

It has been great being here at the sanctuary full-time for the past seven weeks - even if I don't have much to show for it! While I usually take my annual leave during the winter months as it makes life easier here; this year is the first time I have truly felt relaxed and completely switched off from work life (perhaps it is because I'm here for 13 weeks rather than the usual four?) How can I say that? Well my sleeping patterns have changed and I am sleeping for hours on end rather than waking every so often with either work or sanctuary thoughts on my mind; there's also been a few mornings when I lie there trying to work out what day of the week it actually is; and finally I'm also more flexible in my approach to life and not stressing that I'm not making much headway on the "to do list". I've generally been waking everyday and deciding what to do from the list when I see what the weather has planned.

During this time I've also realised how lucky I am that A Poultry Place is so established, a feeling which has only been highlighted by news that some other sanctuaries are struggling financially and/or emotionally. When I look back over the years here, and even before that - the years I spent at Atchin Tan sanctuary - I appreciate the efforts and sacrifices of the past 16 years which I've made to get me where I am today. For example, having worked two jobs for the first 10 years of this journey. Granted it has taken its toll on me personally - the physical work manifesting in bringing on arthritis due to a birth defect in my shoulder much earlier than it would have affected me. And of course, the fact that I'm still single is an obviously sign of the impact having a sanctuary can have on one's personal life. But if I had my time again would I change what I committed to do? Absolutely not.

Despite being in the middle of winter on most days the frosty and/or foggy mornings clear away quickly and bring days soaked in winter sun, which has meant I've had time to chill out with those who also call this place home. And I have done just that. There have been some days when I've just thought I'm going to take my book and some cushions and sit out in the house paddock under Maisie's tree and read for the day and relax - often in the company of cats, roosters and turkeys.

When I first started this journey I was working for myself as a home-based editor and thought that would go on like that for the rest of my life and then within weeks of having the house completed I learnt I was going to lose half of my income due to a corporate takeover. This forced me into working again for others, which meant I would not be home-based and changed the way I had planned this journey. The opportunity to spend so much time here is a godsend and I know it will be a struggle to have to face the prospect of returning to work in late September (unless of course I find me a sugar daddy before then!).

Despite adopting a more relaxed attitude I have been attending to stuff which needs attention (in addition to the day-to-day chores). For example I finally got in and made alterations to a disused chook house which was donated to me early this year - adding some wall panels and a floor to make it into a new safe night shed for a flock of bantam roosters (see pic on last age of this update) and just this weekend I put together another house which had been donated and will be used for other bantams. I also ordered some more water tanks (made possible by the donations received so far this year) - they were supposed to take four weeks to get here but arrived within four days and are still sitting in the drive awaiting for me to make the necessary preparations for their installation (see pic on last age of this update). When they are installed and eventually filled it will mean there's an additional 5000 litres of drinking water for the residents and will allay my fears of running dry in the summer months.

There's also been some time for welcoming newcomers.

Honey, Emily, Maude and Isabelle came to join the chooks as their humans were moving and couldn't take them with them and wanted to ensure they went somewhere safe. Burt, a broiler rooster (below left) arrived after he was dumped in a suburban Sydney park and captured by some wildlife carers to save him from predation. Small boy Roo was asked to leave his suburban Sydney home by a local council and three pure breed turkeys (below right) were surrendered by a person who agreed not to breed anymore.



Again I was touched by the lengths some go to help out others. Nina is a young Muscovy duck who arrived from the Southern Highlands after she was rescued by a woman called Nina, whom she is named after – I'll let Nina recount the story:

"A week ago I was out walking with my husband and three dogs when going past a nearby lake, I noticed a duck I hadn't seen before. It appeared to be limping slightly and when I approached, didn't fly off. It was almost as though it expected me to have food for it. As it was next to the lake, where there are three geese also, I decided to leave it be. However, it was not a variety of native duck I recognised and there weren't any other ducks around. I wondered if it may have been a pet duck which had been released (sadly). I put it out of my mind because it was happy to go back to the water. Today, when looking out of my lounge room window, the same duck was in the paddock next door waddling along looking for food. Our house is a five minute walk from the lake where I saw it last week. I thought it was odd to be in the field, all alone. So I grabbed a piece of bread (I know, not good, but I had nothing else to offer). Needless to say, it didn't fly off and eagerly ate the bread. It allowed me to pick it up - no struggle at all. I now have it in my hallway. I have three elderly free ranging chickens and three dogs, who all get on well. However, I am worried about this duck. When I contacted a local WIRES volunteer, they identified it as a domesticated duck, and said to re-release it to the lake. But as we have quite a few foxes and lots of dogs and the fact that it was quite a distance today from the lake, I haven't done that. It is sleeping indoors in our house - I have nowhere else. It has a snugly straw bed and a bowl of water and an acquaintance (who was not interested in taking on another duck) gave me a quantity of duck pellets. I don't know what to do. It is a lovely duck. I want to do the right thing by the duck. We live on half an acre - the chickens roam the back garden (1/4 acre) and spend a lot of time inside the house....yes, it's true. I spend my life cleaning up chicken poop, but I don't mind. They are a joy to me and they don't like the cold weather... Please can you give me some guidance. Would there be a possibility that you could take it?"



I said yes and the following day Nina (the human and her husband) chauffeured Nina the duck (pic left) here. She has settled in nicely with the special needs ducks in the duck paddock.

Finally I want to share my “bad dad” moment.

A few Wednesdays ago I got the following text message from a neighbour:

“Hey Bede we have 5 sheep in our yard, I shut the gate to the road so they don’t wander off – are they yours?”

I scoffed at the idea believing the sheep were happily relaxing in the drive — only a few hours ago I had posted a photo of them on Face

Book doing just that. But I thought I should go and check. I began the head count 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11. I did a recount — same result.

Plus five would make 16.

I called and said: *“Yeap they’re mine”*

I moved those still here out of the drive up to the paddock so I could leave the gate open and hopefully get the rogue sheep to come back home. As I opened my neighbour’s gate Bam Bam came bouncing up to me obviously proud of the adventure he had led his siblings on (I have no doubt he was the ringleader)... his brothers and sisters took the opportunity to slink past me and begin their journey back to A Poultry Place as I profusely thank the neighbours for their efforts, while at the same time counting my lucky stars that I was home on leave and that my unshaven face is covering the embarrassing watermelon red my cheeks have turned. We make our way home and as soon as we pass through the front gate my rogue kids break into a sprint to run up to the paddock and tell their brothers and sisters of their adventure. As I closed the gate I spied Norman goat, who is usually the cause of such parental shaming incidents looking at me as if to say “it wasn’t me this time dad”. I later discovered their escape was due to a hole I put in the fence with the brushcutter when I was slashing the grass at the driveway entry last summer.

With six more weeks of leave I wonder what other adventures lie ahead.

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