

# Turkeys – Who Are They?

**Abigail invites us to get  
to know them . . .**

Photo of Abigail at UPC's sanctuary courtesy  
of *The Washington Times*.



*An Informative Visual Presentation*  
by Karen Davis, PhD  
President of United Poultry Concerns



*Photo by Frank Johnston,  
The Washington Post*

## **Science Confirms:**

Contrary to the view once held by conventional ornithology that birds are mentally inferior to mammals and that chickens, turkeys, quails and other ground-nesting birds are “unquestionably low in the scale of avian evolution,” science now shows that birds are as intelligent as mammals (“it is now clear that birds have cognitive capacities equivalent to those of mammals”) and that “the chicken is not an inferior species to be treated merely as a food source.”

**Dr. Lesley J. Rogers, *The Development of Brain and Behaviour in the Chicken***

*From an Interview with Dr. Ian Duncan, Professor of Poultry Ethology University of Guelph Ontario, Canada*

**Q: Can chickens and turkeys feel pain?**

A: Absolutely. It is indisputable that poultry are capable of feeling pain. All poultry species are sentient vertebrates and all the available evidence shows that they have a very similar range of feelings as mammalian species. Poultry can suffer by feeling pain, fear and stress.

**Q: Chickens and turkeys are widely regarded to be of inferior intelligence, so-called "dumb animals." Is this an accurate assessment of their intelligence?**

A: Not at all. These animals are poorly understood. Turkeys, for example, do not always do what a turkey grower wants them to, and therefore they're classified as dumb animals, whereas in fact turkeys possess marked intelligence. This is revealed by such behavioral indices as their complex social relationships, and their many different methods of communicating with each other, both visual and vocal. Chickens, as well, are far more intelligent than generally regarded, and possess underestimated cognitive complexity.

## **A Turkey Mother Cares for Her Young**

*A turkey hen makes a ground nest with her beak to camouflage herself and her eggs while she sits on them for 26 days of incubation. She hides her eggs to protect the embryos growing inside from predators such as foxes, raccoons or hawks. Preferring a wooded hideaway, she chooses a dry place, close to water, that allows her to survey her surroundings as she sits on her eggs and to fly out of the nest rapidly if necessary.*

**A mother turkey sits quietly on her nest.**



Like chickens, turkeys belong to the scientific order known as *galliforms*, meaning “cock-shaped.” Galliforms make their nests on the ground instead of in trees, like robins or blue jays, or on cliff ledges, like penguins, gulls, doves, and pelicans. Galliforms include chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quails, peafowl and guinea fowl.

Unlike chickens and other pheasants of Asian origin, turkeys are Native American birds. When the Europeans arrived in the 15th century, turkeys roamed the woods, meadows, prairies and fields of North, South, and Central America, the West Indies, and Mexico. In one description:

*Turkeys were very tame along tributary streams, where there were beautiful forests full of stags and wild turkeys. The birds merely looked down from the treetops at canoes passing down the stream near cliffs rising high above with pine trees and red cedars. Bald eagles soared above their tops . . .*

John Bakeless, ***America As Seen By Its First Explorers***

**Turkeys are at home in every natural element:  
earth, air, and water.**



Though for their daily excursions turkeys prefer walking, they can run 12mph and fly up to 50mph.



# Turkeys Can Swim!



Crossing a river: “The old and fat birds easily get over, even should the river be a mile in breadth; but the younger and less robust frequently fall into the water, - not to be drowned, however, as might be imagined. They bring their wings close to their body, spread out their tail as a support, stretch forward their neck, and striking out their legs with great vigour, proceed rapidly toward the shore; on approaching which, should they find it too steep for landing, they cease their exertions for a few minutes, float down the stream until they come to an accessible part, and by a violent effort generally extricate themselves from the water.” – John Jay Audubon, 1831.



**Poults (very young turkeys) can swim well if they need to.**

## **Turkeys Like to Romp, Dance and Play Together**

A witness stumbled upon this scene: “I heard a flock of wild turkeys calling. They were not calling strayed members of the flock. They were just having a twilight frolic before going to roost. They kept dashing at one another in mock anger, stridently calling all the while, almost playing leapfrog in their antics. Their notes were bold and clear. For about five minutes they played on the brown, pine-straw floor of the forest. Then as if at a signal, they assumed a sudden stealth and stole off in the glimmering shadows.” (Quoted in A.W. Schorger)

In *Illumination in the Flatwoods: A Season with the Wild Turkey*, Joe Hutto writes of how, on seeing him in the early morning, the 3-month old turkeys he was raising like a mother hen would drop from their tree limb, “stretch their wings and do their strange little dance, a joyful, happy dance, expressing an exuberance.”

Turkey embryos communicate with their mother and siblings from inside the egg long before they are born. Young turkeys stay close to their mother for 5 months before venturing off on their own.

**A mother turkey shelters her poults safe for the night.**  
*What Wings are For.*





**Mother turkey with her growing family in Jacksonville, Oregon.  
Photo by Jeff Borchers, The Kerulos Center, 2013.**

A turkey mother will fight a predator, such as a hawk, to the death to protect her young. An eyewitness in Virginia wrote: *“Now I have seen the turkey hen fight with a passion that would make the eagle seem tame.”*

*“I saw a turkey coming into the back field. She had about 10 babies. Without warning, the hen took off vertically as if she had stepped on a mine. About 20 feet off the ground, she intercepted and attacked a hawk that was coming in for a baby. The hen hit the hawk with her feet first and with her back almost parallel to the ground. The hawk flew toward the back of the field with the hen in pursuit. It turned back towards the babies, and the hen hit it again. They both fell about 10 feet and were fighting with their feet, until the hawk headed for the tree line and kept going. The hen returned to her babies. When they went back into the pines, the babies were very close to their mother’s feet. Wish you could have seen it.”*

# Life & Death on a Factory Farm

**Hatcheries throw away thousands of unwanted baby turkeys and chicks every day, hundreds of millions every year.**



*Photo courtesy of The Animals Voice*

**Factory-farm turkeys never know the comfort of a mother bird's wings or the joy of exploring the world with her.**

*Photo courtesy of The Animals Voice*



**The sensitive beak ends of turkeys and chickens are burned off as soon as they are born, causing excruciating pain and injury and making it difficult for them to preen their feathers and peck for food.**





**Newborn turkeys on a laser debeaking carousel in a mechanized hatchery.**



**“Free-range organic” young turkeys with surgically mutilated beaks at Diestel Turkey Ranch in California, a supplier to Whole Foods. The black ends of their beaks are crumbling off.** *Photo by East Bay Animal Advocates*

**Male and female turkeys are sexually assaulted by “milkers.”**





*photo source: Department of Animal Husbandry,  
Tamil Nadu Agricultural University*

**Jammed in crates, sick, scared, and injured young turkeys and chickens go to the slaughterhouse. All they have ever known of life is suffering, fear, and pain, which those who eat them consume in an endless recycling of violence.**

*It doesn't have to be this way.*



# **Amelia, A Turkey Beloved By All**

**Karen Davis's essay, distributed by the McClatchy-Tribune News Service, appeared in many newspapers at Thanksgiving, prompting kind words from people around the country.**

*Photo of Amelia by Davida G. Breier*



**Amelia got a  
chance to enjoy  
life at United  
Poultry  
Concerns.**

*Photo by Richard Cundari*



“We adopted Amelia as a young turkey in the fall of 2007 after a local farmer gave her up. She lived in our sanctuary until August of 2011 when her legs gave out and we had to call our veterinarian, a very kind man, to put her to rest in the yard surrounded by her friends. Until those last sad days she hung out with the chickens and ducks, sat with them under the trees in the afternoon, and when people visited she’d fan out her snow white tail feathers, just like a male turkey, and stroll with the visitors, never leaving their side.

She chose a leafy nesting spot which she hollowed out a little to lay her eggs in. In the evening she loved to stay outside with the ducks, poking around until the last minute of sinking sunlight, but when I called her, “Come on, Amelia, time for bed,” she would amble into her house with the ducks to join the chickens, already perched for the night. . . .”



**“I live in the woods, and there are owls and bears and turkeys and deer, and all kinds of free born creatures. I thought you would like this photo, out of my window, my bird feeder in winter.” – Artist & author Sue Coe, New York 2011**

Karen Davis with Priscilla and Mila, two female turkeys with very different personalities who were rescued from a factory farm to live at our sanctuary. Mila was always peaceful and serene. Priscilla was often moody and angry.

Photo of Karen, Mila and Priscilla by John McDonnell - *The Washington Post*



## **BORIS SPEAKS**

*You never really got to see  
The real turkey inside of me.  
The one with a body my frame could have supported,  
The one with feet where my toes weren't aborted.  
The one who could eat his food with a beak  
Like a real bird and not a geek.  
The one who wanted to have a mate  
But was too large to propagate.  
My life had one saving grace  
And it was Karen Davis's sanctuary place.  
Yes, a human too was she  
But one who took care of me.  
I only knew fear and pain,  
Now happiness did remain.  
Thank you Karen for giving me the chance  
To spread my feathers and do a turkey prance.  
In my last year, I almost got to be  
The real turkey inside of me.*

—Love, Boris



*Boris. Photo by Susan Rayfield*

# What Can We Do to Help Turkeys?



**“Free Birds!”**

# We Can Get to Know Turkeys

By Reading

## More Than a Meal

*The Turkey in History, Myth,  
Ritual, and Reality*



Karen Davis, Ph.D.

*"Not only is More Than a Meal an excellent account of the history of hunting, farming, and killing of the turkey, but it is a penetrating examination of the culture of Thanksgiving, in which the turkey plays a central and demeaning role."*—**Lesley Rogers**, Professor of Neuroscience and Animal Behaviour, University of New England, Australia

# By Discovering

**“Peeper: A Story of Unending Love”  
By Kathryn King in Scio, Ohio.**

**“Every night as he was growing up, if I got on the sofa and lay on my back, Peeper would fly up, lie on my chest, and lay his face by my face for me to pet and stroke him, and we would do this for hours. How many people would think this of a turkey?”**

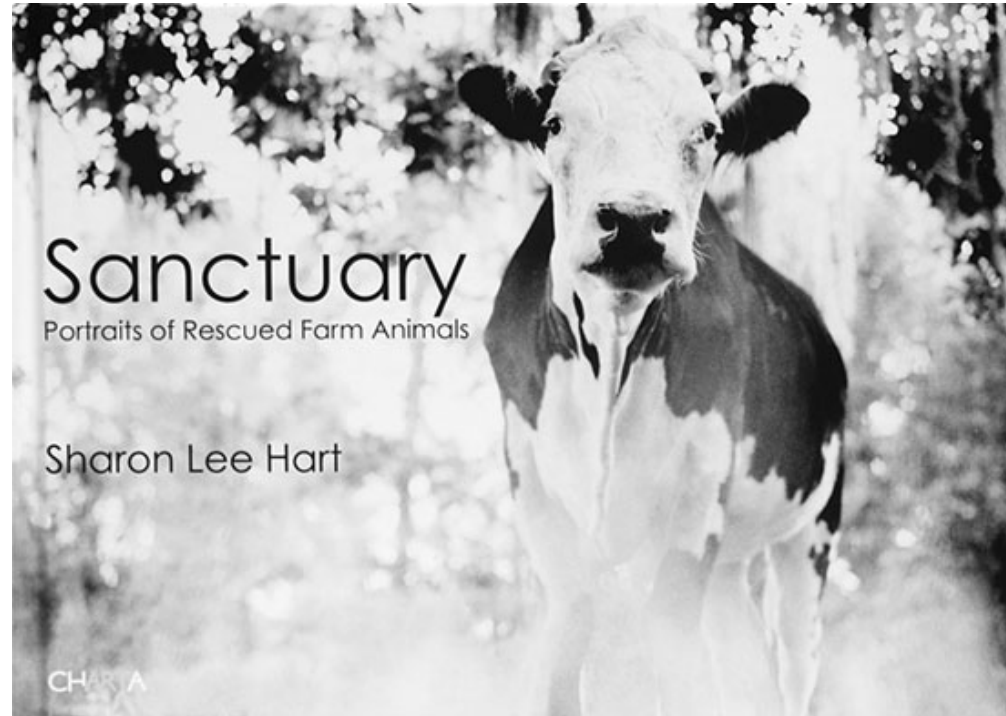


# By Visiting a Sanctuary

## *Sanctuary: Portraits of Rescued Farm Animals*

By Sharon Lee Hart  
Charta Books, 2012

SANCTUARY takes you on an intimate journey to meet wonderful animals and the courageous rescuers who become their companions. Everyone can “visit” a sanctuary by buying, reading & sharing SANCTUARY.





**New Jersey photographer Richard Cundari talks to an attentive Amelia at United Poultry Concerns' sanctuary in Virginia.**

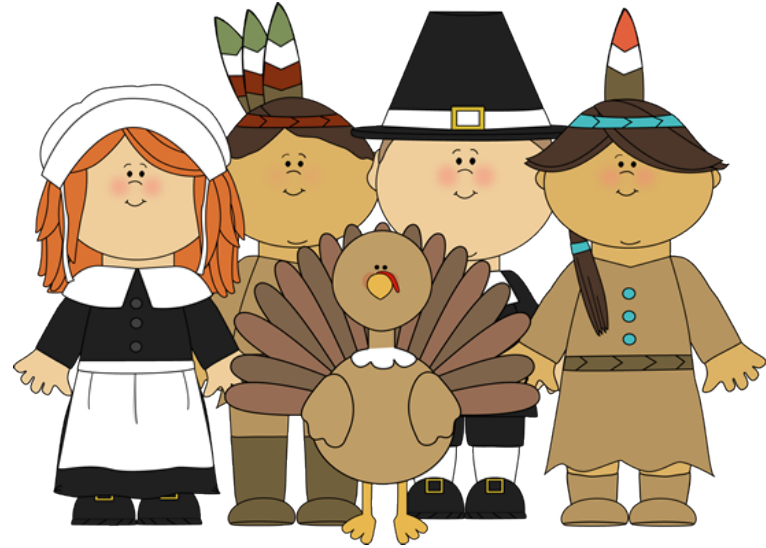
*Photo by Karen Davis*

# By Pioneering New Traditions



*Photo by Liqin Cao*

**Mrs. Gobble-Good's Golden Brown Pie**



# By Having a *Compassionate* Thanksgiving



*Photo by  
The Gentle Barn*

# A Turkey's Plea

*Photo by Susan Rayfield*

***"Don't Gobble Me!"  
-- Boris the Turkey***

***Turkeys are friends, not food  
- go vegan!***



# **Florence and Karen at UPC – What a Turkey Can Be When She is Almost Free!**

Photo by John H. Sheally, *The Virginian-Pilot*, November 25, 2004, Thanksgiving Day.



For more information, visit



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