

To: Friends of Old Apples  
From: Tom Brown

January 10, 2015

### Apple Search---2015

Some of the apples found during the past year include: Almeda, August Queen, Autumn Strawberry, Big Nonsuch, Big Flavor, Cider Sweet, Coffelt Beauty, Early Melon, Green Spitzenburg, Haynes Big Red, Henry, Horse (very large, white), Isaac Newton (Flower of Kent), Pear Sweetning, Queen of the Orchard, Red Transparent, and Thinskin (light green). One apple of particular interest is the Haynes Big Red at the home of Jim Haynes of Letcher Co., KY, this is a seedling his father, Joe, found; the apples can grow to immense size, one was said to be over two pounds.

This year I would like to share with you small stories of delightful animal encounters.

**Turtle Rescue**---Searching for old apples involves driving many miles, for instance my “new car” (a '04 Subaru) has 268,911 miles on it and my older '95 Subaru, now the “Doggie Wagon”, has 308,989 miles. Most of these miles were accumulated searching for old apples. While driving, I frequently encounter turtles trying to cross the road. I always stop and help them safely make the passage, being sure they are completely clear of the road and past any side ditches or embankments. These are wonderful small creatures that have lived in harmony with their environment for millions of years; the same cannot be said about us humans. My best turtle rescue day was a late spring morning while driving 56 miles to the Patrick County Strawberry Festival where I was an exhibitor. On that trip I helped five box turtles safely cross the road.

Another time I was driving in Davie County on Interstate 40 approaching the Yadkin River. On the south side of the road was a small wet area and from it a drain pipe carried a seepage water flow under the four lanes and down to a lake on the other side. On the shoulder of the road was a very large pond turtle, a non-retracting type with an 11 inch diameter shell. With its large size and the very heavy traffic there was absolutely no way the turtle could ever make it across the road. I did not see a safe way of picking up the turtle. Then I happened to spot a large black plastic garbage bag on the side of the road. To my surprise I was easily able to get the turtle into the bag and then it did not struggle as I made my way through traffic across the four lanes. Finally I was able to release my turtle friend, headed down the hill toward the lake.

Last year I was again on Interstate 40 approaching Mocksville; normally I am alert in looking for turtles so I can stop quickly, but not this time. I was well up the road when it dawned on me that I might have just passed a turtle. I finished driving to the next exit and then drove back about six miles to another exit so I could turn around. As I approached the original site I passed a State Trooper who had a motorist pulled beside the road. Then 200 yards away was the box turtle near the lanes of traffic. I had just picked it up when the Trooper pulled away and started up the highway toward me. I waved to the Trooper requesting him to stop. I asked if he was going to the exit down the road, a mile away, and then turn around; I thought that he might because on that stretch of the road was a spot where the Troopers could pull off in the median and watch for speeders. He said that he was going to turn around, so I asked him if he would be willing to take the turtle and let him out on the other side of the road in the area where he was headed. The kind Trooper easily agreed and I said, “We have both helped save a life today”. Hopefully the State Trooper will help other turtles cross the road as he drives many miles in the future.

In the past year I saw an extra-large, highly-colored box turtle near our home. I picked it up for relocation to a spot out of view of our dogs, since one of them sometimes bothers turtles. This box turtle was different because it made no effort to retract into its shell, its small legs were moving as if indicating, “Please put me down so I can continue on my way”. In the same year,

I saw this turtle six times. When I needed to mow the apple orchard grass, I would first walk all the apple tree rows looking for the turtle to make sure he is not going to be in harm's way.

**Toady Arrives**---Three years ago in late summer I was bud grafting apple trees. Normally this is done in the field, but some of the trees were in containers and I could graft them at night on the front porch. My grafting set-up involved a picnic table with a bright table lamp. Just behind me was the living room with a floor lamp just inside the window. Two front door lamps also lighted the porch. All this light at night attracted a large number of insects. Just in front of the grafting table was a wide set of steps going down to the front yard. Part of the step area was occupied by a "doggie handicapped ramp" I had constructed to help an older dog with hip issues. Apparently a toad realized that the ramp would allow him to get on the porch where he could find insects. One night I looked down and saw a large toad about four feet from my chair, he was just out of the bright light in the edge of the shadow created by an elevated sheet of plastic. The toad was also there the next night; he preferred being in an alcove and in shadow as if hiding. Gradually I started catching insects and giving them to Toady. When tossing the insects I could get my hand as close as seven inches without Toady retreating. He would ignore non-moving insects; his long tongue could retrieve insects from over four inches away, if they were slightly further away, he would quickly hop after them. Thus for over a month; a special treat of the evening was to catch insects for Toady. It was always interesting to see Toady slowly make his way up the ramp in the evening. He did not always go back down at night but would sometimes stay on the porch for several days at a time. Once he must have informed some friends, because there was another toad on the edge of the porch plus a tree frog. He continued to show up until the weather turned cool.

The next year we eagerly waited to see if Toady would come back to the front porch. He did arrive, once in April and then in July. Something was different that year, there were fewer insects and Toady would not venture as far onto the porch and seemed to be more wary. He probably came up onto the porch about eight nights and did not return the following year. I will always fondly remember feeding bugs to Toady and marvel at the diversity of the insects at our home.

**Messenger Birds**---When I spray my apple trees I always avoid an area if I encounter a bird nest with eggs and will only resume spraying when the birds have flown away. I had a collection of older potted trees at the edge of my apple orchard. When I had to frequently water these apple trees I would hear "fussing-like" bird sounds from a very tall near-by tree. I thought that this could indicate a close bird's nest; I looked carefully but I never saw a nest and I did not hear any young bird sounds. Then one day I had my spray back-pack on and I had started to spray the trees.

Suddenly, just ahead there were four birds moving in the trees, these were birds that could not fly well. It was as if they showed themselves to say, "Look, we are here, please do not spray us." I did not. About a week later the scolding bird sounds stopped and I was confident that the birds had left. Then in three and a half weeks birds again appeared just before spraying; this was no coincidence. Perhaps they were another family saying, "Please don't spray my home." I didn't.

**Possum Treats**---Some of my apples go to a neighbor who every night feeds a possum and its young who arrive on their front porch. One time, my dogs were continuously barking at the fence on our five-acre dog lot. Just three feet away from them on the other side of the fence were three "teen-age" possum's curiously watching the upset dogs from their brush pile perch. They are my favorite woodland mammal, with their shy demeanor and fascinating way of playing "possum"; I always watch for them when driving, making sure they safely get across the road.

These many small creatures greatly enriched my life. They can also equally enrich your life.

**Tom Brown**, 7335 Bullard Road, Clemmons, NC 27012; Phone: 336-766-5842

Email: [applesearch@triad.rr.com](mailto:applesearch@triad.rr.com); Web site: [www.applesearch.org](http://www.applesearch.org)

© Heritage Apples