

LOCAL NEWS

Hale couple raises herd of 43 fainting goats

by Jason Ogden

HALE – A visit by the uninformed to John and Jackie Pegg's farm in Hale could be shocking at first. That would be until the visitor learned that the Pegg's goats are supposed to faint.

The Pegg's are proud owners of a herd of Tennessee Fainting Goats, which, because of a special characteristic, involuntarily fall on their backs and become rigid when startled.

According to retired Michigan State Police Sgt. John Pegg, the goats are extremely rare and his herd is currently the only one in Iosco County. He said there are only about 5,000 to 6,000 currently in the United States.

The goats were originally bred in the 1880s by Tennessee farmer

John Tinsley and were prized for their meat and their temperament.

The fainting goats were also put in with regular herds to act as decoys – and guaranteed snacks – for a pursuing predator, because they would faint when startled.

The breed is currently on the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy's threatened list.

Jackie Pegg treats her herd, which is 43 members strong, more like house pets than farm animals.

She said as the goats get older, they can learn to control their fainting better than when they are young.

One can throw away the notion that these goats eat tin cans or have a strong desire to head-butt anything; they even get along with

the cat!

Pegg started her herd with a single goat last March. She had read that the goats would make good companions for the sheep. She loved the animal so much, she started buying more.

Her jump into the breeding business began when she bought a half pregnant herd from a breeder in southern Michigan.

She has since quit her part-time job and works with the goats all the time.

Jackie is helped by her husband and two Great Pyrenees dogs, Denali and Neeka, which were bred to tend flocks of sheep and goats.

"The biggest threat to the goats is a common house dog," Pegg said.

It's hard to imagine anything threatening happening on the dandelion bespeckled pasture on which the goats live, but every once in a while a goat will get startled by something enough to faint.

When a young kid, as the six-week-old animals are known, gets swatted at by one of the farm cats, it immediately falls on its side with its legs sticking out as stiff as boards.

According to John, the goats don't fall asleep and sometimes still chew their food while down. Jackie said that it is still slightly unnerving watching them faint, even though she knows they are fine.

"You don't know whether to laugh or cry," she said.

The Pegg's plan to sell half the herd, which is made up of kids, and keep about 12 adult goats.

A top notch young female can bring as much as \$450, Jackie said.

John, who originally didn't want another animal around the already packed farm, has since changed his tune and carries the young goats around like children.

"It has been a real experience," he said.



Photo by Jason Ogden

PROUD OWNER – John Pegg, pictured here with just one of his many fainting goats, raises them on his farm in Hale with wife, Jackie.



Photo by Jason Ogden

PLAYTIME – The Pegg goats need not worry about ever being on a plate, as they will only be sold for breeding and as pets.



Photo by Jason Ogden

THE FAINTING GOAT – A young goat, who was suddenly startled, involuntarily faints and remains stiff for a few moments. According to owner, Jackie Pegg, the goat is unharmed in this action.



Photo by Jason Ogden

FAST FRIENDS – "And fainting goats shall lay with cats" wasn't a Bible verse but, from this photograph, it is evident that all the animals on the Pegg farm get along.

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