

a hummingbird in the hand...



This odd vision started with dancing snakes, laminitis, and a wheelbarrow of horse poop.

Laminitis: a week ago my horse, Svaha, came down with a case of it, otherwise known as founder. This required tracking down a new vet, giving the other horse, Goliath, his shots at great peril to the attending (new) vet. And keeping horses in dry lot, sans grass, for a week. Now, Mona and I are shuttling them out for half an hour, in dreaded grazing muzzles, (they wheeze at us like Darth Vader), and shoveling more poop, concentrated in the barnyard/drylot area.

Dancing snakes: Wednesday. I went to Mona's for the usual horse tending. We admired her young ducks, collected eggs from her free range chickens, a spectrum of colors, sizes and shapes, all heritage breeds (old types the chicken factories don't use anymore). "Hey, you gotta come see this." Mona said. I went into the sheep stall, where she was collecting eggs from one of those things that looks to me like a chicken bookshelf. Coiled in one nest was an enormous black snake (the kind with the white belly and the dark pattern, like Bagheera the Black Leopard). The snake is a regular visitor, and is sometimes seen with an "egg bulge" in his/her body. We don't regret the loss of an occasional egg, because the snakes control rats and mice.

"Damn, wish I'd brought the camera!"

A minute later I wished much harder for my camera as Mona let out a startled yelp and danced backward. I followed her gaze up ward to see a blacksnake of enormous proportions dangling out of the barn's ceiling.

"Cool." I commented. "Where's the camera when I need it."

The show improved. Presently another black snake made its appearance, and the two intertwined in some sort of reptilian prom dance.

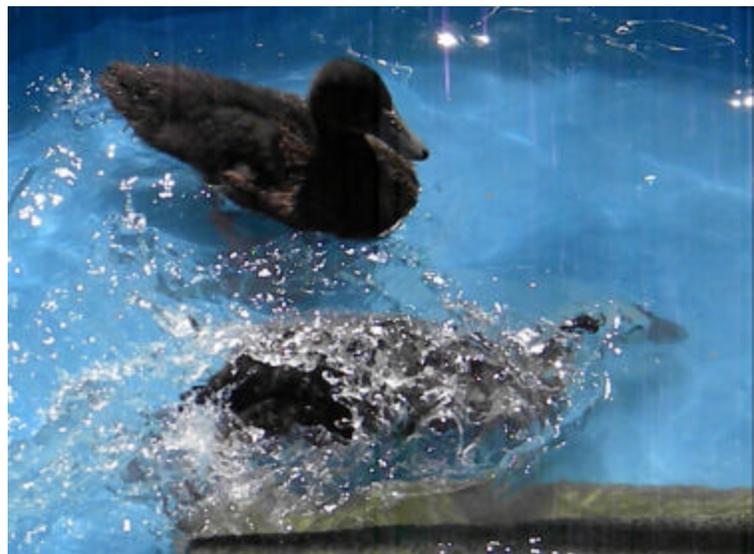
Maybe wedding dance. They eventually vanished back into the ceiling, and I swore I would bionically attach the camera to my body.

Thursday, I arrive at Mona's like a marsupial photographer, the camera stashed in a belt pouch. I let out horses, then drag them, complaining, back to their hay and dust and chickens scratching through the manure piles. I take innumerable photos of ducklings splashing in their newly filled pool. I fork poop out of my horse's stall (Golly never poops in his), and heave the wheelbarrow out of its parking spot to dump it.

I hear Mona yell something about a hummingbird in her garage.

Nay, two of them.

She has hummer feeders up, and they're busy. Somehow, a male and female hummingbird have flown into the attached porch/ex-garage at the end of her house. The



room is huge and one wall is entirely windows. She's opened all the doors and windows she can. the hummer is buzzing against the ceiling tiles, while the enormous beige cat, and the ancient black and white tuxedo kitty watch wide-eyed.

"Fall?" One of them proclaims.

We contemplate the situation. The hummer girl has vanished. We see the male perched on the home gym, an insanely small speck of metallic green. I approach, thinking maybe he'll fly away from me and out the door. He sits there. I get the camera out, and he's gone. I find him again, buzzing against the ceiling. I get a broom, thinking maybe I can very gently herd him out.

Nope.

"Maybe if we got a big blanket."

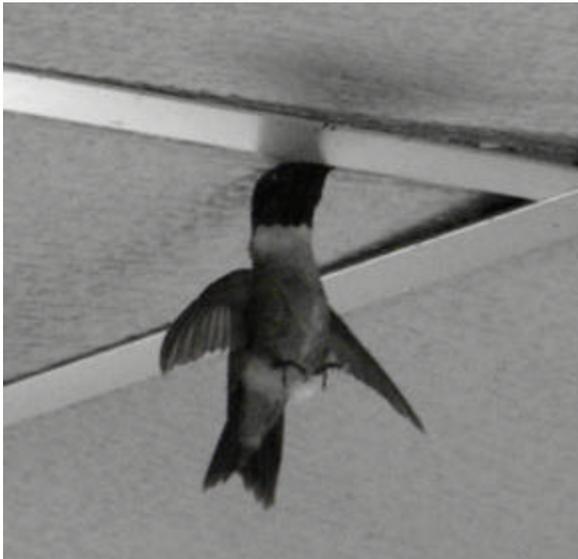
By now, he's hanging upside down from the hatch to the attic. The Great American Bat bird.

Actually, he seems to us like he might be exhausted.

Now what?

"Maybe if we got a big blanket and sort of held it up and gently shoed him out..."

By now he's flown again. We hear the female buzzing somewhere. He flies up to the ceiling again and...



...gets stuck.

"What the heck is he doing?"

We stare in disbelief.

He's not extracting himself, either.

I climb up on the couch (he's conveniently stuck himself over something I can climb on). I consider my T-shirt, then settle on the hat.



The Hat (and its ancestor, which blew off a 1768 period tall ship in the midst of the Chesapeake, but that's another tale) has had a few adventures, but nothing like Hummingbird Hunter...

I gently slide the hat over the bird, slide it, hoping I don't mash the tiny speck of iridescent

green life.

Cool, I'm standing on a couch, my hat pressed against the ceiling, and no bird in sight.

I've wrangled barfing vultures, been handcuffed to a perch by a great horned owl, caused third graders to shriek in delight as the redtail hawk I'm carrying demonstrates projectile pooping, handled herons (with safety goggles; they hunt with their swordblade beaks) and been on several actual wild goose chases. I even wrestled a (very small) tiger once.

I am standing on a couch with a hat pressed to the ceiling, confounded by a hummingbird.

Is it in there? If it is, how to close the hat without squashing the bird.

I finally fold the hat over, wobble down from my perch and walk outside.

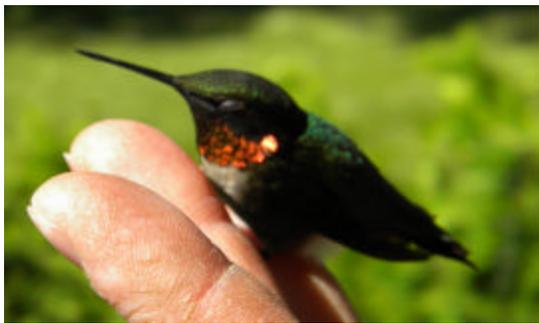
I open the hat and the bird is sitting there.

Gently I remove it and its tiny birdy feet, like cat whiskers, clutch my fingerprints.

He shows no signs of moving farther.

"Where're we going to put him?" Nowhere seems safe enough. I remain, a hummingbird perch.

I contemplate the bird rescues I know. Can they even rehab hummers? Can anybody put a bandage on anything so small? He sits there, eyes blinking slowly. I stand, waiting. Mona hands me, very carefully, the camera. Moving very slowly, I wrangle the camera, one handed, while the other hand remains a quiet tree, out of the cat zone.



He perches, apparently exhausted. I remember hearing that they live on seven calories a day, but that's like us eating several dozen lard-laden Big Macs. Their metabolism is on warp drive. He must have burned a couple of days worth of calories trying to escape the garage.



Finally his eyes brighten, open fully, and he looks off toward the trees. Then, with a buzz and a blur of wings he lifts off.





In a moment he is back, dipping his needle beak into Mona's bird feeder. Then he's off again.

The female successfully escaped the garage as well, with less help. As far as we know, they are out there somewhere in Mona's yard, building their teacup nests of bird spit and moss.

I took the pics with the new Nikon Coolpix (15x optical zoom and 10 megapixels). Hummers are iridescent or metallic, and the angle of light affects the color. In shadow they are very dark, even the male's ruby throat. The camera often focused on my fingers, not the bird. The zoom is better than the old camera, but harder to control.

