THE MAGIC OF SILENCE

There is something about Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road that touches young and old alike even if some have no idea why they feel so good. Presently, with the beauty of spring all around and the gift of sun on our backs it is easy to know why, yet these feelings happen year-round. Recently Katryn Renard, Messages from the Earth Science Program Coordinator, shared a letter from Hannah written after her two day visit last fall. Hannah is ten, and the following extract reflects her incredible writing skills and observations during twenty peaceful minutes alone in her magic spot in the woods.

Hannah wrote “You can see many amazing things if you just take time to look. When the sun comes out from behind a cloud and the wood lights up with a majestic green light, there is no better way to view it than nestled between the roots of a great tree, rubbing an acorn between your fingers in happiness. I can’t wait to go back again, but almost none of the fun could have happened without the magic of silence.” Thank you, Hannah, for allowing us to share your insights.

Rain, rain, rain has continued to affect the spring field cultivation and planting. These days the water table is so high it takes only an inch of rain on the thick lawn outside the Education Building to become waterlogged. Out in the pasture a suspected leak to the water troughs turned out to be a natural spring, full of minerals, bubbling just below the surface.
The corn needs to be planted soon. The oat seeding is a month behind, but we have until mid-June to plant as the crop will be harvested for hay in mid-August. It would be too late to combine if we waited for the seed to ripen. Ensuring enough pasture for our livestock, as well as hay, is still an on-going problem. Farmer Jeff plans to reduce our cattle herd by selling three of our breeding heifers in June. The lambs may go to market to sell on for further fattening, rather than feeding them a lot longer and sending them to the processor.

On the positive side the spelt in field 2, planted last fall, is lush and healthy despite our doubts about its viability when it turned brown in late winter. Spelt contains more protein than wheat and is a mainstay in our chicken and hog feed mix. The mix also includes our own hay and corn, and buckwheat if we grow it. We add purchased soybeans, as our soil is too heavy to produce a decent crop, as well as salt, calcium and kelp.

On-site parking for our third annual Sheep Shearing Day on April 27 ran smoothly thanks to staff and volunteers parking their cars off-site. The sun shone on a happy crowd feeding chickens, checking out the barn and young garden plants, taking a wildflower walk, wandering amongst the lambs and the ewes waiting to be shorn, attaching felt lamb ears to woolly headbands, observing the spinners on the patio from the Central Ohio Weaving and Fiber Arts Guild, and hula hooping beside the Sock Hop Soda Shop.

The first of our goat kids arrived on Sheep Shearing Day. Mia, a second time mother gave birth to twins. She was very tired after the effort but recovered within two hours and allowed the kids to feed. She is the daughter of Raynia and the last of our original Toggenburg breed. She was mated with an Oberhasli buck and the kids are cute. This week two more sets of twins arrived with coloring more brown than black, with darker stripes across their back. They too can only be described as adorable.

Our Apiarist Dave Noble reported some very good news on the status of the bees after winter. Twenty five out of 28 hives survived, a rate of 89%. Approximately 60% survived nationwide. A much better figure than the past few years. The wet, cold spring proved challenging and delayed the first round of queen rearing until May 2, but Dave should still be able to reach his target. There is a plentiful supply of nectar and pollen and the bee colonies are increasing in size. A new swarm was recently captured from the orchard. Providing Mother Nature continues to cooperate there should be a decent honey crop and the sweet prospect of more bulk honey sales at Stratford.
Should you be at Stratford on a rainy day you can always take shelter in our small library. Volunteer ex-Librarian Liz Barker carefully catalogues and files the books, and it is certainly worthwhile to peruse, and even borrow, the gems of knowledge lining the shelves. Looking ahead at the calendar Family Farm Chores, Small Farmers, Story Time, Books Talks, Photography Club and a Photo Contest for Kids continue through the summer. A Family Archery Day is scheduled for June 1. Further details can be found on our website.

Farm Camp starts at the beginning of June with a record 35 older children signing up to act as Junior Counselors. Why don’t you come out and witness the fun, while still having plenty of acres to explore alone and discover the magic of silence?

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