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## MOOOOVE ON OVER...

Mooooove on over February, March is here! And let that be the first of the animal puns coming your way in this issue. This is after all our "Animal & Farming" issue! That's right, here at *Main Street*, March means we've gone to the dogs... and birds... and cows... and cats... and rabbits and all of the other animals out there.

For many years now we've dedicated the March issue to all forms of animals and farming, and it's just a really fun issue for us and we hope that it's something a little different and unique for our readers. Animals are so incredible, as are so many of the folks around here who, in one capacity or another, work with animals and farms. And oh yes I'm going to say it: there is no food without farms, and there is no life for any of us without a symbiotic relationship between all of us! But we'll be diving into more environmental issues next month.

For now, we'll focus on the animals and farms, like beekeeper Gino Robustelli. Griffin had the honor of talking bees with Gino for an afternoon and what he learned he's going to share with us on these pages. Christine interviewed animal photographer Sarah Blodgett, and get ready for some incredible photography! Christine also had a little fun this month with her real estate article... I'm not even going to hint at what her topic is, just flip through the pages and you'll get it.

Mary, on the other hand, features a hop farm. Yes, you read that correctly: hops. It's an incredible story and what fun! Ian has also brought us an interesting and unexpected story this month, and I'll just leave it at that. (Yes, another little zinger for you.) Regina has brought us two pieces this month, and in the first she features the young family behind Sawkill Farm in Red Hook, NY – what a lucky life their kids lead! I envy any kid who gets to grow up amongst so many awesome animals. Regina's second article features a yarn store in Tivoli, NY – you see, yarn comes from where? That's right, sheep. See that tie-in to the theme?

And I don't know if you've noticed this in the past years, but our Friendly Faces in March are those of animals. This is always Ashley's favorite Friendly Faces of the year. In all honesty, she'd probably have all six of the faces be that of cats if she had it her way. She discriminates a little when it comes to animals because her favorite animal is a cat and she's very unapologetic about that, and you might know this fact if you read our weekly "Otis Feed" on our website. But anyway, enough about cats, check out some of the other animals featured by flipping the page! Thanks for reading.

– *Thorunn Kristjansdottir*



MARCH 2020

This beautiful hawk posed for a close-up profile at the Sharon Audubon in Sharon, CT.

Cover photo by  
Lazlo Gyorsok

# The Animal & farming issue

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# LIGHTS, CAMERA, AMBITION

KEITH BOYNTON,  
FILMMAKER

By CB Wismar  
info@mainstreetmag.com

The adrenaline rush.

We've all experienced it, for many different reasons, some wonderful and some simply frightening. For skiers, it's the push off at the top of the mountain and the anticipation of the careening journey to the bottom. For parents, it's the moment when a daughter or son takes a first attempt at riding a horse, riding a bicycle without training wheels, or stepping on to the stage to recite lines in the third grade play.

For Keith Boynton, the young filmmaker raised in the Northwest corner of Connecticut, it is a sensation repeated whenever there is the delicate intersection of people, technology and the ephemera of a script that he has written and will now become a film.

"Action!"

For those who may never have witnessed the process of shooting a motion picture, in its simplest, linear form it goes something like this. An idea becomes a script, which may go through many iterations before funding can be secured and the production process begins. The

producer (who manages the budget and logistics) and the director (who is in charge of seamlessly linking all the creative components from script through production and editing) select a cast, location, crew, props, costumes, etc.

The moment of film reality comes as "quiet on the set!" is sternly offered by an assistant director, the actors are in place with lines memorized, the lighting is adjusted, the camera is locked in place and, when an almost religious hush of anticipation falls over the space, the director harnesses the adrenaline and the magic begins.

"Action!"

Keith Boynton has become quite used to calling "Action!" He is, after all, a film writer and director of some experience, young as he may be.

Growing up the child of famous parents (his mother, Sandra Boynton is an internationally recognized author, illustrator and prolific artist, while his father, Jamie McEwan, was a world-class athlete, a champion slalom canoeist who won an Olympic Bronze medal in the 1972 Munich Games) Keith was surrounded with fanciful ideas, pure artistic dedication, and great emotional and intellectual support.

## Creativity in the genes

Keith Boynton attended Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, CT, and Amherst (MA) College with double major in English and Theater. From childhood, he had strived to be a writer and actor, and with the deluge of creativity within which he and his three siblings grew up, the outcome was never much in doubt.

Boynton crafted his first feature length film while still an undergraduate at Amherst, used the experience to learn and refine his craft and went on to create his second film in 2005. "I had gotten better. Each project was a complete learning experience," he says with the subtle smile of an *auteur* who discovers something in crafting every line, shaping every experience with actors, and intensely taking every read of audience reaction to one of his productions.

While learning the potentials and the pitfalls inherent in the role of being a film *auteur*, he attended the Cannes International Film Festival and Market, patrolling the various booths attempting to drum up interest in his completed film. He had

little success and recognized that capitalizing on a passion would take enormous patience and the capacity to step beyond discouragement.

"There's a wall of indifference," Boynton says with a wisdom born of many conversations, hopeful meetings, and ringing disappointment. Hollywood, as one imagines, is not a friendly place, especially for a young, creative, ambitious filmmaker who is keen on his craft and believes in his message.

## One for the books

Looking to improve his technique and the agility needed to complete a feature film project in reasonable time and on budget, Keith Boynton assembled a production team and created *Chasing Home* in four weeks – principal photography through editing. He calls it "speed filmmaking" and relished it as another learning experience.

In 2014, his production *Seven Lovers* (available on Amazon) was completed, and he took it to the Rhode Island Film Festival for a screening to a new audience – one not packed with friends and family. The enthusiastic response continued to propel him forward.



### Never call it *Macbeth*

As many know, there's a pervasive superstition within the live theater world that when one is preparing a rendition of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, one never calls the play by its title. It's *The Scottish Play* for all concerned, since legends of misfortune and tragedy have beset productions over the years. Riots, injuries, fires, and theater closings have all be attributed to the "curse of *Macbeth*." Always curious and blessed with a "what if this happened ...?" attitude, Boynton decided to pursue creating a film that took the legend head-on.

In his words: "A successful actress accepts the role of Lady Macbeth at a small New England theater, where she begins a flirtation with her charmingly awkward young director, and finds herself haunted by the ghost of William Shakespeare – who's keen to do some rewrites."

It's a lovely set-up and with increasing skills, a fine cast, and charming locations, Boynton was able to create *The Scottish Play*, a piece that has drawn heartfelt applause from festival audiences. It is in film festivals – from the legendary Cannes extravaganza to Sundance in Utah, the Toronto Film Festival and opportunities in Australia, Germany, and a score of other countries – where films are screened, evaluated and – with any luck at all – signed to distribution deals that bring them to the local movie houses and on to streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime.

### Superstition as subject

*The Scottish Play* presents the intersection of a steep learning curve with refined talent and increased confidence. Screened at The Moviehouse in Millerton, NY, to an enthusiastic and supportive audience, the reception provided further motivation for Keith to not only find new audiences for his existing work and to build support and momentum for his next venture, *The Winter House*.



As this article goes to print, Boynton is hard at work shooting *The Winter House* with "bankable" stars and a solid production crew that has brought both skill and loyalty to his productions. A "holdover" crew – the technical talents that navigate camera, lighting, sound, costumes and sets – is a tribute to a young director. The world of filmmaking is populated with "freelance talent," individuals who go from production to production, picking up work where they can and, at the same time, developing some strong opinions about the producers and directors who hire them.

### I don't want to die on that hill

Keith Boynton is confident of his own abilities as a storyteller, a director, a supervising editor. He has learned from experiences, both good and bad. He has deciphered when a comment or suggestion from an actor or crew member should be considered, or politely acknowledged and dismissed. Building a reputation by being argumentative is not a great way to attract and retain talent. As Keith sums it up, when it appears that a creative disagreement is about to rise up, he demurs. "I don't want to die on that hill," he

says with conviction, determined to live to create another day.

The loyalty of crew means that their work is for more than a paycheck and per diem. Keith Boynton deeply values that loyalty and recognizes the time saving comfort of knowing how people work, inherently feeling that they will understand the desired look of a scene, the intended move of actors and cameras, the way the light comes through a window.

So, production continues on *The Winter House*, and Keith Boynton continues to live far from the ebb and flow of Hollywood politics, gossip, and narcissism. He rather welcomes the conflict with loving the rhythms of life in New England and being able to find the moments of peace that are required to allow concept and inspiration to be translated into words, actions and images on the screen. •

*Are you an artist and interested in being featured in Main Street Magazine? Send a brief bio, artist's statement, and a link to your work through the arts form on our "arts" page on our website.*

Opposite page: Keith Boynton on set of *The Scottish Play*. Above: Posters for Boynton's two films. Images courtesy of Keith Boynton.



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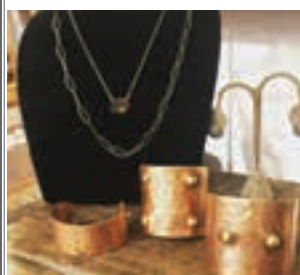
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# friendly faces: meet our pets, fur-babies and friends



**Ranger** is a 12-year-old donkey, owned by Fred Scoville, who resides in West Cornwall, CT. "His job is to protect our calves from predators, like coyotes and bobcats." Ranger is very protective, and as a natural instinct will cross his legs and stomp to keep the young cows from harm. Additionally, his presence is hard to miss, as his braying can be heard from quite a long distance away! Despite his important work, Ranger is an easy-going animal whose happy demeanor is contagious. In fact, he loves being outdoors and likes to run alongside the calves and his two pony friends, Sweet Pea and Nellie. His favorite delicious treats, animal crackers and apple-filled donuts, keep him energized throughout the day. Nevertheless, Ranger appreciates any sort of snack! "He enjoys carrots and apples from neighbors and friends passing by on the road."



**Cooper** is a spunky Cavalier King Charles Spaniel and resides in Norfolk, CT. His sweet, loyal and quirky personality was his golden ticket to adoption by Jim Hutchison, the clinical navigator at Sharon Hospital, and Jim's daughter, Elizabeth. When Cooper is not snoozing on the couch, you can catch him romping in the yard with his siblings, which includes beagles, cats, and rabbits. He is an unconditional lover, often giving more kisses and cuddles than he asks for in return. He also enjoys the outdoors, often scaling mountainous terrain during hikes. A year ago one morning during playtime, Cooper received CPR from his owners after his heart failed. "After that experience, I became a Pet CPR instructor to teach our communities how they can save their canine and feline family members during times of crisis," Hutchison said.



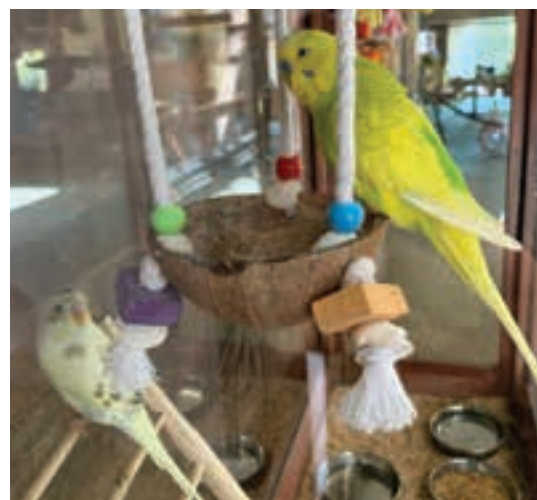
**Mrs. Tibbs** became part of the Shillingford family in the fall of 2016 when her previous owners were no longer able to keep her due to health reasons. Having previously been adopted as a rescue, no one is exactly sure how old she is, but it is believed she's now around six years old. While loving the human members of the family, she wants nothing to do with the two black labs she shares her Salisbury, CT, home with, but will just about tolerate the love-sick attentions of the family pug. While those three live downstairs, Mrs. Tibbs patrols her own second-floor kingdom, taking her pick of beds to sleep on, drinking from everyone's night-time water glasses, and indulging in her favorite pastime of sitting in a wet bath tub or shower!



**Mikjáll** is the black stallion at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY. He is the big man on the farm, neighing at the mares and keeping all of the other stallions and geldings in check from his pasture, as well as from his corner stall where he has a full view of all of the farm's happenings. Mikki (his nickname) is an Icelandic horse, born in the Greater Boston area, but was raised at Thor Icelandics since he was one years old. Mikki has the sweetest and kindest of dispositions, and is one of the most talented horses at the farm. He is actually kind of a freak of nature when it comes to his gaits. He has passed on these positive attributes to his offspring, all of whom reside at the farm, too. Mikki is currently the proud father of ten: six daughters and four sons. All of his offspring are brave, outgoing, and extremely talented just like their dad. Mikki is looking forward to spring with its green grass and breeding season. "Oh haaaaay ladies..."



**Octavius aka Gus** is a two-year-old American Guinea Pig whose owner Kaitlyn Bemiss brought home from PetCo in East Greenish, NY. "He was almost fully grown when I got him," says Kaitlyn. Today, Gus weighs 3 pounds and 8 ounces and lives comfortably in Greenport, NY, with his three humans and three dogs. Kaitlyn affectionately describes Gus as "fat and lazy; yells when the fridge door opens and greets us when we get home." Gus will occasionally get the energy to rearrange his cage because he doesn't like how his mom decorates. He sometimes likes dogs, but for the most part, Kaitlyn tells us he will try to eat them through his cage. "He's only a pig, but he's a good pig," she says. "We love our little garbage disposal."



Noble Horizons in Salisbury, CT, has welcomed two parakeets, **Fred and Ethel**, as part of their pet therapy program. "Ethel, the smaller one is about a year old," says Lana Knutson, director of recreation at Noble Horizons. Fred is bigger with green on his back, and he is about seven. "I purchased Ethel in October because Fred's original mate unfortunately passed away. I was a bit concerned that Fred might not be welcoming to a new bird, but from the moment they met he was so happy to have a companion." Of their newfound friendship Lana says, "They get along marvelously and can be heard from down the hall singing happily together. They got their names in a contest and they were announced on Noble's Valentine's Day dinner party."



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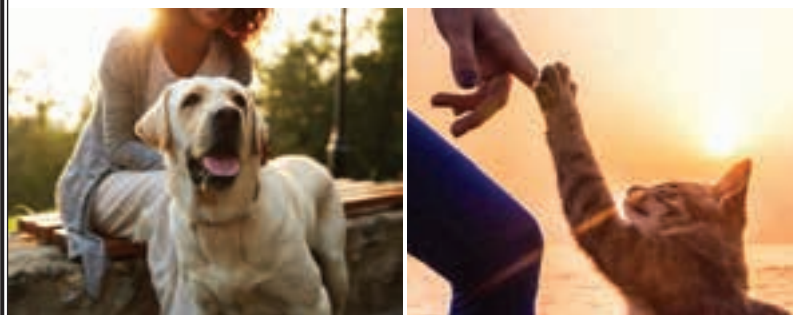
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# IN FOCUS

PHOTOGRAPHER  
SARAH BLODGETT

By Christine Bates  
info@mainstreetmag.com

*On a weekday morning before a luxury product shoot at her studio in Salisbury, CT, on Salmon Kill Road, I talked with Sarah Blodgett about her lifetime career as a commercial photographer and her new passion for wildlife photography.*

## How did you decide to become a photographer?

I was born in New York City and lived there until I was five when my parents moved to Pine Plains, NY, and I became a country girl. My father was a successful commercial photographer who also did work for magazines like *Look* and *Life*. He was part of the Madmen generation; in fact I saw an ad he did for Hilton Hotels on one of the shows.

I got my first camera at age ten; it was a Kodak Ektralite, one of those flat-flash rectangular plastic cameras. At 18 I enrolled in the San Francisco Art Institute and learned the mechanics and the art of photography back in the days of dark rooms and film.

It's really actual work experience that makes you a better photographer. Initially I started out doing photographic portraits of friends. My first clients had eloped and wanted a nice portrait to share with their family. In the late 90s when Pine Plains attracted creative types I opened my own photo studio. I'm an all-around photographer – I do everything from real estate photo shoots for designers and builders, to magazine covers, products and

portraits. A good photographer has to wear lots of hats to make a living.

## Have iPhones and selfies affected your business?

Of course, but there's still a need for creative, trained professionals who can create interesting lighting and composition and use software to retouch.

## When did you go digital? Was it a difficult transition? Do you still use film?

I started shooting digitally in the early 2000s. It was a difficult transition but a necessary one. Every once in a while I'll still shoot a roll of film for a creative project. I miss the physicality of film photography, the processing, working in a darkroom, moving around. Digital photography processing is very sedentary with everything being on a computer, my dance routine while working in the darkroom became ancient history!

I used to have a large collection of antique cameras and I used to shoot with all of them including a reproduction 4x5 box camera, complete with the dark cloth and cable release cord. In some moment of insanity I sold all of my cameras and I miss them.

## When did you add wildlife to your repertoire?

About six years ago a friend of mine encouraged me to try photographing wildlife. I was immediately hooked! I'm building my body of work and

getting my name out there as a nature photographer. I was getting a little bored with my day job photography and needed something new. Since I had always been a birder it was a natural step to go into long lens



Above: Wildlife photographer Sarah Blodgett in the wild with her long lens Canon. Below, left: Blodgett captured this winter visitor a short-eared owl in flight. All photographs courtesy of Sarah Blodgett.

photography. The first thing I learned was that wildlife photography, especially birds, is hard!

Birds are always moving quickly, the light changes depending on where they are and you have to shoot manually at the fastest possible shutter speed in order for that slim chance that you'll get a good shot. Birds in Flight – BIF's – as they're known in the business, are the most difficult. Even though, as they say, wildlife photography is 95% disappointment and 5% ecstasy, there's nothing I would rather be doing and the work has actually made me a much better photographer in my day-to-day work. Recently I spent five days by myself in the Everglades in a tent – it was sublime. Being able to settle into a place and get to know who's living there (in the animal kingdom) is the key to getting great shots. I usually need to scout out an area several times before I can figure out the best shooting vantage points. The Everglades are so peaceful and fairly void of humans, which is my preferred venue.

## What special equipment do you need to photograph animals in the wild?

For starters you need at least a 300mm high quality lens so you can capture detail at a distance. I began by saving up my cash to get a telephoto lens. The first lens I bought was a Canon 100-400 zoom lens that turned out to be not quite tack sharp. After a year of learning the basics I graduated to a Canon 500 mm fixed focal length lens, which I bought, used from another well-known wildlife photographer. It's as long as my arm and weighs 8.5 lbs. You also need lots of dorky clothing in order to blend in with your surroundings – camouflage pants and poncho, rubber pants for the water, and great snacks. I have a hat with a built in light so that I can turn it on to see my camera settings early in the morning when animals are active. I have a blind, which looks like a small tent, outfitted



Continued on next page ...



with windows and doors designed for cameras. I use the blind for fox dens and other shy birds that I might not otherwise be able to get close to.

### **Do you photograph all kinds of animals? How do you know where they are?**

I try to find subjects wherever I am – birds, foxes, and coyotes locally. I had a chance to photograph bears, moose, and mountain goats in Montana. I'm headed to Southern California next week and hope to find mountain lions and bobcats as well as birds. There's a network of wildlife enthusiasts on line, which are a great resources, and I also check in for tips with the local National Wildlife Refuges or Audubon Centers.

### **How do you develop a reputation as a wildlife photographer?**

Winning contests is what gets you known. It's a growing field with more and more competition. Some people say it's the "new golf" because it's highly populated by wealthy, retired folks. I have placed twice in the top 100 of the annual Audubon photo contest, which is a huge honor. I've had my work published in *Bird Watching Magazine*, *National Wildlife*, *Audubon*, and *Wild Planet Magazine*. Usually this also involves writing, which I really enjoy. Now I've added speaking. Most recently I did a slide show and presentation about photographing birds at the Sharon Audubon Society.

### **How do you make a living photographing birds?**

I support my wildlife photography with print sales of my work, as well as my commercial photography busi-

ness, portraits, real estate, and product photography. My website, [www.sarablodgett.com](http://www.sarablodgett.com) showcases my work and photographic services. On Facebook and Instagram I interact with my fans and friends daily, posting recent projects and subjects.

Ecotourism with burgeoning photographers is another opportunity to use your skills. Leaders and co-leaders of these tours are encouraged to teach photographers not only how to get great shots but to be respectful to their subjects and the environment in which they live. These gigs can be a day-long workshop or a full, week-long photo tour in places like Africa, Norway, Antarctica, etc.

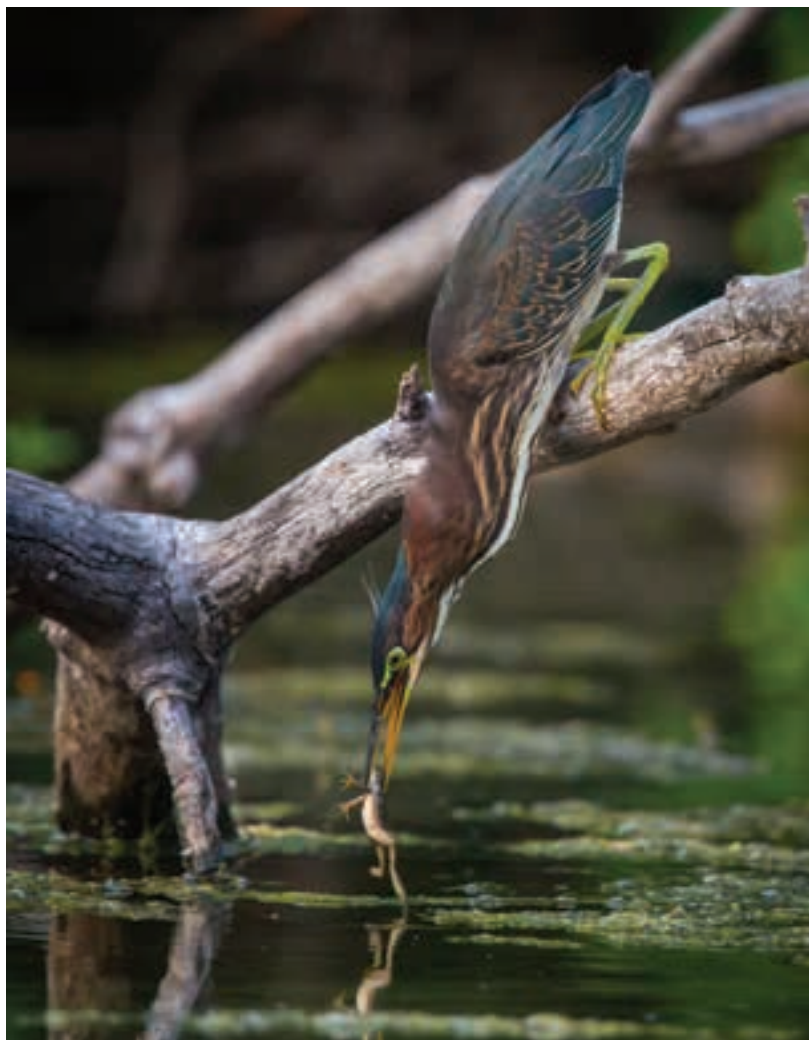
Every photographer has to hustle – it's part of the business.

### **Are there wildlife photography ethics?**

I quickly learned how important it is to understand and respect animal behavior. You never want to stress an animal or bird (especially a nesting one) with your presence. It's important to be sensitive to the clues they give you and for you to retreat if the signal is to "bugger off." The perfect shot is never worth scaring a duck off her nest, or keeping a fox mother from delivering a meal to her kits. There are other issues too. For example some photographers will cut a branch out of the way of a known nest, in order to have a clear view. This branch could have been offering shade, a perch, or privacy to nesting chicks and parents. In short, it is always best to put the needs of your subjects before your own. For example, I can't justify using drones for wildlife photography – introducing unnecessary stress into their world.

### **What are your favorite places to shoot?**

The Salton Sea in California is one of my favorite places to shoot. It's on a migration path in Southern California and is host to around 400 species of birds. New York State has a wonderful variety of birds that are full-time residents as well as vast array of migrants that pass through or come to breed in the springtime.



Above: A green heron successfully grabs his lunch. Below, left: Herons in a rookery on Wiltsie Bridge Road in Ancram. All photographs courtesy of Sarah Blodgett.

One of my favorite East Coast haunts is the Delmarva Peninsula in Virginia where I visit Chincoteague and Assateague Islands as well as the Blackwater Preserve. These habitats offer amazing shore birds as well as other birds and animals such as the little sika deer, which were imported years ago from Japan.

### **What makes your photos distinctive?**

I always try to take an artistic approach in whatever I do. I was trained as an artist and I just can't help myself! I believe that my work is worthy of being called fine art not only because of its visual appeal but because these images will become part of our history. As more and more birds disappear because of climate change and human expansion, what will be left is our visual story telling through art and photography. ●





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HOW ANIMALS CAN AFFECT OUR WELLBEING – AND VICE VERSA

# Animal-assisted therapy

By Thorunn Kristjansdottir  
info@mainstreetmag.com

I consider myself so incredible fortunate to have grown up on a farm and surrounded by animals. I grew up in the family horse business, Icelandic horses to be specific. But we then also had cats, there were dogs on the farm, and we had rabbits, fish, and parakeets when my brother and I were kids, too. Sounds pretty terrific, right? I think it couldn't have been much better, but then I could also be a bit biased.

When I was a kid, I didn't think about how lucky I was to have so many animals in my life – I took it as a given because I didn't know any better. And I certainly didn't consider the effects that these animals could have on me, my mental and emotional state. I just knew that my animal friends always made me happy.

What I'm referring to is basically pet therapy, or as I've learned is the technical term: animal-assisted therapy. When I was a kid, or even as a young adult, I thought it was normal to talk to my animals, to take specific and intentional time to spend with them and to bond with them. Still to this day I do that. They crave that one-on-one moment just as much as we do. They have things that they need to tell and or communicate with us. So always be mindful to listen to them, too. But back to the point; in the last decade or so I've read a lot of headlines and heard a lot about the positive impacts that being around animals can have on us humans.

## They calm us

You've probably heard of therapy animals like dogs, llamas, and horses, right? A lot of therapy animals will visit hospitals and nursing homes to name a few, because of the calming effect that they have on people, especially in stressful situations. What happens to most of us when we see an adorable and friendly dog approaching us? We smile, we feel a calming effect come over us – right? That is precisely why these animals are in their jobs. They are there to help. And they're experts at it!

## Major horse love

You might also have heard of some equine therapy programs like the Equus Effect locally in Sharon, CT, that work with horses and veterans. I can attest that horses make for the most amazing therapy animal. They are so in-tune with whomever is around them and they respond in ways that make you have to pay attention to them and the work you are doing with them. Horses respond to body language, and sometimes you can have a whole conversation just through body language. And so for all of the above-mentioned reasons, I totally understand why horses are used in therapy in general as well as working with veterans.

One of my favorite quotes is from an Arabian Proverb and it goes, "The wind of heaven is that which blows between a horse's ears." I love it because it is true. When you ride a horse, and feel that wind on your face ... and you are in heaven. You are completely free. You are one with the horse and with nature. It is nirvana.

Riding a horse and working with them can literally feel like you are in heaven. You forget your troubles



Photo: istockphoto.com contributor gurinaleksandr

and the troubles of the world and you get lost in those big brown (in most cases) eyes. And if you are so lucky to build a trusting relationship with a horse – they see you for who you are and you see them for who they are and you come to a mutual understanding – that connection and relationship will be a forever one. You've gained a best friend for life. One who does not judge you, and one who will love you unconditionally – especially when you have pockets lined with treats.

The love, bond, and trust that you form with a horse is one of kindness. I could go on and on about my love affair with horses, and I don't mean to be discriminatory against dogs, cats, birds, or any other animal friends. They are all so unique and special, and the connections and relationships that we can form with animals can sometimes be more impactful on us than a relationship between a human.

## A love for all animals

I'm no expert when it comes to animal-assisted therapy. I only speak from my own personal experiences,

as well as from the few things that I know about therapy animals. These animals do an incredible service to many people, and I have nothing but the utmost respect for the animals and their handlers. The amount of dedication and service is something that needs to be and should always be applauded. So for this "Animal & Farming" issue of the magazine, I wanted to devote this healthy living column to all of the animals out there who help us, as well as other animals. Because, remember, animals also help other animals.

Let's forget about humankind for a minute, and just bow our heads to all of animal kind. We are all animals. We all coexist. We are all part of a the cycle of life. And we all live on planet Earth. So while so many animals depend on us, we also depend on them. Let's share the love and give the utmost respect to all of animal kind.

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# Housing for the birds

## REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT IN YOUR BACK YARD

By Christine Bates  
info@mainstreetmag.com

*Reflecting on a subject for an article dealing with real estate and animals, I realized that the same considerations humans have when selecting a home are also true in the avian world – security, construction, location, room layout, finishes, etc. The realtors' view that there is always the right client for a house applies to birds as well, so I consulted with birdhouse experts to provide readers with the information required to consider starting their own backyard real estate development project and become a responsible landlord. Unlike human habitats, there are no regulations and no leases to sign.*

### Housing shortage

Nationally there is a housing shortage in most parts of our country. The same is true for many of our bird neighbors as trees are cut down, open agricultural fields are developed or returned to forest, people move in and the natural landscape becomes fragmented. Birdhouses, at least for some species that make their nests in the cavities of trees, provide needed shelter, especially during hatching session. A national effort to save bluebirds by building and installing bluebird houses has turned around their population decline. Purple martins nest almost exclusively in housing provided by humans and are declining in our region.

### Air-b-&-bird?

Songbirds are seasonal tenants and many don't show up until spring to look for a house to raise their young. They move from one house to another after their fledglings have left the nest and then may resettle for the next clutch before migrating south for the winter. Most birdhouse tenants don't buy and settle down in the same place year after year to increase the chances

of the vulnerable young surviving. Like people running out on their rent, they have moved on to the next spot.

### Location, location, location

When it comes to looking at houses, each bird species is very particular and very practical. In general the best address must be sheltered from wind and rain and be out of the reach of predators. Birdhouses should not be located in areas where pesticides have been used as it poisons the insects that birds feed on. Commercially cultivated fields and golf courses should be avoided, but again each species has their own idea about a good neighborhood.

Waterfront real estate is desired by wood ducks whose natural nesting place is in old growth and mature hardwoods. But nailing a wood duck box on a random tree near your pond may do more harm than good. The box needs to face open water and be at least four to six feet above the high water line, a 100 feet from other boxes and in shallow water to prevent large mouth bass swallowing ducklings as they emerge from the box. Bluebirds want to face as much sun as possible and look out on an open space away from the prevailing wind. Of course, like most people, birds like to be close to dining. Native plant gardens that attract insects also attract birds that dine on insects.

Purple martins are even more demanding. They prefer to stick together in a multi-family house 12' to 18' off the ground in an open area with clear flyways 30 to 120 feet from human housing and 60 feet from trees.

### Curb appeal attracts the right kind of tenant

Each species of bird has specific requirements that attract them to a new home. All birds seem to prefer untreated, unpainted wood, preferably cedar, pine, or cypress. Bright colors attract predators. Roofs should



be sloped and overhang the sides and front of the house. Smart birds know that perches are a bad idea as they make it easier for predators to enter. Many fanciful birdhouses that are widely available are the equivalent of Big Mac houses – too fancy, too big, and not very practical.

### Housing discrimination

There are building specifications for each species of bird from owls to titmice. And like any other kind of residential project you need to build to suit the market. For example bluebirds need a 1.5" hole 6" to 10" above the house floor. The interior space should be 5" by 5" to accommodate broods of five to eight chicks. Barn swallows prefer open boxes that are set up in sheltered areas close to a mud source. In contrast barn owls select open areas close to hollow trees, cliffs, riverbanks, or barns with lots of rodents. These large birds require a 3¾" to 4 ½" elliptical hole. Tiny birds like wrens and chickadees need a tiny opening of only 1 1/8."

Continued on next page ...

Above: A swallow returns to the birdhouse to feed its young. Photo istockphoto.com contributor Michael-Stubblefield.



### Avoid home invasions

Sparrows and starlings, both invasive species imported from the UK in the late nineteenth century, will enter unprotected birdhouses and kill fledglings. Protect residents with Noel predator guards – metal mesh cages that fit around the entrance to keep predators including cats, weasels, raccoons, and snakes out of the nest box. The right sized hole for a bluebird will keep out starlings but not sparrows. If your house is mounted on a pole you might need a wide cone or a baffle to prevent predators from climbing up into the house. And be sure that these home invaders can't drop from above. Domestic house cats kill an estimated 500 million birds a year. Please keep them safe inside your own house.

### Birds do not need heat or central A/C but a staircase is helpful

The interior of the birdhouse is just as important as the exterior to avian lookers. The walls should be at least  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick for insulation. While central A/C is not important, ventilation is required – just a few small-drilled holes near the top of each side and some holes in the bottom to prevent flooding. Since these nest boxes or birdhouses are primarily for hatching, protecting, and then launching the young the interior wall below the entrance hole should have grooves like a ladder to help nestlings get out of the house. You've heard of "failure to launch."

### Spring is the time to put your house on the market

Just like humans most birds start looking around for a house in mid to late March and it should be ready for showing by March 1. Like houses for sale, it may take a while for the right bird to find you.

### Staging

From a bird's perspective while the size, location, and type of house and its entrance are important; different species also have preferred interiors. For example ducks and woodpeckers like a layer of wood shavings when they move in to provide warmth and a cushion for eggs, while most songbirds bring their own furnishings to a clean house.

### Annual maintenance is required

Just like any investment property most birdhouses require annual maintenance and cleaning. Sharon's Audubon Center suggests that all birdhouses be cleaned on March 1 and it's a good idea to wear a facemask and gloves for this annual task. Easy access to the interior is important – it seems like a shop vac might come in handy.

### Consult an expert

Just as you would hire an architect to build a house, you should search out up-to-date sources on the habits and preferences of the kind of bird you want to attract before buying, building, or siting a birdhouse. Bats,



Above: This birdhouse sitting in this garden is a decorative accent. It meets none of the requirements for any avian dweller. Photo by Christine Bates. Below, left: An Audubon bat house, bat book, and bat puppets.

for example, have been decimated by white nose disease and need help. They prefer to be near water with a large, flat house mounted on a pole or affixed to the side of a building facing the sun. At sunset, as they emerge from their house, you can enjoy them diving in midair and devouring insects. Providing them with a proper home can help keep bats out of your house.

Over 81 million people in the US feed birds and watch wildlife from their own homes. It's an affordable, increasingly popular activity that provides a glimpse into the behavior of a mysterious presence that flies in and out of our daily routine. In our region there are still songbirds living amongst us, but far fewer than even ten years ago. Feeding and sheltering birds are small ways for us all to stay in touch with our immediate environment and make a small change. The return on investment is incalculable. ●

*Christine Bates is a real estate agent with William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty and has written about real estate since the first issue of Main Street Magazine in 2013.*







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EASY-PEASY

# Chocolate mousse

By Jessie Sheehan  
info@mainstreetmag.com

So, this is a recipe for easy-peasy mousse with truly the most perfect of light and fluffy textures. But said texture is not achieved via the traditional method of whipping eggs. It is accomplished instead with a genius hack: melted marshmallows. Now, before you turn the page, or scroll away hurriedly, scoffing at the mere thought of adding marshmallows to mousse, hear me out. Although I cannot explain the science behind why melted marshmallows impart a mousse-like texture to melted chocolate and whipped cream, though my guess is that it has something to do with the gelatin in the marshmallows, that is, in fact, exactly what they do.

I stumbled upon this trick while reading a recipe for “instant” mousse (as I am drawn to any and all recipes with the words “instant” or “easy” in the title) and was instantly (pun intended) smitten. I modified the recipe to make it my own, adding more heavy cream and omitting the butter and hot water. The resultant mouth feel of my finished product was, indeed, exactly like that of a mousse in which much more time and effort had been spent on its ethereal texture, than that which had actually gone down. And for that I was pleased.

## A smashing hit

But when both my boys went bananas for the mousse, I knew I was really onto something. Rarely do I make something that they each respond to so positively, particularly the younger one who is downright picky when it comes to dessert. In fact, whenever

I ask him to taste-test my latest and greatest treat, he often tells me that it is just “too sweet,” a description of which I am honestly not sure what to make.

This time, in fact, it was my youngest who tried the mousse first, when I was still tweaking the recipe. He took a bite and then another and another. But when I asked him what he thought, he explained that it was fine, but tasted nothing like chocolate. Hmmmm. You might think that at that point I rolled my eyes and walked away, vowing never to share anything sweet with the kid again. But guess what? He actually has a great palate and the truth is, if he likes something, then I know it’s good and if he doesn’t, I know it has issues. And so, I listened to him.

## Solving the problem

My original recipe included melted chocolate (of course) but nothing to amp up or deepen that flavor – and I realized that my second-born might be actually be onto something: maybe the “secret” ingredient in the mousse – the one that gave it all of its wonderful “mousse-like” texture (i.e.: the marshmallows) was canceling out the chocolate flavor. I rectified the situation by adding a bit of Dutch process cocoa powder (I like Dutch process for its dark color and strong cocoa flavor) and a bit of espresso powder, which brings out the flavor of chocolate without actually adding the flavor of coffee (another scientific phenomenon which I cannot explain).

And you know? I solved the problem in spades. Not only was the mousse now deeply chocolate-y, but it was not too sweet (despite the marshmallows) and the picky kid ate at least



three ramekins of it. The not-so-picky kid also ate about three containers worth, and I could not have been happier running to and from the kitchen, delivering them chocolate mousse for the better part of an evening.

## Some thoughts on the recipe:

The recipe takes almost no time to come together – the only “time” really, is the time it takes the melted chocolate and marshies to cool, and you can speed this up by submerging the bowl in an ice bath and stirring frequently. And although you can refrigerate the mousse after transferring it to ramekins, for a chilled mousse experience, it is also ambrosial enjoyed at room temp. However, if you do serve it right away, the flavor of the espresso will be a bit more pronounced – it fades after being chilled – so consider yourself warned.

## Ingredients:

3 cups mini marshmallows  
2 cups heavy cream, divided  
1 cup semisweet chocolate chips  
1 tbsp Dutch process cocoa powder  
1 tsp espresso powder, optional  
1/2 tsp fine sea salt  
2 tsp pure vanilla extract

Place marshmallows, 3/4 cup cream, chocolate, cocoa and espresso powders and salt in a medium saucepan over medium heat and cook until melted and smooth, stirring frequently. Transfer to a large mixing bowl and let cool to room temp.

In a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, or in a bowl with a handheld mixer, whisk the remaining cream and vanilla on medium to medium high speed until stiff peaks form.

Gently fold the cream into the cooled chocolate mixture in three additions until combined.

Transfer to six 6-ounce ramekins and serve immediately with additional whipped cream or refrigerate until chilled. •

*Jessie is a baker and cookbook author; you can learn more about her through her website [jessiesheehanbakes.com](http://jessiesheehanbakes.com).*



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# Smokedown Farm: TAKING THE LEAP WITH HOPS

By Mary B. O'Neill, Ph.D.  
info@mainstreetmag.com

Farming is part of the fabric of the northwest corner of Connecticut, so it's not surprising that Englishman Dr. James Shepherd and his wife, California-native Katherine (known as "Shrevie") chose this area to put down roots and fulfill their dream of owning and operating a farm.

After eight years in Botswana and Nigeria with James's work with the Center for Disease Control in the areas of HIV and TB and Shrevie's as a grants officer for the US State Department, they moved back to the US with their teen sons to begin another chapter of their lives. He is an infectious disease specialist at Yale University School of Medicine and Shrevie recently completed a graduate degree in international social work at the University of Connecticut.

## Field of dreams

In October 2014, they bought a defunct dairy farm on Sharon Mountain which covers 175 acres of fields and forest. As James puts it, "We knew this was the place. It had excellent soil and a small footprint of buildings." With a modest farmhouse and two barns at the front of the property, you can see what he means.

They christened it Smokedown Farm. Shrevie recounts, "When James's mother and uncle were small they were evacuated from London during the war to a farm in Oxfordshire called Smokedown Farm. They loved living on the farm probably

more than they liked living at home and still talk fondly of their days on Smokedown. We thought it was a lovely reminder of England."

After purchasing the farm they needed to decide what to plant. James's involvement as a board member of the Connecticut Farmland Trust, with the mission of protecting farmland from development and establishing a local, sustainable food system, led him to consider an unlikely crop – hops. For James, "Hops is that high value, sustainable, and locally appropriate crop. With craft brewers expanding in the state, we felt it was a crop we could raise and sell locally."

With nine growing acres, Smokedown is the largest hop farm in Connecticut. Each season brings them closer to a financially sustainable yield and propels them along the learning curve, which has been considerable.

## Team hops

James employs his medical research skills to farming and has a somewhat scientific approach to the work. This, complemented by Shrevie's enthusiastic willingness to get her hands dirty, provides an effective division of labor.

In 2018, they hired farm manager Ally Hughes to complete their team. Previously she was Assistant Winemaker and Vineyard Technician at a winery in central Nebraska, where she was born and bred. "Agriculture is deeply rooted in my Midwest upbringing," says Ally. "I'm a fourth-generation farmer. My farming interest is specifically in the craft beverage industry. I'm looking forward to helping produce quality hops for the craft brewing industry of New England."



Above: Compressed hops being prepared to get baled in burlap. Photo: Ally Hughes. Below, left: The spectacular harvest crew that helped bring in hops over Labor Day Weekend!



## No winter's rest

In winter, the farm looks like its main crop is telephone poles – 667 larch telephone poles to be exact. This is enough to ideally support 1,000 plants per acre. Larch wood is durable and waterproof, as well as rot-resistant in the ground making it the perfect choice for hop farming.

Each of these 18-foot tall posts is buried four feet deep – a fact indelibly burned into the mind of pole-burying James, who is personally acquainted with each one.

Overhead the poles are connected to metal cables that crisscross to form an aerial trellis. They are then lashed

to the ground at the end of each 625-foot row. A lover of precision and without the use of a Fitbit, James asserts that if one were to walk up and down every row it would cover five-and-a-half miles.

## Hungry hop

James describes the need for amending or feeding the soil over the winter and throughout the growing season. "Hops prefer sandy, loamy soil and because of their accelerated growth rate, they require a lot of nutrients, particularly nitrogen. They thrive in a highly irrigated ground that drains well."

Continued on next page ...



Pests such as the hop aphid and potato leafhopper, as well as downy mildew preclude organic growing. Non-restricted fungicides and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is practiced at Smokedown Farm. For pests, this means understanding their life cycle and preferences, monitoring their activity and adjusting treatment accordingly, and tolerating harmless bugs.

### Shootin' from the hop

In the early spring, hop shoots grow with reckless abandon from the hop rhizome or crown. These shoots resemble purple mini-asparagus and left unchecked, each will grow into a hop plant.

Four to eight shoots are ideal for optimal growing. Extra shoots will siphon off energy from the plant root. This makes it necessary to "crown" the hop plant by trimming the shoots.

Hop shoots are a delicacy in northern Europe, where the price has earned them the reputation of being the most expensive vegetable in the world. The Shepherds tried to make a go of introducing the northwest corner to the glories of a sauteed hop shoot. Unfortunately, our tastes lag behind those on the continent. Until that changes, instead of feeding people hop shoots, they are composted to feed their future sisters.

### Vine vs. bine

A hop farm is "like a vineyard on steroids," observes James. A native perennial plant, its Latin Linnaean name is *humulus lupulus*, meaning "wolf of the woods." Hops are aggressive and rapid growing.

However, it grows not as a vine, but as a bine. What's the difference? Vines possess a vertical stem that sends out tendrils which attach to a vertical support to brace the stem. Bines stems wrap themselves around the support. Shrevie describes that "to help in catching onto the support, the bine has scratchy hairs that can cause what's known as 'hop rash.'" James offers the scientific term for scratchy hop hairs. In case you were wondering, it's trichome, from the Greek *trichoma*, meaning – you guessed it – hair.

### Hop training

At the end of April, hop training begins. Shrevie's description of the process sounds as exhausting as it is. It requires a platform rig attached to the back of a John Deere. Every three feet of each row coir cord, a sisel-esque coconut fiber, is hung from the trellis. The coarseness of the coir gives the hop hair something to grab onto.

Then, the hop plants need to be repeatedly "encouraged" to attach themselves to the coir. The hop plant must be trained clockwise around the cord. This follows the natural growth pattern of the bine. The plant follows the sun from east to west and resets during the night.

In addition, the hop harvesting machinery is calibrated to accommodate coconut coir, and it has become an industry standard.

### Here comes the sun

Hops are extremely photosensitive and are intimately clued into the amount of daylight they're exposed to. James explains that hops need 15 hours of sunlight to create optimal growing conditions. This occurs above the earth's 44th parallel, which makes hops a perfect crop for the northern hemisphere.

Prior to the Summer Solstice, as the bine grows up it begins to develop the nodes of sidearms, on which the hop



Above: A view down a row of Chinook hops in mid-July. Below, left, L-R: James "Jame-sy" Shepherd, George Shepherd, and Dr. James Shepherd enjoying a beer at Kent Falls Brewery after a long days work. Photos: Shrevie Shepherd.

flower will grow. After the Solstice the hop plant can sense the shortening of the day and will begin to produce pale cone-like flowers, which grow exclusively on female plants. Any male plants will go to seed.

### Harvest

From mid-August through mid-September the hops are harvested. The whole plant, coir and all, is cut to the ground. Shrevie waxes exuberant about this time of the year as if she actually enjoys it. It's intense, exhausting, and requires many hands getting scratched to make light work.

After harvest, the bines have only a short time to have the hop flower removed and dried in the hop-drying kiln or oast. Ally explains, "The hops are harvested from the field and run through the harvester immediately and put into the oast. This all occurs on the same day and the sooner the better. If the hops are left on the bine they will begin to rot and spoil."

After drying, the hop flower can be bagged as whole cone or as of last autumn, with the purchase of the proper machinery, put through a pelletizer and bagged for breweries or homebrewers. The whole cone hops

are more of a specialty item. Kent Falls Brewery, in Kent, CT, uses whole cone for its popular Bird Post pale ale. Harney & Sons use them for their caffeine-free New England Teamaker Hops.

Although the fields look bleak and barren now, the Smokedown Farm team is looking forward to the 2020 growing season. They are keen to expand hop production and establish themselves as *the* source of quality hops for the craft and home brewer alike. ●

*Hop varieties grown at Smokedown Farm include Chinook, Tahoma, Santiam, Teamaker, Centennial, Challenger, and Cascade. These varieties are sold to breweries in the area such as Kinsman Brewing in Milldale, Kent Falls Brewery in Kent, Two Roads Brewing/Area Two Brewing in Stratford, Back East Brewing in Bloomfield, and Little House Brewing in Chester. The list is expanding each season and recently they've added online ordering and delivery for the home brewer.*

*For more information about Smokedown Farm and their hops, visit them online at [www.smokedownfarmhops.com](http://www.smokedownfarmhops.com) or email [smokedownfarm@gmail.com](mailto:smokedownfarm@gmail.com).*





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# Fine threads

*Creative types enjoy exploring the luxurious range of yarns at Fabulous Yarn in Tivoli, NY*

*By Regina Molaro  
info@mainstreetmag.com*

Knitters and crocheters can find lots of creative inspiration at Fabulous Yarn – a luxury yarn boutique in Tivoli, NY – a picturesque village in Dutchess County. The artsy town is home to many enticing destinations including Hotel Tivoli, which is owned by artists Brice and Helen Marden. The yarn shop ushers even more color to the small, stylish enclave.

Fabulous Yarn boasts an extensive collection of yarns and wools in a wide palette of colors. Its rainbow of hues ranges from soft and subdued beiges and creams to cool blues, warm yellows, and bold orange and red hues. It also includes rich browns, grays, and elegant blacks.

## **From the start...**

The business, which initially debuted online in 2006, specializes in handspun, handmade, and hand-painted yarns. Although the business launched with one or two specialty yarns from Artyarns and Blue Sky Alpacas, the collection now includes everything from alpaca yarns to merino wool yarns, mohairs, angoras, organic cotton yarns, yak yarns, beaded silk yarns, and beyond.

Fabulous Yarn, which is helmed by Judy Schmitz, evolved from another business venture that the yarn maven launched in 2003. The now defunct company, fabsweaters.com offered a range of novelty items

from handmade sweaters and hat sets to classic cardigans, baby gift baskets, baby blankets, handmade baby booties, and beyond.

“As my sourcing grew for my hand-knit business, fabsweaters.com, it took over my home with piles of yarn. My husband asked me why I didn’t just sell the yarn? During my daily commute to New York City when I was doing marketing for Time Warner, I created and launched the Fabulous Yarn website and never looked back,” says Schmitz.

She mentions that she had no idea the yarn business would take off as quickly as it did. As a result, Schmitz had to shutter fabsweaters.com, so she could focus solely on the yarn business.

Fabsweaters.com and Fabulous Yarn aren’t the first business ventures launched by Schmitz. “I’ve been into textiles and fiber arts since I was in college. That’s when I started my first company, Brock-Reed, which offered hand-knits that I created using knitting machines. The business was based in San Francisco during the 1980s. At one time, Schmitz also enjoyed a stint serving as lead designer for Joe Boxer’s silk boxer collection.

Continued on next page ...



Photos depict Fabulous Yarn's store in Tivoli and some of the products that they offer. .

### The brick-and-mortar debut

"Over the past year, our business has grown, so we made the commitment to open a brick-and-mortar shop. Friends and customers hounded us to do it," reveals Schmitz. Beyond unloading all the yarn from her attic, the yarn enthusiast is happy to be part of a vibrant arts community. The quaint tree-lined town boasts everything from charming cafes and a sophisticated tapas bar to enticing farm-to-table restaurants, a grocery shop, and several art-driven shops.

Although Fabulous Yarn is housed in a 200-square-foot space, it offers a vast selection of hand-made, hand-dyed, hand-painted, and unusual yarns. The colorful shop also offers some machine-dyed yarns, but only collections

that Schmitz believes exemplify the luxury yarn category. These include Artyarns, Zen Yarn Garden, Madeline Tosh, and Jade Sapphire Cashmere.

Schmitz reveals that Blue Sky Alpacas, Malabrigo, Artyarns, and Jade Sapphire are her top performers in terms of sales. "Blue Sky and Malabrigo are the go-to yarns for many – well priced and unique both in the color palette and fiber type," reveals Schmitz. Artyarns and Jade Sapphire are ideal for the true luxury knitter who yearns for top-of-the-line fiber and rich colors.

Since its debut, Fabulous Yarn has expanded its collection of knitting yarns and accessories to include all kinds of fiber and related products – from knitting needles and crochet hooks to books, magazines, patterns, accessories, kits, spinning wheels, and a range of luxury bags and totes. The collection also includes knitting gifts such as Knit Kits and Zen Needles – Fabulous Yarn's own collection. It also has bags and cases from Namaste and Atenti.

Beyond the 200 square-feet of fab retail space, Fabulous Yarn boasts its own 800-square-foot warehouse. At press time, Schmitz was prepping for an expansion into a more spacious warehouse, so that the retail space on Broadway could serve as more of a retail space and community destination – a gathering space for workshops and events.

### Dedicated artisans

Schmitz says that 99 percent of her retail business is done online. The remaining one percent of dedicated customers are local – they hail from all over New York State as well as Connecticut, Vermont, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and beyond. "We are a destination for lots of local knitters," adds Schmitz.

Beyond the luxe, quality collection, stellar customer service continues to lure customers. Whether sales

occur online or in store, customers are wowed by the personal attention, product knowledge, knitting and crocheting expertise, and a dedicated staff who are always eager to assist customers.

One of Fabulous Yarn's reviews stated, "I felt like I was communicating with an actual human rather than a person looking to type short hand as quickly as possible, which I have felt with other online experiences."

Another exclaimed, "This is the best place to buy yarn! Great color selection, luxurious fibers, and always the best prices! Such fast shipping too!" Others regarded Fabulous Yarn as a destination for luxury, quality goods.

At press time, Fabulous Yarn offered online assistance through its online chat service and via the phone. The convenient service enables customers to seek expertise and problem solving through this service. The new warehouse, set to open later this year, will certainly host classes, workshops, and more. ●

*To learn more about Fabulous Yarn and all of their offerings, you can visit them at 60 Broadway, Tivoli, NY or give them a call at (844) 233-8163 or visit them online at [www.fabulousyarn.com](http://www.fabulousyarn.com).*



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# A hive mentality

KEEPING BEES IN THE COMMUNITY



**H**umans have been intertwined with the life cycle of bees for at least 10,000 years. From the interior of Africa, where the very first recorded beekeeping techniques came via pottery containers, to the walls of Egyptian tombs where human and bee interactions are depicted in ancient forms of Egyptian art, humans and bees have been inextricably woven together throughout the vast honeycomb of history for reasons of survival, sustenance, and most recently – economics. Since the introduction of the movable comb hive in the eighteenth century, the modern value of the bee has mostly to do with what they are able to output, namely perhaps the most ancient human delicacy – honey.

*By Griffin Cooper  
griffin@mainstreetmag.com*

## **Are bees endangered?**

While today's honey bee might have been domesticated thousands of years ago, the economic fascination with honey persists. Now might be the last affront in the decades of indignities suffered by wild and native bee populations as ecosystems teeter on the verge of collapse. Popular science has propelled awareness for the honey bee onto the international stage in recent years, helping give birth to sustainability programs on behalf of the most common of

domesticated species of bee while propagating the perhaps false notion that the honey bee itself is endangered – or anywhere close to it.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, numbers of honey bee colonies have actually risen over the last ten years while the native bee population remains an utter mystery. The reason is perhaps bitterly unsurprising for those committed to organic sustainability. In New York, the honey bee represents a major aspect of the state's agricultural economy. A veritable army of honey bee colonies are put to work state-wide in order to pollinate more than \$300 million worth of mechanized agricultural crops like apples and pumpkins. The 60,000 colonies in New York aren't the only ones used for agricultural production either, bees are shipped in from all over the world in order to sustain the production of goods as well as being exported to other regions to pollinate mass produced crops.

While honey bees are not currently at risk of extinction due to their economic value, the track of the wild bee remains frighteningly incoherent. With efforts being made to keep honey bee sustainability in the public consciousness growing over time, the decline of native bee

species has faded into the periphery of environmental discourse – a fact that may prove detrimental to ecosystems across the planet. While the fabric of the importance of the wild bee continues to be woven thicker and pulled tighter over the eyes of endearing environmentalists, in Millerton, NY, the would-be hero wears a surprising cape. Though commercial beekeepers might be responsible for the majority of the pollination services that take place on behalf of major agriculture, it's the hobbyist that still maintains an intimate connection with the bees themselves – and the communities they serve ever so faithfully.

## **A beekeeper's life**

"I filled out an application for my beekeeping license in 1983 after I came across a flyer at one of the markets here in town," says Gino Robustelli, Millerton's resident acquisitive autodidact who has been beekeeping and spreading the word on sustainability ever since. "I got a knock on my door from a local beekeeper from Avon, CT, a few days later asking me if I would like to

*Continued on next page ...*

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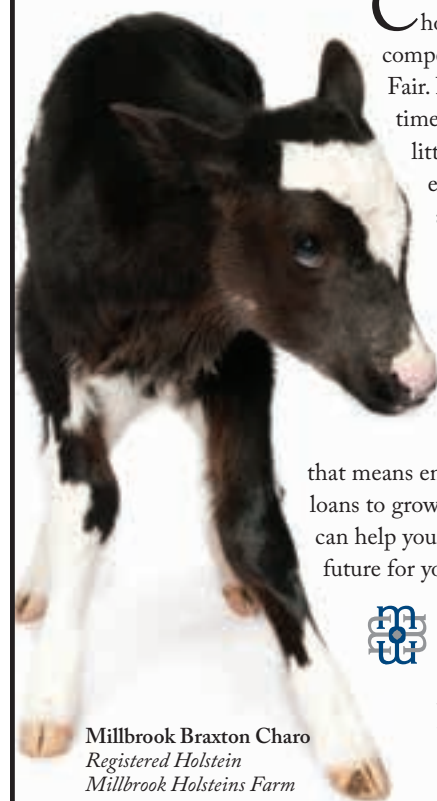
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help him with his bees. I remember the first time he opened the hive for me he said, 'You're a good candidate because you're not afraid.'"

Shortly after, Gino and his new beekeeping associate became friends and began installing beehives for residents across the area. Over the course of the next few years Gino would help install between 60 and 80 hives along the Route 22 corridor and into Connecticut until the local fad of harvesting honey from the backyard died down and local homeowners lost interest.

"We would be travelling in the van all day with the bees," Gino recalls. "There would be thousands of bees covering the windows and no partition. My wife couldn't comprehend how I could stand it, but, the truth is, many people aren't aware of how docile bees actually are."

#### A true passion

Despite being allergic to bee stings, Gino's passion for beekeeping and his pursuit of knowledge when it comes to the future of the honey bee, as well as New York's native bee species, burns with the same passion as it did 30 years ago. "I'm very passionate about beekeeping culture, it's a niche community and at the same time, the contributions local beekeepers make has a pervasive impact on residents in a variety of ways. The sustainability of the wild bee populations is just as important as we move forward and I'm always eager to share what I've learned."

Today, Gino manages the sustainable honey bee program for the gardens at Silo Ridge in Amenia, NY, where he began planting sunflowers specifically for its bee population when he first started working at the venerated members-only community. Soon after starting at the gardens in Silo Ridge, Gino was asked to lead the honey bee initiative which has since blossomed into the preeminent symbol for local wildlife sustainability. "Silo Ridge is the most sustainable, biodynamic, beekeeping initiative in our area. The leaders there have kept the beekeeping program alive, unwavering in their effort to protect the local honey bee population."

While Gino enjoys the platform the Silo Ridge initiative offers, he has started something of a cottage industry of his own from the comforts of his home in Millerton where he raises Italian honey bees. Gino specializes in making his very own organic beeswax, hand creams, lip balms, and, of course, honey, which he sells under the name Uncle Gee's Bees at McEnroe Organic Farm Market in Millerton as well as to friends, family, and anyone willing to give the organic experience a try. When he's not spending time in his kitchen, steeping his flowers in olive oil for medicinal purposes, Gino has spent time touring area schools with observation hives and early mornings honing his home-grown researching skills. "I'm always reading – staying aware of national



and local agricultural issues will effectively grow the already extensive network of knowledgeable people in our community. I buy my bees and raise my bees, I would love to start getting the kids in the area involved as well."

#### Where the wild bees are

Hometown beekeepers like Gino hold no pretense when it comes to the issues surrounding losses of the North American honey bee, the prevalence of the problems with commercial beekeeping are not lost on the local bee enthusiast. "It's work, it's a dedication to maintenance that makes sustainable beekeeping and unfortunately many beekeepers are content with making up for their losses in other ways because it seems easier," says Gino. "But the fact remains, beekeepers still continue to take too much honey and many of our local bees

Above: Gino all suited up amongst his bees. Below, left: Uncle Gee's Bees honey. Photos courtesy of Gino himself.



Continued on next page ...



are being exported to other parts of the country like California to pollinate commercial crops like almond fields.” As a result of their integral contributions to the economic integrity of mass-produced crops, significant efforts have been made on behalf of the scientific community to stem the tide of honey bee population losses. The same cannot be said for another decline – that of the native, or wild bee populations.

“Nobody really knows about the wild bee population,” says Gino whose research has now turned toward understanding native bees and their contributions to local ecosystems. “Typically, when the queen leaves, the swarm follows, making it hard to geographically track the progress of wild bees.” Though beneficial information regarding populations of wild bees remains frustratingly ambiguous, their impact as pollinators of the natural environment is undoubtedly crucial to the future success of area ecosystems. Wild bees, like the eastern bumble bee, of which a number of species have experienced significant declines in recent years, pollinate wild flowers and plants whose seeds feed birds who then feed mammals and thus, maintain ecosystems.

### Sterile landscapes and agricultural neglect

“We don’t plant flowers anymore and as a result, our landscapes are becoming sterile,” Gino says of our pension for planting commercial

gardens. “Commercial products like Korean Boxwoods and our habit of seed bombing our backyard gardens contribute to the loss of wild flowers and grasses.”

Indeed, civilized society has a habit of “tidying up” the natural landscape both at home as well as on a larger agricultural scale. For Gino, sustainability means returning to our wilder roots, “We should consider letting more wild grasses grow again. Every spring my family will plant wild flowers and let them be, in fact, if it wasn’t for my wife, everything on my front lawn would consist of wild flowers.”

Still, the neglect of native bee populations persists and for Gino, it starts on an industrial level. “The agricultural neglect begins with a monoculture of planting herbicides in our area like those sprayed over corn for example, a GMO product that is Round-Up ready – meaning planting a barrage of herbicides to kill the weeds around the corn. This not only affects our bees, but has run-off effects on our streams and wells.”

Mechanized agriculture is responsible for feeding people across the planet and there is little doubt regarding its importance in regards to modern commerce. The question remains, what kind of lasting effects does constant landscape alteration have on the natural environment. “Wild bees are being executed by the removal of acres of meadows. Our fields are full of natural grasses,

mowing kills the regrowth possibilities. Fields are mowed but not allowed to go fallow, creating sterile landscapes with no wild flowers – this not only has a negative impact on bees, but butterflies and birds as well.”



### Lingering questions and potential solutions

The issue of native bee decline leaves lingering questions revolving around potential solutions, namely just how harsh the population decline actually is and what are the environmental stressors that are measurable when it comes to wild bees. The answer? Perhaps it’s a matter of simply paying more attention.

For Gino, the communal culture of beekeeping local honey bees, combined with the universal benefits wild bee populations provide, make finding a balance mean bringing hope to all. “The beekeeper is mainly responsible for pollination and yet, it can be a double-edged sword. We should ask ourselves if we are doing enough to support local pollination while at the same time artificially stimulating bee populations.” Simple acts, acts so fundamental to small town life, like letting a bit of our lawns avoid the summer manicure, or returning to the act of planting our own flower gardens again may in fact bear the fruit of sustainable ecosystems that wild bees make possible while allowing for the continued enjoyment of our honey bees, and the sweet nectar they provide. •

*All statistical information provided on behalf of both the federal and New York State Department of Agriculture.*

Above: A close-up of one of Gino’s honey combs. Below, left: Uncle Gee’s Bees honey. Photos courtesy of Gino himself.







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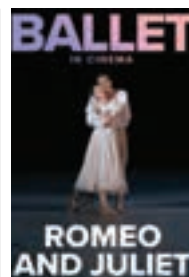
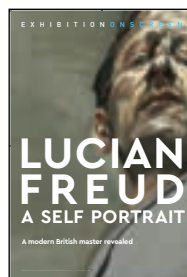
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# Read this article about puppies!

By Ian Strever  
info@mainstreetmag.com

You fell for it, didn't you? You saw that banner of adorable, impossibly fluffy puppies, and you couldn't help but read on. Coupled with an enticing title and some nifty rhetoric, you're now drawn into an article about an animal only a mother could love.

"What's that?" you're probably wondering, but let's dwell on the puppies a little longer, because they're cute. How did that picture work on us? In short, we are hard-wired suckers. According to Natalie Angier of *The New York Times*, "scientists who study the evolution of visual signaling have identified a wide and still expanding assortment of features and behaviors that make something look cute: bright forward-facing eyes set low on a big round face, a pair of big round ears, floppy limbs and a side-to-side, teeter-totter gait, among many others." Puppies check all the boxes. You never stood a chance.

## Here's the twist

If I had told you that this article would be about a creature with no fur at all on its head and neck that maintains its body temperature by defecating on its own feet and that subsists on roadkill, you wouldn't have made it past the first sentence. Throw in that you can actually see right through its nasal cavity, and you'd be reaching for the nearest garbage pail.

But maybe – just maybe – if I've tapped into that morbid, slightly sophomoric part of you that is just weird enough to read on, perhaps you're curious about how so many



Photo: istockphoto.com contributor Rawpixel

repulsive qualities could exist in one animal. And maybe you are open-minded enough to allow that there is some beauty, some important and necessary role for all creatures on this planet – even a turkey vulture. If so, read on.

## The animal world's oddballs

Because turkey vultures are oddballs in the animal world. If you have a soft spot for Mexican hairless dogs, blobfish, and flightless birds – things like that – then maybe you already appreciate turkey vultures. They are ungainly as hell, stumbling into flight with a cacophony of feathers and tipping and angling atop thermal currents with the least amount of grace it takes to stay airborne. Whenever we look to the firmament in hopes of spotting a bald eagle or a falcon, more often than not, the six telltale splayed "fingers" of the turkey vulture betray the gyre of this far more common raptor.

Why are they so ubiquitous? Well, why are deer everywhere we look? Answer that question and you'll know why this scavenger, which feeds on decomposing carcasses, numbers in the millions and has extended its range since the 1970s to include southern Canada.

More cars, more roadkill, more call for scavengers. Viva la vulture.

And therein lies some of the – dare I say – majesty of this creature. Its utter heinousness derives from the very evolutionary adaptations that also make it wonderful. Yes, you can see directly through its nasal cavity, but it's because vultures possess an uncommonly large olfactory lobe that picks up the scent of ethyl mercaptan that arises from the corpses of recently-killed animals. This also explains their relative gracelessness compared to other birds: they prefer to fly close to the ground in hopes of picking up that scent. Plus, it's the only North American vulture species that can do that.

Once airborne, vultures are more interested in surveying the landscape for fresh meals, so their flight is largely static, using their wings to angle into thermals to coast from spot to spot. Their wingspan can reach up to six feet, but attached to a rather bulbous body, it makes for inelegant flight characterized by

Continued on next page ...

twitchy, angular adjustments. There is, after all, no need for speed. All of its prey is dead.

### Unique characteristics

Naturally, anything that feasts on roadkill and carrion will test the limits of our unconditional love, but that behavior requires some fascinating and singular traits. A bald head allows the vulture to cleanly inspect carcasses at close range. And yes, vultures exhibit urohidrosis, meaning that they defecate on their own unfeathered feet to keep themselves cool, not unlike sweating. But why?

In addition to temperature regulation, this adaptation allows turkey vultures to do what they do. The uric acid in their feces dries and cools their feet, or tarsi, but the acid also kills bacteria that the vulture acquires from tearing apart decaying carrion. Disgusting, yes, but functional in the extreme. If a kindergartener were to enumerate the qualities that make birds birds, they would probably first mention feathers, flight, nesting, and singing. The turkey vulture, on the other hand, lacks feathers on

parts of its body, flies awkwardly, builds no nests, and is nearly – but not entirely – voiceless, as I discovered one bright, humid morning in Sharon, CT.

Hiking a quiet section of the Appalachian Trail, I approached an outcropping of ledge and began to ascend, even using my hands at times to navigate the damp ledge. As I neared the top, I heard a low whoosh, almost like the sound of waves on a beach, and as I poked my head over the ledge, I immediately saw the dark form of a turkey vulture hidden in the shadows of the cliff.

I ducked below the ledge and backed down several feet. I wasn't afraid of the bird, but like a rattlesnake, it had put me on notice that I needed to keep my distance. Fortunately, I didn't experience its more aggressive means of deterring predators, which is regurgitating semi-digested meat, a defense that is both repulsive and injurious, should it land in the enemy's eye.

So let's add projectile vomit attacks to the list of revolting characteristics of the turkey vulture, and it's no wonder that their predators are few and their population increasing. And when we go back to that kindergartener's list of bird traits, vultures also break the mold when it comes to nesting. They lay their one or two eggs directly on a rocky surface – probably what I stumbled upon in Sharon – and the parents take turns incubating and defending them from natural predators

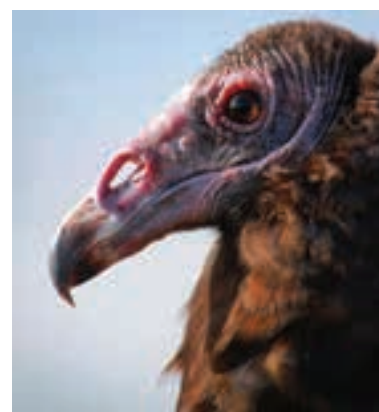


such as foxes, raccoons, and larger birds such as bald eagles, red-tailed hawks, and owls.

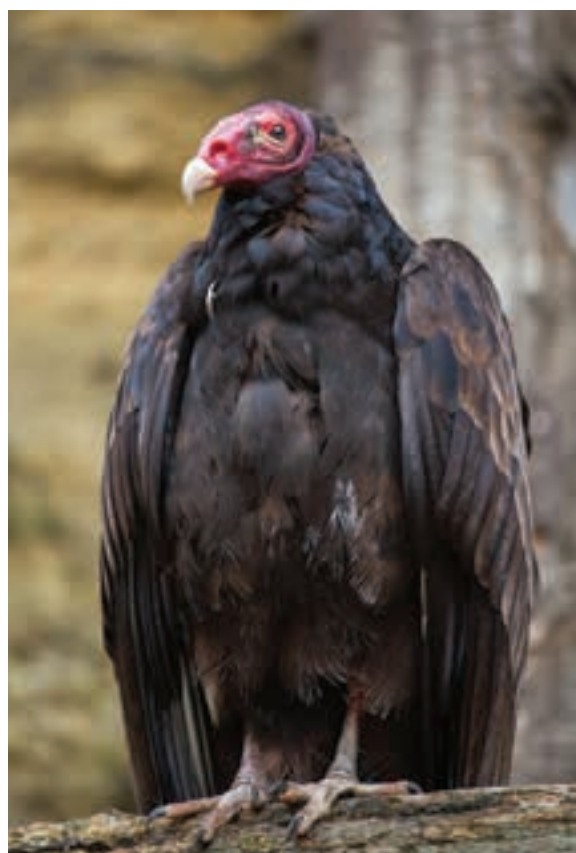
### An intimation of death

This latter group is worth considering in juxtaposition to turkey vultures. Most raptors are noble, graceful, and terrific in the original sense of the word (from the Latin *terrere*: to frighten). They command the kind of respect that made them the hunting companions of English nobility in bygone days. To watch a peregrine falcon sear the sky to apprehend its prey is to witness one of nature's most fearsome events.

To observe a turkey vulture is not that. But there is something unsettling about their presence. When I discovered one at such close range, huddled in a dark crevice, it was an intimation of death. Its sound was like that of a wave, but in the way that a wave retreats into the sound of the planet. It could be a river, a wave, or your pulse – a sound we forget about until something brings it back into our awareness, and a vulture can bring that song into relief, like a mournful solo in an orchestral dirge. •



Above, top to bottom: The six "fingers" of a vulture's wings are the telltale sign of one coasting along thermals to its next carrion. With most of a turkey vulture's repugnant characteristics, look past the trait to the purpose it serves. The hollow nasal cavity allows it to pick up on the scent of its next meal. Left: They aren't much to look at, but turkey vultures are beautiful in their functionality. All images are from istockphoto.com and contributors are from top to bottom Marek Stefunko, Jenituck, and wrangel.







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# Farm Fresh

A husband and wife team run Sawkill Farm – a livestock farm in Red Hook, NY



By Regina Molaro  
info@mainstreetmag.com

The Hudson Valley area is dotted with lots of charming farms, reputable restaurants, and delectable food. The culinary scene plays a significant role in the community, which boasts many farmers' markets, farm-to-table restaurants, tasting events, and beyond.

In recent years, there's been much discussion about food. People are becoming increasingly attuned to where food is sourced and the welfare and health of the animals, including whether hormones and antibiotics are used.

Red Hook's Sawkill Farm is a 200-acre livestock farm that is proud to fulfill its mission – to raise 100 percent grass-fed and pasture-raised meats for people in the Hudson Valley and the New York City area. The farm, which was founded in 2010 by Michael Robertson, is co-owned and operated by him and his wife Kallie Robertson.

## Origins

Before they met in 2012, Michael and Kallie both shared an appreciation and interest in farming. After an unfulfilling career in the tech sector, Michael segued into farming. He initially got his start in Austin,

TX. He later moved to New York. His first introduction to the Hudson Valley and livestock farming was through a job at Hawthorne Valley Farm. Before purchasing a farm and settling in Red Hook in 2010, Michael served as manager of the Queens County Farm in Floral Park.

Two years after starting the farm, he met Kallie, who was visiting Sawkill from Brooklyn. Her mission was to pitch Michael on working with her company Farmigo. Although the company has since ceased its operations, its mission was to connect farmers with consumers in the city. This was done through an online marketplace.

When Michael initially planted the seeds for Sawkill Farm, his vision was to grow vegetables, have livestock, and offer a full range of products. "As we started farming, we recognized a need for local and sustainably-raised meats. We noticed a lot of vegetable farms popping up and increased competition," says Kallie. That's when Michael decided to switch gears.

Rather than focusing on vegetables, he decided to raise livestock. "The welfare and health of our animals is extremely important. Our beef and lambs are 100 percent grass-fed. Our pigs are raised in the

woods and our chickens – both egg layers and broilers – are raised out on the pasture," says Kallie.

As the farm evolved, Michael and Kallie continued to date. She moved up to Red Hook full-time when they got engaged in 2013. Since design and marketing were Kallie's areas of expertise, when she moved up to the Hudson Valley, she focused on Sawkill's branding and marketing. She also set her sights on managing the farm's shop and building the product collection.

The farm raises approximately 1,000 egg laying hens per year. The Robertsons also process approximately 1,500 broiler chickens as well as 100 pigs, 20 steers, and 60 lambs each year. At press time, 25 ewes were about to give birth to a new herd of sheep.

Beyond raising their children – Rollo, age 3, and Sylvie, 3 months – the Robertsons also raise British White and Black Angus beef cattle, which can be spotted grazing the farm's pastures in the spring, summer, and autumn seasons. During the cold winter months, the cows and sheep feed on hay.

Continued on next page ...

All images depicting Sawkill Farm, their animals, humans, and products. Photos courtesy of Sawkill Farm.

Sawkill Farm raises its sheep for their meat and fiber. They have a motley crew of many breeds. As for the pigs, a mix of heritage breeds including Berkshire, Old Spots, and Tamworth reside in the woods alongside the creek. “They spend their days rooting and foraging for whatever they can get their snouts on,” says Kallie.

The heritage breed roasting chickens are raised outdoors on the sprawling grass areas. As for the free range eggs, their egg layers are raised out on the pasture. The coops are rotated weekly, so they always have access to fresh grass and bugs. The Robertsons also raise a mix of chicken breeds including Rhode Island Red, Araucana, Black Australorp, and Cuckoo Maran.

In their quest to utilize as much of the animals as possible, Michael and Kallie expanded Sawkill Farm’s operation to include the production of yarn and lamb pelts from the sheep, leather goods using hides from the steers, soaps using beef tallow, and bone broths, created from the animal bones.

That concept aligns well with trend forecaster Euromonitor International’s Top 10 Global Consumer Trends, which were recently predicted for 2020. It points to “Reuse Revolutionaries,” which represents ethical consumers seeking alternatives to single-use products. Their



inspiration: to reduce waste, offer more with less through reusing, and minimize the environmental footprint. They also yearned to honor and respect the animals by using as much of as possible.

#### Farm shop

Sawkill’s farm shop is the destination for snapping up lots of goodies. Opened in 2013, the shop is the destination where the community interacts with the farm and all its bounty. Being open year-round certainly has its benefits and enables the Robertsons to generate revenue, which often isn’t the case when it comes to farming in the Hudson Valley due to the harsh winter weather, which tends to linger well into spring.

The collection includes grass-fed beef and lamb, pasture raised pork, chicken, bone broth and chicken stock, soaps, leather goods, sheep skins, and yarn. Top performing products include grass-fed steaks, bacon, sausage, bone broth, and eggs. The chicken is a real standout as well.

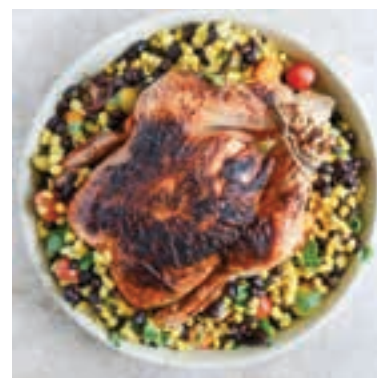
Sawkill Farm also sells local products such as honey from

Ray Tousey Honey; maple syrup from Crown Maple; and cheeses from Grafton Village Cheese, Jasper Hill Farm, and Chaseholm Farm Creamery. The range of sauces and marinades hail from Poor Devil Pepper Co., Maya Kaimal, and Show-Me BBQ Sauce, and the sauerkrauts from Hawthorne Valley Farm. Beyond the Red Hook shop, Sawkill Farm sells its meats, eggs, and soap at two year-round farmers markets in Queens.

As for other projects in the works, the Robertsons are busy enjoying the day-to-day activities of raising children. “That’s our big project for the next few years. Before we had kids, we worked hard to get the farm to a place where we could have more flexibility to spend time with our family when we had kids,” says Kallie.

The Robertsons remain grateful to the community, which, in their opinions, makes the Hudson Valley such a special place to live, farm, and raise a family. “We are deeply grateful to everyone who trusts us to feed their families and allows us to live this life,” concludes Kallie. •

*To learn more about the Robertsons and their Sawkill Farm, you can visit them at 7782 Albany Post Rd, Red Hook, NY, call them at (845) 835-8142 or visit them online at [www.sawkillfarm.com](http://www.sawkillfarm.com).*



All images depicting Sawkill Farm, their animals, humans, and products. Photos courtesy of Sawkill Farm.







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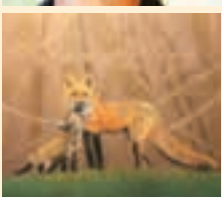


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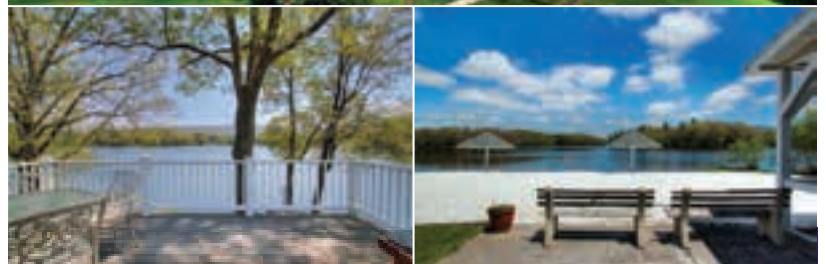
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# Crescendo

## THE MOVEABLE MUSICAL FEAST

By CB Wismar  
info@mainstreetmag.com

*Crescendo.* The word is from the Italian, first used in the late 18th Century to describe the moment in a musical performance when there is a gradual increase in volume. It's dramatic. It's enveloping. It announces that something important is happening and the audience should really pay attention.

*Crescendo.*

A musical consortium of singers and musicians who have, since 2003 been performing under the imaginative direction of founder and artistic director Christine Gevert, whose total dedication to music has allowed her to craft a career that is enveloping, dramatic, and worthy of one's attention.

### Child prodigy to international star

From her childhood in Chile where she was, early on, recognized as an amazing talent, Christine Gevert has crossed oceans and cultures in pursuit of musical mastery. Her degree in music theory from the Conservatorio Nacional de Chile was just the beginning of her academic and performance career.

Working as assistant to celebrated Chilean conductor Alejandro Reyes, Christine had a life-changing conversation. Reyes assured her that to continue to allow her talent to grow, she had to leave. It was a dramatic decision, but the music called her, and the next movement in her personal symphony began.

The next stop on her journey was Germany where she studied choral and orchestral conducting, received her Master's Degree in organ and early music performance from the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg, and studied conducting in Berlin and harpsichord in London. As a celebrated performer, she has been featured in festival concerts in Narol, Poland, Paris, France, and across Chile and the United States.



### To perform and to inspire

Not only did Christine become a skilled performer, she discovered a flair for teaching and has taught in Berlin at the Berliner Kirchenmusikschule, the Universidad de Chile, and the Pontifican Universidad Catolica in Santiago, Chile. Locally, she's enthralled students at Bard College at Simon's Rock and presented many lectures across the region..

It is a fair question to wonder why, with such an exhausting resume, Christine Gevert has ended up in Lime Rock, CT. The short answer is that no one can ever be sure where one's muse will lead them.

The long answer involves more travel, this time to Boston, MA, where the early music scene had great attraction to a very talented, very energetic performer. The "scene" in Boston, however, proved to be less welcoming than she hoped. Prodigious as her talents were, the tight circle of performers and groups was difficult to penetrate, and with the counsel and advice of others who had experienced the frustration of trying to break into a closed community, Christine began to look for complimentary

positions that could give her the base to pursue her art.

### A place of her own

"One of my colleagues assured me that to create your own program, you should first become affiliated with a church music program." She needed a base, and when, in 2001 an opening at Trinity Episcopal Church in Lime Rock, CT, was circulated, she found her new home.

Building a robust music program at Trinity led Christine to meet other noted musicians in the area and as her own local choir became more and more refined, the notion sprouted and grew to begin that group dedicated to Renaissance and Baroque music – a concert group that could draw from the wider talent pool represented at churches in Norfolk and Salisbury, CT, in Great Barrington, MA, and in Millerton, NY.

To prepare for the debut of Crescendo, Christine joined the late Al Sly who was the revered music director at the Salisbury Congrega-

Above: Crescendo Encore at St. James Place in Great Barrington, MA. Photo courtesy of Crescendo.

Continued on next page ...



Above: Christine Gevert at the harpsichord. Right: Music Across Borders - Full Announcement March 2020. Images courtesy of Crescendo.

tional Church and conducted the choir for Sly's light opera company performances. She also presented three months of Saturday concerts at Trinity Lime Rock, bringing the passion of music to bear on the endless struggle against war and violence. Dedicated and truly cosmopolitan, Christine Gevert had made her mark in the local community.

With strong support from the local community and the financial impetus that benefit concerts by notable performers could bring, Christine Gevert announced Crescendo, initially comprised primarily of voices from her home congregation and supplemented by skilled musical accompaniment provided by regional artists who shared her passion for early music.

### Stunning voices, brilliant instrumentalists

At its fullest vocal offering, Crescendo brings nearly 50 singers to the stage at St. James Place in Great Barrington, MA, and to the chancels of churches in Lime Rock and Lakeville, CT. Comprised of both skilled amateur and professional voices, the smaller Crescendo Vocal Ensemble and the Crescendo Period Instrument Orchestra are often joined by internationally recognized soloists in performance.

Not every Crescendo concert is focused on Baroque and Renaissance music. A 2013 commission of *West Lake Cycle* by John Myers and *Five Elements* by Cheng-Chia Wu brought contemporary music to the

region, much of which was offered in Mandarin Chinese. The result of that highly energetic presentation – *New and Ancient Voices: Interpreting Nature in China and the US* – won the Chorus America/ASCAP Alice Parker Award, national recognition for the adventurous program and the intricately staged performances utilizing Chinese instrumentation.

### The spring musical awakenings

“We’re truly excited about our early spring concerts at the end of March,” commented Gevert as she has decided to build on the success of the group’s recent *Thanksgivings For Life and Love*, which paired Spanish Renaissance Polyphony and Latin American Folk and Contemporary Music in an elegant juxtaposition. The February concert featured accompaniment by charango, guitar, quena, flute, palaguito and zampona. If those instruments aren’t easily identifiable, their distinctive sounds come to life in the plaintive music of Andean cultures, and the combination of that unique sound with the highly trained voices of Crescendo made for a brilliant musical juxtaposition.

### The musical tradition continues

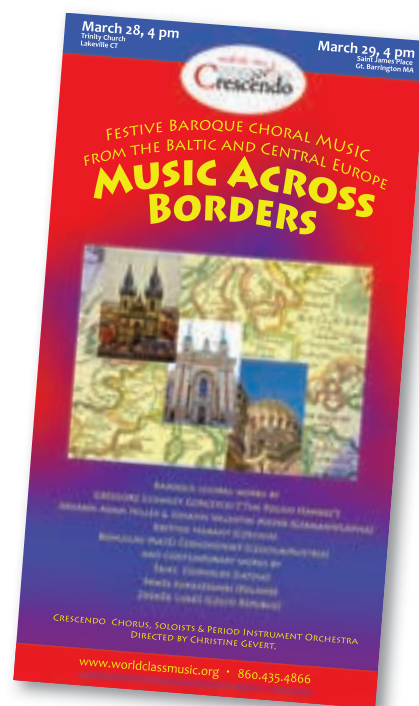
When Crescendo welcomes audiences to the spring concert, the continued emphasis on cross-cultural music, both ancient and contemporary, will focus on the music of Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic and

Austria. “Most concert goers have not experienced the ethereal tones produced by tuned musical glasses – the glass harp,” offers Gevert. “When we perform Esenvald’s *Stars*, the magic will come to Lakeville and Great Barrington.”

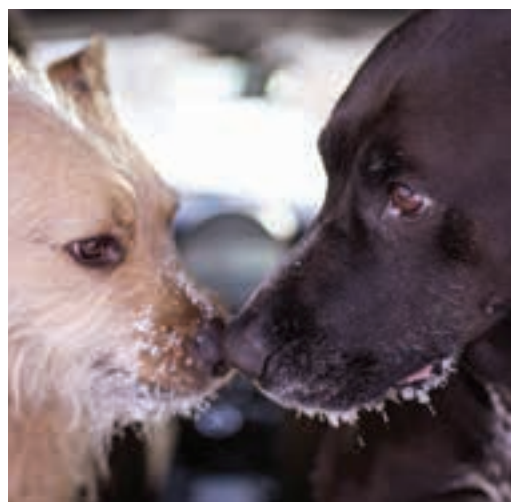
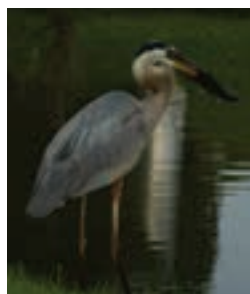
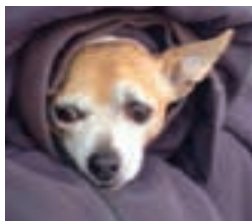
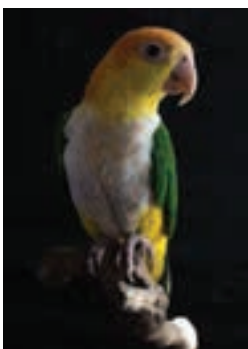
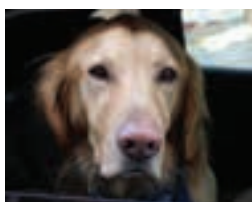
An additional spring concert event will pair Christine Gevert on harpsichord with soprano Julianne Baird performing works of the Bach family – from Johann Sebastian Bach to his sons Carl Philipp Emanuel and Johann Christian to his grandson, Wilhelm Friederich Ernst Bach.

Christine Gevert has brought her estimable talents as a performer and conductor to the bucolic region of the Litchfield Hills, the Berkshires, and the Hudson Valley, and the area has welcomed her and made Crescendo concerts a significant cultural draw. In a region that boasts Music Mountain, Tanglewood, and the Yale Summer Festival, Crescendo gladly takes its place as a regional gem ... the rising music that enralls and invites audiences to pay rapt attention. •

Information about Crescendo concerts and educational programs can be found at [www.worldclassmusic.org](http://www.worldclassmusic.org). This truly is “world-class music.”







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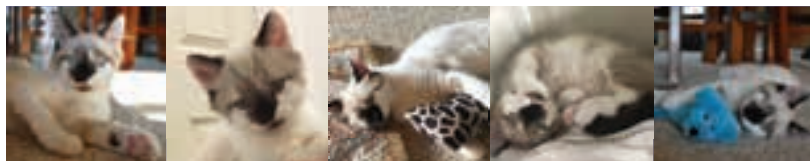
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### Sienna Sky Pet Cremation Services

Dignified and compassionate pet aftercare. Ghent, NY. (518) 816-2092. [siennaskypetaftercare.com](http://siennaskypetaftercare.com)

As of October 2018, Sienna Sky offers compassionate, fully transparent, and customizable pet aftercare, including individual or group cremation service for dogs, cats, rabbits, birds, reptiles, and more. Witnessed and same-day service is available. Sienna Sky also offers a wide selection of urns, keepsakes, and memorial jewelry. Owner Susan Bandy says of her decision to purchase Buddy's Place upon the retirement of its owner, "I felt that such a valuable service should still be available to the community, so I agreed to purchase the business in order to continue providing respectful and fully transparent pet aftercare. We are also seeking to expand to offer affordable cremation services for horses." Sienna Sky is proud to offer its unique service across the Tri-state region and specializes in making pet owners' farewell to their beloved friends open and respectful by allowing clients to be present for their pet's cremation if they choose and working with each client to personalize the service as a way to honor their pet. For example, clients may include special items, such as a favorite toy or treat, to accompany their pet during their transition. Sienna Sky donates a portion of profits to The Lily Pond, a not-for-profit animal sanctuary. "It's important and healthy to honor the love and joy that our pets brought to our lives and to allow time and space to grieve. Sienna Sky will begin offering pet grief support workshops this year," says Susan.



### Walt's Dairy LLC.

A multi-generational dairy farm owned and operated by the Kiernan family. 328 Valley View Road, Copake, NY. (518) 329-0797.

Even after farming for over 90 years in two states, Walt's Dairy in Copake, NY, is still humming along with the same kind of honest, persistent dedication to the quality and care for their livestock that has swept through generations of the Kiernan family. Starting in 1927, and after four generations of dairy farming in Shelton, CT, Rosalie and Bill Kiernan moved the farm and their children to Copake in an effort to escape the growth of the urban atmosphere in Shelton. Today, Walter and David Kiernan are running the farm with their parents Rosalie and Bill where their 168 milking cows provide quality milk to the Milk Co-op of Hudson Valley Fresh, which provides fresh milk to local schools in the Hudson Valley and the Berkshires. Through it all the Kiernans remain true to the hard working ethics of the American farms of yesteryear, as Bill Kiernan puts it: "Farming is a way of life, it means working with nature in the elements to create something worthwhile to feed our world. Farming requires a strong work ethic, in the hopes that you may pass these qualities onto your children." The Kiernans have also participated in selective breeding to build herd genetics. In what has become tradition, many generations of the Keirnan family have shown dairy cattle at the local and national fairs. Members of Walt's Dairy currently show cows at the Columbia County Fair and The Big E.



### Dutchess County SPCA

Securing caring, responsible, permanent homes for adoptable animals. (845) 452-SPCA (7722). @DCSPCA. [dcspca.org](http://dcspca.org)

Founded in 1871 as a citizen's society dedicated to helping homeless animals as well as preventing cruelty, and thought to be the second oldest SPCA in the nation, the Dutchess County SPCA became a not-for-profit corporation in 1963. The DCSPCA is not affiliated with the national ASPCA, but rather is an entirely independent New York State registered charity subsisting of service fees and private philanthropy. For over a half-century the DCSPCA has served as a community resource center for pet adoption, advocacy, education, and the prevention of animal cruelty. DCSPCA is the only animal rescue that is chartered to enforce Humane Law in Dutchess County and its Humane Law department investigates and prosecutes cases of animal abuse and neglect. The DCSPCA offers a low-cost wellness clinic and spay/neuter services, as well as operating the Paws and Claws Thrift Shop, stocked entirely by donated items that are sold for the benefit of the shelter. DCSPCA proclaims its greatest reward is the number of animals – literally thousands – that it is able to rescue from abuse, neglect, or abandonment; nursing them back to health and ultimately finding loving, forever homes for them. The DCSPCA say they firmly believe that animal welfare is a direct reflection of human welfare. They envision themselves as a service organization for people, helping keep their pets in safe and loving homes, and helping domesticated animals fulfill their purpose as happy and healthy companions to the humans that will protect them.



### Active Riding Trips

Offering equestrian vacation packages all over the world. Stanfordville, NY. (800) 973-3221. @ActiveRidingTrips. [activeridingtrips.com](http://activeridingtrips.com)

Talking travel and horses all day – what could be better? Since incorporating in 2008, Active Riding Trips has become one of the longest-serving equestrian vacation providers around. With an astonishing 71 equestrian vacation packages available featuring 16 different countries across the globe, Active Riding Trips has enjoyed working with a cache of some of the most incredible destinations on the planet. Riders and vacationers are swept away on horseback to locales like the Inca Trail and Machu Picchu, featuring condor sightings and absolute luxury accommodation. The sights and smells of a Bordeaux Ride in France as well as rides in the Gredos Mountains of Spain offer the type of immersion vacation that sees travelers and families raving about their trips every time. Looking ahead toward the future, Active Riding Trips' initiative remains twofold: to help keep equestrian sports growing by introducing new members of any age to the sport; and to continue trying to give back with programs like their "Ride for Pink" where 10% of the trip cost is donated to the American Cancer Society for R&D. Owner Stacey Adams, who has had the great fortune to ride all over the world, says her biggest problem when asked "which is your favorite ride?" is how to explain that it's truly hard to beat riding (and living) in the Hudson Valley.

## INSURING YOUR WORLD

Late winter and early spring is approaching. With it comes late winter snow falls, yet more importantly the spring rains, which have been causing serious flooding lately. This column will be devoted to how water impacts our insurance coverages. Most specifically, flood insurance. There is a common misconception that if a building is not in a flood zone, one cannot purchase flood insurance. This is absolutely false. Anyone can purchase a flood policy. The premium is dependent upon the actual zone determination assigned by FEMA, the Federal organization that set forth the zone maps. The higher the chance of flooding, the higher the premium. A base flood policy only covers the structure itself and one has to purchase additional coverage for the contents if desired. If you have a mortgage on a residential property, flood insurance will be a requirement if you are in a designated flood zone by your mortgagee along with standard homeowners insurance. This also applies to commercial mortgages on commercial properties. There are limited types of water damage coverage that can be added to a homeowners policy such as "back up of sewers and drains." Yet make no mistake, this should never be construed as a replacement for a flood policy. Check with your agent today regarding this important coverage.



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## How do I know my cat is happy?

We are all familiar with common behaviors associated with a happy cat such as a clean bill of health, good appetite, and playing on a regular basis. Kneading and purring, for the most part, indicate happiness, as well as a joyful greeting upon my return home or friendly mingling or lounging with me. As my cat successfully distracts me while trespassing over my keyboard, he rubs his cheeks on my computer monitor, marking it as "safe." As I gently place him on the floor for the third time and interpret his behavior as slightly menacing, I know he is expressing his want for more of my attention, but most importantly, he is telling me he is happy. While I smile at him, it elicits more of his attention-seeking, happy behavior. I should relax about my typos as a result of the paw prints traipsing across my keyboard, for he is just trying to make me happy, right? He is, in fact, reading and responding to my smiling facial expression, an ability that cats acquired over time according to an Oakland University study. My smile is most likely eliciting the "loving" behavior in my cat, but I might want to keep my ego in check. According to the same study, my smile is linked to positive things like love and treats, and the compassion that I receive from my cat may simply be a result of his own self-serving needs. The good news? He loves the attention I give him, and the study confirms our cats are truly interested in us. And so it goes, my continued trek to making sure my cat is happy, all the while making me happy, too.

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## Spring bird feeding tips

Birds eat many things, from seeds and grain to insects, fruit and nectar, but in early spring all these food sources are scarce and there is fierce competition for available food. Backyard birders can provide more food and help all birds enjoy a nutritious, healthy diet by:

- **Cleaning and repairing bird feeders.** Winter buildup and storms can damage feeders, and winter flocks can leave feces and other debris on the feeders. As spring warms up, feeders should be thoroughly cleaned, and any repairs should be made.
- **Adding extra feeders.** As spring birds arrive in the backyard, more birds will be jostling for space. Putting out additional feeders will help more birds access food, and using different feeder styles (open platforms, large hoppers, multi-perch tubes, etc.) will appeal to different birds and will minimize aggressive competition.
- **Providing a variety of foods.** Different birds prefer different foods, and offering a better variety (like sunflower seeds, suet, mealworms, nectar, fruit, peanut butter and mixed birdseed) in the backyard will attract a wider range of hungry birds.
- **Minimizing pesticides.** Insects are a key food source for many birds and provide essential protein for nesting birds and hungry chicks. The more birds there are in the backyard, the more insects they will eat (providing natural pest control) and minimizing pesticide use will prevent accidental toxic contamination of birds.
- **Providing water.** Just as birds need healthy food, clean, fresh water is also essential. Clean and disinfect bird baths, and consider adding a bird bath fountain or solar fountain to the yard to attract birds with splashing noises.

Birds are hungry in spring, and feeding them well is a great way to enjoy backyard birds and meet their spring needs. As those needs are met, birds are likely to take up residence in the yard, leading to a bird-filled summer as well and more backyard birding fun to come.

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## Thinking about becoming a dog foster parent?

Fostering is the act of giving a temporary home to a dog in need who has often been pulled from shelters that have reached capacity. The experience can be an amazing one, but it takes a lot to be able to love and let go. If you can, it's one of the most rewarding ways to give back. Here are a few tips for those considering fostering some of the many loveable pups in our area.

>> Become familiar with rescues in our area, there are lots! Some shelters do not encourage fosters to adopt in the event that you "foster fail," which is when you end up adopting the animal you have decided to foster.

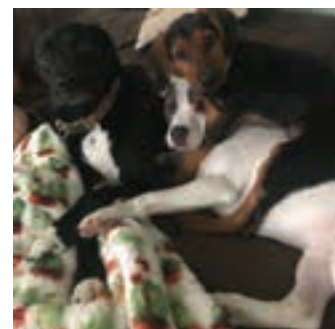
>> Understand that the dog will stay with you until an approved adopter is chosen. This may take anywhere from weeks to months. As a foster, housing, play time, initial training if needed, vet appointments, meet and greets, adoption events, love, care, and attention are all part of the process.

>> Dogs who are rescued can range in age. Understand that some dogs may have been saved from unfortunate situations and may be extremely timid or have social issues that will require special care.

>> **There is nothing wrong with foster failure!** I have three dogs, all of them rescues, two of them made us "foster failures." The best things come when you least expect it and at the end of the day – when you know, you know!

Tara Dellea  
Pet rescue advocate

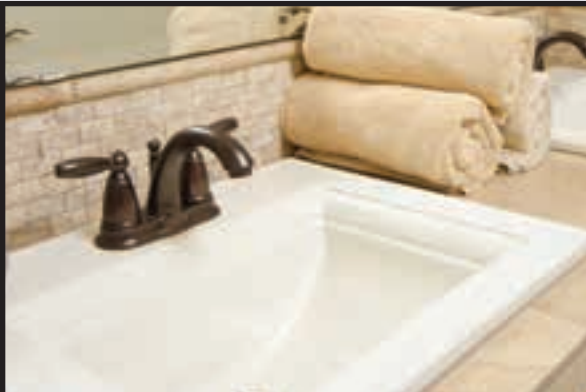
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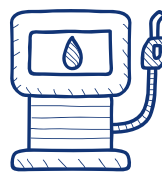
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