

Time and turkey: preserving nature takes patience

"There is a way that nature speaks, that land speaks. Most of the time, we are simply not patient enough, quiet enough, to pay attention to the story."

—Linda Hogan

A turkey is a turkey is a turkey. Or not.

In this season of thanks, cornucopias and the glorious bird, we might learn a thing or two from the "Chocolate Turkeys," more accurately "Dindon de Chocolat." This is a species that Loudon holistic farmer Jim Czack and his wife and business partner Annette Young work every day to preserve, along with the Embden Goose and a few other rare species.

Czack is a foodie, son of a master chef, livestock and poultry historian, geneticist, and farmer rolled into



D. QUINCY WHITNEY

one, obsessed with genetic preservation and the patient lifestyle essential to its survival.

These turkeys, documented to the 1550s in France where a group of Jesuits became master breeders of Chocolate turkeys, were most likely transported to America during the Civil War, through trade between

France and the south at Charleston. With the establishment of the post-World War II economy and the modern agricultural system, the days of the Chocolate turkey were numbered—critically endangered by the turn of the last century.

In 2007, Czack, living in Rye, agreed to his wife's request to get some chickens. Turkeys followed when Czack, upon consulting the Livestock Conservancy, found that the Chocolate Turkey was endangered. In 2010, upon acquiring their Chocolate breeders, Czack and Young began their first genetic preservation project. They named their farm Elevage de Volailles (poultry breeding farm) in deference and gratitude to the early genetic preservation work of the French Jesuits.

Czack and Young eventually purchased a farm in Loudon where today they raise waterfowl, poultry, and livestock in what can only be described as "the old-fashioned way," using patient animal husbandry skills synchronized with nature. When you look around the meticulously kept 70-acre farm, you see a collection of waterfowl, poultry and livestock that are as gorgeous to look at as they are rare.

When Jim got tired of mowing grass, he decided to turn the grass over to rams and goats who would do an even better job. He acquired Black Welsh Mountain Sheep, of which there are only about 10,000 in the world, known historically in Wales as "The King's Mutton." Then came the Boer Goats, grass-eat-

ing goats (meat) goats; Nubian Goats (dairy); and San Clemente Island Goats, domesticated just 40 years ago on San Clemente Island in California, of which there are only about 500 in the world.

Add to that roster endangered Pekin ducks; Rouen Fonce ducks and Embden Geese. Raising turkeys, geese and ducks requires three to five different timetables. Raising ducks incorporates three different harvest times — seven weeks, 12 weeks and 18 weeks — roughly from March to December.

"What's the point of raising waterfowl, poultry and livestock if you don't listen to them," said Czack simply. But the process of listening means changing the paradigm from factory production to nature's

timetable. Instead of fighting time and space, Jim embraces both.

Unlike typical "free range" grazing that involves moving a herd from grazing lot to grazing lot, Czack moves his herds and flocks every day, via mobile fencing, to 30 different paddocks each month, timed according to digestion science and a 30-day life cycle of naturally occurring parasites. The grass-feces-life cycle grazing makes the breed stronger and the pasture more fertile and sustainable.

Consumers and most chefs don't really want to know about the patience part. "They glaze over when I try to explain. They really don't want to know," Czack said.