

When you first move to the country and decide a small farm is your chosen lifestyle, its amazing how really little you know. But what's even more amazing is how fast you have to learn.

"Free to good home" is a term often used when livestock is being offered. We were vigilant for adds with "free to good home" in them as it was a great way of stocking our small holding. Perhaps people advertising in this way should be obliged to expand on *why* it is free and *why* they want to get rid of it.....

We had been breeding turkeys for a little while in the hope of having free range turkeys for Christmas. Nothing like sitting down to a family Christmas with the knowledge that you had grown the vegies, hatched the turkeys and fattened the duck. Great pride in being able to say that. That is, so long as the kids are willing to eat "Clucky Ducky" and "Gobbly the turkey" but that's another story.

We had been scouring the classifieds for a gobbler to add some new blood to our turkey clan. In passing, a neighbour said he that had one we could have. He was a beauty. White feathered, large framed, big legs and a proven breeder. I suppose that is when the question should have arose "why are you giving him away". His kids had a sort of wry smile as we drove away with our new prize turkey. I think they partied late into the night.

It wasn't long before this very large white gobbler started to impress his personality on the place.

At first we thought he was just trying to establish himself in the pecking order. He was rough with the other turkeys, chooks, ducks and even geese but that is normal isn't it? An occasional fight was to be expected when you introduce new blood, and he would settle in and the others would get used to him. Not long after that though, he seemed to be being avoided by the others. Even turkey hens, who crave the attention of eligible young males, seemed to cower in the corner to avoid the great white gobbler.

That's when his attention switched to humans. Toes were his favorite. If you went to feed the chooks in thongs or sandals, your toes were fair game. Caused quite a giggle really, when his pecks at your toes made you dance like

you were being shot at in an old cowboy movie. That is until he actually got you. But that was only the beginning.

As his confidence grew he would start a ritual of ambush. He would lull you into a false sense of security by pecking and scratching around, appearing to ignore you. But as soon as you entered the pen and were clear of an easy exit, he would attack you from behind, claws first, flying at your legs. Wellies had become required wearing to protect your toes. To feed the turkeys now, you needed to balance on one leg and keep the gobbler at bay with the other by putting it on the gobbler's chest.

With gobbler puffed up and gobbling and you keeping him at bay with your foot, the turkeys really didn't get that great a feed. Our instinct had now become to reach the gate and toss the food in without entering. He would still try and get you through the wire, just for good measure.

Checking for eggs was an even bigger drama.

Taking the advice of the local experts, we had 44 gallon drums filled with straw for turkey nests. They worked great, and the hens were happy to lay an abundance of eggs in them, that was until you had to bend down and reach inside to collect the eggs for incubation. That was now life threatening. The bicycle stack hat and garden rake were mandatory attire and gave some protection, but this gobbler was not only crazy, he was very determined. It was a rare day that some of the eggs didn't get used as missiles to assist with your escape. With all the drama surrounding the turkeys we began to have second thought about the pleasures of country living.

Attacks progressed to the gobbler flying at you head high, all 20 kilos of feathers and spikes, like a half grown Emu with attitude. The war wounds were mounting. From small scratches and bruises to pulled hammies as we sprinted to clear the pen.

Even the dogs had ruled out heading down to the turkeys, once one of their favorite haunts. The menace of the white gobbler had taken over. Our small acreage wasn't big enough for the two of us, one of us had to go.....

Sitting down to Christmas dinner that year was a relief in many ways. Another year over full of hard work and great experiences and, for the first time the kids had no problem eating the Christmas turkey and even asked for seconds to make sure he was gone forever.

We see those nieghbours sometimes, but we never let on and they never ask. I would hate to let them have the satisfaction of knowing they got us poor city folks trying to be farmers.

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