

SHANNON BROOK FARM

ORGANIC • PASTURE-RAISED • LOCALICIOUS
CHICKEN & LAMB

2566 Jennings Road, Watkins Glen, NY 14891-9625 • 607.731.1840 • www.ShannonBrookFarm.com • shannon@ShannonBrookFarm.com

Shannon Brook Farm Newsletter

June 15, 2013

This week on the farm I was reminded of the curious and amazing interactions between species. A few weeks ago we brought 15 piglets home to live in our shed. Once they had acclimated to their new location and were trained on the electric tape we moved them to the adjacent pasture.

As we moved the piglets down the lane the pups got in on the act. They crawled under the gate into the oncoming piglet traffic. Both piglets and pups were startled by one another. Everyone involved backed up a few steps, sizing up the other folks. Then the piglets moved on toward the green grass, quickly forgetting about their encounter with the mysterious fur balls. We often forget that these animals are very young and have literally never seen other types of animals.



The piglets, half Spotted Pig and half Wild Pig, emerging from their pigloos out on the pasture

The mother of the pups, Frankie, has an affinity for pigs. She sat on the opposite side of the gate calmly watching the piggy parade and her offspring joining the procession. Our other dogs, Billy Buttonwood and Johnnie, have different relationships with the pigs. When Billy enters their domain the piglets swarm him as if he is their mother. They race up and try to climb on him – all the while he has a baffled, concerned look on his face. Johnnie, on the other hand, has no patience for pigs. She barks a short bark to tell them to leave her alone. She has no interest in being their mother.

Out past where the piglets have taken up residence two of the geese are sharing a nest to incubate their eggs. The geese, mother and daughter, are sitting on a baker's dozen. The Chinese White, known as



Mother and daughter brooding their eggs together

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Big Bird, is the mother, and the grey goose, Madeleine, is her daughter. Madeleine, named after Walter's sister, is half Chinese White and Half African Grey. In actuality, the Chinese White is an African bird as well. Sitting on the nest for these girls is usually a tag team effort but as the first hatch date draws near the geese are doubling up keeping the eggs extra warm and each other company.

Earlier in the week when we were out working in the fields we heard Billy Buttonwood barking incessantly. We have learned that different barks have different meanings. A low yipping can mean that a lamb has been born. Whining can mean that the dogs just want to be on the other side of the fence. A constant barking in one direction often means there's an intruder, such as the cow that wandered between our house and the shed at 10:00 pm last week.

Since Billy kept barking we thought something must be amiss. When we went to investigate we saw a large, colorful hot air balloon descending just north of the farm. Billy had seen it coming and worked with Johnnie to pull the sheep together into a tight group. With Billy taking the lead aggressor position, Johnnie stayed back with the sheep, making sure they were protected while Billy took on the dragon.

This is a well-known behavior of livestock guardian dogs when working in pairs. Before Frankie had her pups she was our lead dog, lunging towards the threat as Johnnie stayed back with the flock. The dogs communicate with each other frequently through barks and eye contact. As Frankie moves forward she occasionally looks back to make sure her flock and teammate are out of harm's way.

Although Johnnie was the runt of the litter and takes the 'I'll stay with the flock' role, she is ferocious. I can imagine she'd be just as fierce a foe as either Billy or Frankie. When it comes feeding time we have to place her bowl 15-20' from the next bowl or a frightening fight will break out, instigated by the runt. White fangs and red gums flashing and the fur flying, the two powerful dogs whip around in circles, aiming for the jugular, threatening to take each other's lives. It only takes once to say, 'Never Again!'



Billy Buttonwood learning to play with the pups, The bandit and The Badger

Billy, the father of the pups, has only recently decided to play with them. Until now he has been quite startled by their friendly curiosity, nipping and barking when they come near. Now he throws out his paws inviting them to play though he's still not ready to share his food bowl.

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The Boy and The Badger love to swim



The Boy and The Bandit being silly



The Bandit and The Badger goofing around



Our friendly local serpent