

Times Union (Albany, N.Y.)

Section: Capital Region

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Date: Sunday, June 4, 2006

Edwina's great escape ends

Pet emu's flight for freedom concludes with safe return home

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GUILDERLAND - The great Guilderland emu chase ended safely with little more than a few feathers on a manicured suburban front lawn Saturday, after a two-day tour of the northern end of town.

Edwina the emu's adventure began when she escaped late Thursday from her pen at David Carpenter's farm on West Old State Road.

Carpenter had bunked his sheep and goats in the emu pen because he wanted to put up a volleyball net in the sheep pasture - in anticipation of a party Saturday for local neuroscience professionals. In addition to the animal husbandry, he teaches environmental health at the University at Albany.

The goats kicked a hole in the emu fence, and out Edwina dashed. A 4-foot-high fence farther out keeps in Carpenter's 15 head of cattle, but it couldn't contain Edwina. She got through that second fence and raced to freedom.

Carpenter had hoped she would return on her own, but it took a makeshift cavalry of Guilderland animal control, police and neighbors to corral her on Saturday afternoon, with the help of a leash and well-positioned tackle.

On Friday, she had swung by Lynnwood Elementary School, up the street from the farm, and created quite the buzz at the kindergarten graduation that day. By Saturday morning, she was touring the homes on Helderview Drive, a loop along Route 20 a few blocks from her home.

Carpenter speculated that Edwina escaped to compensate for being cooped up all spring caring for her first clutch of eggs.

Although emus can't fly, Edwina wasn't an easy bird to capture. Emus can also sprint up to 40 miles per hour, according to the Oakland Zoo Web site. And with their necks outstretched they stand almost 6 feet tall. Carpenter guessed that Edwina weighs about 140 pounds.

Carpenter said emus kick powerfully, but only in front - they can't kick behind.

A police call early Saturday alerted Carpenter to Edwina's position in a wooded area off of Route 20. A few hours later, she crossed the busy road to Helderview Drive where she picked her way across lawns and otherwise hung out in the rain.

Around 1:30 p.m., Guilderland's director of Animal Services, Richard Savage, along with Carpenter, several police officers and a handful of neighbors finally cornered the bird on Ron Vogel's lawn.

Savage tossed a leash around the bird's neck. It fell around her feet, but it hampered her running enough that a neighbor could tackle her from behind.

The group quickly wrestled the bird onto a stretcher. Carpenter covered her head with a white sports sock. Unable to see, she stopped struggling, he said.

"They're not afraid, they're not aggressive, but obviously when someone's chasing after them, they're not going to stand still," Carpenter said.

Vogel's son, Reid, and his Reid's friend Matt Potolski, both 9, witnessed all the action this week. The boys attend Lynwood Elementary school, and they had front-porch views of Saturday's capture.

"All the kids were wacky, like crazy excited," Matt said.

"It was kinda big, so I was wondering what it was," Reid said. "A couple of fifth-graders knew what it was."

With their afternoon baseball games rained out, the boys had already scavenged the yard for emu feather souvenirs.

Ron Vogel said his family has lived there about a decade.

"It's our first emu," he said. "I guess on a rainy day like this, it's good to have some excitement."

Back on the farm, a quiet, subdued Edwina lingered near the back of her pen. The only hint of her adventure were a few feathers hanging at odd angles.

She and her mate, Edwin, were a gift to Carpenter about 10 years ago.

Edwin didn't mind all the media lavishing attention on him and Edwina. He nipped gently at the sock Carpenter offered through the fence, the same one he used to hood Edwina.

Edwina also escaped last year, and three times before that. As one police officer walked back to his car, he waved and said, "We'll see you next year!"

Carpenter laughed.

The cows lowed. And Edwina continued to pick her way along the fence in the mud.