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Facts & fancy for Rio Grande animal-lovers

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Varmints & Critters

p 9, 12

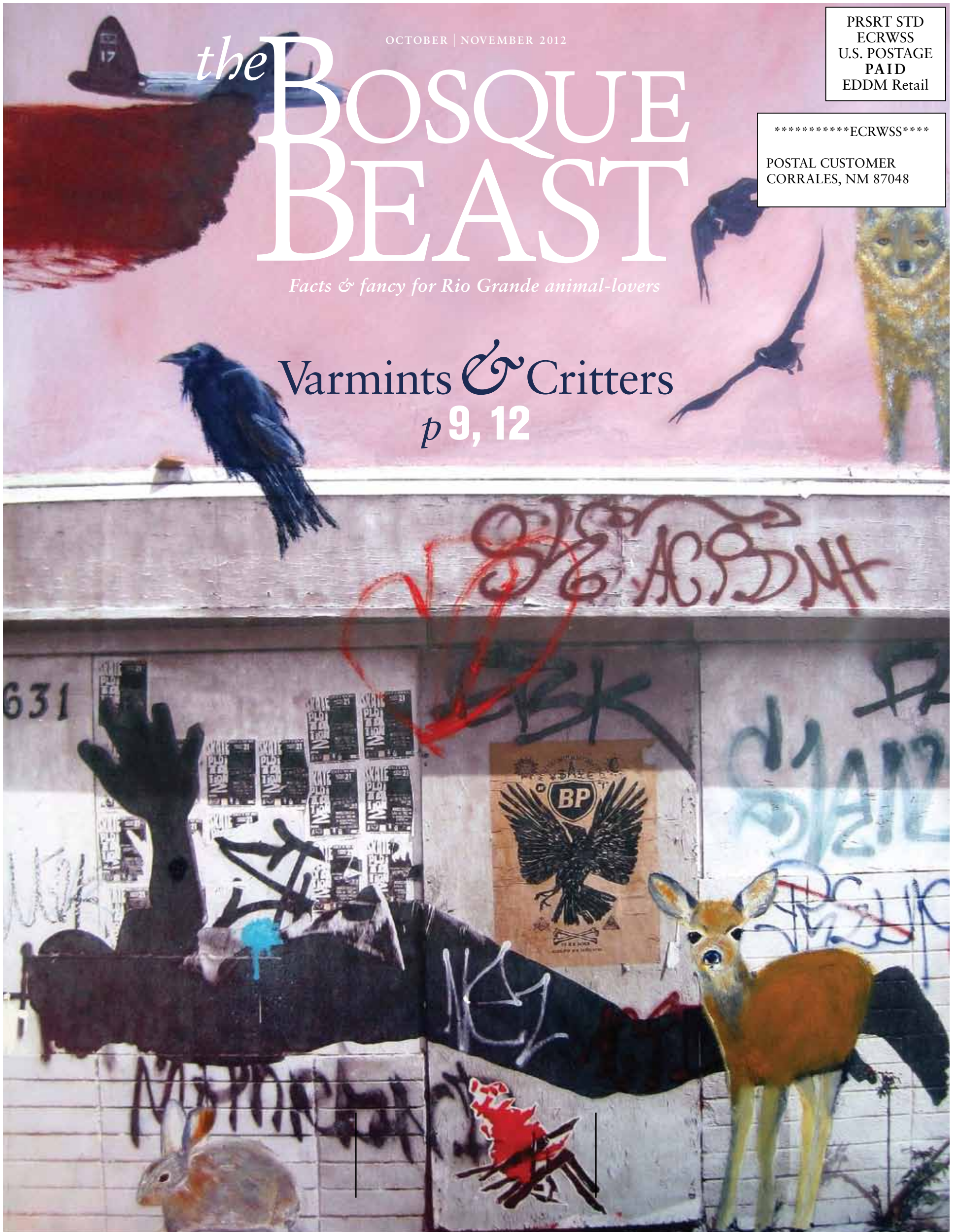




PHOTO BY KERRY SHERCK

We do
what
we can

I started walking the rescue dogs at Corrales Kennels once a week mostly because it seemed doable. So many volunteer jobs turn out to be un-doable, especially over the long run. Helping Melinda Helton walk dogs just one day a week (“It takes one to help one,” April/May) seemed like something even I could manage. Heck, it’s a 10-minute drive from my house.

Still, there are weeks when getting down there seems nearly impossible. With a million deadlines looming, carving out an hour to trudge down the ditch with an unruly dog seems like scheduling time to watch the grass grow. I tell myself that this is precisely why I need to do it — because for one hour, I am forced to let go of all the hurry and worry and just be here now with this dog.

Even better, the walk doesn’t lead to anything. So many acts of charity have a self-serving reward, like being thanked and fussed over and feeling a sense of accomplishment. Walking dogs that come and go offers no such reward. All I am accomplishing is to make one dog a little happier for one day, one hour.

I guess Melinda and Dan, who runs Corrales Kennels, would like me to use the time to train the dogs a little, teach them good behaviors. But I turn out to be lazy and distracted, daydreaming as I walk, telling myself the dogs enjoy being able to dart ahead, wade in the ditch, walk in circles, as with an overly lenient grandma. I tell myself that such little acts of selflessness do add up to tilting the global balance of humanity toward goodness a little — if nothing else.

But I am wrong. While I am doing my good deed and spacing out, things are happening at Corrales Kennels. Melinda’s daily devotion to the cause leads one rescue group to get a volunteer, Amy, to help her out. As the number of dogs and volunteers grows (since some rescue groups already had their own walkers), Dan is spending so much time fetching dogs, he trains Melinda and Amy to handle it. They start taking notes and keeping charts, and soon Amy is compiling a weekly schedule that matches dogs to walkers. As of September, all the dogs for all the rescue groups are getting walked every day the kennel is open.

Last week, we had nine dog walkers, with several of the new ones spending days on end just working with one dog. (See “It takes a village,” p. 6.) And Dan, thanks to his long dedication to the animals of Corrales, finds himself not only running his boarding and grooming business, but also an informal animal shelter for the Village.

Some people, in other words, are not content to just show up for an hour and do a nice thing. Because they keep an eye on the goal — rescuing homeless dogs, training them, making them more sociable, and finding them homes — the charitable act becomes a real force for good in the community. Rather than dream about the possible impact of doing good, they make it happen.

Keiko Ohnuma | Editor & Publisher



On the Cover

Santa Fe artist Cate Moses works from a strong sense of place, painting the animals with whom she shares a home in the high desert. A wildlife advocate, she spends a good deal of time tracking, observing, and photographing wildlife, and her artwork seeks to bring humans and other animals into dialogue. She painted *631* (oil and original acrylic gel transfer photograph on back-framed panel) as a response to the 2011 Las Conchas fire. Laying awake hearing firefighting planes and howling coyotes, she grieved for the homeless animals and decided to create an uneasy refuge for them at an abandoned gas station she had photographed at 631 Cerrillos Road. By the time the painting was complete, the rains had arrived, and bears and deer were roaming the evacuated streets of Los Alamos at night. Moses is represented by Arroyo Gallery, Santa Fe and Telluride.

the BOSQUE BEAST

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We want to hear from you!

The Bosque Beast aims to serve the whole animal-loving community. Send your letters to: Editor, P.O. Box 374, Corrales, NM 87048 or editor@bosquebeast.com. Please include contact information so we can verify your identity. Letters may be edited for space and clarity.

Correction

We mistakenly reported in Aug|Sept — “What’s the deal with girls and horses anyway?” — that “wild horses continue to be rounded up by the BLM for sale or slaughter.” In fact, wild horses and burros rounded up by the BLM are not sold; they are kept in holding for adoption by qualified buyers. Wild horse advocates claim that some of these animals *end up* being sold to slaughterhouses in Mexico and Canada once adoption is final (after one year). The problem has spread, they say, since the 2004 Burns Amendment, which allowed the BLM to sell without limitation any animals over 10 years old or that have been passed over for adoption three times. The BLM *has* sold 5,400 animals under these conditions. According to the agency website, more than 47,000 horses and burros are in holding facilities, while 37,300 remain on public rangelands, exceeding by nearly 11,000 the carrying capacity of rangeland in balance with other uses (such as cattle grazing, mining, and oil/gas development). The BLM estimates that the wild population grows 20 percent each year in the absence of significant predators.



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No changes planned in coyote management

A slight increase in coyote numbers, probably because of heavy fruit production this year in the Village, led to a slight uptick in calls to Corrales Animal Services, according to the annual review of Corrales' coyote management plan heard by the Corrales Village Council on Sept. 11.

Techniques being used to control coyotes in the Village continue to focus on preventing encounters: avoiding coyotes (especially during cub season), secure fences, and eliminating outdoor food sources.

Animal Services reported 4,599 calls for service this fiscal year, compared with 4,500 last year, and 78 coyote incidents versus 70, amounting to an estimated 1 percent increase attributed to coyotes.

The Integrated Coyote Management Plan has been praised for its role in organizing Corrales' response to coyote-livestock conflicts. The plan directs residents to contact Animal Services with any problems. Residents are prohibited from shooting, trapping, or poisoning coyotes on their own.

Longtime coyote advocate Susan Weiss congratulated the Village for its success this past summer in permanently scaring off a mother with cubs from culverts near the fire substation. The cubs did not have to be seized, as in the previous two years. She reiterated that complaints about coyote predation should be measured against reasonable and adequate means of prevention.

Winter approaching

As temperatures drop into the 50s and colder overnight, skunks and raccoons have been observed growing their winter coats. This time of year usually brings an increase in service calls for wildlife as animals are active preparing for winter.

Horses and dogs kept outside are also likely growing thicker coats, said Animal Services officer P. "Frosty" Frostenson. The Village requires that animals kept outside be provided with shelter, food, water, and clean pens year round, including water troughs free of ice. Standards vary, however, according to the situation. Residents should not assume from their own observations that animals have inadequate shelter, but should contact Animal Services: 898-0401.

Kennels full

The number of cats and dogs abandoned in Corrales has reached an all-time high. "It's the worst I've ever seen," said Frosty. He said people have called from surrounding communities hoping the Village will accept homeless animals, which suggests that Corrales' new "no-kill" ordinance is fueling a belief that animals can be left here safely.

All summer, the three dog runs leased by the Village at Corrales Kennels were full, and dogs occasionally had to be doubled-up in the runs, said officer Catherine Garcia. The Village kennel bill was surprisingly high.

All the rescue groups in and around Corrales are at capacity, Frosty said, while recent free and low-cost adoption events staged by larger groups and shelters make it hard for local rescue groups to compete in getting their own dogs adopted.



Bono goes home at last

Of the many pit-bull mixes that have come through the rescue system in and around Corrales, the old black dog named Bono became something of a *cause célèbre*. Initially found wandering in the Village in summer 2011, he turned out to be around 9 years old and seemed semi-aggressive around other dogs. Volunteer Melinda Helton worked with Bono over the 13 months or more he spent at Corrales Kennels

under the auspices of Second Chance Animal Rescue. Reading about his plight in *The Bosque Beast*, Animal Humane offered to try to get Bono adopted. Even though he was featured in one of their YouTube videos ("Adopt Bono," which got nearly 300 views) and served as an office mascot to executive director Peggy Weigle, no one wanted an old, black pit-bull mix. Bono was returned to Corrales Kennels, where he is (ironically) a darling of the volunteer dog walkers. Last month, the "no-kill" poster child finally found his forever home — at a kind of doggie hospice. A Corrales couple with a special place in their hearts for senior dogs have taken in 29 of them over the years. Bono left with tail wagging, according to the half dozen volunteers tearfully wishing him well.



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Dawn Janz keeps both chickens and dogs in the Corrales sandhills. That calls for some creative home segregation.

A row of five sleeping platforms keeps the little dogs cozy in their sleep sacks. Top: “The Final Solution,” a state-of-the-art chicken coop protected from canines on all sides.

Anatomy of a foster home

RESCUING DOGS, CATS, AND CHICKENS MEANS A FLOOR PLAN IN FLUX

WHEN DAWN JANZ LEFT CHICAGO FOR CORRALES IN EARLY 2011, she knew she couldn't leave behind her love of animal rescue — or the half dozen or so foster animals she had ended up adopting herself.

But since most houses are designed for people, plus maybe a dog or two, she had some requirements for a place that could be modified to suit a revolving bunch of four-legged roommates and house guests.

First, no stairs. One of her dogs has paralyzed back legs, and she sometimes takes in animals with mobility issues. That's why the main rooms have no carpeting either: Her paraplegic dog can more easily drag his legs on tile or wood and not get rug burns.

Next, a bunch of gates were needed to section off the house, plus a dog door to the yard. The house is laid out so dogs and cats can be kept apart, since Janz fosters both. “I have Cat Land and Dog Land, and this is Cat Land,” she says, indicating the large library/office off the hall that contains the bedrooms. She works and sleeps back here with her cats, who don't make a mess. The carpets are still white, the barking distant, and the furniture fabrics chosen not to trap fur.

A gate in the hallway keeps the dogs up front in the living/dining/kitchen area, where they have access to the dog door and yard. Of course, a fence had to be installed in the yard to guard against coyotes, but this turned out to be little deterrent in the Corrales sandhills—especially once Janz got some chickens. So the dogs now have a fully enclosed dog run where they can be safe when she's not around.

And so do the chickens. Janz bit the bullet for a large, fully enclosed coop that she calls the Final Solution. She still managed to lose a chicken, though, when one of her dogs figured out how to grab and pull a bird through the chain link.

Dogs are, after all, the coyotes we invite home.

Janz's house is a continuing work in progress — but she is not one to give up easily. A former project manager for an international bank, she quickly adjusted to her future career prospects by going back to school in nursing.

Likewise, she had planned to continue with Dachshund rescue, but ended up accepting larger dogs plus cats for the Corrales rescue group CARMA. This has meant giving up a front room that was supposed to be for exercise (oh, darn) so the foster cats could be kept someplace where they could be quickly caught.

Janz had her impressive organizational skills tested this summer during the Romero fire, when the whole animal crew had to prep for a possible evacuation. (She wrote about lessons learned in the Aug/Sept issue, “Wildfire! Now where's Fido?”). The experience of trying to shoehorn everything into her vehicle led to the recent purchase of a used minivan that can haul 10 to 12 small dogs at once, with a lower deck for hauling in cages.

Happily, the blaze stayed well clear of her home. But she was fully prepared to drive back to Chicago, where she still has a house, if no shelters would accept the animals. And she immediately set to work investigating how Corrales would make its own home for animals in case of emergency.

“I've done rescue a long time,” she says with a shrug. “You learn how to deal with problems.”

Janz hastens to add that any home can be a good place to foster animals as long as the occupants are willing — she fostered dogs for many years in apartments. But “when I chose my house in New Mexico, I wanted to design it to best support the kind of fostering I do, which historically has been the harder-to-place animals.”



The locally famous zebra-striped donkey named Sancho Panza has moved downriver to Los Ranchos, where he is giving the fish-eye to a whole new set of fans.

A donkey of a different stripe

SANCHO PANZA IS ONE OF THOSE ODD CREATURES whose striking appearance seems to foretell an adventurous destiny. Rescued from Missouri two and a half years ago, he traveled to Corrales in the company of a zebra bought by Bentley Kassemi, an exotic-animal rescuer who was talked into taking the skinny, skittish creature from a livestock auction. The two striped animals were rumored to be the seeds of a petting zoo, but Kassemi's plans changed, and Sancho Panza found himself back on the market.

One day in early 2010, Corrales resident Diann O'Neill was driving home on Loma Larga when she found herself doing a 180 at the sight of a zebra-striped donkey for sale. "I thought, Oh my God, he's meant to be mine," she said. "I fell in love with him and bought him that day. I think I went straight to the bank to get cash and had him delivered the next morning."

Sancho Panza spent a year living at her house on Camino Arco Iris, right next door to Mayor Phil Gasteyer. A great watchdog who once alerted O'Neill to her potbellied pig trapped under the gate, the donkey gained fame for his ineffable charisma, apparent to anyone who falls under his scrutinizing, Zen-like gaze.

A restless escape artist, Sancho Panza tore through countless latches and chains, and was known around the neighborhood for his wanderings. He enjoyed hanging with the family pig and German Shepherd, and "he loves kids," said O'Neill, who attracted loads of attention walking him on the ditchbanks. Even yardworkers would be caught goofing around riding the unflappable beast.

Last month O'Neill, who founded Adobe Computers in 1998, moved to Seattle to be near her grandchildren. She was so heartbroken at having to leave Sancho Panza behind, she couldn't decide until two days before moving which adoption offer to take. She ended up moving before he did.

The donkey must have understood the situation, she said from Seattle, because he leaped into the trailer of the "really nice man" who ended up taking him home to Los Ranchos. The man is going to buy him some donkey friends, O'Neill reported happily. "He's the coolest animal I've ever known," she added, growing tearful. "He'll be happy wherever he goes — he's like that. But I hope he'll miss me."

SPOOK MEET!

Corrales will host a **PET ADOPTION EVENT** with a Halloween theme on Sunday, Oct. 28, 10am to 4pm at Wagner's Farmland Experience, 6445 Corrales Road. The second annual Howl & Prowl, hosted by Justice Great Dane Rescue and Boofy's Best for Pets, will feature a number of rescue groups with pets looking for homes. The pet contest always brings some original entries at 11am, combined with all-day freebies from vendors, dog tricks, pumpkin decorating, and other tricks and treats.



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Sunday, October 7, 10:00 a.m.

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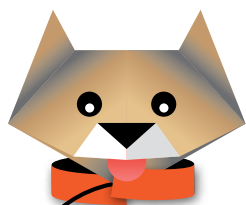
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CORRALES
DOG WALKERS

It takes a Village The recently formed Corrales dog walkers had their first organizational meeting on September 15 (SEE "WE DO WHAT WE CAN," P. 2).

FRONT ROW, FROM LEFT: *Melinda Helton, Angela Stell, Paula Steinberg, Carolyn Girard*; BACK: *Michelle O'Cleireachain, Ethan Mohan, Gina Hanson, Sarah Coddou, Lesley Small*. Not pictured: *Daniel Brigman, Rob Girard, Amy Ordogne, Michele Rose*.



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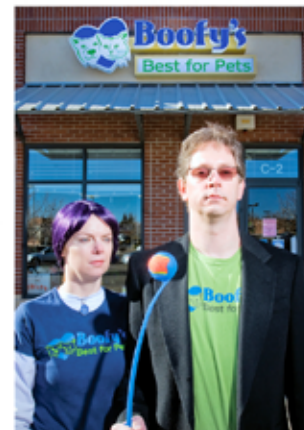
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KATHY O'NEAL



The best gait for conditioning

This subject is so important, as these majestic beasts can't tell us how they are feeling. That said, if you are a real horseman and spend time with your horse, you know they do tell us how they are feeling, to a certain degree. If we choose not to pay attention, our horses can suffer without us even knowing it.

Remember that last office picnic or family reunion? How you played volleyball for two hours when you hadn't played a sport in years? Remember how sore you were the next day? Well, that is how your horse feels on Monday when you have ridden him into a sweat both weekend days without a conditioning program set up for him during the week.

This is a subject that is extremely important to the well-being of your horse. In my work conditioning race horses, polo ponies, jumping horses, and weekend trail horses, I have had success with animals staying sound and healthy well into their teen years by using common sense and a bit of education, with the horse's well-being at the forefront. My focus here will be on conditioning to ride on the weekends.

With fall and cooler weather, we must consider shorter daytime hours, and keeping our horses in condition with less time and opportunity to devote to them. Of the three gaits — walk, trot/jog, and canter — I believe the walk is the most overlooked gait.

To me, walking is the foundation for all conditioning programs. It increases blood flow through the body, tightens and strengthens tendons and ligaments, and allows the body to cool down after faster exercise.

You can use it both to warm your horse and prepare the body for more strenuous work, and to cool down and recover from faster exercise before asking the body to do more. As a trainer, I spend time at the walk not only for conditioning, but to control my horse's mind as well. Something as simple as walking over logs or circling around a barrel or bush helps focus the horse and prepare him mentally for what I am going to ask next. If he is focused and relaxed, his body is going to respond better to a conditioning program. And if he knows he is going to walk when you mount, he may stand better and be altogether more relaxed, as he won't anticipate being asked to go right out of the gate.

Some horses tend to look forward to getting ridden so much, they want to go fast right away. If you insist that they walk, they will become more willing to obey. And as far as I am concerned, if the walk is flat-footed and not hurried, they can walk as fast as they want.

Suppose your horse was ridden quite a bit this summer and fall, and is fairly fit. As you lose daylight hours and have to cut back, three days a week is the minimum for keeping him in some degree of fitness. This will also keep him in enough work that he is not so fresh on the weekend.

Here is a sample conditioning program for a horse that is relatively fit, and can be exercised three times a week, preferably at least once midweek.

On the weekend, you might trot 10 minutes, walk 10, trot 10, canter 2 1/2, walk 5, canter 2 1/2, walk 10.

During the week, if you have only 30 minutes, you could lunge your horse in the corral at the walk and trot for 20 to 30 minutes, or go for a quick ride. By eliminating the canter, you will keep heart rate and breathing from going so high that you have to take time to cool down.

See you out there on the ditch this winter, walking your happy horses — may your ear muffs be toasty and your gloves nicely mended!

Kathy G. O'Neal runs Livery Training Stables in Corrales, where she teaches both English and Western riding to adults and children, trains riders for competition, and boards horses. Visit her website at www.liverytraining.com

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A clear danger to migrating birds

The fall migration season means more birds flying — usually to their deaths — into plate glass windows that they cannot see. It is the single largest cause of bird mortality linked to human activity, according to International Migratory Bird Day, which estimates that up to a billion birds are killed by window strikes each year.

Birds see a plant or tree reflected in a window, and fly toward safe haven, not seeing the glass. The illusion is worse on cloudy, foggy, or rainy days.

Just because dead or injured birds are not found after a strike does not mean the bird survived. Half of all strikes result in death, according to one estimate, when the bird later dies of its injuries or is seized by a predator.

Sadly, birds die most often from strikes because they are visiting home bird feeders in winter. To prevent your bird feeders from being lethal, place them either close to windows (less than 3 feet) or far (more than 30 feet). You can tape something inside windows to make them easier for birds to see, the most effective being ribbons or sun ornaments that move.

If you hear a strike and find an injured bird, use a towel to cover it and place it in a ventilated cardboard box in a warm, dark, quiet place. Don't touch the bird, but check on it every half hour. If it seems to be recovering, release it in a safe place outside. Otherwise, contact Wildlife Rescue Inc. at the Rio Grande Nature Center for instructions: 344-2500.

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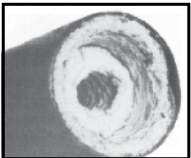
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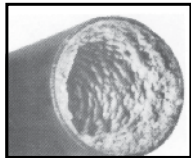
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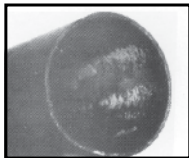
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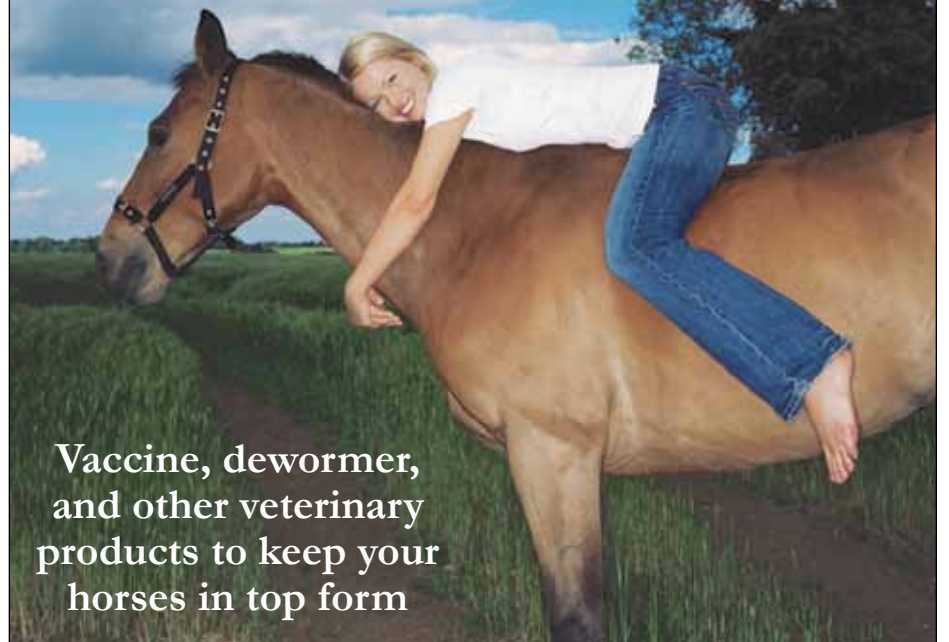


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When backyard nature turns into...

Wildlife control operators walk the thorny terrain between protecting animals and killing them



Coyotes are among the wildlife that have learned to adapt to nearly every human environment, from cities to seashores.



Left: An attic where bats left guano for several years, a foot thick in places. Their urine can permeate the building so that insulation has to be removed. Right: Spikes are commonly installed by homeowners as a pigeon deterrent, but the pigeons have instead used them to anchor nesting materials. PHOTOS COURTESY RD WILDLIFE

IT'S NOT JUST CORRALES, OR EVEN THE WEST. Coyotes are everywhere these days — in the suburbs, along the coasts, ambling across the Golden Gate Bridge, giving cops a chase in lower Manhattan. They have joined raccoons, squirrels, gophers, rats, and pigeons as animals adaptable enough to coexist with populations of humans who passionately wish them dead.

But it's one thing for a homeowner to confront the burrowing, chewing, pooping pests that are a perennial pain. When a large predator like the coyote joins the pack, humans' natural fear and confusion about wild animals leads to some strange reactions. Today's teary-eyed animal-lover might turn into a wild-eyed gunslinger tomorrow after a coyote growls at the family dog. Or tears a head off the family chicken.

Nonviolent souls take to the other extreme, calling on the nearest government agency to cart the offending creature off to some distant wilderness, which is a more delicate but no kinder way of getting it out of sight and mind. And then there are those misguided souls who appreciate the neighborhood fauna so much that they actually leave out food and water — and turn out to be the animals' worst enemies of all.

When modern homeowners take on nature, in other words, their first instincts rarely solve the problem and often make it worse — just as with gardeners. Extermination, though satisfying vengeance, usually does not work well or long. Wildlife biologists often cite the statistic that you would have to eliminate 70 to 80 percent of the coyote population to make a dent in their numbers, since they respond to being shot or trapped by having more and larger litters, and their absence just invites coyotes from the surrounding country to move in. And coyotes are everywhere these days.

Extermination can also have unwanted consequences, like a sudden influx of rats, or enough foxes to threaten the local songbirds. After all, coyotes became a problem thanks to an earlier extermination campaign, the one that eliminated the wolf.

Moving animals elsewhere may seem like a kinder approach, but wildlife experts grow hoarse explaining that it can actually be more cruel. "The animals are usually put in a habitat that is already filled with animals of that species, and so they have to compete for resources that may already be stretched to the limit because of environmental conditions such as drought," says Kerrin Grant, wildlife care director at The Wildlife Center in Espanola, where a number of coyote pups from Corrales have been sent.

The problem is the same in the growing suburbs of Nairobi, Kenya, where threatened African lions have been wandering into neighborhoods, killing pets. A biologist notes in a Sept. 11 New York Times report that relocating a lion "kills it slowly and cruelly, but out of sight." Euthanasia, the lion experts claim, would be kinder.

"Humanely" trapping your common house mouse has similar drawbacks. "Studies show that most wildlife that is relocated does poorly in a new environment," says local wildlife biologist Justin Stevenson. Especially if it turns out the animal left behind a litter of babies. Now what?

AS HUMANS CLEAR MORE LAND for homes on mountain and mesa, and wild sources of food become more scarce, conflicts with wildlife have multiplied and spread, spurring the growth of what are variously called wildlife control, nuisance wildlife control, and wildlife damage control operators. In Albuquerque, Stevenson and his wife Holly Smith started RD Wildlife Management earlier this year, leaving their careers in government to consult on problems from bats in the belfry to an attic full of pigeon droppings.

Stevenson believes that most human-wildlife conflicts are exacerbated by a lack of knowledge leading to warped perspectives (and encouraged by sensationalist programs like *Infested!* and *Billy the Exterminator*). The impulse to reach for a quick fix — which some pest-control companies and manufacturers are only too happy to provide — just guarantees the homeowner is going to keep on paying and searching.

"Many homeowners will try everything on their own before asking anyone, when we could have seen right away that something wouldn't work," Stevenson says. He and Smith offer advice by phone at no cost, and when they don't hear back, "we know that they're planning to take care of the problem themselves."

They encourage people to "do the right thing," meaning effective, humane approaches that emphasize exclusion (keeping critters out). "We try to be straight down the middle and follow science," says Stevenson. But that doesn't always jibe with human emotional needs.

"People are uncomfortable knowing they are still in the neighborhood," he says, offering snakes as a prime example. "You don't solve the problem by moving them somewhere else, but it's hard to strike a balance with people." He and Smith lean toward ecologically sound, preventive solutions, but may end up killing pests if there is no other way to save a home, farm, or garden — and the animal itself is nowhere near endangered.

"People's perspectives on wildlife change depending on their circumstances," notes Stephen Vantassel, project coordinator for Wildlife Damage Management (icwdm.org), a research and information site. Animal-loving urbanites may oppose eradication of beavers flooding out a farmer's crop, he says, but then you have to ask them, "Why are you stopping the shoplifter? He just wants something to eat!" Vantassel reasons.

WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT differs from conventional pest control not only because it focuses on animals instead of insects, notes Vantassel, but because operators do not use pesticides and toxicants, which generally require some form of state licensing. States regulate pest control much more heavily than the relatively small field of wildlife damage control, so operators in many states run the gamut of philosophies about how to deal with troublesome critters.

Made up mostly of sole operators and mom-and-pops, wildlife control approaches also vary greatly with each situation. "A good operator will determine how to reduce damage to a tolerable level, not just go for a body count," Vantassel says. That generally means some combination of trapping, removal, and exclusion.

continued next page

The key, says Stevenson, is figuring out how and when to remove, how and when to exclude. RD Wildlife Management uses techniques like professional-grade netting, bird wire, solar-powered repellents, and traps fitted with cameras. These solutions may take time and money, but they aim to be more effective over the long run than removal alone.

“With bats, raccoons, skunks, exclusion is very effective,” Stevenson says. But outdoors, exclusion is often impossible. “I don’t lie to people,” he says. “If you have pocket gophers chewing up roots and destroying trees, we can remove them, but we’ll have to come back and do it several times a year.”

When it comes to coyotes, problems tend to be highly situational. Nationwide, reports of attacks are far more frequent during pup season (spring to summer), when adults are protecting dens or hunting for food. Corrales animal control officer P. “Frosty” Frostenson says specific, aggressive coyotes have been trapped in the past, but he disputes the idea that high coyote numbers are to blame for predation in the Village. “Experts agree there is a sustainable level based on available food,” he says, which in Corrales has remained fairly constant: an adult population ranging from 60 to 120 adults.

Public education, exclusion, and avoidance are the primary techniques adopted likewise in Toronto and Atlanta this year, where controversy flared after coyote attacks. This tends to be the approach recommended by experts to municipal governments as most effective and affordable.

Stevenson relates a recent situation in which the Village of Los Ranchos consulted him about a coyote with severe mange that was preying on geese. Rather than go shoot the coyote — which is illegal in most residential areas, not to mention alarmingly unpopular with residents — he set a trap with a camera, then quickly went and euthanized the coyote in the morning.

BUCOLIC NEIGHBORHOODS like Los Ranchos and Corrales, whose high land values reflect the premium placed on living close to nature, unwittingly invite wildlife problems by maintaining suitable habitat right nearby: the bosque and mesa. In cities, too, humans have been adept at creating habitat for species

like raccoons and pigeons. “The vast majority of nuisance species, urbanization has *given* them homes, not taken them away,” says Vantassel. “All the food we waste — who do you think eats that?”

Humans also invite problems by providing food, intentionally or not. In Toronto the coyote problem in certain neighborhoods was traced to ladies leaving out chicken and rice for the animals. Cat food left outside — as well as cats — can also give individual coyotes a taste for something that might turn to the nearest alternative if frustrated.

“People want fairy-tale solutions,” says Vantassel. “There’s so many mythologies the public has about wildlife control.” He likens relocation of problem animals to airlifting your annoying neighbor 200 miles away and dumping him in the Nevada desert. “How humane is that?” Animal-lovers disparage hunters, he adds, but turn around and pay a wildlife control operator to do the same thing. “The challenge is getting people past the notion that every individual animal is sacred,” he says. “I’m more interested in the viability of the species.”

Stevenson echoes the frustration. While the field has come a long way from its origins in trapping and shooting, preservationists pose their own set of obstacles to coexistence with wildlife. “Our struggle is teaching them that there are real issues,” he says. “You *do* have to disclose problems when you sell or rent; animals can create health issues and expensive damage, falling home values.” That may not bother one homeowner, but what about his neighbors?

“You will never match people’s ethics 100 percent,” Stevenson adds. And since much of the job involves managing people’s expectations, wildlife damage control will never be lucrative enough to draw heavy investment in research and technology. RD Wildlife Management devotes considerable time and energy to educating lawmakers and the public — which may help their success rate eventually, but not their paychecks.

Successful community wildlife management, says Stevenson, consists of getting people to sit at the same table and look for common ground. “But I have to stay grounded in reality,” he adds. “If you don’t do some kind of wildlife control, you will fail at wildlife management.”



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Divorce leaves judge to assign pet custody

About four years ago, my wife brought home a beautiful mixed-breed puppy for my birthday. A friend of hers was moving and could no longer care for it. I fell in love with Jake, but unfortunately fell out of love with my wife, and we are in the process of divorce. When she moved out, she took Jake with her. Since Jake was originally a gift for me and I was 95% responsible for caring for him, walking him, playing with him, and being with him, I am angry and miserable and want Jake back. Is there anything I can do?

Divorce can be emotionally devastating on not only spouses and their children, but on family pets as well. I can certainly understand how frustrated and sad you are.

Traditionally, dogs have always been considered property, and divorce settlements have typically allowed family pets to be distributed in the same way as a table or dresser. This is still true in most states and with most judges. However, the trend recently has been for courts to recognize the intrinsic difference between an animal companion and a floor lamp. Most people see their dogs, cats, horses, and other animals as members of their extended family, and some judges are now trying to factor this emotional bond into their divorce deliberations. The best resolution, of course, is for you and your soon-to-be ex-wife to come to a private written agreement as to visitation, care, and custody of Jake.

New Mexico is a community property state and, as such, property is divided equally between divorcing parties. Unless one party owned the animal prior to the beginning of the marriage, and because a dog cannot be physically divided in half, it may be up to the court to decide where the dog goes to live if the parties cannot come to an agreement. In circumstances where both parties have been equal caregivers for their pet, my guess is that the judge would order it to remain with the person with physical custody.

If your wife will not negotiate with you over Jake's custody, you can try to persuade the judge that Jake is more emotionally attached to you, due to your close daily contact as primary caregiver; that you can provide Jake with a more interactive place to live; and that Jake was intended by your wife to be a gift to you. As in a child custody case, the judge may weigh the "best interests" of the dog in making a decision. But keep in mind that no judge is going to appoint a psychologist, social worker, or guardian to assess the dog's needs nor award visiting rights or joint custody.

Also, if you get a judge who adheres to a "strict property" analysis when it comes to companion animals, and awards Jake to your wife, you may have no choice but to accept this (though you can certainly appeal, which is a lengthy and expensive process that is unlikely to change the result). While such a resolution would no doubt be a terrible emotional blow, keep in mind that there are countless shelter and rescue dogs desperately looking for a loving home and, if you adopt one, then both Jake and your new dog will count themselves two of the lucky few.

Perhaps one day we will have a judicial system that fully recognizes the value of our companion animals, devising ways to appropriately assess the best interests, not only of the human parties to divorce, but also the non-human ones. Good luck!

Ed Goodman worked for more than two decades as a trial lawyer in Massachusetts. A painter, screenwriter, and novelist, he lives in Corrales with his partner, Ennio Garcia-Miera, and their six dogs, four turkeys, four chickens, and a parrot.

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CHERIE JONES



Tiny Toes Rat Rescue

Albuquerque (www.tinytoesratrescue.wix.com/nm)

Anyone who has cooed at the cages in a lab or pet store knows that “fancy” rats — any domesticated as pets — bear little resemblance to the much-feared denizen of city sewers, the Norway rat. Pet rats seem to inspire greater devotion, in fact, than hamsters or gerbils, probably because they are more responsive and can be trained.

“The longer I had them, the more I fell in love with them,” Cherie Jones says of her first pet rat, acquired 12 years ago, and the companions she adopted for him. “They’re affectionate and playful — a lot like dogs. They love people.”

But rats live only two or three years. At age 1, a rat is slated for retirement at Tiny Toes Rat Rescue in west Albuquerque, where only young, healthy rats are offered to carefully screened adopters. Cherie and Chuck Jones take in rats that need homes or have health problems, and provide a sanctuary in their living room for 55 of the long-tailed critters.

It takes the couple about eight hours to clean all the cages. Feeding costs \$100 a month. This summer their rats got hit with a highly contagious infection, and administering antibiotics took three hours a day.

None of this seems to matter to Cherie Jones, an animal-lover who fell for the rodents so hard that she immediately started fostering for the rat club she joined in California, where she was living. “They called me their greatest foster failure,” she admits, because she would grow too attached to let them go.

It didn’t take long for Chuck to get bitten (so to speak), and when they moved to New Mexico two years ago, the couple saw a clear need for rat rescue here as well. Cherie started combing shelters and Craigslist for rats needing homes, until Tiny Toes ended up with 55, of which 29 are currently available for adoption.

“We have a strong faith in God,” Cherie Jones says of the colony that takes center stage in their living room. “We feel strongly that when you do the right thing, God will provide.” The Joneses have set no limits on the number they will take in, as long as they can care for them — and their spotlessly clean house, home to five cats and a dog, testifies to that commitment.

Jones will drive as far as Las Cruces or northern Colorado to save a rat, “because I think of the animal,” she says. “I just love them so much, I feel I have the responsibility. They’re so full of personality—they’re not just a thing. And a few more mouths to feed is a minor inconvenience to me, compared to what they’re facing: losing their lives.”

The Rio Grande Turtle & Tortoise Club

Albuquerque (www.rgttc.org)

Baby-boomers probably remember the dime-store turtles that lived in blue plastic dishes with a fake palm tree and a half inch of water. But who remembers what became of all those turtles?

Red-eared sliders, as the aquatic species is known, quickly grow as large as 12 inches, and require a large filtered tank or pond to thrive — which most of those pets from Woolworth’s did not. Turtles also got a bad rap for carrying disease, since children would lick their hands after handling them and get infected with salmonella.



SANDIE JACKSON

For these reasons, among others, turtles and other chelonians (as the turtle-tortoise family is known) are no longer considered fun and easy pets for children. In fact, the main purpose of the Rio Grande Turtle and Tortoise Club remains education, though it has run a rescue program since 2003.

“We’re still working to educate people on proper husbandry, and teach kids to respect all animals because they’re living, breathing creatures and need the right diet,” says Sandie Jackson, the club’s rescue chairman. Turtles get fed all kinds of junk, but their needs are actually quite complex and vary with each species.

Virtually all the turtles found in Albuquerque are escaped or abandoned pets, Jackson says — often defaced with painted shells or coins glued to them. Turtles end up abandoned, sick, injured, or dead largely because of owner ignorance.

Red-eared sliders, for example, have gone feral nationwide, and are considered an invasive species that competes with natives. Federal law now bans the sale of turtles with shells less than 4 inches long, but “sellers stay on the move,” says Jackson, and hatchlings are still hawked at flea markets and roadsides.

That keeps RGTTC’s rescue arm busy trying to match available animals with carefully screened adopters — meaning those that can provide suitable, secure, outdoor habitat.

Even more complex are the needs of tortoises, such as the popular sulcata (African spurred tortoise), which can live past 100 and top 100 pounds, with an appetite to match. Sulcatas were a lucrative fad in the 1990s, but like potbellied pigs before them, grew too large and destructive for many owners to handle.

Jackson’s rescue group has re-homed as many as 119 animals in one season (spring to fall), and she herself keeps two tortoises and nine box turtles, which explains why you might be startled by a large, prehistoric creature lumbering across her back yard.

A dog owner until 1998, Jackson was devastated by the death of both companions in the same year, and vowed “no more furred animals.” She took to the garden to tend her dahlias, and her sister got her a turtle to hunt garden snails. Then the animal-lover in her took over.

“I never thought I’d be a turtle person,” Jackson admits. “But it’s their personalities — they’re unique.” At dawn and dusk, her chelonians apparently put on quite a show in the yard. “It’s hard to explain,” she admits. “They’re extremely entertaining, and don’t bark, shed, chew, make messes, or live indoors.” And they never grow dependent or lonely.

To the 90 member families in the RGTTC, this apparently makes turtles the ideal pets, tricky requirements aside. “They’re definitely not like dogs or cats,” Jackson says with a smile.

Could you rescue *that*?

Are some uncommon dedication



CINDI CRIBBS

Haven for Hamsters

Rio Rancho (havenforhamsters.webs.com)

Cindy Cribbs has three lively dogs who adore her, so she knows what a “real” pet is like. Yet it is hamster rescue that occupies her every free moment and dollar. Hamsters get the big air-conditioned bedroom in her two-bedroom house. Hamsters are the reason for the second job she works at night.

Hamsters live, on average, about two years. That has led a number of people to ask Cribbs why she would bother to “rescue” them. Pet stores tend to recycle unsold inventory as snake feed, while most of the discarded Christmas gifts get turned out on the mesa.

“I thought, what the heck, they’re not disposable,” Cribbs says, stroking a pet rat, one of ten that she cares for along with three dozen hamsters, eight gerbils, and five guinea pigs. She first saw a dwarf hamster while visiting an Albuquerque animal shelter seven years ago, and wondered aloud who bothers to surrender a hamster. She was told it had been dumped by a pet store and would likely end up as snake feed. So she adopted the sorry critter for \$2.

This was in the mid-2000s, at the height of the dwarf hamster craze. Half-size rodents from Central Asia, dwarfs got turned into pets fairly recently, and are not completely tame. Or, as Cribbs puts it, they can be downright nasty.

An undeterred animal-lover, she researched, and acquired companions on Craigslist. Soon she found herself taking in every kind of hamster that was being offered for free. At one point she had at least 60.

Happily, the dwarf craze has since died down, leaving guinea pigs and rats as the rodents of the moment — which explains the presence of multiple species among the dozens of colorful cages stacked in the cool, dark, dog-proof bedroom in Cribbs’ Rio Rancho home.

“My first job pays PNM,” she quips; “the second one pays for this” — indicating the clatter of hamster wheels, colorful plastic hamster balls rolling around the floor, and rats nosing the air outside their cages.

Each evening when she gets home, Cribbs slips into this room and opens the cage doors, and all the animals perk up. At night she cooks for them: steamed veggies usually, but occasionally a nice lasagna, which means that Cribbs herself might not dine until midnight.

Once a month, all the cages get cleaned. In summer, the animals get treated for mites. Not surprisingly, Haven for Hamsters is currently accepting intakes only on a case-by-case basis. Adoptions slow down in summer, and stop between November and Christmas, since holiday adoptions tend to expire when health-club memberships do (in March).

“Every time one dies, I say that’s it,” she sighs, wondering how long she can keep up the pace. Since Haven for Hamsters is more sanctuary than shelter, every one of her animals is guaranteed haven or heaven.

“I figure they have such a short life, I want to make absolutely sure they live happy for the rest of it,” she says. Her love of animals, in other words, can’t be measured by their size or longevity. It lasts for as long as they do.



BILL VELASQUEZ

House Rabbit Society

Albuquerque (newmexicohrs.org)



After dogs and cats, rabbits are the third-most-popular pets in America, so abandoning them is quite popular too. Rabbits, however, have few rescue groups looking after them, as Bill Velasquez discovered six years ago when he stepped in to help a rabbit in distress.

Bill and his wife Deb had become regulars at the veterinary hospital when their two rabbits got seriously ill. After both animals died, their vet called them about a rabbit that had been badly attacked in a pet store and left in a back room to die. A vet tech had rescued the poor creature, which Velasquez took home while he hunted for rescue groups.

Shocked by what he learned was common practice at pet stores — cheap disposal of sick, injured, and unsold rabbits through drowning or abandonment — Velasquez sent “hate mail” to all the local pet stores that sold rabbits. To his surprise, a district manager at Petco challenged him to come up with a solution. He contacted the executive director of the House Rabbit Society, Margo DeMello, who had recently moved to New Mexico. Together, they started the monthly rabbit adoption event at Petco, now in its fifth year. Rabbits brought to the Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Rio Rancho shelters are thus able to meet potential adopters in an environment that encourages responsible ownership.

The House Rabbit Society now counts 50 volunteers, 20 of them regularly visiting city shelters to look after bunnies and educate the staff and public. The group treats sick and injured rabbits so they become adoptable, and Velasquez himself handles “bonding” issues, where bunnies learn to live together instead of trying to kill each other — a common source of problems.

The group’s main mission remains education and advocacy. Rabbits, even more than cats and dogs, end up abandoned and neglected because not enough of them are “fixed.” Hoarding incidents can easily result from their famously fast multiplication factor.

Thanks to the rabbit society, the Albuquerque shelters now spay and neuter all rabbits they take in, while the national group finally persuaded Petco to stop selling rabbits in all its stores.

Adopters are the other half of the education equation. “It’s not a child’s toy,” reads a sign at the Petco adoption event. “It’s a 10-year commitment.” Just because rabbits are cheap does not mean they are simple, Velasquez says. “They will take daily care.”

Adoptions are not offered at Easter, when impulse purchases run high. And the group makes it a point to emphasize that prey animals don’t naturally take to being petted and held — or that the family dog might see it as identical to the creature he chases on the mesa.

A rare male in the mostly female world of animal rescue, Velasquez cuts a doe-eyed figure himself, perched in a rabbit cage stroking a pink-eyed white on his lap. “It was the right thing to do,” he says of his unsought career in rescue, “and there was a need.” An electrical engineer and avid cyclist, skier, and marathon runner, Velasquez has no problem telling you that he used to come home from the city shelter in tears.

“But then I told myself, why should I be surprised? Look at what people do to each other. People can be mean.”

continued next page



RACHEL JOHNSON



Hedgehog Rescue

Rachel Johnson, Santa Fe
(rustandroses@aol.com)

Careful readers of *The Bosque Beast* will recall that hedgehogs, unlike porcupines, are not native to the Americas. So any hedgehog found wandering around in New Mexico was bred to be a pet.

Happily — as far as hedgehog-lover Rachel Johnson is concerned — they are not popular in New Mexico, which keeps down any profiteering by would-be breeders. The state restricts import and sale of hedgehogs, so most of Johnson's rescue cases have been from out of state.

Like most rescuers, she started out with a pet, the first of many. At one point she had a hedgehog come down with wobbly hedgehog syndrome — a common consequence of irresponsible breeding — and felt such pity at the thought of animals that wouldn't get proper care that she started a hedgehog rescue organization. But the demand has never been that high.

Johnson has cared for retired breeders and taken in isolated victims of hoarding. Primarily she serves as the state's informal clearinghouse for hedgehog information, and has arranged for the adoption of animals being relinquished by others. She tries to educate people interested in the spiny mammals that "they are not guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters, or any other creature you might be familiar with. They are not always friendly."

Cute and comical, related to shrews rather than porcupines, hedgehogs are highly individualistic, so "you might have a prickly nasty ball on your hands for the rest of its life," Johnson notes. "They are not good pets for small children." Since they are nocturnal, hedgehogs don't make good classroom pets, and since the domesticated ones originate in Africa, they need an additional heat source in winter.

Hedgehogs also need specialized paraphernalia, from running wheels to feed. They need a veterinarian who understands them. "They are picky eaters," Johnson adds. "Each individual I've had has liked a completely different mix." And buying from a responsible breeder can mean waiting as long as a year, since hedgehogs don't reproduce often or much.

For fans, however, a hedgehog can be as companionable as a cat or dog. "Some people are able to really bond with them," Johnson says. "They're a lot of fun to watch and interact with." Hedgehogs live 6 to 7 years, so the ones that turn out to be prickly must find a very tolerant owner — an occasion for which Rachel Johnson is still on standby.

"I sort of feel like my role is to be a place for the grumpy guy, and love them through it."

For both rats and rabbits, "pink-eyed whites" are the last to be adopted, even though they are friendlier than other breeds. Pink-eyed whites seem to be the rodent equivalent of black dogs.

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Love at first 'Like'



Both Animal Humane New Mexico (left) and the national ASPCA use their websites to drive Internet traffic to Facebook and YouTube, and vice versa.



Social 'petworking' gives homeless animals a million more chances at adoption

Kayla Sawyer

You can't visit every animal shelter in the country to find your furry new BFF, but you can scroll through Facebook or Flickr from your home computer. It's as comfortable as online dating and as convenient as "Add to Cart." Social media has forever transformed the process of adopting pets.

From the early days of mass emails about kittens available to a good home, the Internet and social media particularly have become essential tools for rescue organizations trying to reach every possible adopter — especially for pets needing extra help to find that special someone.

"We use Facebook for everything — fundraising, sharing our adoptable dogs, sharing our wonderful, successful adoption stories, 'happy tails,' and just general news," said Angela Stell, director and founder of New Mexico Dogs Deserve Better (NMDDDB). The two-year-old group has never operated without social media.

Animal Humane New Mexico, at 47 years old, also does not hesitate to keep up with the times. Its photos, videos, and stories of available pets receive dozens, sometimes hundreds, of comments, "shares," and "likes," leading to many successful adoptions.

"We needed to share stories that would touch people's hearts, because they're more likely to 'share' that story," said Dawn Glass, marketing director at Animal Humane. "And that's how we're able to find homes for pets."

Recently a neglected young dog was brought to Animal Humane. Wrigley was shy and fearful, but improved greatly as the shelter's behavioral team worked with him. "He needed an owner who would understand his needs," said Glass. "That's not an everyday adopter."

Wrigley's photo and story were posted on Facebook and received 130 "shares" in the first few hours. He was quickly adopted by an experienced dog owner who saw the post in a friend's newsfeed. The combination of photo and story is powerful: It takes the idea of adopting a dog or cat and personalizes it. You read the animal's history and see something of its character.

Recently the NMDDDB shelter in Hobbs posted a photo and story on the group's Facebook page about a trippawd (three-legged) Husky in need of a home. The post was seen by a woman in Georgia who fell in love instantly. NMDDDB made arrangements for a home visit, screening, and safe places for the dog to stay on her journey.

"Using these social media sites opens up all sorts of new doors to opportunities that the dogs did not have before," said Stell. "But with that also comes a downside: More people with ill intentions, or those that really have no business having an animal, also have access to the information." That makes due diligence even more important in placing animals in the Internet age. NMDDDB uses an intensive screening process on all placements, Stell said, as well as for

transport drivers and other volunteers. "You can never be too careful when lives are at stake."

Online shoppers learned long ago to be careful about using Craigslist. That caution holds doubly true for animals offered on the want-ad site. One rescuer in Albuquerque contacted what appeared to be a fellow rescuer on Craigslist, only to discover that he was a front for an illegal breeding operation. She asked not to be identified in this story because of deadly threats the breeder made when she confronted him.

Thanks for sharing

Social media operates much like word of mouth, multiplied by thousands. "Sharing" on Facebook can make any post snowball, extending to new networks and audiences. Sam Blankenship, director of adoptions at Animal Humane, said each time one of their "Pet Tail" videos is posted, the featured dog — usually one that has languished at the shelter for months — is adopted within three weeks.

"We use photos on Facebook and Twitter to help animals, asking our friends to share the videos and photos so we can flood the web with the animal in need," he said. "We are batting 100 percent with our adoption videos. Social media has changed the face of adoptions."

Animal Humane joined Facebook in 2009, but didn't start using it seriously until 2010, said marketing director Glass. "As we realized the importance of social media, we became more formal and strategic in our content, so that we have a consistent voice and message to our community and can be sure that every post we make is going to be really effective."

Joining YouTube in 2010, Animal Humane began posting videos to introduce adoptable pets, and featuring a "senior pet of the week." The film team is made up of four members of the adoptions staff who take turns writing and filming videos about animals that have been in the shelter for more than 70 days. Soon they plan to expand that to pets who've been waiting more than 30 days.

The staff uses Flickr to archive pet photos and event photography, and Twitter to keep followers updated on where the mobile adoption team will be. "A lot of people will re-tweet," said Glass, "and that helps direct traffic to our local adoptions."

The national ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) used Twitter to help animals find homes after a tornado hit Joplin, Miss., last year. In June the group launched a campaign to make pet adoption "go viral," live-streaming programs from headquarters in New York City. Now ASPCA is using Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest to boost hard-to-adopt cases, and with its national audience has been finding people willing to travel across the country to rescue previously unwanted pets.

continued next page



Animal Humane volunteers Patti Danforth and Pam Nichols work on a video featuring an adoptable dog. PHOTO COURTESY ANIMAL HUMANE

Spreading the love

People share information online for the same reasons they did before the Internet — because they feel a personal stake in the information and want others to know about it. With a single post, tweet, or uploaded video instantly executed on a smartphone, that impulse can reach across the country in minutes, with unexpected results. That's what makes social media such a valuable tool in pet adoption: It's quick, convenient, far-reaching but also targeted.

Fans who "like" the Facebook page of a particular shelter stay apprised of its events and needs, building an audience of supporters. But those hard-core fans also have friends, connections, and interests beyond the rescue community, just a post away, multiplying their reach.

Informal emailing is still widely used among friends to get animals adopted or reunite them with their owners (see "Email trail ends in happy tail," opposite). But on social media, the positive impact doesn't have to end with adoption. "Tell your friends one of the most effective ways you can help animals," said Glass, "is by sharing your positive adoption experience on Facebook, and helping us spread the word." **And you can re-post that all you want.**

Email trail ends in happy tail

Apparently, it happened like this: A photo of a dog was sent June 28 from Angela to Julie, who sent it to Barb, Bonita, and Mateo. Barb then sent it to her email list with a message that read, in part, "My friend Julie was in Annapurna restaurant a few days ago, when this puppy wandered in and layed down on her feet. It has no tags, no microchip, no lost dog signs around, no calls to the pound looking for it. She's female, very sweet, and about 4 months old. My friend is going to Mexico for two-weeks starting this Sunday and is desperately trying to find someone to either foster care for it or adopt it forever..."

I forwarded the email to a rescuer in Los Lunas named Viola who has a large email list often used to find dogs homes.

The next day, Sandi responded to Viola's email. "I know who's been looking for that pup! She escaped from her yard!"

The puppy's owners drove up to Bernalillo to fetch their dog that very afternoon, leading Julie to send a final email: "this is one heck of a happy story – although my throat was a bit choked up saying goodbye – but what a crazy reunion it was – the owner had given up hope and had built a shrine for the pup..." which naturally led to high-fives all around the list.

In another era, that puppy might not ever have found its way back home, and ended up instead in the shelter/foster system. A few casually circulated emails reunited this dog with the owners in two days. – Editor

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KAT'S KORNER



KAT BROWN

Splotchy and Friendly Girl

Why do we do it?

My boys' mother died last night. You may recall that I mentioned in a previous column a road trip to pick up two kittens. Well, Oliver and Yoshi are now big strapping boys. And I am their mom now. But I have kept in contact with Tim and Tamy, who own their furry mother, Splotchy. And I also just learned that Willie, the cat-chasing rat I mentioned last issue, has passed on, and his mom is devastated. Animal rescuers and "moms and dads" alike often wonder, when we lose another of our babies, why do we do it?

The boys came from a cat community in Houston that existed when Tim and Tamy moved into their home over 20 years ago. What started as a band of neighbors feeding stray cats became an extended family for Tamy and Tim. They added ramps and nooks for hurricanes and floods. As more of the neighbors moved away, their yard became home for the cats. But their goal is zero population growth.

Cats are becoming the highest population of healthy animals euthanized at shelters across the country, and many rescuers are working with cities on a solution through TNR (trap-neuter-release) programs. Best Friends Animal Society in Utah has set up many such programs, including one in Albuquerque. For every cat brought into a city shelter, at least one cat dies. Bring in a litter of five kittens, and you do the math. That is a statistic my fellow cat-lovers and I would like to see changed.

It was natural for Tamy to accept the responsibility of the cats in her neighborhood. She grew up in Japan, where cats are looked at quite differently. Every village, town, and city has neighborhood cats that are welcomed and cared for. If you go to a park or temple and sit to meditate or rest, you might find a cat sitting next to you. Many shops have a cat or two to keep the mice away. And since many apartment-dwellers cannot have pets, they enjoy interacting with cats at places like Japan's "cat cafes" and other opportunities to just sit and share some time with a furry creature. Purring has a known calming effect.

Japan's cats are used to being treated kindly. There is even an island, Tashirojima, dedicated to them. Before the tsunami hit last year, all of the cats there began running to the top of the hills. And all of the human residents without question followed them. There were no human fatalities, but 11 cats perished. They were all mourned as friends. For Tamy, taking care of the neighborhood cats allowed her to bring some of her culture to Texas.

Last night, Splotchy came to the back door while Tim and Tamy were asleep. She died outside the door with her faithful niece, Friendly Girl, standing guard. She was buried under her favorite mandarin tree. Feral cats will hide when they are sick — instinct tells them to stay away. Cats that have a bond with humans come home for help. Splotchy was three times the average age of a feral cat. She had a family to come home to. And that is why we do it.

Over the years, many of us have tried to provide as much love and family as we can give the animals that come into our lives, whether by adoption or fostering or TNR programs or volunteering or supporting a community. We have cried in joy and sadness and anger. But we keep doing it, for the love of the animals and how they make our lives complete. Knowing that in their own way they appreciate what we do. We have domesticated these animals for our use and pleasure. We owe them a dignified and safe life in return.

Kat Brown of Albuquerque is a lifelong animal-lover, especially of cats. She wears many hats, but animal-lover is perhaps the one that has given her the most pleasure. Share your cat stories or comments at katskorner88@gmail.com.

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JOYCE FAY Happy Tails



Some thoughts on shooting without harm

Last Sunday, I visited friends in their new home. Five of my six dogs fell in their lily pond, and since I had a little Nikon Coolpix in my pocket, I grabbed a few quick shots. Even though I didn't manage to focus on Gracie emerging from the water, decorated with vines, I'm glad I have a picture of the moment. I could have done better with a digital SLR camera, but I didn't have one in my pocket.

People frequently ask me what kind of camera they should get. The answer is, "What do you want to shoot?" or "What kind of images do you want to make?" You cannot create the same image with different cameras. One type is not better than another, just different, with lots of tradeoffs. For the ease and speed of point-and-shoot cameras, we give up so much control of the image.

I still have an 8" x 10" viewfinder camera. (That's the kind where you work under a black hood, examining an upside-down image on the ground glass with a loupe.) With this camera I can make amazingly sharp, perfectly composed photos. I don't use it anymore because the time it takes to set up, and the limitations of working in such a slow, deliberate manner just aren't worthwhile for anything I'm doing currently—the answer to the question "What do you want to shoot?"

What I shoot most currently is homeless dogs in shelters. I want to portray the beauty of each of these individuals, so I use a digital SLR because it gives me the best image. A 70-210mm zoom allows me to be at a nonthreatening distance from the dog. I can use a flattering focal length for full-body shots, and zoom in for headshots with soft-focus backgrounds. A patient handler works with the dog as I try to get the best possible shots. The camera is fast enough to capture good moments, and high-quality enough to make large prints suitable for any purpose.

Small digital cameras open a new world of photography. I've always taken photography rather seriously, and believed that it wasn't worth shooting if I couldn't achieve a sharp, well-composed picture. Now I'm discovering a new sense of fun through the immediacy of today's point-and-shoot digital cameras. Even a few years ago their use was very limited because of the shutter delay. Now most cameras shoot fast, and shoot video as well as stills. Even cell phones have this capability, so it's possible to be always ready to photograph what's happening in your life. It may be the cute things your animals are doing, or your friends at lunch. Even newsworthy events around the world are being recorded by ordinary people using their cell phones.

Time has taught me that snapshots I once disdained become treasures later, when they stir memories of pets long gone, or of our younger selves—even if they are of no interest to anyone else. I am working to overcome the limitations of instant cameras. For example, learning to work without a viewfinder is a challenge. I still want to produce a picture that is worthwhile, but I am learning that it can be worthwhile to shoot even what is not going to be what I would consider

a good photograph. With practice and luck, I may even be able to make some photos that are good on an instant camera – images that would not have been possible with any traditional camera.

Finally, don't forget to edit what you shoot. Throw away most and make sure that you file the rest so you will be able to find them.

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Photographer Joyce Fay founded Bro & Tracy Animal Welfare in 2000, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping individual animals find the right homes. The intention of this column is to share some of those stories.

Even More Humane

Albuquerque's top animal charity makes a huge leap toward no-kill



Executive Director Peggy Weigle



Artist renderings of the new adoption lobby (top), and the renovated campus



The proposed outdoor dog runs where potential adopters can meet their future family

If you remember what Animal Humane used to be like, it's nothing short of miracle how the organization has jumped to the head of the rescue scene since Peggy Weigle became executive director six years ago.

"Nobody cared," Weigle recalls of the organization she unexpectedly joined in 2006. "Everything was in bad repair. Staff morale was low, the HVAC (heating/cooling) system was broken. We didn't even thank people who donated less than \$500! We spent the first year just apologizing to people."

Now broadcasting a cheerful presence in neighborhoods across the city, Animal Humane has become the first place people think of to adopt a homeless pet, offering ongoing support to pet owners from vaccinations to obedience classes. More to the point, Animal Humane is closing in on the goal of adopting out every animal it takes in — what some refer to as the holy grail of "no kill" — which is no mean feat for an organization that accepts 5,300 animals a year.

To help put that goal within reach, Animal Humane has broken ground on an ambitious \$5 million capital renovation project that will replace its hodgepodge of buildings in southeast Albuquerque with the state of the art in shelter design — changes that Weigle says have been proven to get animals adopted.

"It has been the vision of Animal Humane for several decades," she says of the 47-year-old nonprofit. "It grows out of working toward saving more lives."

"Saving more lives" is a theme heard often in Weigle's many presentations to groups and donors across the country. It is the first among seven outcomes promised by the 20-month project that broke ground in August.

Since she first offered to help out in 2006 and was instead handed a job description by the retiring director, Weigle has added \$1.5 million in programs and facilities toward the life-saving goal. These include Animal Humane's satellite adoption clinics on Montgomery Avenue and Corrales Road, which adopt out about 1,000 animals a year; the state's first low-income veterinary clinic, which treats 3,000 patients a year; and a cat facility modeled on the iconic Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Utah. Humane education for children has been added, along with a trap/neuter/feral cat program that has reduced kitten intakes by 25 percent. Staff has doubled to 85; euthanasia rates have fallen 65 percent under her tenure.

Weigle's focus now is on that last percentage of animals being euthanized that might be saved. She says an analysis of 2011 data showed that 40 percent of euthanized animals might have been adoptable if the organization had adequate facilities to treat ringworm and reduce stress-related conditions. That's why quarantine facilities, cleaner and quieter kennels, and an expanded clinic rank high on the list of changes, along with other upgrades that help create a calm, predictable environment from the moment pets arrive.

The warren of buildings and yards that make up the Animal Humane campus in a remote, rundown part of the city has been a source of frustration on this score for years. Weigle recalls shopping for alternatives as soon as she started her job. But after a career running nonprofits and high-tech companies, she recognized that an organization with no track record on capital projects would find it tough to raise \$8 million or more for a new campus.

Six years later, with fundraising successes like the \$1 million low-income vet clinic and the \$100,000 Robbie Jones Memorial Cat House under its belt, a \$5 million expansion appears well within Animal Humane's sights. But Weigle has since rethought priorities and decided to upgrade the current facility, in effect improving the neighborhood rather than abandoning it.

Renovation plans include such neighborhood upgrades as a landscaped central park, a separate park along Virginia Street offering trees and seating, and an off-street loading area for Project Fetch, which takes hundreds of animals each year from outlying rural communities that would otherwise be euthanized.

Planned in five phases, the project's first and most important undertaking is a \$2.75 million adoption and administration building featuring an appealing, hospital-like lobby. Shelters with such lobbies report a 28 to 40 percent increase in adoptions, Weigle says. Instead of cages, dogs will be met in 25 "real-life rooms" with individual ventilation and drainage systems. A new multi-use education room should double current outreach to more than 3,500 people a year.

A completely separate admissions building will minimize encounters between animals that are losing and gaining homes. A new cattery with state-of-the-art "condos" will be linked to the existing cat house, so animals don't have to be moved back and forth across campus.

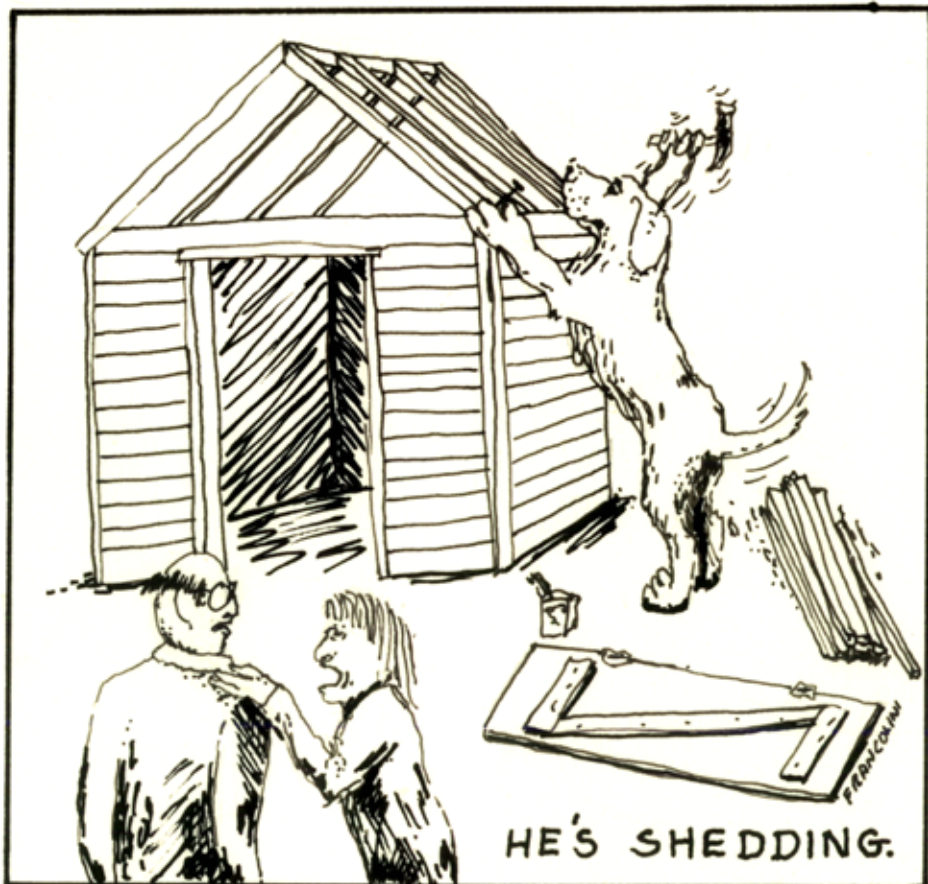
Designed by the specialty firm Animal Arts in Boulder, Colorado, the master plan relies for some \$1.27 million in funding on naming opportunities for donors, who can assign their legacy to everything from the adoption lobby to one of the real-life rooms (half of which are spoken for at \$15,000 each).

A much larger expansion was completed by the Santa Fe Humane Society and Animal Shelter in 2005, with nearly all of the \$10.2 million raised from public donations over a period of several years. Animal Humane is much closer to its goal, starting with \$2 million from investments and another \$1.7 million from existing donors, effectively funding the first two phases of construction.

However, "that last million will be the hardest to raise," says Weigle, and will depend on tapping every last animal-lover who will part with \$5 to save more lives. Large donors so far have proved "truly inspired" by that goal, says Weigle, and "all agree that facilities are where that starts."

The Santa Fe shelter has undoubtedly improved its ability to save lives, says public information officer Ben Swan. Its live-release rate is now at 90 percent — which equals Animal Humane's record, even though Santa Fe serves as the city's "open-admission" shelter, accepting about 6,500 animals a year. Very few open-admission shelters achieve euthanasia rates below 20 percent, and 10 percent is considered low enough by some standards to merit the politically divisive term of "no kill." (By comparison, the City of Albuquerque shelters took in 24,200 dogs and cats last year, of which 29 percent were euthanized.)

"We haven't had to euthanize for space," says Swan, "and the increase in space also helps reduce stress on animals so they don't deteriorate while they're here." If humane sheltering is the goal, in other words, improved facilities clearly help. And while Weigle will never rest short of perfection, saving more lives is a goal that Project Humane can deliver. *Information at www.projecthumane.org*



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Most offer practical and financial support for animals and foster adopters.



Snuggles

Corrales Animal Services

Snuggles was found in Corrales in July as a puppy of about 6 to 8 months. Animal Humane took her in, but returned her unadopted after 45 days. Snuggles is a great dog that just needs some training to focus her high energy. She would do best in a home with a secure yard where she can get the attention she craves. Contact Corrales Animal Services at 898-0401 to arrange a meeting.



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BOSQUE NOTES

Human habitat 1, wildlife habitat 0, fire matchpoint

Since the Romero fire burned over 250 acres, including part of the bosque, public pressure has grown on the Corrales Bosque Advisory Commission (CBAC) to propose more wildfire-prevention measures. At its Aug. 28 meeting, the Corrales Village Council heard CBAC President Mark Kaib present a recommended strategy, the most controversial portion of which is creating more “shaded fuel breaks.”

Wildlife advocates oppose these cleared areas — one of which was demonstrated in the bosque last year — because the mid-level vegetation that would be removed is considered crucial to wildlife.

Opposing sides do not agree on the appropriate balance between wildlife preservation and fire mitigation, or how much threat wildfire really poses to Corrales homes.

Citing Benjamin Franklin (“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail,” and “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”), CBAC chairman Mark Kaib recommended to the Council:

- Better planning, public education, prevention, and intergovernmental training and coordination;
- Additional wildfire training and equipment for the Corrales Fire Department;
- Public outreach and education about prevention (such as volunteer fire patrols),

evacuation plans, wildland/urban interface safety, and homeowner measures and responsibilities;

- Implementing the Corrales Bosque Wildfire Protection Plan (CBWPP), with shaded fuel breaks as a vital component, in order to reduce combustibles and provide staging areas for firefighters.
- Other components of the CBWPP include:

*further hazardous-fuels reduction efforts, as deemed appropriate and sustainable bosque closure and preparedness step-up plan
community evacuation and traffic management plan
animal evacuation plan*

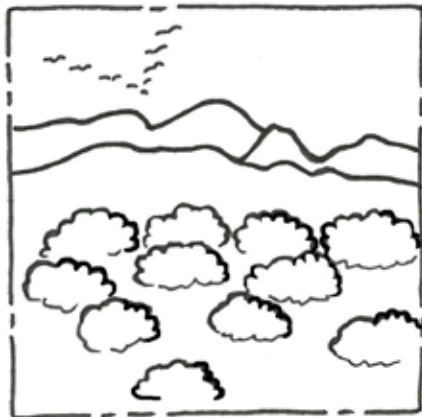
The Village Council unanimously adopted the CBAC’s recommended strategy. Funding will be sought from the New Mexico Forestry Division to identify sites for shaded fuel breaks subject to Council approval.

According to the CBAC, studies show “Removal of non-native plants and excessive fuels is critical to slowing the loss of Middle Rio Grande riparian habitat to wildfire.”

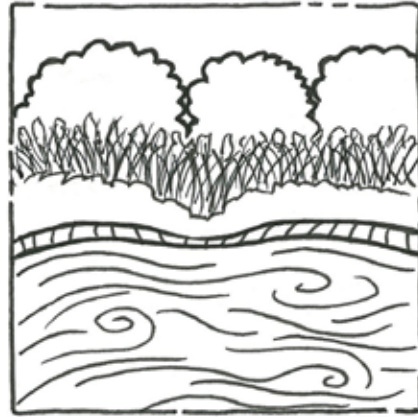


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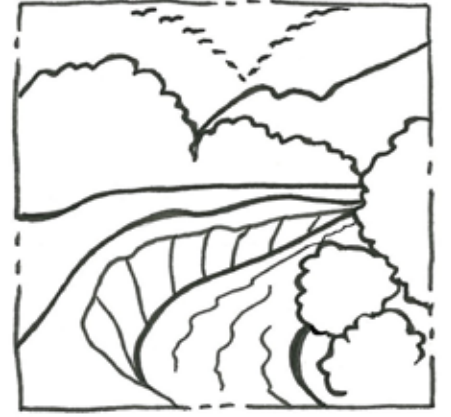
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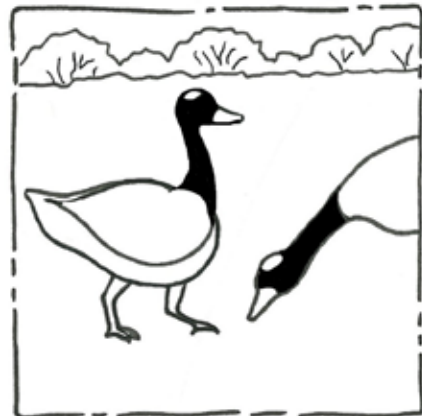
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Lessons clear in parvo alarm

Parvovirus. The word alone strikes fear in the hearts of dog owners, especially of puppies. Of course, it's not a new fear, since the virus was first described in dogs in the late 1970s. But it hit the headlines again this summer. Funny thing is, if you look at last year's headlines, you will see similar stories with headlines almost verbatim, things like:

"Experts warn of a deadly disease running through dog parks"

"canine virus on the rise"

"... all city parks are a hotbed of the virus this year."

Let's take a quick look at this disease, bearing in mind that "There is nothing new under the sun."

When the virus was first described in the late '70s causing severe gastrointestinal symptoms in dogs, it was named CPV-2 (canine parvovirus type-2). In the early 1980s a slightly different strain was isolated, called CPV type-2a. We discovered that the virus continues to mutate and evolve, so now we have multiple strains out there. Two of the more important are CPV type-2b and type-2c.

Even though we know about these strains and track their mutations, we don't completely understand how they affect our dogs. One study showed that current vaccines might not protect dogs against the newest strains, but other studies have shown the opposite.

For now, the assumption is that current tests can find parvo infections almost all the time, and current vaccines (from a reputable manufacturer) will protect most dogs most of the time.

If a dog (usually less than a year old) does get infected with the parvo virus and becomes ill, the symptoms are generally gastrointestinal. The puppy may start out being lethargic or not eating well, but we usually see diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal discomfort, or any combination of these eventually.

The virus itself is not fatal, but the dehydration, starvation, and concurrent bacterial infections will kill a young dog if left untreated. That is why, if we diagnose early and treat aggressively, we can usually pull the dogs through it.

But not always. There will always be a small number of patients that, for whatever reason, die in spite of our best efforts. Fluid therapy, nutritional support, anti-vomiting medication, and antibiotics are the hallmark therapies. Different veterinarians have success with adding other treatments as well.

A study from southern Arizona just looked at about 53 dogs that were parvovirus positive, and reported that 45 percent of the dogs were less than 4 months old; 41 percent were 4 to 11 months old; and just 14 percent were at least a year old. A large share, 73 percent, had CPV type-2c; the remaining 27 percent had type-2b.

What can we conclude from all this? Pretty simple, actually:

- Vaccinate any female dog that may give birth, so her milk will protect her newborns for some time.
- Vaccinate all puppies at 8 weeks or older, either for parvovirus alone or in combination with distemper; and younger than 8 weeks if their history is unknown or they have been away from their mother.
- Vaccinate a puppy more than once, usually more than twice.
- Spend the money to see your vet for a good vaccine from a reputable company that has been handled and stored properly. Bargain prices and no-name brands are a big gamble.
- If you do suspect a parvovirus infection, especially in a puppy, seek medical attention quickly. The earlier you start treatment, the better its chances.

This is one time where the saying has never been more true, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Daniel Levenson operates the Southwest Veterinary Medical Center at the south end of Corrales Road. Visit his website at mysouthwestvet.com.

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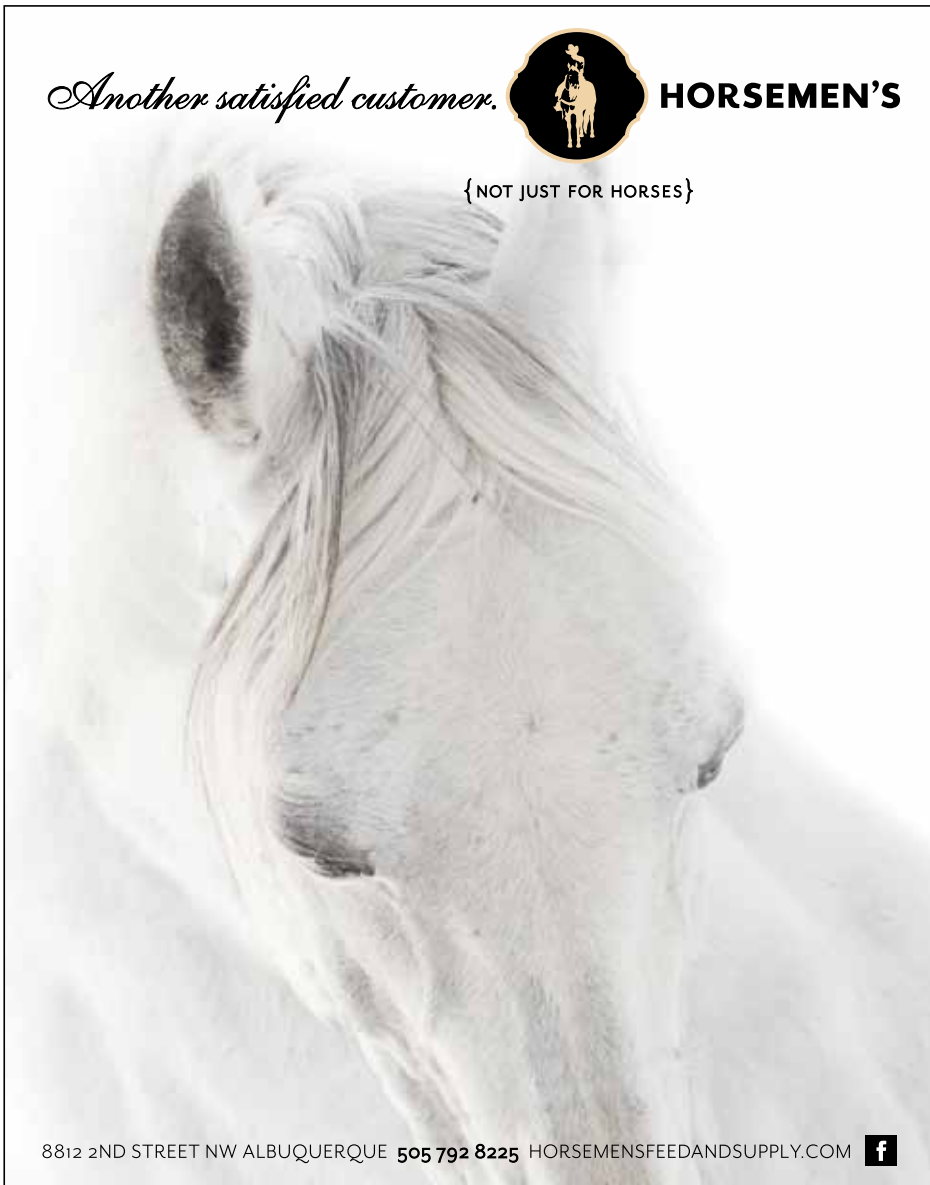
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