



Dr. Donald Hodges (left) feeds one of his male peacocks peanuts. The birds also have a weakness for canned dog food. Peacocks can be herded after a fashion, according to Hodges. (Right) It looks like he's walking his peacock but the bird is moving along with Hodges as he inadvertently herds it through his yard. (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)



Peacocks add touch of class to backyard scene

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Ancient Roman gourmets thought roasted peacocks were just the thing to top off a special night at the Forum.

Donald Hodges prefers to keep the exotic pheasants alive and strutting in his Farmington Hills backyard.

"I saw them at the zoo and thought it would be elegant to have peacocks strolling around," said Hodges, a dentist. "You don't notice the weeds in the garden so much when you have peacocks."

His fascination with the birds turned into a desire to own the creatures when he saw an advertisement for peacock chicks in a Wixom newspaper. Hodges thought the \$15 per chick price tag was reasonable for birds that are valued at \$500-\$800 as adults.

After buying three chicks in Wixom, Hodges added to his collection through purchases and a trade-off with the Detroit Zoo. It wasn't long until his backyard became a miniature aviary for nine of the colorful birds.

Besides collecting peacocks, Hodges also dabbles in gardening.

HIS BAMBOO patch supplied some of the plants that decorate the grounds of the Detroit zoo's new aviary. In return for the bamboo, the zoo gave Hodges a rooster and two pea hens from its peacock collection.

Although one hen managed to escape when its cage door was opened shortly after it arrived in Farmington Hills, the two remaining birds settled down to life in a wired area. A few of the feathered contingent in Hodges' menagerie are allowed to roam about the yard in the company of the family's dog, cat, tortoise and domestic birds. A guinea pig is safely tucked away in a cage inside the house.

"The birds stay pretty much in the area. One of the males might fly into our neighbor's yard, but they don't seem to mind," Hodges said as his oldest peacock strutted across the lawn, dragging its long train.

Although they seem to be homebodies, the peacocks sometimes take off for other parts of the neighborhood.

"A few months ago, we had a male peacock on LaMuera street. He must have been chased there by a dog. You can herd peacocks after a fashion," Hodges explained.

After a weekend's adventure, the bird settled into a tree at the edge of Hodges' yard and spent a Sunday night calling to its companions.

THEN, it decided to return to the yard. A hen that disappeared at the same time came back less willingly. Hodges had to gather her back from LaMuera street.

During the birds' sojourn on LaMuera, a resident called the Farmington Observer and asked for advice on handling lost peacocks.

After a picture of the mystery bird was published in the Observer, Hodges recognized it as his wayward male peacock. Since then one of the hens has found a different way to pass time. For the past week, it's been nesting under a small tree in the yard.

"We didn't know she was there. She disappeared about Sunday. My son was cutting weeds in that area and he

didn't see her until she moved her head a little. He was cutting weeds over her head and almost decapitated her," Hodges said.

In 28-30 days the hen will hatch her eggs.

"She's very patient. She gets up for 10 minutes, takes some food and stretches her muscles by walking around the yard and then I don't see her again for 24 hours," Hodges said.

Drab white with some touches of green around her neck, the hen is a sharp contrast to the male's array of brilliant green, blue purple and yellow colors.

AT BIRTH, chicks look alike. By the time they're three months old, however, the males begin to show a blue color. A faint green ring is all the color the pea hen will show, Hodges says.

Eyes on the peacock's tail begin to form when the bird is 3-years-old. Two years later, the long train will reach its mature size.

Hodges' acquisition from the Detroit zoo is more than 5-years-old. It

struts about with a long train, displaying it on warm afternoons.

Eventually, he hopes to crossbreed the black shouldered variety with the India blue birds. At the moment, he keeps the two varieties separated.

Although Hodges is proud of his screeching pets, he admits that they're lazy birds addicted to lounging about the yard.

They rouse themselves and admit a sharp, long screech when they see an unfamiliar object like a hawk, according to Hodges.

"You should hear that screech at 4 a.m.," he said. "They make noise when they hear a loud car or a motorcycle. And they have good eyes. Sometimes when I see them watching the sky, I look up and I can only see the glint of an airplane or a hawk."

HIS SHARP-EYED BORDERS are partial to dog food and peanuts but usually they munch on bird chow.

"I knew one lady who raised peacocks and she said hers were almost disappointed if they came to her and

she didn't have any dog food for them. It's a treat for them," he said.



This is how our mystery bird appeared in last week's edition.

Attorney slams suburbs for racial prejudice

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Racial integration is an issue the suburbs have conveniently put on the back burner in favor of debates over women's liberation, gay rights and Farrah Fawcett Majors.

This apathy allows realtors, employers and neighbors to practice a subtle brand of prejudice.

That's the assessment of John Rennels, 34, of Farmington Hills. Rennels is vice-chairman of the Northwest Interfaith Center for Racial Justice which watches the racial attitudes of Detroit and suburban businesses, schools and libraries.

"People are not willing to deal with integration," said Rennels, an attorney for the Livonia Education Association. "People aren't interested in it, in the suburbs or in Detroit. Both blacks and whites have become less interested in it."

One of the ways to deal with the problem is to bring an increased awareness of the situation to persons. That can be done through the way in which blacks are portrayed in books that are available to school children.

The Center for Racial Justice is reviewing the books in the Redford Union schools library for stereotypes.

"SCHOOLS BUY new books that have positive images of blacks. But the libraries have a way of keeping the old books in their children's section, too," he said.

Another way the Center tries to insure fair practices in the suburbs is to watch businesses and government attitudes toward race.

Next year, the Center plans to look at employment practices in the Livonia and Redford school districts.

Concentrating on Farmington, Redford, Livonia and a small area of Southfield, the Center takes care of complaints aimed at prejudicial real estate practices.

"If someone complains about the rental practices of a realtor we send out testers—a black couple and a white couple."

"If the apartment is rented at 9:30 a.m. when the black couple is there but is available for the white couple at 10 a.m., then we advise the realtor about it through a letter. Usually, if they know that action could be taken, they stop," Rennels said.

IN SPITE OF the efforts of various groups, racial problems still exist. In West Bloomfield, a black professional is given a rough time when he puts in



JOHN RENNELS

a bid for a \$100,000 home.

"Blacks in the suburbs catch a lot of flack, unless they're doing the cleaning," Rennels said.

Part of the reason that blacks will continue to catch flack in the suburbs is the lack of exposure young suburbanites have to non-white cultures.

"In Farmington Hills, most of the black children you see in the schools come from Boy's Republic or the Sarah Fisher Home," Rennels said.

"They are the only blacks in a class of 30, and have a lot of pressure on them to conform. There's not a whole lot of consciousness raised in the schools."

Many residents bring with them to Farmington Hills attitudes toward race which developed out of the bus-ing controversy in Detroit, according to Rennels.

And these attitudes were apparent when "go home buses" window signs appeared in a majority of homes in Rennels' subdivision. "There's a strong feeling on it in my neighborhood. Very few people put signs in their windows unless they really are upset about something," he said.

He admits that busing is far from the answer to all of the problems facing the Detroit schools, but adds that it's a step toward progress.

"EVEN THE MORE LIBERAL aren't convinced that shifting kids around isn't going to help much. It probably wouldn't work, but, on the other hand, to do nothing would have the effect of making no progress at all toward solving the problem," Rennels said.

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