

Celebrating Animals



If you're driving down country roads in Marshall, Mich., you might spy Erin Parks and her two pets out for a stroll. "We get a lot of waves and head-turns," Parks says. Sparky and Mama take it all in stride, as if to say, "What? You've never seen a llama before?"

Traditionally used as pack animals by the indigenous tribes of South America, llamas are classified in the same biological family as camels and alpacas. They have a reputation for being bad-tempered and stubborn, but their fans say that llamas behave badly only when they're overloaded or overworked. Two-year-old Sparky, pictured here, and his mother, Mama Llama, are strictly pets and are nothing but sweet and playful, Parks says.

But like other pet species, llamas are also subject to the vagaries of humans. This is at least the third home for Sparky and Mama Llama, says Parks. Specialty rescue groups take in llamas cast off for the same reasons that cats, dogs, rabbits, horses, and other animals lose their homes. Their needs include specialized veterinary care, space to roam, annual shearing (depending on climate), and as with any pet, training and socialization.

Those who share their lives with llamas know the animals are like more traditional four-legged friends in other ways. "They come running to the fence to see if we have treats," says Parks, who took just such an opportunity to get Sparky's closeup. — *Arna Cohen*

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