

A woman with short white hair, wearing a white t-shirt and shorts, is crouching on a grassy field. She is reaching out with her right hand to touch the nose of a large tortoise. The tortoise is facing her. In the background, there are two zebras grazing in a field of tall grass. There are several large, leafy trees scattered throughout the landscape under a bright sky.

# SANCTUARY

The sweet, strange and miraculous tale  
of Three Ring Ranch

STORY BY MICHAEL SHAPIRO PHOTOS BY SERGIO GOES



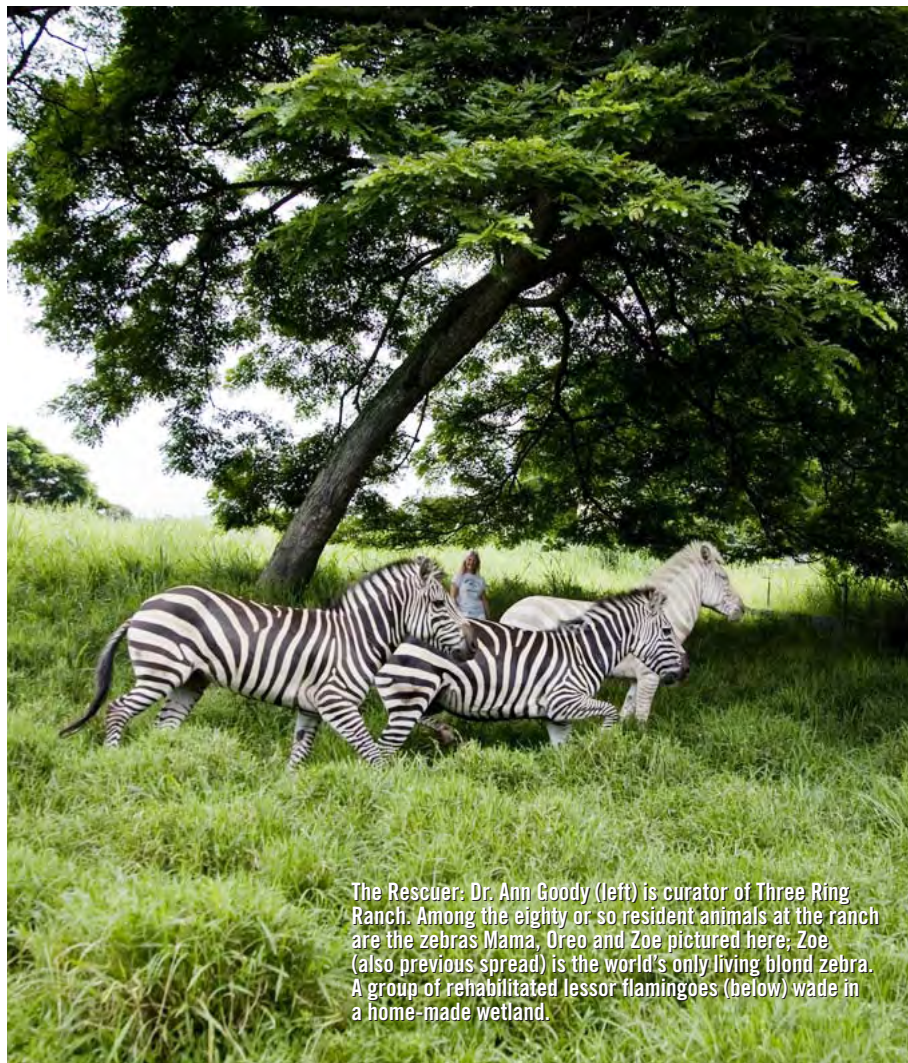
## Sanctuary

**K**eaolani, above Kailua-Kona, is a land of multi-acre plots and million-dollar homes, a realm of effortful lawns and winding driveways. A place where if you plant flowers of the wrong color, you could get a letter of complaint from your neighbor's lawyer (true story). So as you drive by the property with its mailbox resembling a zebra, you might be surprised to see a woman in surgical scrubs piloting a tractor into her garage. That woman, so small she's almost swallowed by the machine, is Dr. Ann Goody, curator of Three Ring Ranch. Rather than sink their savings into a



McMansion and live the Kona dream, Ann and her husband Norm turned their 5-acre lot into what is today Hawai'i's sole federally accredited nonprofit exotic animal sanctuary, one of only thirty-eight in the country.

Ann and Norm started out in 1998 with five animals; today the ranch is home to more than eighty. Its residents are an eclectic menagerie of exotic creatures (that is, exotic to Hawai'i) who were abandoned or abused by their owners, seized in raids, or rescued from failed zoos: zebras, oryx, parrots, llamas, chinchillas, guinea pigs, lesser flamingoes, tortoises, barn owls, a rare and ostentatious South African crowned crane. There are also a few natives who suffered injuries so severe that they can never live in the wild again: a pair of 'io, endangered Hawaiian hawks, and several *nēnē*, Hawaiian geese. In fact, all the residents will live out their natural lives here. "This is *their* home," says Ann, whose fiery devotion to the animals is the driving force sustaining the ranch. "We just work here." She's not being glib;



The Rescuer: Dr. Ann Goody (left) is curator of Three Ring Ranch. Among the eighty or so resident animals at the ranch are the zebras Mama, Oreo and Zoe pictured here; Zoe (also previous spread) is the world's only living blond zebra. A group of rehabilitated lesser flamingoes (below) wade in a home-made wetland.



the ranch is legally entrusted to the animals, some of whom—like Pele, the self-mutilating eclectus parrot who warbles "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," or Goliath, the 260-pound tortoise whose owner had deliberately overfed him to induce gigantism—will probably outlive their human caretakers.

Ann can tell you every animal's story of suffering and salvation, but none may be more poignant, fortuitous and magical than her own. She had been living in Big

Bear, California, pursuing a nursing career and volunteering for the Bureau of Land Management and the US Fish & Wildlife Service to rehabilitate injured wild animals. Then, in 1994, lightning struck: She won a trip to Hawai'i by peeling a contest label off a McDonald's soda cup. She loved the Islands so much that five months after she returned to California, she entered an essay contest sponsored by a local magazine. The topic: "Why I deserve a vacation." The prize: a trip to Hawai'i. She won. She returned, and this time, she stayed. Though she had loved working with animals, she intended to pursue nursing; she had no intention of starting a sanctuary. But the universe, it seems, cares little for our intentions.

Enter Dr. Norm Goody, then an anesthesiologist at Kona Community Hospital. Norm, whose subdued demeanor belies a quiet intensity, was struck by his own form of lightning: Ann. After a whirlwind courtship lasting almost a full week, Ann agreed to marry him. "He was a catch, you know," she says. "Nice doctor,

## Sanctuary

never been married.” Then, the day after their wedding, lightning struck again. This time, literally.

Ann Goody should have been killed. “The lightning struck my head, burned into my chest,” she says. “Smoke came out of my nose and mouth, my eyelashes were burned off.” She suffered brain damage so severe that she had to relearn walking and talking. Tenacious and optimistic, Ann fought her way back and



**Norm Goody greets David the tortoise and Chops the sheep**

within a year returned to her job administering a large health care organization in Kona while simultaneously working to complete her doctorate.

During her convalescence, Norm and Ann went snorkelling off Miloli‘i, where nature gave Ann the second of what she calls her “idiot slaps”: She was attacked by a tiger shark. It nailed her hard enough to launch her clear out of the water, but she was again impossibly lucky; it hadn’t bit her. Beachgoers who witnessed the attack were amazed she was alive, much less unharmed.

Even without a gratuitous shark attack, Ann’s recovery from the lightning strike was as difficult as it was astonishing, and she had her tough days. On one of them, in 1998, Norm asked, “What can I do to help?” She replied, as a joke, “Oh, I’d love a zebra.”

But Norm, to his credit, can’t take a joke. As fate would have it, he’d just read (in the pages of *Hana Hou!*) about the Moloka‘i Ranch Safari Park, a zoo that kept zebras. He called to see whether he could arrange to buy a foal. As fate would again have it, the park had recently closed, and its owners were trying to place the animals, including their zebras. The

lucky ones found homes in other zoos; others were not so lucky. “A couple of friendly, tame eland became the barbecue at the Moloka‘i High School graduation,” says Ann. “Lucky and Wahine were their names.” A barge full of animals—antelope, barbary sheep, eland—was shipped to Ni‘ihau for private canned hunts. But the seas near shore were too rough to land, “so they shoved the animals off the barge and let them swim for it,” says Ann. “A lot didn’t make it.” In all, some 400 animals from the Moloka‘i Ranch Safari Park didn’t survive its closure.

Because Ann was licensed to care for wild animals, Moloka‘i Ranch enthusiastically invited her to come over and take her pick. “I chose animals I thought no one would want,” she says. One of them was Oreo, a “very pregnant” zebra. The day after they corralled her into a pen at the Safari Park, Oreo went into labor. Fate struck again: She gave birth to Zoe, a blond filly. “Not an albino,” says Ann. “Zoe has blue eyes and gold stripes. She’s a *blond*.” Blond zebras are impossibly rare; they occur only once in about three million births. They don’t survive in the wild because they’re targeted by predators. Only two are known to have been kept in captivity: one in a German zoo in the early 1900s and another in Tokyo in the 1970s. Zoe, who today happily grazes the pasture at Three Ring Ranch, is the only living blond zebra known to exist in the world. Oreo, Ann’s first animal, a zebra nobody wanted, had birthed a filly worth seven figures, a literal million-dollar baby.

Ann and Norm returned to the Big Island with their new family (the two zebras along with two oryx, and Frazier, the South African crowned crane) to continue their careers. But then, in 2002, Ann received her third idiot slap, this one a close-fisted sucker-punch: malignant breast cancer. “They said: ‘You might not make it to the end of the year.’” But the doctors perhaps underestimated Ann’s tenacity (and ridiculous luck). After surgery, chemo and radiation therapy, she’s now in her fifth year of remission.

Rather than cast herself as some hapless victim of a recurring cosmic joke, Ann, like most successful people, saw her misfortunes as opportunities—indeed, as imperatives—to change her life. She decided to quit her job and focus on the ranch full time. Norm continued to work at the hospital for a few more years before he, too, quit. Now they sustain the ranch (and themselves) on savings, investments

## Sanctuary

and donations. “Some people know right away what they’re supposed to do in life. I had to get hit by lightning, to get cancer, to be tossed in the air by a shark to realize that I needed to focus on what I do best. Now it’s about what I do for the animals. This is what I’ve done every day for the last nine years. And I love it.”

And they are extremely good at it. Every animal that lives on the ranch has its own daily “enrichment” regime; whatever an animal needs, it gets. For chinchillas, it’s a twice-daily dust bath (Furby, the anti-social chinchilla, gets his own cage and bathes separately). For the lesser flamingoes rescued from the Hawai’i Tropical Botanical Gardens near Hilo (where the climate is too moist for lessors), it’s a food blend that the Goodys developed themselves. That feed has proved so effective that the San Diego Zoo now uses it. But it isn’t only with meeting the daily needs of the resident exotics that the Goodys are successful: According to US Fish & Wildlife data,



Three Ring Ranch has one of the western region’s best track records in rehabilitating and reintroducing natives and migrants like *pueo* (short-eared owls), shearwaters, night herons, tropicbirds, a rare golden ‘io and, recently, a critically endangered hoary bat.

Their success isn’t the result of the Goodys’ unflagging dedication only; Ann also has a rare ability to read animals that, to an onlooker, edges on telepathy. “You’ve got lab work and x-rays, but if you listen,” she says, “the animal will tell you what’s wrong. It’s the tiniest thing—a twitch in the nostril, a tremble in the shoulder. Animals talk to you nonstop with their bodies.” To understand them, she says, requires a “whole different way of being receptive.”

She demonstrates by approaching Voodoo Princess, a resident horse. “You never reach for a horse’s face,” she explains. “They don’t understand hands, since they don’t have any.” She stands sideways, still and relaxed. When Voodoo lifts her nose to Ann’s face, she turns and blows softly into the horse’s nostril. Voodoo’s ears relax, her head bows. “You let the horse come to you, and you exchange breath, because that’s how horses greet each other,” she says, stroking Voodoo’s forehead. “Then your hands can go anywhere. That’s what they call ‘whispering.’ It’s not magic.” But what may seem magical to those who speak only human is Ann’s ability to communicate with every kind of animal she encounters, no matter the species, and understand what it’s saying. “She’ll pick up a wild animal and examine it with her bare hands,” Norm says, “while all the veterinarians are wearing big gloves.” Norm is learning to see some of the things Ann naturally picks up, but he still finds her ability mysterious. “It’s a skill not everyone has; some people are musicians, some are painters. It’s her gift.”

Ann, though, is confident that her skill is not innate; it can be taught, so the ranch’s primary mission, aside from caring for the animals, is education. The ranch runs a residential program affiliated with UC Davis and UC Berkeley; second- and third-year veterinary students live in the Goodys’ home at the ranch to earn credit for animal communication and behavior. Local students also intern at the ranch, many of whom go on to veterinary school and plan to return to practice in the Islands. The ranch has a “100 percent success rate,” says Ann, in helping her interns get accepted to veterinary schools, which are more competitive than medical schools. At the moment, the Goodys are applying for grants to expand their education and outreach programs by building a classroom facility on the grounds.

Given the way the wheels of fate have spun for Ann, the future of the ranch promises to be a wild ride. “I have the best and worst luck,” she says. “As long as you keep your sense of humor, it’s really fun. I’ve had some hard fights, but how many people can walk around and scratch a zebra or teach kids? This is totally cool.” HH

To arrange a tour of Three Ring Ranch, visit [www.threeringranch.org](http://www.threeringranch.org) or call (808) 331-8778.