

Not Your Average Proud “Parents”



Leaping lemurs, as illustrated by the one on Dr. Cathy Cranmore's head, are not an unlikely sight at Tri Lakes. Neither are baby kangaroos, called joeys, like the one she cradles as husband and exotic animal breeder Don Osborne looks on.

Veterinarian Cathy Cranmore and her husband, Don Osborne, met when she was selling a llama and he was buying one. Falling in love over their mutual interest in exotic animals came pretty easy, but what probably helped seal the deal was a gift from Don to Cathy of a creature that was new to both of them at the time: a coatimundi, or “coati.” And the rest is history, as they say.

Robert the llama is now 21 years old and still living with them on their 130-acre spread in Mount Pleasant. But their “family” has grown into the hundreds and includes an expanded Noah’s Ark of animals. Or, as Dr. Cathy says, they have just about everything, “from aardvark to zebra.”

Before their joint venture—or, more aptly, joint adventure—Don had been in the construction business, and eventually he and his brother sold out. He decided to use his land in East Texas beginning in the early 1990s to breed

exotics. Dr. Cathy is originally from Oklahoma, but she says it was not hard to decide where they would set up shop. Don, originally from the Waco area, already had some land in the community of Monticello, near Mount Pleasant. And, she smartly explains, “Don had more barns, so I moved down here.”

Tri Lakes Exotics and Veterinarian Clinic is on a 130-acre compound on FM 21. Both Don and Dr. Cathy spend a great part of each day, and part of each night, too, tending to the over 30 different species that they breed and raise. Baby zebras need to be bottle-fed every four hours, 24 hours a day, so Don gets up during the wee hours when there is a little striped beastie to be fed. Also, baby kangaroos require pretty constant care. Don and Dr. Cathy treat it just like they would a human infant, diapering and pampering it. By day, the little “roo” has the run of the vet clinic, and by night, the run of their home. When bedtime arrives, into a cloth pouch it goes, where it hangs on their bedroom doorknob to slumber.

Dr. Cathy says every day is an adventure, with much physical activity, constant feedings and varied medical care. But she also says that she and Don don’t ever really get tired of the endless chores because of their great love for what they do. She puts it this way: “We don’t come to work. We come to play.” For their nurturing pleasure, there are literally hundreds of furred and feathered animals on their compound, so there is certainly never a dull moment.

But, as if all of their creatures weren’t enough, Dr. Cathy also has a thriving veterinarian practice, and people come from miles around, as it’s not easy to find vets that specialize in exotics. On any given day, she will have visitors from Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas seeking care for primates or any number of other exotic animals. It might be a camel one day or a giraffe the next, but if you meet Dr. Cathy, you’ll soon understand that the unexpected is never really unexpected by her, and she delights in them all.

Although she is passionate about all animals, Dr. Cathy says there is a most favored creature of hers. “If I could only have one animal, it would be a coati,” she says. “They have more personality than any other. They are the one animal, that, if you adopt one out, the owner falls absolutely in love with them. They just make you love them.”

And, like potato chips, one is not enough for her and Don, so they share their home with five of these funny-but-fabulous-looking creatures. Their coatis eat dry dog food, use a litter box “most of the time” and sleep all night and get into everything by day. Dr. Cathy is quick to tell any potential adopter, “they are very active, similar to the constant activity of a 2-year-old. If you have knickknacks, you don’t want a coati.”



Roy Wilmeth, a preveterinary student at Texas A&M University and a Mount Vernon native, enjoys time with Little John, the 3-month-old camel with which he has especially bonded.

She says they are not the ideal pet for everyone. For any exotic, or even domestic animals, potential “parents” should consider their own lifestyle, level of activity and dedication before getting any kind of pet, and they should match those realities with the type, habits and characteristics of the animal.

If you’ve done your research and do decide that an exotic pet is what you want, and your local ordinances permit, in your search for a creature, you’ll be sure to come across the name of Tri Lakes and Don Osborne.

“If you stand behind what you sell and you sell a good product, it works,” Don says. “Customers will be back. Word of mouth works.”

That’s why the zoos, trainers, parks and other educational facilities, as well as individuals, come to Tri Lakes when they are interested in adopting something maybe a little less conventional. With Dr. Cathy on-site, the health of the animals is pretty much a given, and Don concentrates heavily on socializing animals and also breeding for a good disposition. He says he won’t breed animals with an ornery or aggressive personality, and he spends an extraordinary amount of time “humanizing” his animals, hand feeding little ones by bottle or bucket to help instill a gentle nature.

Tri Lakes is the largest breeder of coatimundi in the United States, but where the coatimundi play, so do the deer and the antelope and the camels (one hump and two), llamas, zebras, kangaroos, lemurs, Patagonia cavis, miniature donkeys, otters, wallabies, wallaroos, peacocks,

rheas, capybara, kinkajous and other living things that make up over 30 species in the Tri Lake wild kingdom. Don says of these, some of his more popular sellers are the camels, zebras and kangaroos, and he has a little to say about each.

Camels, Don says, are very gentle giants, and they are wonderful animals that give their trust to humans and are very trainable. He also makes a point to say that they’ve been domesticated as long as, if not longer than, dogs. He also says they are pretty easy to care for and their needs are similar to those of cattle.

Regarding zebras, he reverently says, “They are striking and so sharp to look at.” He also says that they can be ridden, and unlike horses or cattle, they never have to have their hooves trimmed, but their other care is similar to what a horse receives.

As for kangaroos, he says they are another species of animal, just as endearing as the coati, and that if you have one you will probably have two. All of their kangaroos are bottle-fed from a couple of months old, and often times, these babies will serve as the unofficial greeter to the vet’s office.

It’s hard to keep up with Dr. Cathy, as she sits still hardly a moment, with many a baby to feed and patients to see. But, she and Don do get a little help from their current preveterinary student, Roy Wilmeth, who is studying at Texas A&M University and is a native of nearby Mount Vernon. Roy seems to be thoroughly enjoying his time at Tri Lakes and says he has benefited greatly from his exposure to all of the varied species. He says he now plans to incorporate some exotics into his own future practice. Dr. Cathy glows when she talks about Roy as a local and how well he fits with her practice. She says, “The people are great around here. They are all a lot like Roy, and many know him. With him here, it’s like a family reunion every day.”

As for her practice, when Dr. Cathy is not treating and ministering to her menagerie, she counts many a domestic cat and dog as her patients. Most of her clients know that when they come for their appointments, it is highly likely that there will be a diapered baby kangaroo bouncing around the waiting room or peering out the front door, or a coati scampering about. And just as likely, Dr. Cathy will greet her visitors, answer phone calls and a few other chores with, say, a lemur resting in the crook of her neck or sitting on the top of her cranium, and she will be absolutely gleeful about it.

Dr. Cathy and Mr. Osborne are not your average “parents.” They count the hoofed and pawed and clawed among their family, and the work that goes into raising each and every one is unique and demanding. Theirs is positively a niche that not many have the stamina and love to fill, but they raise their animals with care and give each a very human name like Kevin, Maggie, Liz and Jan. Yet, their “kids” are not average, and neither are they, but they do consider themselves very proud parents.

Tri Lakes Exotics and Veterinarian Clinic is a member of Wood County Electric Cooperative and is located at 111 FM 21 in Mount Pleasant. Visit the business on the Web at www.trilakesexotics.com.

Energy/Climate-Change Bill

A Balancing Act We Can't Afford to Ignore

On June 26, the Waxman-Markey energy-climate bill passed in the U.S. House by a margin of 219-212 and is now under consideration by the Senate. This bill would establish national limits on carbon dioxide emissions and create a complex trading system for emission permits. This bill is of great concern to Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) and to all electric cooperatives across the nation, as it has cost implications for all members of electric cooperatives. That's why the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), a national organization of electric cooperatives, has been working hard for all members of cooperatives to encourage lawmakers to set fair and just emission allocations, set goals consistent with technology and create a balanced bill that keeps electricity affordable, ensures availability and addresses climate requirements.

At WCEC, we support the NRECA's efforts and believe the current challenge will be a true balancing act and that lawmakers must consider that:

1. The capacity to generate electricity must increase by 30 percent to keep up with demand growth, prevent shortages and ensure reliability.
2. Electricity must remain affordable.
3. Climate-change legislation should be realistic and attainable.

There are many near- and long-term actions and solutions that will successfully meet future demand in an affordable manner, and they include:

- Restrained rate of demand growth through energy efficiency.
- Increased energy generation from renewable energy sources.
- Increased use of nuclear energy.
- Reconfiguration of coal-fired plants to be more efficient.
- Development of carbon capture and storage technology for power plants.
- Improvement in the viability and cost of consumer-generated energy.

But, while members of Congress consider all of these, it is imperative that affordability of electricity for all Americans remains an utmost concern. In this urgent matter, we are calling on all WCEC members to contact their legislators. They must be reminded that climate-change legislation should remain fair, affordable and achievable. Go to WWW.ourenergy.coop to make your voice heard.



POST NO BILLS

Attaching Signs to Utility Poles Presents Safety Hazards—And It's Illegal

BY CHRIS GRAMMES

Although seemingly innocent enough, putting signs or other items on utility poles creates serious safety hazards. Staples, nails and tacks used to hang signs—as well as the signs themselves—pose dangers to Wood County Electric Cooperative's line workers who must climb poles when either restoring power following storms or while performing routine maintenance to ensure system reliability.

Posters or other objects (birdhouses, balloons, flags and even basketball nets) can be dangerous obstacles. Also, the nails and tacks left behind from signs can snag utility workers' boots or puncture safety clothing, putting line workers at risk of slipping or even electrocution.

In addition to being hazardous, tampering with utility poles can be costly. Posting signs or attaching other objects to utility poles is illegal and can carry a fine of up to \$500 per day.

Wood County EC appreciates your help in keeping utility poles clear and linemen safe.

Chris Grammes writes on safety issues for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

WE NEED YOUR HELP.

Climate-Change Legislation Should Be:

**Fair. Affordable.
And Achievable.**



Our Energy, Our Future™
A Dialogue With America

▶ Senators are drafting climate-change legislation NOW, and you can impact the outcome. Go to www.ourenergy.coop to make your voice heard.

Upcoming Member Vote on Articles of Incorporation

To ensure best practices, periodically the Board of Directors of WCEC reviews the bylaws, articles of incorporation and other documents that dictate operational procedures for our member-owned cooperative. These reviews always consider the current economic climate, the health of the cooperative and new laws and regulations. To that end, in a recent board meeting the directors reviewed the articles of incorporation, which were last amended in 1994.

Article X of WCEC's articles of incorporation details how the cooperative divests of various properties and also dictates the entities that WCEC can borrow money from. As it stands now, WCEC is prohibited from borrowing money from any entity other than the United States Government Rural Electrification Administration or the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation. That means, other than the federal government, WCEC currently has only one other source of funding. While a limited source of funding tied to the government was a common practice when cooperatives were initially starting up in the 1930's, the industry-wide practice today allows more flexibility in seeking loans to insure the most competitive rates and terms.

It's imperative that WCEC retain the ability to borrow money, which is necessary for capital intensive projects, as well as for emergency events like ice storms when large portions of the infrastructure must be rebuilt. But, it's also important that the cooperative be able to take advantage of the best deals. Typical loans for WCEC are generally for several million dollars. Even one percentage point increase or

decrease in interest rates can have significant impact on the cost to provide service to our members. By having flexibility in choosing lenders, we are able to diversify our loan portfolio to manage interest rate risk.

For these reasons, the board of directors recommends to the members that an amendment be made to the articles of incorporation that allows the cooperative the flexibility to borrow funds from various banks, rather than the two limited sources prescribed. In cyclic economic times, having the ability to seek funding from more than two sources is not only prudent, but a sound fiscal decision.

The board also recommends a change to Article IX to provide for consistency in the language used between the Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws by specifically adding the language for cast ballots.

Members will have the ability to vote for these changes to the amendments on an upcoming mail ballot. We hope all members will take the time to consider the benefits of these recommendations and will choose to vote. Responses from at least 5 percent of the WCEC membership are necessary for any change, so please take the time to review your ballot, which will also include a vote for directors. As a member of a cooperative, your participation matters.

As Debbie Robinson, CEO and General Manager of WCEC reminds us, "The cooperative process is one of democracy, and unlike an investor owned utility, all of our members have a voice in shaping important matters. I'd like to remind every member that they have an equal voting right, and we encourage all members to be involved."



SAVE ENERGY ■ SAVE MONEY

Keep air-conditioning tuneups quick and costly repairs to a minimum with these simple tips for year-round maintenance.

- **Change the filters once every month. This is especially important during the summer when dust and allergens circulate.**
- **Remove plants, branches and debris from on and around outdoor air-conditioning equipment.**
- **Indoors, vacuum return-air registers and air vents regularly.**



HAPPY LABOR DAY!

Your friends at Wood County Electric Cooperative wish all members and their families a relaxing and safe holiday.