

# The Year the Peacocks Visited Me

By Tom Mayhew

It happened one day in late August 2011. There I was, an enthusiastic amateur photographer and rose gardener, having photographed all the things around my home – the roses, the dahlias, the birds, the various animals, the people visiting my rose garden, and I was wondering what to photograph next around my home. I was thankful that I had so many opportunities to photograph so many interesting things, right here in my own yard and home. I was sitting inside the house and happened to look up and glance out the window, and to my surprise, there was a peacock looking into my window. I suppose he was wondering what was going on in the house. I quickly grabbed one of my cameras, which are normally lying on the dining room table, always ready for a sudden photographic opportunity in my yard and I photographed him looking in the window at me. This was my first photograph of a peacock and this was to go on for quite some time, a full year of many photographs until it ended in late July 2012, when the PA State Constable caught the last of the peacocks, which he had taken one by one to a farm in North Bucks County PA, where they could live a normal peacock life, free ranging on a farm.



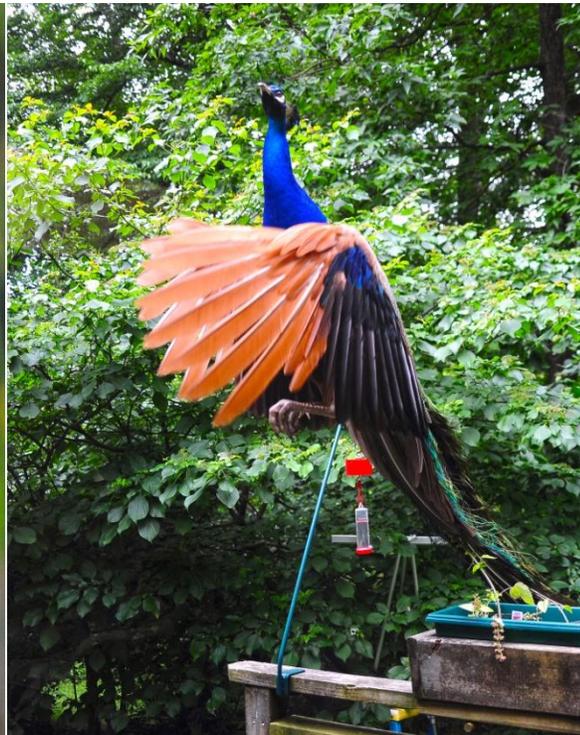
Peacock at my Front Door

## The Year the Peacocks Visited Me

The peacocks that visited my yard were actually a group of four male peacocks and one female peahen. It is the male peacock that has the beautiful iridescent feathers and the large spreading tail feathers which he often displays in order to attract the female peahen and also to make himself look larger when confronting his competitors. The peacock also has colorful orange wingtip feathers, which are normally tucked away under his body and are not very obvious when he is strutting around showing off his tail feathers. But these colorful orange wingtips are very obvious when he is flying. The female peahen is rather plain in color and does not have the beautiful tail feathers. The male peacock grows a new set of tail feathers every year. His tail feathers are at their best during the mating season, which occurs in the March-May time period in my area in Langhorne, PA just north of Philadelphia, PA. The peacocks drop their tail feathers in July and then start to grow new tail feathers. By November the peacock's tail feathers look good again and are fairly long. The peacocks can handle the outdoor weather conditions, including the snow, year round in the Philadelphia, PA area. The peacocks and peahens can fly and typically spend the night time roosting high in large trees like Beech, Oak and Tulip trees which are prevalent in my neighborhood. The visiting peacocks went through their yearly cycle of growing new tail feathers, competing amongst themselves for the affection of the lone peahen, flying onto rooftops or into trees when disturbed, sometimes calling to each other when separated or when gathering for the night and oftentimes just resting on railings or chairs. One of their favorite resting and sunning spots was on the railings on my back porch, just outside my sunroom windows.



**Peacock Looking in my Window**



**Leaping onto my Roof - Orange Wingtips**

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The four peacocks and one peahen that visited me had escaped from a man who kept them in a cage about a half mile from my house. He did not seem to be very interested in getting them back, so they roamed the area and decided they liked my neighborhood and so they roosted at night in the tall Beech Trees in my neighbor's yard across the street and they visited and often stayed for long periods in my yard every day. In the evenings as it started to get dark, the peacocks often could be seen coming down the street, returning from their day's activities. They would go up my neighbor's driveway, fly onto his roof and from there, they would fly into the large Beech Trees. It would take them a while to get settled in the trees into their positions for the night. You could hear them squawking and talking until they settled down for the night. During their visit, I was able to walk amongst them and photograph them at will in their various activities. I think they considered me one of them, and they would often spread their tail feathers (in defiance ?) as I approached them and so I was able to get many close-up photos of this action of theirs. The peacocks seemed to be in competition for the acceptance of the peahen and sometimes the males would peck at each other for domination. Sometimes the peacocks would walk in circles as a group, occasionally stopping to display their extended tail feathers in defiance of each other. Because I was with them a lot and had close-up photos of each, I was able to tell them apart and I could identify each one. One peacock had what looked like a white star on the front of his neck and so I called him "white star". I think he was my favorite (but he didn't get the girl). Eventually the female accepted one of the peacocks (he was the largest, not "white star") and they paired up, often perching on the railing together. The peacocks would eat the vegetation that they liked in the yard and we observed that they preferred dry cat food pellets that a neighbor put out for her outside cats. I did not feed the peacocks, but I once did an experiment, putting out three options for them and their choices were, first dry cat food pellets, second a birdseed mix and third, dry dog food pellets. I later found on a visit to the Grounds for Sculpture Facility in Hamilton NJ, which has about 20 peacocks and a peacock house on their vast 42 acre grounds, that they feed dry cat food to their peacocks. Another facility feeds their peacocks a food mix for wild fowl.



**One Peahen with Four Peacocks**



**The Chosen Pair – Peahen and Peacock**

## The Year the Peacocks Visited Me



**Peacock Close-up**



**Peacock Flying off My Roof**



**3 Peacocks and Peahen on My Porch**



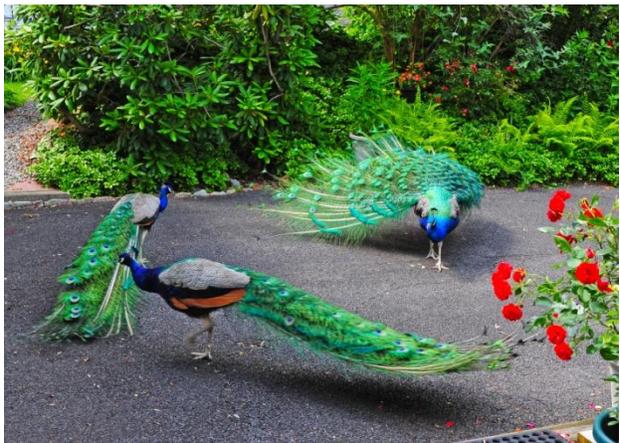
**4 Peacocks Follow Peahen in Snow**

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Although the peacocks provided a lot of entertainment, they sometimes could be very annoying. Besides the noise that they occasionally made, they seemed to have a natural predisposition to get up onto things – like rooftops and trees. One of the other things they liked to do was to get up onto automobiles. Because I keep my car in my garage, I did not have any problem with this. But visitors to my house and some of my neighbors would occasionally have trouble with peacocks getting on top of their cars. Because the peacocks are competitive, they are sometimes irritated by their own reflection in the sides of a shiny car, thinking it is another peacock. They would stalk around a car and study their reflection, sometimes pecking at it. The peacocks did not seem to disturb the roses in my rose garden, but they would often parade through the garden, sometimes in single file, pecking at plant life and insects in the ground. I noticed that they liked the berries on the Lantana plants. They often rested for long times in the sun, on railings, chairs, other perches or rooftops but at other times they would seek out and rest under the shade of large shrubs. They operated as a group and kept track of each other.



**Peacock on Car in Driveway**



**Peacocks Circling Each Other**



**Peacocks Eating Vegetation & Berries**



**Peacock and Rose Garden**

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It was at the end of the mating season in 2012, when the peacocks were being relocated, and their numbers were being reduced as a group, that the remaining peacocks became more irritated. When it got down to one last peacock in July, he became aggressive. One day when I was standing at the street curb talking to a lady who was visiting my rose garden, we were surprised when he walked up behind us and pecked her on the back of her leg. I reported the incident to the township and the PA State Constable. Then later, as I was filling a bird feeder with seed, he jumped up at me in one of his fighting stances - two feet out and claws forward, but I fended him off with the bird feeder. I think he considered me to be the equivalent of one of his former peacock competitors and therefore he needed to dominate me. We two had a few aggressive encounters after that, me with a broom or a water hose, and he with his stalking me, trying to get "too close for comfort". But the PA State Constable soon caught him with a net and that ended our "Alpha" male peacock duel. I think It would have been better if the group of five peacocks had stayed together. But we enjoyed the peacocks the year they were here.



**Peacocks Roosting in Tree at Night    Three Peacocks Meandering thru Garden**



**4 Peacocks - Sept 25, 2011 - Short Tail Feathers - 3 Peacocks on My Porch Roof**

## The Year the Peacocks Visited Me



**Sept 25, 2011 Tail Feathers Not Developed - Nov 15, 2011 Tail Feathers Longer**



**Jan 25, 2012 Tail Feathers Developed**



**June 6, 2012 Tail Feathers Very Long**

## The Year the Peacocks Visited Me



**Dueling Peacocks**



**Peacock Flying Off Back Porch Railing**



**Peacocks in the Snow**