

As a practical matter...

# Integrating Animals into the Garden Environment



Story and images by Rolf Dethlefsen & Connie Lee

**A**bout fifteen years ago we built a house north of San Diego on a tract of virgin land. Over time we slowly cultivated the soil and established a CRFG garden. We want to pass on some experience gained about integrating animals into of the garden operation for practicality and enjoyment. We proceed by telling you this story in the chronological order that we acquired the animals.

## Honey Bees

Honey bees provide pollination, honey, beeswax and propolis, a natural substance also produced by the bees which has been used in traditional medicine. The care of honey bees requires special equipment and knowledge. Thirty years ago it was much easier to keep bees and produce honey than it is nowadays. The environment has changed, and the survival rate of beehives is much less now. It has become an important objective today just to keep bees alive.

## Dogs

Man's Best Friend provides companionship and protection after being properly trained. To be effective the dog must exclusively live in the garden, where it will need a dog house.

We have experience with the following breeds: Doberman, Labrador Retriever, Rat Terrier and German Shepherd. All will make intelligent companions and guards. They will keep deer and rabbits away and go after gophers with mixed success. They will also defend their place against coyotes.

Dogs need to be controlled by a fence around the orchard or garden. We have learned that the hard way. Dogs will announce strangers and also rattlesnakes. Three of our dogs have been struck in the face by a rattlesnake. They swelled badly and after two days of undisturbed sleep they survived without lasting damage.

## Chickens

We started with chicks and a young rooster purchased at a feed store. We made a chicken house and a fenced run out of old lumber and wire mesh. After a few months the rewards were coming in the form of fresh eggs, almost one egg per chicken per day. We had bought the rooster when he was several months old. When he became an adult he turned dangerously aggressive. A rooster has sharp spurs on his feet which he can use to wound a person's leg. Later we brought up chicken eggs in our place. When those roosters grew up they were peaceful and showed no tendencies for attacking us. Birds' brains are programmed in the early days of life; they imprint humans as parents. Chickens eat weeds, insects and seeds. Their eggs will have a wonderful sun-yellow color if they can range freely.

## Guineafowl

Guinea chicks, or keets, came to us as one-day-old birds delivered by the U.S. Postal Service. They were mailed from Metzger Farms ([www.metzgerfarms.com](http://www.metzgerfarms.com)) in Northern California. The young birds were initially raised under infrared light in the garage since they had no mother chicken to keep them warm. They all grew into adult guineas without losses.

Guineafowl look like clowns and play the role. They will announce strangers or anything that alarms them. They can fly into trees and sit there and keep watch. They eat greens, grains and insects, including ticks.

## Ducks

Next we acquired white ducks of the Pekin variety, also by mail from Metzger Farms. Ducks will happily eat insect pests, and they even like large snails. They need water available in which to bathe.

## Geese

Also geese of the white Emden variety came to us from Metzger Farms. They grew to maturity without problems. Geese can bite, but our babies had no animosity toward us once they were grown. Geese keep weeds down, especially grass. But they also like other vegetative matter, so small trees and gardens require wire fences for protection. Geese

seem to be the most intelligent of our birds. They are social and can be quite entertaining.

## Wild Owls

We placed wooden boxes into trees and on steel poles. After several years owls moved in for breeding. The white box on a pole in the title photo is occupied by breeding owls. Under the boxes are lots of small animal bones. Gophers are hard to eliminate otherwise because we prefer not to use poison.

**Rolf Dethlefsen**, an engineer and a member of CRFG since 1984, relocated to the US from Germany in 1961. **Connie Lee**, an accountant, relocated to the US from Taiwan in 1981. Both are retired now and maintain their garden and orchard north of San Diego. This is where the Ronnie apple cultivar originated.



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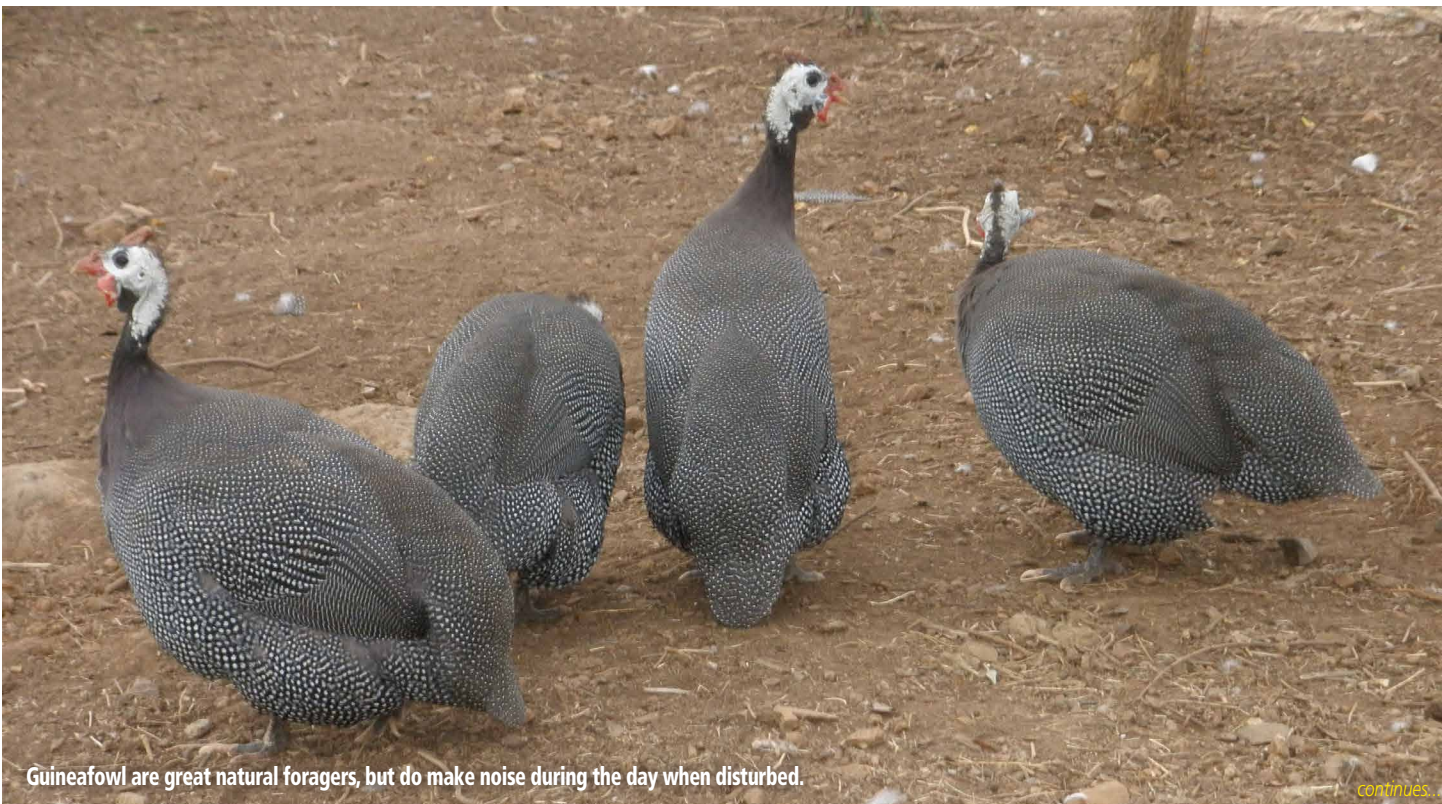
Rooster, mother hen and chick



Ducks, Pekin variety



These Emden variety geese raised from one day old goslings aren't aggressive or prone to bite.



Guineafowl are great natural foragers, but do make noise during the day when disturbed.

*continues*



A fig-loving hen does take some fruits and damages a few, but compensates with about one egg per day for most of the year.

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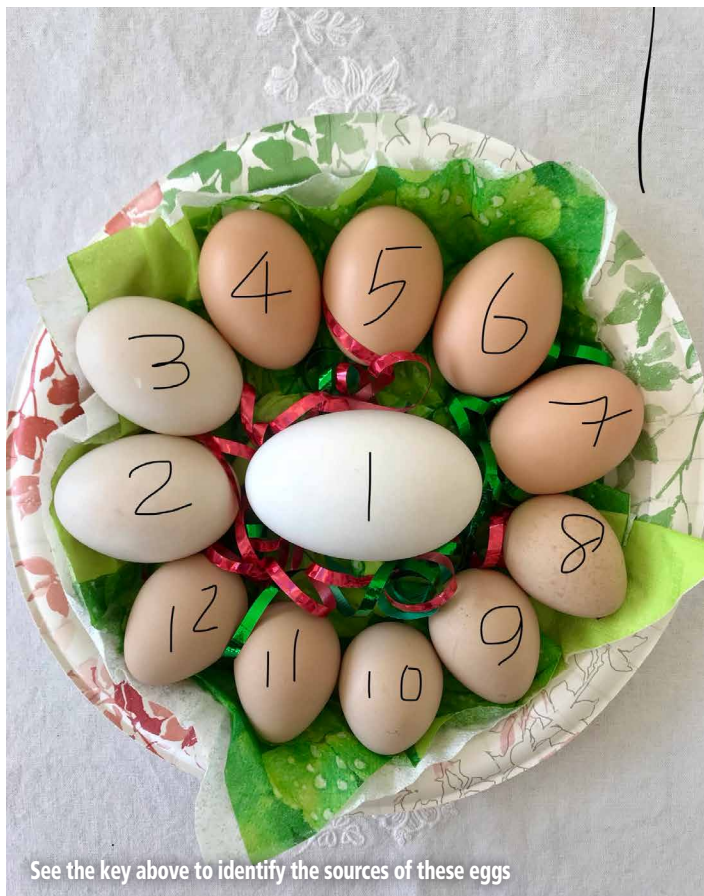
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# Birds Provide Talents Useful in the Orchard

CHICKENS	GUINEAFOWL	DUCKS	GEESE	OWLS
Lay about 1 egg per chick daily.	Lay eggs in spring.	Lay eggs in spring.	Lay eggs in spring.	—
Eat seeds, weeds, insects, worms.	Prefer insects.	Prefer snails.	Prefer greens.	Prey on gophers, rats, mice.
Scratching can damage a garden.	Noisy, fly better than chickens.	Need water for bathing.	Can damage young trees. Need water for bathing.	Need a box in a tree or on a pole.

### Key to the Egg Photo Below

- 1 ..... Goose
- 2 thru 3 ..... Duck
- 4 thru 7 ..... Chicken
- 8 thru 12 ..... Guinea



See the key above to identify the sources of these eggs

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