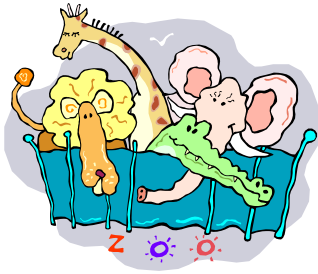


# The Peaceable Kingdom Does Not Exist

By Maggie Leman



I always said I wanted a zoo. Most kids had an imaginary friend; I had an imaginary menagerie! There were no cages or fences on my fantasy farm, just lots of different kinds of animals with absolutely impeccable manners. I grew up moved to the country and realized my dream. Okay, start humming the tune to Green Acres here...

At one time we had 30 different species of animals living on our farm. We had one big barn and one big pasture, where nearly all of the outside animals lived. We had a couple of smaller pens with single stall houses, I did know I needed to keep the boys away from the girls. The poultry, chickens, geese, guineas and peafowl, free roamed and the goats and horses often did too. Luckily the

neighbors live a good distance away and we didn't have a garden. We had more yard birds than we could count, 20 some rabbits, several giant reptiles, lots of cats and dogs, parrots, goats, 3 riding horses, a draft horse, a blind miniature horse, some other animals, I forget what all... The chickens roosted in the barn, the goats had splashes of, well you know, all over them every morning. The peacock LOVED to use my truck's windshield to admire himself. And a 30-pound bird with giant feet and claws leaves lasting marks in automotive paint. Our house was not air-conditioned so the door was often open. Goats love to come calling and they like to climb on countertops. We really tried to do our best by each individual creature in our care. The chores were never ending but for a while we were pretty happy. Then it began to really wear on the animals and us. I sold my beloved horses, our property is not really suited to them as it is entirely wooded. Then the poultry had to go, I wanted a new truck, clean goats and to be able to walk down to MY pond without being butt pinched by my own ungrateful geese. The number of reptiles decreased as the snake-keeping craze waned and so also went the "small livestock" we kept to feed them. Life got easier. Now we just have few house pets, 2 little dogs and a couple of parrots, 4 old rabbits who are living out their lives roaming the yard, two neutered barn cats and the pygmy goats. I still have a menagerie, but my goatherd, with about 40 head, is one of the nicest in the state and, in my humble opinion, in the whole country. We can focus our efforts on them.

We get the chance to talk to so many people who are just starting their country life. Some don't have any livestock yet or have a horse or some chickens and are looking to add to their little farm. They just want to have a few of these and a couple of those to give their place the feel of a "real" farm and everyone will live in happy harmony. This is the Captain Kangaroo/Petting Zoo vision of life on the farm. Boy, we suburban kids were really led down the garden path when it comes to the real thing.

Good people, let me tell you now, the peaceable kingdom does not exist on this earth. Farmer Brown has known this all his farming life, he grew up knowing you didn't mix the pigs with the cows with the chickens. But you say your place isn't a "real" farm, and Bessie Cow, Nellie Horse, Nanny Goat, and Bidly Chicken are beloved pets, not livestock! Come on now, you wouldn't cage your canary with your cat... Oh you can put everyone out in a big pasture and go on like that for a while and maybe, if you get lucky, everything will seem to work out fine. But people are collectors by nature and many faux-farmers have very big naïve hearts and start taking in more animals than they can realistically cope with day in and day out. Now, most real farmers keep one breed as their primary livestock with maybe a small herd or flock of some other breed for their own use (who doesn't like eggs with their bacon?). This dramatically simplifies care and Farmer Brown knows he can really do it right, even with a very large herd. Same with pet livestock owners, on a little hobby farm spread in the country. If you concentrate your efforts on one or two species, you can do a superior job of caring for quite a few animals. Your little faux farm will look and feel just like the real thing and will bring you as much pride and satisfaction as that big working farm down the road.

So just because you aren't really farming (you are, REALLY) you have to think like a real farmer. Just because your livestock isn't really livestock (they are, REALLY), they need to be treated like fine livestock. Real farmers care deeply about their animals, live and breathe to care for them, work long hours daily to meet their needs before tending to their own needs, and are very proud of their well cared for herd. Any kind of farming CAN BE and SHOULD BE a humane, caring and loving partnership, even if it's just an all-consuming hobby or your family's livelihood..

So what I am getting at is that all these different creatures have different nutritional needs, different social needs, and different housing needs.

Sheep will die of copper poisoning if fed horse, cattle or goat feed, goats will suffer serious copper deficiency if they only get feed safe for sheep (but often labeled for sheep and goats!) or get bladder stones if they eat too much chicken feed or horse feed. Some components of pig feed are toxic to horses and goats.... Some

additives to cattle and goat minerals are toxic to horses. Your goat may chew the hair off your horse's tail and mane in the effort to satisfy their craving for fibrous forage and become blocked. The ducks will swim in the water trough polluting it several times a day. Chickens can carry salmonella and will happily poop in everyone's feed trough, including their own, spoiling expensive feed and sharing that salmonella with everyone. That nosy goat will try to make the horse share his grain and get his neck broken when the horse grabs him and tosses him out of his private dinner dish.

I love to visit faraway farms on the internet and I sometimes see pictures of nice pens full of happy little goaties and right there just outside the pen gate is a big metal trashcan with its lid weighted down. I just KNOW this is a can full of feed. If you think for one minute it is secure against a marauding goat you have your head in the sand. One day you are going to forget to latch the gate. The pasture partners in crime will team up and push that can over and the feast will begin. The next morning you are going to walk into a yardful of critters with terminal bellyaches. Your feed and hay needs its own locked storage room.

Most livestock animals are also herd animals, they really prefer the company of their own kind. Each species has its own set of instinctive rules and that helps them get along in their own herd and form their own society. A sheep in a herd of sheep is a happy and contented creature, but a sheep in a herd of goats doesn't know the rules for proper head butting. Their skulls are slightly different and the way they butt is slightly different. A goat and sheep butting heads can really hurt each other, but if they are head butting one of their own kind it is much safer. It is true that single individuals will buddy up with whatever other herd animal may be available and even form a tight bond, a horse with his goat companion for instance. But put another horse out there and soon Nanny or Billy gets the cold shoulder.

And then there is the family dog, the "wouldn't hurt a fly" dog, the "everybody's friend" dog. Folks, listen to me, DOG = PREDATOR and LIVESTOCK = PREY. This is the way it is, it will always be like this. It may not happen today, it may not happen next week; you could go on for years with no indication that your nice dog is really a fierce wolf. Dogs are diligent and patient and will wait for YEARS for the chance to "hunt" and "chase", this a predator's nature, they are very careful and patient in their stalking. A dog doesn't have to actually attack to be a danger. All he has to do is chase the sheep or goats, who tire quickly and die from the stress and exhaustion. Your dog won't mean to kill, it will just happen. This is how it works in the wild; this is how it works on the farm. My niece has several ferrets and 2 dogs. She is pretty sure one of the dogs would love to make a chew toy out of the first ferret he encounters. So she has a rule in her house, there are to be at least 3 closed doors between the dogs and the ferret room. This way she knows there will nearly always be at least 2 doors closed and surely at least one door securely latched to protect her pets from each other. Even if you have a dog that is meant to be around livestock you shouldn't let them have access whenever they want it. When your sheltie is out herding the sheep it may look lovely, and make you feel like a real farmer, and Ole Shep sure likes it a lot, but your sheep don't think it's fun at all. Herding dogs are used to move livestock quickly and efficiently, make the job take less time. If you let your dog "herd" whenever he wants, your sheep and goats will be under constant stress. Stress leads to disease, just like in people. The ONLY exception is a well-adjusted Livestock Guardian Dog. Sometimes the tables get turned! Here's a scenario, your little dog has been wandering through the pastures for months, nary turning a head, but today Nanny is out with her new kids and here comes little Princess Pup under the fence. Maternal instinct goes into high gear and here comes Nanny barreling into an unsuspecting Princess.... Folks it's not pretty, I have seen a pygmy goat doe nearly kill a small dog. She didn't have horns but she had that dog down and was going to push her INTO the ground until she broke that dog in two. Now imagine what your mare is going to do when she has a new foal or what Bessie will do when she is defending her new calf.... Not only will they defend against dogs but will defend their precious baby against their own pasture buddies.

Lots of people keep a barn cat or two; I am no exception. No real problem here except that barn cats and their kittens often carry toxoplasmosis, a disease caused by a tiny internal parasite. Cats get it by doing what they are kept to do, kill and eat vermin. There really isn't an effective treatment. Most cats don't get sick, but they spread it through their feces. Barn cats LOVE to sleep in the hayloft on a nice soft bale of hay and if they need to "go" during the night will often find a "potty" right in the hay! Toxoplasmosis causes abortion in sheep and goats, there is no other symptoms really other than a bunch of dead babies. And once again there is no really effective treatment.

A fence that will keep in a horse or cow will not stop a goat or a pig. A loose goat will be into the chicken coop (chicken wire is nothing to most goats) and be nose deep in the chicken feed in a heartbeat, overindulging himself into a toxic bellyache, or poisoning himself on your azalea bushes. Free ranging chickens without a proper coop for roosting at night will be a buffet set out for the neighborhood fox or will take to roosting in the barn rafters and pooping all over everyone down below. Cows can do fine with minimal shelter and many of them actually like to stand out in the rain on a hot day. Goats on the other hand are convinced they will melt as

soon as the first raindrop falls, and a wet goat is very often a very sick goat the next day. Horses seem to prefer their own stalls at night, but goats would prefer to be housed as a herd.

I love sitting out in the pasture with my goats, schmoozing and scratching and being goat kissed and goat rubbed. But sometimes I like sitting outside with a cold glass of tea and not having to share. You really need your own space too! Goats love to jump on cars, you might not mind them climbing on your old farm truck, but your mother-in-law is going to be madder'n a wet hen when she finds dents and dings and HOOFPRIENTS on her freshly washed Corolla. You will have building and repair projects and you DON'T need a 4 legged or feathered foreman over seeing the job. Your neighbors have every reason to expect you to keep your animals contained too. Many a feud has erupted over trampled petunias. A cow is a terrible thing to find in the middle of the road as you come around that blind curve. Many states have very strict laws about livestock loose on the highways and roads. Strong fences, secure latches, tight roofs, and sturdy walls, proper stalls and pens each to fit the needs of the occupants makes a happy homestead.