



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
by Pauline Scott
Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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PIGLETS EXPECTED SOON AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

March 1st came in like a lamb this year, and it seems appropriate healthy twin lambs were born that day at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road. Whether March will go out like a lion remains to be seen! However, with the pronounced signs of spring and the record warm temperatures since the first weekend in March, there seems little chance of a return to winter. I hope I do not have to eat my words!

With the quick warm up, and a warm forecast for the following two weeks, maple sap collection finished for the season in Ohio. On March 8 the Tuesday farmhands collected the remaining sap, and brought in the buckets and spiles to wash and store. It was hot, quiet work for the men who continued cooking until the end of the week. Sap collection amounted to 1,150 gallons resulting in 19 gallons of maple syrup, about two thirds of an average year.

The voices of the chorus frogs coincided as usual with the end of sugaring. The bird songs increased overnight as they started seeking their mates. The first red-wing blackbirds, tree swallows, and bluebirds now grace the prairie with their presence.

Bill and Becky Swoager made the rounds of the bluebird boxes to ensure they were empty of any unwanted occupants and their nests. The numerous sparrows have a tendency to take over, and our aim is to keep them for bluebirds. Interest in bluebirds and cavity nesting birds continues to increase judging by the eighty people who attended the workshops held at Stratford this past Saturday. Darlene Sillick and Paula Ziebarth are the Ohio Bluebird Society area contacts and welcome any inquiries.

The long awaited new sow has arrived at Stratford. She is in fact a purebred Tamworth in-pig gilt which Farmer Jeff picked up on March 7. She will not officially be a sow until she farrows on March 24. She weighs about 335 lbs., has a deep brown coat, and notched ears. The notches represent details of her birth history. As yet she does not have a name. She was mated to a Tamworth boar and we have her registration papers. We hope to register her off spring, and depending on how many she produces sell some for 4-H projects.

We freed up space for her to be alone in the hog pen, thus avoiding any conflict with our two fattening hogs. Those two were in hog-heaven when they were allowed out to live in the back yard on the east end of the barn. An area inside the wire fence had been cordoned off with two strands of white woven electric fence placed low to the ground. It would appear they could easily jump it, but it worked. Their hoof prints in the mud indicated they had checked out the fence, been shocked, and never went near it again. After one night the grass was torn up and their snouts muddied, as they rooted for grubs which will quickly improve their condition and weight.

The llamas, Lightning and Rafiki, are the first to be seen in the fields in the morning. Rafiki has taken to standing on the fluffed-up manure pile in the South Pasture, probably enjoying the warmth and the view. It will not be long before we can look for signs of calving readiness in our Red Devon cow Bessie and her daughter Sweet Annie, and Jersey cow Sassy.

A number of lambs fill our birthing pens and more are expected. On March 9 premature twin goat kids were born. Their hooves and lower legs were still quite soft, and they could not suckle unless lifted up and supported. Providing this can be done every two hours they have a good chance of surviving. To date they are doing fine, and nursing on their own. The remaining nannies are expected to give birth in early April.

If you are ready for gardening please mark your calendar for Saturday, March 26, and register for our classes. An adult Organic Gardening 101 and an Organic Gardening for Kids is offered from 9-11 am. and a Seed Starting class from 11:30-1 pm. Please bring your seeds, plants, catalogs and skills to share at a free seed swap between 10 and 1 pm. with no registration necessary.

For the second year a series of learning sessions on wood carving will take place on Thursday evenings April 7-28 from 5:30 to 7:30 pm. with advanced registration required.

A comprehensive description can be found on our web site.

Spring officially begins tomorrow, and despite the mild winter I am glad to see the first of the daffodils, the pussy willow, the snowdrops and other early bulbs, and even the multi-flora rose! Best wishes for a happy springtime.

Pauline Scott is a farm and nature guide at Stratford Ecological Center, 3083 Liberty Road, Delaware. She can be reached at 740-363-2548 or by email at info@stratfordecologicalcenter.org. Website: StratfordEcologicalCenter.org