjoyed watching the proud, brightly feathered girls as they wriggle down into the dense hay and position their plump bodies perfectly so that when finally the egg comes, the nest is flawlessly arranged to receive it. Though we rarely let the hens hatch their prized eggs, there is always one who manages to either hide some or convince us, one way or another, to let her hatch at least an egg or two.

This year, it was not solely the chickens who felt the undeniable urge to contribute to the burgeoning life that spring was encouraging. There are also rescued ducks who reside at WRR, and one thin, shy female decided that it was time to join the chicken contingent.

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Lynn’s Letter

in their egg laying activities. This particular duck is creamy white with just a hint of russet on the tips of her wings. She came to WRR as a fluffy youngster and was always shy and unsure of herself. But it was spring and she had a job to do.

She chose a spot that was out of the way of chicken traffic, a quiet area in a dark corner of the chicken house where few would take notice of her and her shelled treasures. Each day she demurely positioned herself on her nest, laid one pearl-colored jewel, and then left the hens behind and waddled out to join her duck friends in the shallow blue pool. She repeated her ritual each day for over a week.

One morning she chose life with friends over her eggs and moved on to other activities. But her nest was now being watched over by a hen who had never been successful at egg laying. Here she observed the perfect situation, a nest filled with eggs and a mother who would never return.

The lanky brown and beige hen settled down to what would soon be the experience of a lifetime. Over the coming weeks, she took great pride in her new standing as a mother-to-be. She was devoted to her adopted eggs and turned them regularly so that all sides were warm and the tiny embryo inside was receiving the care necessary to grow into a healthy chick.

Her work and wisdom would not go unrewarded as the day finally dawned when tiny, down-covered ducklings squirmed and pecked and made their way out of each crisp shell. As they emerged, mother hen was waiting patiently to greet her new family. Once eggs hatch, hens remain on the nest, letting the little ones get to know their new, considerably larger world and their siblings. This mother was no different; she knew precisely what to do and was happy to accommodate each baby.

After a week it was time to parade the new brood out to meet their extended family. As the proud mother escorted her youngsters through the hen house door and into the yard, there were some puzzled glances and strange calls coming from the scrutinizing chicken circle. But the hen was too proud to care that her babies had these oddly flat webbed feet and broad beaks. She was their mother and to her they were not odd; they were beautiful.

One particularly curious hen named Henrietta made her way to the peculiar “chicks” and planted a sharp peck on the top of one downy duckling head. The mother hen would have none of this and chased Henrietta, scolded her loudly, and ran back to protect her brood from any further assaults.

As the weeks passed the community of hens and the lone rooster decided to accept the brown
hen and her unique youngsters. There were no more pecks on the little ducklings’ heads; even the inquisitive glances ceased. The other chickens understood that no matter their appearance, these were the beloved chicks of the brown hen who fully accepted them, webbed feet and all. But it would not be long before the new mother would fully understand the real meaning of the word “different.”

Her offspring had grown just enough to begin venturing a few yards from her watchful eyes and one warm, spring day when the sun was shining bright the little ducklings could not resist the call of a small pool of fresh, clean water. As the tiny, bright-eyed babies approached, they were only one quick leap from enjoying their very first swim. One duckling led the way and in seconds, all the siblings followed. Their mother could not believe her eyes. Surely her babies were in danger and she had to save them from drowning! With her frantic cackles she called all the hens to her side; every hen was just as hysterical, circling the pool with the mother, calling to the youngsters and running about with their feathers ruffled in excitement. Meanwhile, the ducklings swam contentedly about until, emerging from the water, they waddled to their mother’s side and nestled under her warm feathers.

Time and time again the ducklings took to the pool as their mother waited anxiously for them to return and in no time she grew to understand that, for her chicks, this was normal—her babies just happened to love to swim. As the ducklings grew and lost their down, their hours were spent more in the water and less alongside their mother. They were no longer in need of her watchful and loving care. It was time for them to move on to one of the sanctuary ponds and leave life in the chicken yard behind.

We gathered the ducklings into a large carrying cage and let them sit in the chicken yard; all the hens and the rooster came by, looked them over for several moments, then moved on. But one small, brown mother hen came to their side, sat and chirped and said her good-byes. She stayed for an hour and then stood and went back to life among her chicken family. The ducklings called to her but only briefly and once all were quiet, we carried them to the pond where they tumbled excitedly from their cage and took to the water where they were greeted by their new family.

This patient, noble brown hen could never have her own babies so she assumed care of the demure duck’s nest, hatched her eggs, and raised her young. She did not mind when the others would not accept her odd-looking chicks; she cared for them just the same. And when the day came to tell them goodbye, the brown hen did so unselfishly and with the grace that only a devoted mother could have.

More on Members’ Day

Join WRR for our 2022 Members’ Day at the Kendalia Sanctuary! Members can look forward to a vegan/vegetarian lunch, tours of the Sanctuary and our new veterinary suite, and an enrichment booth.

Tickets are $45 per person, and because Members’ Day is strictly for WRR members, we ask that each member household only purchase a total of four tickets.

Questions? Call Mackenzie Perez at 210-538-9761 or e-mail events@wildlife-rescue.org.

Please RSVP by Thursday, October 6th Click Here

UPCOMING EVENTS

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FOOD DRIVE
Friday, August 19 to Friday, August 26

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BIG GIVE 2022
Thursday, September 22 to Friday, September 23

~
MEMBERS’ DAY
Saturday, October 22

~
GIVING TUESDAY
Tuesday, November 29

~
ARTISTIC ANIMALS
Thursday, December 8

MARK YOUR 2022 Calendar!
WILDLIFE RESCUE & REHABILITATION'S
45th Anniversary Members' Day

Saturday, October 22, 2022 | 10:30 AM - 2:00 PM
WRR Sanctuary — Kendalia, TX

What to look forward to on Members' Day:
• Vegan and vegetarian lunch
• Sanctuary tours
• New veterinary suite tours
• Enrichment booth
• Visit with fellow WRR Members and staff

Please RSVP by Thursday, October 6th: Click Here