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Rachel Lenson

Freedom hatched in Rachel's room ... Liberty could be next

By Peggy Goetz
Irvine World News

The week school let out Rachel Lenson looked on the lawn in the back yard of her Turtle Rock home. At first, the 10-year-old thought what she saw was a golf ball, perhaps knocked into the yard by a neighbor. But it didn't look quite right.

It definitely was not a golf ball. As she and her mother, Eileen, examined the small oval object a little over an inch long, they realized it was an egg.



Mike Schwartz/Irvine World News
Rachel Lenson found a small egg in the back yard. Her mother Eileen decided to put it in an incubator and on July 4 it hatched. Now they have another in the incubator that Rachel found on this lawn chair.

"It looked like a small cheap plastic egg," said Eileen.

It was in fact a bird egg in perfect condition. How it got to the middle of their lawn unharmed they did not know. They later speculated that a bird's nest must have been raided by one of the rats that they see frequently who are attracted to the fruit on the citrus trees at the side of their house.

They looked around in the shrubbery inside the yard but found no nest to return the egg.

Eileen happens to have an egg incubator in the garage.

She had purchased the Styrofoam model when Rachel was in preschool and had been heartbroken to leave the hatching chicks at the petting zoo at Irvine Regional Park. Rachel and Eileen have hatched any number of chicken and quail eggs since and sent them on their way.

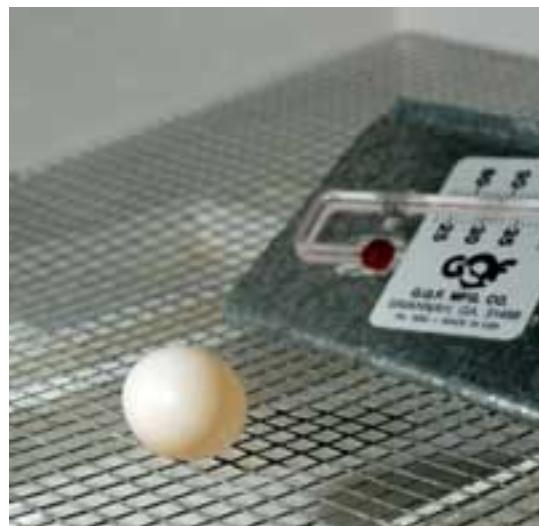
Rachel's father, Lloyd Lenson, is "not an animal person," they explained, so the animal projects belong to mother and daughter. They had decided not to hatch any more chicks because it was so difficult for Rachel to give them up.

"She grieved for every chick," said Eileen.

When the two found the bird egg, Eileen fired up the old incubator.

She guessed the temperature should be about the same as for chicken eggs. They set it up next to the reptile

habitats on the counter in Rachel's room, otherwise filled with dolls, stuffed animals, books and other things little girls' rooms are filled with. Freddie and Precious inhabit two of the glass enclosures. They are both female fat-tailed leopard geckos, according to a knowledgeable Rachel, who



The second egg sits in an incubator, but tapping sounds are already audible.

added that she is not responsible for Freddie's unfeminine name. Next to her bed, which holds a stuffed dog and horse nearly as big as Rachel, live Roxy and Nellie, two blue-bellied western fence lizards. The incubator fit right in.

For two weeks, Rachel faithfully turned the egg every day, as she had the chicken eggs. Mother birds and chickens turn the eggs in their nests regularly. This helps the babies develop properly.

On July 3, Eileen and Rachel saw the first evidence of their baby trying to make its way out of the egg, a tiny crack on the surface of the egg. When they got up on July 4, there was their baby, still wet-looking but free of the shell pieces.

"It had an enormous beak for the size of the egg. Like a Roman nose," laughed Eileen.

They named it Freedom.

The two had no idea what kind of bird they had hatched or what it would need to eat. So they called the police. An officer from animal control soon arrived and carried baby Freedom off in a teacup padded with paper toweling. He turned it into Pacific Wildlife Project for care. The group cares for and releases wild birds who have been injured or orphaned.

Eileen said the officer thought the bird was a pigeon. But Eileen said a mourning dove seemed more likely to her, considering the birds they usually saw in the yard.

Linda Evans of Pacific Wildlife said such a young chick would have been placed with her domestic brood dove for warmth and fed by hand. Although she has had half a dozen young mourning doves brought in during the past month and cannot say which one came from the Lensons, Evans has not lost any of the chicks brought in. She thinks Freedom is probably among the group about ready to be released.

Trude Hurd of the Audubon Society said the egg was

probably not dropped by a rat or other predator raiding a nest.

Mourning doves are careless nesters and often only put a couple sticks together for a nest, she explained. They will also just lay the eggs wherever they happen to be at the time, including in the middle of someone's lawn, in a flowerpot or out in the open.

Evans of Pacific Wildlife recommended that people not try and incubate a wild bird egg. The best thing to do is call a licensed organization like Pacific Wildlife, (949) 831-1178, that has facilities to incubate and care for the eggs of wild birds.

After Freedom's hatching, Eileen and Rachel went off for their vacation on a cattle drive in Utah. It was the second cattle drive for the two. Again it has been a mother-daughter thing as dad is not a horse person either.

Rachel said she looks forward to being in a rodeo next year. She said that when she grows up she wants to be a professional barrel racer. Barrel racing, she explained, is an event at a rodeo.

They thought their days as mother birds were finished. Then last week Rachel looked out on the patio.

On one of the patio chair cushions sat another egg in perfect condition.

So they got out the incubator once again. This egg seemed destined to hatch in less than two weeks. Within a few days they started to hear faint pecking noises. They are not sure just when Liberty will hatch.