



HOME ON THE RANGE

THREE RING RANCH EXOTIC ANIMAL SANCTUARY

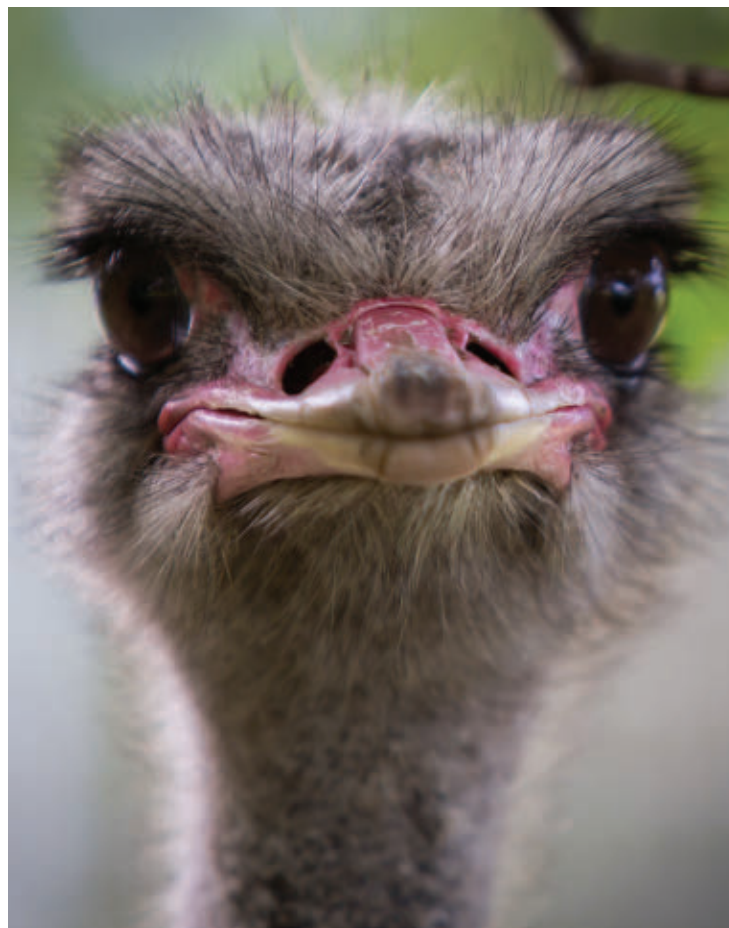
WORDS BY EKUA IMPRAIM

In a quiet subdivision above Kailua-Kona, Dr. Ann Goody has a wild surprise in her backyard. Her and her husband Norm house a number of improbable animals on their property, including a blonde zebra, monkeys, pink flamingos, and an assortment of parrots. You can view the animals on a tour of the 5-acre property, but the animals have not been brought here simply for enjoyment. The Goodys' property is a much-needed refuge for animals that have been abandoned, abused, or injured. It's called the *Three Ring Ranch Exotic Animal Sanctuary* and it's home to a variety of animals that are cared for and rehabilitated with the help of Ann, Norm, and a team of dedicated volunteers.

The non-profit ranch is the only USDA-licensed, fully accredited animal sanctuary in the state of Hawai'i. Hawai'i has strict rules around issuing possession permits due to the state's worries about non-native species escaping into its fragile ecosystem, so obtaining a permit was no easy task. But with persistence, the Three Ring Ranch was able to prove its adeptness at caring for the animals it receives and has been carrying out its mission to promote environmental responsibility since it was founded in 1998.

You'll know you have arrived at the ranch when you spot a zebra-shaped mailbox, although the first actual animals I encounter during my visit are two large, friendly dogs. As the morning volunteers finish their duties, Ann emerges to greet those who have come for the tour. At the very beginning, she informs everyone that the main purpose of the tour is to educate people about how to interact with animals. While the ranch provides guests with a wonderful opportunity to get up close and personal with exotic animals, it is clear that the animals have ended up there because of mistreatment by humans. Almost always, the mistreatment has been accidental, and Ann wants to teach people better ways of caring for and approaching animals.

Throughout the tour, Ann shares the animals' stories and their journeys to recovery. She encourages guests to feed and interact with many of the animals while explaining the best way to approach each species. With a keen understanding of both human and animal tendencies, Ann tries to help visitors understand each animal's thought



process when it is approached by a human through interactive demonstrations. She gives thorough explanations of why an animal may react adversely to certain types of human sounds, contact, or body language due to each species' natural inclinations to avoid predators or mate in the wild.

Some of what she says may shock animal lovers as they realize that what they have viewed as harmless petting and interaction may actually be perceived as threatening to an animal. But ultimately, the goal is not to make guests feel bad about their past actions. Rather,

the Three Ring Ranch aims to inspire people to be more mindful in their future interactions with animals. This includes encounters with animals outside the ranch. While Ann understands that travelers are often excited to see wild animals, she encourages people to stay quiet and observe them from a distance including the *honu* (green sea turtles) and spinner dolphins people may encounter as they explore the warm waters of Hawai'i.

One of the more unlikely animals at the ranch is a bison named Cody. Ann talks visitors through the careful process of walking up to Cody in a non-threatening way before allowing everyone to feed him carrots. An even more unlikely scenario than a bison living in Kona is that the bison's best friend is a donkey. Throughout the ranch, certain animals have been carefully paired with other species to support rehabilitation. Much of the ranch's knowledge about what works in terms of animal pairings has been gleaned through a substantial amount of observation, and the ranch has plans to publish its findings in the future.

Some of the most troubling animal stories are those of the various types of parrots at the ranch. Showy feathers, humorous dance moves, and the ability to speak often endear parrots to humans, but inappropriate care can have a drastic impact on the birds. Ann emphasizes that much of the abuse is unintentional, explaining that people "were using animals for their own means without considering what the animals need." The parrots at the ranch are all in various stages of recovery from mistreatment, and each bird has its own rehabilitation program that might include a daily dance session.



While Ann focuses on the stories of animals, she has overcome harrowing struggles in her own life. She has been struck by lightning, attacked by a shark, and survived a battle with breast cancer. As you tour the ranch with Ann, you sense that she understands the fragility of life for both humans and other species. She is passionate about spending her life doing what she loves, and she pursues her mission to promote environmental responsibility through the ranch's programs with urgency.

Tours are a small part of what happens daily at the Three Ring Ranch. Volunteers help with the day-to-day operations of the ranch, and more volunteers are always needed. Educating youth is an important component of the Three Ring Ranch's mission as they hope to teach children how to better interact with animals and become environmental stewards while they are young. This helps ensure that the knowledge imparted will be sustained, and it inspires young people to become animal advocates. In addition to weekly and biweekly educational programs for local youth, future veterinarians also have the opportunity to participate in internships and externships at Three Ring Ranch.

At the end of her tours, Ann takes visitors to a room that holds goods that were made from endangered animals such as fur coats and medicines that purport grandiose results. The products in the room were sent to the Three Ring Ranch to be used as part of their educational programs. Ann tells the stories behind the products and explains how some of her students are working on creating designs that resemble animal skins, but are made from other materials. This may not resolve all of issues around endangered animals, but the hope is that creating these replicas will curtail people's desire to buy products made with endangered animal skins.

This hopefulness captures the atmosphere at the Three Ring Ranch. While it is a place of challenging stories, the tales do not end with sadness. Instead, the organization operates with optimism and determination to change the trajectory of each story. Getting a glimpse of what the Three Ring Ranch does by joining one of their educational tours is both enlightening and exhilarating. It's a rare and exciting opportunity to see exotic animals up close, and you leave with an increased awareness of how to better coexist with the vast array of species that inhabit our planet.

Three Ring Ranch Exotic Animal Sanctuary offers educational tours upon request. Tours begin at 11am and last around two hours. Tours must be arranged in advance. For more information or to reserve a tour, email visit@threeringranch.org or call (808) 331-8778 to check availability.



