



A woman poses with Buckwheat the donkey at Farmhouse Garden Animal Home

Buckwheat the donkey is a Zoom superstar, making office workers giggle with her appearances to benefit the Farmhouse Garden Animal Home, the Canadian animal sanctuary where she lives outside Toronto

AFP | Toronto

The coronavirus pandemic has led millions of people to embrace meetings via Zoom, but admittedly, those can be as tedious as in-person conferences.

So one animal sanctuary in Canada, in dire need of cash after being forced to close to visitors, found a way to solve both problems.

Meet Buckwheat, a donkey at the Farmhouse Garden Animal Home, who is ready to inject some fun into your humdrum work-from-home office day -- for a price.

"Hello. We are crashing your meeting, we are crashing your meeting -- this is Buckwheat," says sanctuary volunteer Tim Fors, introducing the gray and white animal on a Zoom call.

In the video application's signature window panes, the call attendees offer some oohs and aahs as they realize what's happening -- and then erupt in laughter.

"Buckwheat is crashing people's meetings in order to make some money," Fors tells AFP.

"They donate to the sanctuary when they want her to crash a meeting, so it's mostly a fundraiser so we can feed the cows, especially during COVID."

The Farmhouse Garden Animal home in Uxbridge, about an hour's drive northeast of Toronto, used to rely on visitor dona-



Buckwheat the donkey at Farmhouse Garden Animal Home

tions and paid on-site activities to make ends meet.

But since the pandemic erupted in mid-March, the former cattle ranch can no longer welcome outsiders, putting a serious dent in its finances.

Big money for 10 minutes

"About four years ago, Mike Lanigan, who is the farmer here -- he is a third-generation cattle farmer -- he had a change of heart and decided not to send his cows to slaughter anymore,"

Fors explains.

The animal sanctuary was born: it's now home to about 20 cows, chickens, ducks, a horse and Buckwheat, the female donkey born 12 years ago.

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ening the sanctuary's survival, its leaders quickly realized they needed to identify other ways to bring in money.

They themselves were using Zoom calls for work -- and thus was born the idea of having animals sit in on people's work calls to lighten the mood.

On the sanctuary's website, interested parties can fill out a form to hire Buckwheat, Melody the horse or Victoria, whom Fors calls the "matriarch of the herd."

A 10-minute Zoom appearance costs CAN \$75 (US \$55). For double the time, the price shoots

up to CAN \$125, and \$175 for 30 minutes, sanctuary co-founder Edith Barabash told Toronto Life magazine.

"We are always happy when the people on the meeting are surprised," says Fors.

"We started about the end of April, and I think we done about 100 meetings and sometimes we are crashing meetings three or four times a day."

On one call, Fors tells attendees that he hopes they will visit the sanctuary once lockdown measures are lifted.

"Definitely," one of them says.



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A screengrab of a Zoom meeting with Buckwheat the donkey

UN forecasts even warmer temperatures over next 5 years

High latitude regions and the Sahel are likely to be wetter than the recent past, the World Meteorological Organization says

AFP | Geneva

The annual mean global temperature is likely to be at least one degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels in each of the next five years, the World Meteorological Organization said.

The WMO said there was a 20 per cent chance that it will exceed 1.5 C above 1850 to 1900 average levels in at least one year, according to its annual climate predictions for the coming five years.

The last five-year period has been the warmest five years on record, said the Geneva-based United Nations agency, which counts 193 member states.

Temperatures over the next five years, 2020 to 2024, are very likely to be within the range of 0.91 C to 1.59 C above pre-industrial levels.

Almost all regions, except parts of the southern oceans, are likely to be warmer than the recent past, which is defined as 1981 to 2010.

"This study shows -- with a high level of scientific skill -- the enormous challenge ahead in meeting the Paris Agreement on Climate Change target of keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 C above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 C," said WMO secretary-general Petteri Taalas.

The 2015 Paris accord seeks to limit global temperature rises through sweeping cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

Wetter Sahel

The WMO forecasts do not take into account changes in



A man cools himself in a fountain in Gorky park in central Moscow

greenhouse gas and aerosol emissions due to the shutdown of economic and industrial activity triggered by the coronavirus crisis.

"Due to the very long lifetime of carbon dioxide in the atmos-

phere, the impact of the drop in emissions this year is not expected to lead to a reduction of CO2 atmospheric concentrations which are driving global temperature increases," Taalas said. The planet's average temper-

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PETTERI TAALAS

WMO SECRETARY-GENERAL

ature is already more than 1.0 C warmer than the pre-industrial period, the WMO said.

Looking at the five-year period 2020 to 2024, the organisa-

tion said there was a 70 percent chance that at least one month would be 1.5 C warmer than pre-industrial levels.

However, there is only a three percent chance that the entire period would be 1.5 C warmer than that baseline level.

The northern North Atlantic region could have stronger westerly winds, leading to more storms in western Europe over the next five years. High latitude regions and the Sahel are likely to be wetter than the recent past, the organisation predicted.

The WMO also said that in 2020 alone, many parts of South America, southern Africa and Australia are likely to be drier than the recent past.

Meanwhile, the Arctic is likely to have warmed by more than twice as much as the global mean.