

Summer has been and gone and this is the first opportunity I have had all year to sit down and recap on events of the past few months. Thankfully summer was very tame compared to previous years. In fact it was the coolest I have experienced since leaving Sydney in 1999. I can't recall a day topping 38 degrees, with most hovering around the late twenties or early thirties – a stark contrast to last summer when we experienced three heatwaves (five consecutive days of 35-plus heat) within a five week period. As someone who doesn't really like heat of more than 30 degrees, this summer was very welcomed, as it was by all the other residents.

The impacts of the cooler summer were obvious – the sheep paddocks were still green in January – I cannot remember that being the case ever before. The paddocks usually go brown around late November and don't get a greenish tinge until towards the end of March. January brought more than the average rainfall, which sadly did not continue through into February and as a result all the tanks are now a little low but hopefully autumn will bring some rain. And to cap off the three months of weird weather two weeks ago I woke up to a thick fog engulfing the area – about three months before we usually get fog.

January saw the sanctuary turn 14 – in that time it has been home to 2337 others apart from me.

During the festive season a flock of roosters, who had spent a few months getting to know each other in the rooster integration area in the house paddock graduated up to Roosterville, as all 13 were living happily together. It was the first time the rooster integration area has been empty since I created it a few years back but experience told me it wouldn't last long. It didn't – just three days.

During the first week of January I had three separate requests to take in roosters, all of whom had been hatched as part of school hatching projects during the final term of the 2014 school year. All six had been adopted by families, who were reluctant to rehome them but had no choice due to living in suburbia and neighbours' complaints. They are now getting to know each other (some pic right).



Five ducks have also taken up residence so far this year. The first arrival is a little sweetie I call Quacker. Quacker (see pic next page) was one of two ducklings rescued from a duck meat farm where they were being fattened up for slaughter, with no water to swim or bathe in, no mother duck to keep them safe and warm, just thousands of scared little babies wandering around in their own poo in a brightly lit shed. Quacker has a severely deformed bill which has resulted in his nostrils closing up and exposing his tongue, which in the shed had become dry and scabby, he has learnt to adapt to the deformity and eat and drink but often his breathing is quite laboured. Unfortunately the second duckling was in a very poor and weak state when the rescuers came upon him/her, on the shed floor stuck lying on his or her back, having lost their balance, squealing for help and paddling with their little feet in the air in a fruitless attempt to right themselves (a scene usually seen in such farms). Sadly this little one died before arriving at the vet. Quacker, is quite vocal and is

beginning to make friends with the older ducks in the special needs duck paddock, which is home to many other former factory farm inmates. Thankfully, 10 days after his arrival another Pekin duckling, known as Bombay, who is of a similar age arrived and the two have since become inseparable.

Ten former battery hens have also taken up residence and are slowly beginning to regrow their feathers and put on some weight. One of them arrived with a completely bald head and almost no comb. In my 16 years of living with rescued hens I have never seen such a sight. I call her Queenie (pic below right), as she reminds me of the Borg Queen from Star Trek Next Generation and Voyager.



Later this month I'm heading to Edgar's Mission to be one of the presenters at an Australian-first workshop. The Kind Critter Care Conference, is the idea of Edgar's Pam Ahern and is aimed to help people determine if running a farm sanctuary is for them, by providing insight into just what is involved in running a farm sanctuary and the many challenges it presents and to assist those who currently care for farm animals or those wishing to take on rescued farmed animals. Pam asked me to participate given A Poultry Place is one of Australia's longest established sanctuaries for rescued farmed animals, and I was happy to accept. The response to the workshop has been overwhelming, so much so that it is being repeated again in May.

It is great to know there is so much interest in people wanting to do "hands-on" work for those many people only see as food. It gives me hope, just like this message I received at the end of the year from a young woman I met when I was speaking at TEDx Canberra last year:

"I have to give you a big thank you Bede. I saw/met you at TEDx at a time when I had been struggling for a long time with eating meat. Lunch at TEDx was the last time I ate meat and you had a lot to do with pushing me over the edge into vegetarianism. You made what seemed like an unachievable goal not only possible but necessary. Thank you and I love the important work you do." ●

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