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Jackson County's best friends



Purr-scilla the guinea pig nibbles on a piece of carrot.

By Silandara Skydancer
Staff writer

She knows Shiela and Nugget and Clara and Gretta; Trixie and Liza and Dedeede and Ranger but can she recall; the names of them all?

Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer was a rather unusual pet for Santa to keep, but residents of Jackson County are able to top that with Margo Purdy's brood of guinea pigs, only a few of whom are named above; Ray Trine's play farm full of llamas, miniature donkeys, laying geese, long-horned cows and huge sheep; Godzilla the pet Iguana and Charlotte the tarantula at Blue Ridge School; and Glynis Heenan's pet pygmy goats and pot-bellied pig.

Unusual pets abound in southern Jackson County.

Descending a spiral staircase in her home, you find yourself in a room half-filled with cages emitting surprisingly soothing chirping noises. Upon closer inspection, the cages contain small furry objects, some brown, some black, some red and some in-between.

Margo Purdy of Glenville has been raising guinea pigs

since she was 14-years-old. A friend had one and she got hooked. The only time in her life when she's been without at least one guinea pig was during four years of college and two years after that of renting a no-pets-allowed apartment.

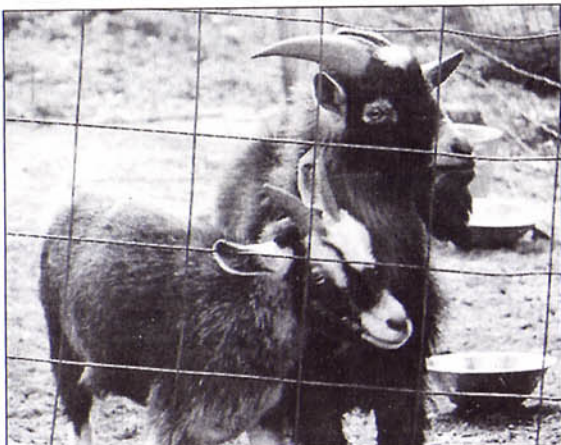
Guinea pigs - known as cavies (pronounced K-V) in the guinea pig breeding and showing world - emit three different types of sound, said Purdy.

The chirping sound is general conversation.

Squeaking is usually because it's time to eat - from the guinea pigs viewpoint at least, as Purdy demonstrated



Arnold the pot-bellied pig chows down on breakfast.



Daisy and Dan, Glynis Heenan's pygmy goats, anticipate some food.



Julie Vancampen, a friend of Anna Rae Trine, feeds a llama.

by letting one of them nibble on a piece of carrot; after a minute the room filled with squeaks. Squeaking can also mean a fight is about to break out, Purdy said.

Guinea pigs also purr, often when they are petted, to express pleasure. Purring is also used during sexual discussions among themselves.

"Biologists have broken them down into many different subgroups," Purdy said.

What does she do with all of these little animals?

She sells them locally as pets for about \$10 each, sells the breeding quality ones at shows for about \$20, and keeps the rest to breed and show herself.

Purdy raises two different breeds of guinea pigs - Satin Americans and Americans - both short-haired, but there are many different breeds and variations, she said.

Guinea pigs are one of the easier pets to keep, she said, easier than a dog or cat. When they are born, they are self-sufficient and eat solid food within a few days. They live for four to six years.

It sounds like the barn is collapsing with one last heaving groan. But it's just one of the miniature donkeys braying.



One of Ray Trine's geese protects her eggs.

Anna Rae Trine, Ray Trine's youngest daughter, of Yellow Mountain is in charge of looking after the llamas and the other animals at the farm. She makes the rounds in the evening after she finishes her homework.

The llamas push their long noses out in anticipation of food. These llamas may spit at each other trying to establish dominance or territory, but they don't spit at people with food, or even a camera. One even gives gentle kisses.

The Trine's have had llamas for several years. Ray, who grew up on a working ranch in Florida, wanted to create a similar environment for his children, but without the dan-

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gers of horses or a herd of cows.

Next to be fed, and petted, are two long-horned cows. Then there are the miniature donkeys, a laying goose and other aquatic birds. The farm's three dogs follow along, stopping to do what dogs do.

Two huge sheep and four Nubian goats trot across a low hill beneath the trees. Shearing the sheep cost twice as much as any other sheep, said Trine. He's been told they are the biggest sheep anyone has ever seen. "I guess we just feed them too much."

Life on the farm is an experience in life and death. On Saturday, April 15, a newborn llama - a cria - joined the fold. Animals come; and they go.

"What ever happened to Goosey Lucy?" asked Trine's second-youngest daughter Elizabeth. "The bobcats got her, didn't they?"

Billy the attacking billy goat only stayed for a while. He drank beer and made faces, Elizabeth said. He used to get upset and attack you if you didn't bring him beer.

The mountain lions likely got Wild Thing the rooster. The girls grew up with him attacking them as they drove a golf cart around the farm. It became a game of hide and seek, one of the many in the game of life.

He stretches his majestic head as a finger reaches out to stroke his scaly body. If he were a cat, he might purr.

Godzilla the iguana, pet of Blue Ridge School, likes to be petted. Under his warm red

day lights he certainly looks exotic. Unlikely to cause havoc on an unsuspecting city like his namesake, but exotic and unusual nonetheless.

A student who was unable to properly care for him donated him to the school a year ago. If his growth rate is any indication, Godzilla likes his new environment - he's shed four times in the last two months.

"I think it means that we're learning how to take care of him better," said Patricia Palmer, second grade teacher and Godzilla's caretaker.

Palmer didn't know anything about iguanas when the school adopted Godzilla. She's had to learn a lot and is still learning.

Animals in the school - Godzilla isn't the only one - teach children about life and death, said Palmer. Eventually, they all pass on.

However, Godzilla also teaches children good nutrition. He eats lots of fruits and vegetables - tomatoes, romaine lettuce, broccoli stalks, apples, canned green beans and squash. Grapes are considered a special treat.

He lives in a cage constructed by the shop class with materials donated from Lowes in Franklin. The cage should last him a couple more years, unless he decides to imitate his namesake, but it will need to be expanded. Iguanas cannot be kept small if left in a small environment as many people believe, Palmer said. They do not just adapt to their habitat. You have to give them a large enough habitat in which to grow.

"If he survives in this school, I think he'll be here when these kids in second grade graduate," Palmer said.

While a small herd of llamas, some goats, geese, ducks, miniature donkeys, guinea pigs

and an iguana would look a bit silly trying to pull a sled full of toys and one jolly old man, they make up an eclectic group of unusual pets.

Each gives its own gift and perhaps a slightly different perspective on life.