



Two Sandhill cranes and their colts have a visitor during breakfast.

When Pigs Can Fly

Barrington Hills Farm's two major wetland ponds, its vast crop acreage, and a dedication to Certified Organic farming methods provide perfect habitat for Sandhill crane nurseries. I have observed one pair of Sandhills nesting in one or the other of the ponds over the past three years.

The first year, 2016, they nested on the Chapel Road pond and successfully fledged our "King of the Road" colt (featured in the May/June 2017 QB). In 2017, they hatched two colts from the farm's Spring Creek Road pond. Those colts appeared to be healthy when hatched, had a lot of energy, and fought constantly. They both disappeared within three weeks' time. Coyotes, hawks, owls? Who can say what grabbed them?

In 2018, the adult pair hatched and successfully fledged two more colts from that same pond.

Birding experts estimate that the average survival rate for a Sandhill pair is .3 colts per brood per year. In three years, the Barrington Hills pair successfully fledged three birds in three years—a one bird per year average.

While doing research on Sandhills, I learned that in some areas of Canada and the United States (only Tennessee, east of the Mississippi) Sandhills are thought to be overly abundant and hunting permits are allowed. Bag limits are two to three birds per day. Unlike "nuisance" birds (to fishermen especially) like the Cormorant, some hunters actually eat Sandhills instead of composting them. There is considerable disparity of opinion on what the birds taste like. Some say they are the "rib-eye of the sky". Others remark that the birds are tough and stringy and can't be eaten without having gravy poured over them. Imagine the size of a drumstick, 12 inches for sure. Still others say they taste like pork chops. Pork chops?

Me, I don't know, I have not tasted them.

I'll find out "when pigs can fly". 

Paul McFadden has lived in unincorporated Algonquin for nearly 50 years. The Barrington Hills area and Barrington Hills Farm offer opportunities for his camera work with nature.



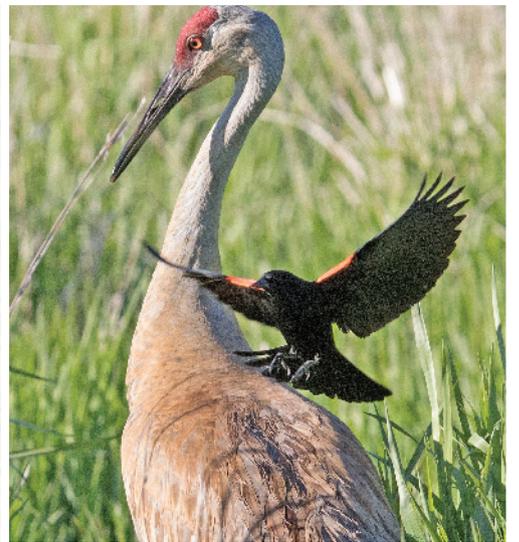
The hungry colts are up with the rising sun.



The colt learns how to turn the worm from the ground.



Colt siblings squabble at breakfast.



A blackbird gets in on the action.



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The Sandhill crane keeps a close eye on the colt at feeding time.



www.barringtonhillsfarm.org

Barrington Hills Farm is 700 acres of pristine, undeveloped land located at Haegers Bend and Spring Creek Roads in the northwestern most corner of Barrington Hills. The rarity of Barrington Hills lies in its open space, fresh air, clean water, and abundant wildlife. The land is precious and delicate and in constant need of stewardship to keep it that way.