

Kids in the kitchen: Woman provides sanctuary for rescued baby goats



Gabor Degre | BDN

This is one of several kids born to goats that were rescued from an Aroostook County farm in December. They now live at the Peace Ridge Sanctuary in Penobscot. The animals were kept in an barn that had not been cleaned in years. *Buy Photo*

By Abigail Curtis, BDN Staff

Posted Feb. 06, 2015, at 4:02 p.m.

PENOBSCOT, Maine — Daniella Tessier’s kitchen is full of baby goats, and she wouldn’t have it any other way.

The 11 inquisitive kids nuzzled up to Tessier on Friday morning and chewed at her long brown hair while she explained how they ended up in her sunny kitchen and how lucky they are that their fate made a sharp turn for the better back in December. That’s when the state Animal Welfare Program heard several goats were being kept in less-than-ideal conditions at a private dairy in southern Aroostook County.

Tessier, executive director of the Peace Ridge Sanctuary in Penobscot, said the original report to animal control officers stated the goats were on the second floor of a tall barn.

“We all said, how does that happen? How do goats live on the second floor?” she said. “When

we went to see, we could see right away that they weren't being kept on the second story. They were on accumulated manure. It raised them to the level of the rafters."

Tessier, who was called to help by Animal Welfare Program officials, needed to clamber to the top of the 25-foot manure pile to get to the 19 goats — most of which were pregnant does. Her sanctuary specializes in providing a safe home for what she calls "farmed" animals. She is accustomed to seeing animals kept in substandard conditions, but the Aroostook situation was something she had never experienced before.

"Quite literally, these goats have been living in there — multiplying, dying," she said. "What I saw was a herd of goats, most in pretty bad shape, with their heads up to the rafters of the barn, at the ceiling level. They were smashing their horns off because they were running into the rafters. That was a lot of manure."

Liam Hughes, director of Maine's Animal Welfare Program, said his agency found the goat owner was "overwhelmed" by the amount of animals he had. Hughes is not releasing the person's name because he was "very cooperative" with the state and is not being charged with anything.

"The animals were being kept in subpar conditions," he said. "There was a large amount of feces and waste piled up in the barn. If the owner didn't cooperate with us, we would have had to file for a search warrant and remove the animals. Luckily, he did. We will always try to work with people to educate them."

State agents and officials from the Peace Ridge Sanctuary were at the scene for much of the month of December. Tessier said sanctuary staff needed to work fast and be creative to make room for the herd in Penobscot. Before the rescue, the 14-year-old sanctuary was providing shelter for 160 rescued animals: turkeys, geese, ducks, guinea hens, rabbits, a horse, a cow and a small herd of sheep and goats.

"We're a part of the national sanctuary movement. We have a different ethical take on farmed animals," Tessier said. "I think people are quick to feel empathetic about cats and dogs. But with farmed animals, only some people are empathetic. All animals deserve to live with dignity. All animals suffer."

The sanctuary staff and volunteers were able to raise \$5,600 to buy a new structure for the goats, where they would live after spending time in the sanctuary's quarantine facility to make sure they didn't have communicable diseases. Then, a few at a time, the rescued goats were brought about 150 miles south to Penobscot.

"What we were noticing when we first started transporting them to the sanctuary was that they didn't know how to walk on the ground," Tessier said. "They were looking at the sky like they'd never seen it before. They had had no way of getting outside."

A few weeks after arriving at the sanctuary, the goats began to have their babies. But the cold and the poor health of the mother goats meant the babies were not going to thrive in the

unheated new structure.

“Most of the babies were all really low birth weight,” she said. “Most weren’t able to stand to nurse. They were dying of hypothermia, so I started picking them up and taking them to my house.”

And that’s how it came to be that Daniella Tessier has 11 baby goats living in playpens in her kitchen. At first, they all needed to be bottle fed every two hours around the clock. Some needed more medical attention, including a gentle little fellow named Jean-Luc that needed eye surgery for an ulcerated cornea.

Because of the goat nursery and all the soiled towels and blankets it generates, Tessier and her crew are now doing 13 loads of laundry a day. With more babies coming — at least 12, she thinks — it’ll soon be time for this batch of kids to graduate to a heated stall.

“It’s a lot of cleaning: no sleep and a lot of cleaning,” Tessier said. “We’re always saying, ‘the pitter patter of little hooves is so sweet.’”

In the future, the goats may be adopted by carefully selected families who sign contracts that they will not use them for breeding or for milking.

“They’re going to be pets,” Tessier said firmly.

For now, sanctuary staff are continuing to think of ways to generate money for the goats’ medical and infrastructure needs. Toward that end, they are running a Valentine’s Day ‘Goat-a-Gram’ fundraiser. For \$10, people can send a card to their special someone — complete with photographs of the goats’ faces. All proceeds will go to the goat rescue effort.

Tessier and Hughes said they hope people will continue to pay attention to the animals around them and reach out for help if they see something that worries them.

“If people see something they think is wrong, definitely they should call their local animal control officer or [the Maine] Animal Welfare [Program],” Hughes said. “A lot of the cases animal welfare has been seeing recently are good people who are overwhelmed with their circumstances.”

For more information about Peace Ridge Sanctuary or the Goat-a-Gram fundraiser, visit their website at peaceridgesanctuary.org or call 326-9507. To contact the Maine Animal Welfare Program, call 287-3846.

<http://bangordailynews.com/2015/02/06/living/kids-in-the-kitchen-woman-provides-sanctuary-for-rescued-baby-goats/> printed on February 8, 2015