



Furry,
Feathery,



& other



Friendly

Footsteps

at *Firewheel...*





“Homes and Habitats”

Limerick by Greg Yearsley

*When you're in the Hills
There are many wildlife thrills.
Dwellers feath'ry and furry,
Do waddle and scurry,
So enjoy the natural frills!*

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Acknowledgements

There are many reasons why families appreciate living in the Hills at Firewheel.



The people are friendly, the community is pleasant, the homes are well-maintained, and there is an abundance of wildlife to enjoy.





With a pond on the edge of the neighborhood, the golf course and park across the street, and a nearby pasture with cattle grazing, the Hills at Firewheel is a natural sanctuary.



It's not surprising that many residents have memorable critter encounters to share. Please enjoy these true stories – all occurred right here in Garland.

Rambling Rummaging Raccoon

Just after closing time on an otherwise quiet night at the neighborhood pool, there was much scrabbling and commotion as a huge head attached to a tremendous barrel-shaped body squeezed out the cone-shaped top of a trash container near the exit gate.

After flopping onto the patio, an XL-sized raccoon shuffled in a hurry of panic towards the nearest fence gap and disappeared into the darkness.

An eye witness who saw the entire event was not able to provide a positive identification afterwards – after all, the fleeing escapee had a mask on its face!



Playing Possum



When one resident noticed that her Jack Russell terrier was digging furiously along the side yard fence, she became curious about what could be causing the frenetic activity. Finally, it became apparent that something was wedged in the crevice between the wooden

fence and the neighbor's stone retaining wall.

Trapped in the few inches of space was an unfortunate animal, which turned out to be an opossum who had crawled in, flipped over, and was stuck upside-down. Indeed, the creature was in real distress and wasn't just *playing possum*. While the concerned activist decided what to do to help, and because this was a sizzling summer day, she began pouring cool water onto the poor animal so it would not overheat.

Since the critter could only be accessed from the neighbor's yard, who were not home, a call to Animal Control and eventual assistance from the Garland Police Department set in motion a dramatic rescue. The responders entered the neighboring yard, picked up the possum up by the tail, and discovered that she had three babies in her pouch... a real *o'possum* moment! After much excitement and congratulations all around, the marsupial menagerie was relocated to the Spring Creek Preserve.

Kitty Critters

One home's doggy door has been serving as a two-way portal to wild kingdom adventures in the Hills habitat for the past several years. Here's the story ... This family's ordinary house cat became a great warrior hunter in the backyard, even though she could not get over the fence! First it was small prey including bugs, rats, and snakes.



As she grew bigger, so did the catch-of-the-day. As a compassionate kitty, she never actually killed anything –



she only brought her “friends” in to play. Unfortunately for the family – the guests usually got away. Day-after-day, there were birds, bunnies, and beasts roaming the home.

The lady of the house invested in a net to capture-and-release any and all visitors. Sometimes, it took up to an hour to catch the birds and oftentimes even longer to corral the elusive furry friends.



Mystery Critter

Perhaps the most memorable activities occurred a couple of years ago when a brazen animal trespasser temporarily entered the scene. Since a doggy door is both an entry and an exit to the outside world, the invader was sneaking into the kitchen in the middle of the night and helping itself to the pet food dishes on the floor.

Eventually, the family dog, cat, or both would wake up and put the entire household into a bustling commotion of the most raucous, fur-flying scuffles imaginable while chasing the freeloader away.



Early speculation was that the midnight intruder was a raccoon or bobcat, but eventually the unwelcome *snacker* was identified as an extremely large and ill-mannered housecat who roamed the neighborhood at night.

Suffice it to say, that this family's friends never know what will run across the room when they come to visit.

Critter Capers



The story continued when the bunny population exploded in the Hills several years ago, the fearless feline would bring in a rabbit nearly every day and the chase was on! The familiar scene saw the harried hare hopping headlong through the house, followed by the lady with bird net in-hand, followed by the dog, and then the cat (who had mostly lost interest by that time).

Later came the squirrels that amazed everyone with how fast and hard-to-catch they were. Finally the squirrels and bunnies figured out not to go into that back yard, so things are much calmer most days. Even the birds have thinned out, but now the geckos are the ones who don't have a clue not to come near. They "play dead" until they are rescued and put back outside so they can scamper off.

Wascally Wabbits



Bunnies abound in the Hills and probably every resident has their own series of *hare tails*.

The following examples are just a few of them:

#1: This past Easter, one home put out several oversized and colorful decorative eggs in their landscape beds. Early one morning, a passerby noticed a real, live rabbit sitting and nibbling breakfast in the midst of the festive scene. Could it have been the *E-Bunny*? – maybe not such a *hare-brained* idea after all.

#2: After researching that rabbits do not like mint, an industrious gardener attempted to thwart their tendency to *veg- out* on her vegetation by planting a spray of mint in a raised planter barrel. Mysteriously, the herb quickly suffered from severe crushing, and the reason soon became clear. A clever rabbit was yanking out huge chunks of turf from the lawn, then hopping up into the mint planter bed to thoroughly enjoy the grass.



#3: One resident was delighted with the eye-appealing results after adding beautiful tulips to her front flower bed just as dusk approached that evening. Early the next morning while going out to get the newspaper, she was horrified to find that every single tulip head and all the petals were sheared off and gone. Busy bunnies...



#4: In a close call, a rabbit was feasting on carrots left out by residents in their back yard. Fortunately for the rabbit, one of the residents was watching as a large red-tail hawk swooped in for his own snack, but both the rabbit and resident were faster

than the hawk. The rabbit *high-tailed* it into the nearby bushes while the resident leaped out to the rescue.

The hawk flew off as fast as his wings could carry him, no doubt deciding that the rapidly advancing human with voice and fists raised in his direction was not going to share the tasty morsel. The resident sat on a garden rock as the hawk perched in a neighbor's tree, hoping to wait it out. Unfortunately, the pesky human sat guard as the now brazen bunny cautiously hopped out and continued to nibble the carrots.



Eventually, the hawk admitted defeat and flew on to another *fast food* location. The rabbit visited the yard (and carrots) for many years to come, but the hawk snubbed the residence from that day on.

Horns, Bars, and Hooters

Owls are cool, and not just because they are the revered mascot of Garland's original high school. One quiet evening, an unmistakable *hooo--hooo—hooo* was clearly audible inside at least one Hills home. After



a curious resident sneaked onto the patio to investigate, the hopeful observer looked all around the nearby tree tops and rooflines never expecting to actually locate the source of the call. WHAT LUCK! A barred owl was spotted on the highest peak of the roof across the alley. The bird was perched proudly and silhouetted perfectly against the moonlit, cloudy sky. A dramatic scene that definitely deserves *a screech and a hoot*.



Horned owls have also been sighted, although, unlike the barred owls, they seem to prefer hunting in the nearby parks rather than taking to the streets of the Hills at Firewheel!

Bouncing Baby Bobcat

Shortly after moving into the neighborhood, one family discovered unexpected former residents on their property.

A healthy mother bobcat and her frisky cub had claimed space under the back yard deck.



One evening around 11:00 p.m. these nocturnal neighbors caused quite a ruckus rustling up a late-night snack.

After the mama cat set the expired rabbit on the ground, the eager-to-learn cub practiced pouncing on the prey several times before dragging it under the deck.

Unfortunately, the two beautiful felines moved out, but the residents enjoyed their private zoo while it lasted. The rabbits rejoiced!



Armadillos Alive!

Armadillos in Texas? – of course!!

Armadillos in Firewheel? – absolutely!!!

During a resident's neighborhood walk one evening, a heavy rustling in the bushes caused him to stop abruptly and see what might emerge.



Ironically, the heavy-plated mammal that waddled out was not in an *armorous* mood, sensed danger, turned back, and burrowed even deeper into the brush. No 'arm done, and a good story all around.

Wile E. Coyote versus Roadrunner

Soon after daybreak on a Sunday, a lone resident watched two beautiful coyotes loping down the middle lane of Garland Avenue near Campbell Road.

The larger one was nearly the size and color of a Great Dane while the other was considerably smaller with a mottled gray coat. The large coyote zoomed across Campbell Road in front of a resident's car and leaped over a white cattle fence. This coyote can often be seen in the area at twilight.

Perhaps they were on their way to meet Road Runner for coffee and doughnuts at the local Acme café?



Speaking of road runners, a lightning-fast chaparral was seen near the Hills one day as it streaked through a parched open field.

Contrary to legend – it was not chased by a rocket, did not dodge a dropping anvil, wasn't pursued by a speeding truck, and was not outsmarting a wild-eyed coyote as it streaked by (at least not at the moment observed).

Duck...



In a situation that was anything but ducky, one neighbor out for a morning walk was upset to see a brooding mama duck

pacing anxiously and nervously next to a storm sewer while her bewildered babies were squeaking frantically down below. The quick-thinking resident called an HOA representative who called the City Water Department.

A capable and caring service technician was dispatched with great alacrity. Upon removing the manhole cover, he *ducked* inside and deftly rescued every single *duckling in distress*. Indications are that the family did not run *afowl* again and not another *peep* has been heard from them since.



Duck...

In another duck tale worth telling, one back yard served as nursery for a local duck population. As the ducklings matured, their mother wanted them to relocate to a nearby pond, or perhaps a neighbor's swimming pool. Simple, right? Wrong! The grown duck flew over the fence, stood in the alley, and quacked the order to march (or whatever month it was) expecting her offspring to follow. The little ones made a purposeful beeline towards the sound. Problem...actually BIG problem – a tall wooden fence.



All of the minions desperately attempted to get their *ducks-in-a-row* as they tried to crash through or hop over the obstruction. Human to the rescue! A tender-hearted homeowner picked up each-and-every one of the dozen little ones and carried them through the gate. When the baby birds were delivered outside the fence, the mother duck waddled down the alley with the brood following. As one last adventure, the mama duck spotted a neighbor and his dog not far away. Seemingly without a sound and within seconds, the little ones scurried underneath her and when she sat down all 12 were hidden from view until the danger passed. We can only hope that everything went *swimmingly* after that.

Goose!

The neighborhood pond often serves as temporary lodging for migratory birds. Sometimes they stop-and-drop for an hour or so, and sometimes they move in for days or weeks at a time.



One year, nearly 20 Canada Geese came to stay. Most everyone would agree that the CG is one of nature's most consistent-looking creatures – every one of them

has nearly identical markings, coloring, and size.

One time, one of the geese, or perhaps we should say *guest* or *guess* (as in guess what type of goose?) that joined the group that was totally unlike any of the others. The unique bird had a short yellow bill and a white head with two prominent black “bars” on its head, from which it gets its name, the bar-headed goose.



There was complete acceptance both ways and the “stranger” stayed and played right in the middle of the flock at all times. The diverse and happy family that had arrived together eventually departed together.

Parading Peacocks

One lady who lives near the pond beheld a stunning sight while looking outside one day. She was amazed to behold a large peacock nibbling flowers underneath the window, with the mate just outside the iron fence.

While she goggled, the colorful couple strutted their stuff for nearly an hour as they *gobbled* everything in sight. A relative of the fortunate witness reported seeing these self-same bespeckled birds under the trees by the golf course earlier that day.



Another resident was similarly amazed to spy the ostentatious visitors after taking her son to school that same morning. She returned home to see the spectacular twosome in the alley behind her home. She grabbed a camera and with skillful *aplume* snapped a photo in full living technicolor. It is safe to surmise that everyone who encountered the birds that day found themselves *true blue peacock fans*.



Something's Fishy!

One of the Hills' residents was photographing the wildlife at the pond when he spotted a green heron struggling to devour a bass. It looked like a case of "the eyes bigger than the stomach!" (and beak, too!)



After numerous attempts to reposition the fish so that it could be consumed, the industrious and persistent bird finally managed to swallow its meal. After several anxious moments, wondering if the heron would choke on what might very well be his last supper, the relieved neighbor watched the stuffed bird sluggishly fly away.

And that's the end of that fish *tale*!

Turtle Troop

On a hot summer day, an apparently irresistible mist was cascading skyward from two neighborhood pond fountains to the delight of the local aquatic group.



No fewer than 13 turtles were counted from land as they crowded onto the fountain rings in the center of the pond, enjoying a refreshing afternoon shower.



There is no evidence to substantiate the rumor that one of the shy ones almost came out of its shell that afternoon.

Leaping Lizards!

Neighborhood pest control alert!

Simply provide a safe environment for anoles and geckos at your house and your home is guaranteed to receive one of the very best pest control services that nature can provide!



The anoles hunt during the day and the geckos prowl at night...insects and spiders beware! One residence has not had roaches in years! A free service and, at least in the case of anoles,

truly *green!!!*

So...don't let the lizards *bug* you!!!



Bats in the Belfry

Going out for the morning paper one day, a neighbor noticed a very small brown lump attached to the fascia of the front porch. Upon careful examination, the fuzzy object turned out to be one of the smallest bats in the U.S., a two-inch long Eastern Pipistrelle!



The little guy cooperated for a brief photo-op, but by the next morning, it had moved on to a less touristy area of the burbs. If you happen to come across one, don't go *batty*!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is a lot to like about living in the City of Garland. As these interesting and entertaining animal encounters attest, the natural resources and ecology of the Firewheel area are conducive to a high quality of life for people and wildlife alike.

Story Contributors

Our stories were submitted by several Hills residents and are all true based on their own personal experiences. *Kathlyn Auten* provided the roadrunner and two rabbit stories, *Jennifer Cain (formerly Sherlock)* wrote the opossum story and *Glenn Hadsall* composed the account of the bobcats underneath the porch. *Carolyn Jenkins* and *Sasha Toomey* contributed the peacock stories, *Judy Streit* drafted the mother duck and ducklings in the backyard tale, and the “Critters” story is an anonymous entry. All other stories are courtesy of *Vicky and Marty Selznick*, and *Greg Yearsley*.

Concept, Editing and Compilation

The original idea and concept was developed by *Greg Yearsley*. *Vicky* and *Greg* compiled and edited the collection. The first draft manuscript was reviewed by *Kathlyn Auten*, *Marty Selznick* and *Connor Yearsley*.

Design

The neighborhood owes a huge debt of gratitude to *Vicky Selznick* for her tireless and creative efforts to lay-out, format, design and produce this piece.

Photos & Graphics

The peacock photos are contributed by *Keri Bennett* and *Sasha Toomey*. The bobcat photo on the porch is submitted by *Glenn Hadsall*. All other photos are original pictures taken in and around the Hills at Firewheel and are provided courtesy of *Marty Selznick* from his private collection. Marty, and his wife, Vicky, are dedicated photography enthusiasts and spend much of their spare time photographing scenic landscapes, wildlife and nature. Contributors of photos retain all rights, as specified in release form for this publication.

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**This anthology of critter capers is presented
in honor of all inhabitants who left their *imprints*
and their...**

Friendly Footsteps at Firewheel...



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