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THREAT FROM ABOVE

In rural southern Illinois, a cattle farmer fights back against black vultures, birds that can prey on newborn cows and for a long time never settled so far north

By Andrew Carter | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

In daylight they move in low, slow circles above the country roads and the cattle farms in rural southern Illinois, outsiders in a continuous migration. They do not fly as much as they glide, at least not while they prey, and when they circle they are searching. Road-kill makes for an easy meal. So do newborn cows, much to the anguish of farmers.

For a long time black vultures never settled so far north. But now they've arrived, and it is for that reason that Patty Zettle, 62, keeps her Benelli Black Eagle 12-gauge at the ready. She is as certain as she can be that black vultures killed one of her calves last year. It had to have happened not long after Black Ruby — and Zettle names her cattle — gave birth.

Zettle discovered the scene only after it was too late:

A mutilated calf with missing eyes. Most of its tongue ripped out. Chunks of its flesh, gone. It's difficult not to become attached to the newborns and their mothers and the thought that Black Ruby's baby died in such a way has left Zettle haunted. It was a loss, too, of upward of \$2,000 — no insignificant sum for a small-time cow-calf operation with tight margins.

In the aftermath, Zettle made a likeness of a black vulture out of wire and cloth and hung it on a tree.

"That's my effigy," she said matter-of-factly one morning in late May, pointing it out while she moved her cows from one pasture to another. Among all she'd learned about black vultures, that was among the most valuable: They do not like effigies.

Zettle climbed out of her farm cart and unhooked the dummy bird from a branch. She scooted along through the tall grass and clumps of mud and secured it to another tree in the field where she'd led her cows, guiding them along by name — Millie, the matriarch, and Funny Face, with the specks around her muzzle — and gentle reassurance.

"Come on, girls," Zettle said, and they slowly ambled through the paddock in a bellowing chorus of moos. Soon they were all together, with a healthy pasture to graze upon and the fake vulture to stand guard

See **VULTURES** on Page A4

Above: Robert Willmore and fiancée Patty Zettle hang a dead black vulture in a tree on Zettle's farm near Thompsonville, Ill., on May 19, in hopes of scaring black vultures away from her cows **E. JASON WAMBSGANS/TRIBUNE**

Benton's actions known years ago

Speaker's office told of other harassment claims against disgraced ex-state representative

By Jeremy Gerner and Rick Pearson
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

SPRINGFIELD — When he detailed the steps his office took that led state Rep. Harry Benton to resign his seat amid allegations of sexual harassment, House Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch praised those who "trusted our office to listen, support them and ensure their concerns were handled appropriately."

"Allegations of misconduct are taken with the utmost seriousness," Welch said, revealing that an investigation by state Legislative Inspector General Michael McCuskey found Benton displayed "clear patterns of conduct" that were "outrageous, unethical and unbecoming of a member" of the House.

"We have a process that's in place that I believe is a good process," Welch told reporters at an unrelated press conference in Chicago following the Plainfield Democrat's resignation earlier this month. "They trusted us to have procedures in place that would protect them, protect their confidentiality and we had a process in place that guaranteed due process of the accused."

But Welch's account of his office's swift response stands in sharp contrast to what happened three years ago. That's when a young female Benton staffer — one of his first hires whose interactions with the lawmaker were part of the investigation — outlined a lengthy series of harassment allegations, many of a sexual nature, to Welch's office.

Back then, the speaker's office slow-walked the case after the woman reported the harassment allegations to the speaker's then-chief of staff in April 2023, the Tribune found.

Benton wasn't interviewed by the speaker's top staff until three months later, in July 2023, according to calendar records obtained by the Tribune. That was after the woman had already quit her job, saying she feared for her mental health. According to the former staffer, Benton was not disciplined at the time.

In a pair of statements in response to questions from the Tribune, Welch's office defended its handling of the case, saying it acted "promptly" and said "appropriate action was taken" — though the statements did not specify what, if any,



Benton

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Bike lane ticketing program records big fines against delivery companies

City has issued nearly \$2.6M in penalties since program's creation

By A.D. Quig and Talia Soglin
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A bike lane ticketing program meant to make busy downtown streets safer for cyclists and pedestrians has found package delivery giants are among its most consistent scoff-laws, news that will not come as a surprise to Chicagoans used to seeing trucks and vans idling throughout the Loop.

The city issues warnings and tickets to bike and bus lane blockers as part of its "Smart Streets" pilot program. Cameras mounted on city vehicles and Chicago Transit Authority buses capture the obstructions, and tickets are issued by the city's Department of Finance.

Roughly a year and a half since the

program's creation, the city has issued tens of thousands of warnings and citations under the program and has issued nearly \$2.6 million in fines to impiders of bike lanes, bus lanes and bus stops, not counting late fees, according to data received via an open records request from the city's Department of Finance.

Vehicles owned by Amazon Logistics, FedEx and UPS were charged a combined \$460,000 for bus stop, bus lane and bike lane violations between November 2024 and early this May, according to the data.

That doesn't count independent contractors that work with those companies but use their own vehicles, or major firms that contract with the corporate giants for things like last mile delivery. Companies like Trans One Inc. and Northwest Express

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An Amazon delivery truck is parked in a bus lane on South Dearborn Street near West Van Buren Street in the Loop on July 9. **EILEEN T. MESLAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**



SPORTS

Still the toast of the town

Celebrating the World Series-winning 2016 Cubs never gets old at Wrigley Field, even as the players do, writes Paul Sullivan.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Conductor takes a bow

The barrier-breaking Marin Alsop is leaving Ravinia after six years as chief conductor and a one-time curator of the festival.

NATION & WORLD

US troops killed in attack

The U.S. military said Saturday two troops were killed and another is missing after an attack by Iran on a base in Jordan. **Page B5**

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179th year No. 200
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Walk sights in Shakespeare’s hometown



Rick Steves

Nonliterary types might find England’s Stratford-upon-Avon to be much ado about nothing, but Shakespeare’s hometown is blanketed with opportunities for Bardolatry. It’s an easy side-trip from London, but an overnight stay is best to take in a performance.

Shakespeare was born and raised here. He then spent most of his career in London, where he taught his play-going public about human nature with plots that entertained both the highest and the lowest minds at the same time. His tool was an unrivaled mastery of the English language. He retired — rich and famous — back in Stratford.

Within Stratford’s compact old town, you can walk easily to most Shakespeare sights. The River Avon, which flows right through town, has an idyllic yet playful feel, with rowboats, swans, and an old, one-man, crank-powered ferry just beyond the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

The best Shakespeare-related thing you can do here is see a play. Even if you slept through English Lit, you’ll find the experience memorable. The Royal Shakespeare Company is undoubtedly the best Shakespeare troupe on earth and performs shows year-round here and in London. Between excellent acting and remarkable staging, they can even make Henry VIII feel accessible.

The RSC operates two theaters in town: the flagship Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the intimate Swan Theatre. Both are designed to feel traditional, down to the standing-room-only spaces. Even if you’re not seeing a play, the lobbies of both theaters are



The prime Shakespeare sight in Stratford-upon-Avon is the half-timbered Elizabethan building where the playwright grew up. **CAMERON HEWITT**

normally open to the public. You’ll learn interesting tidbits of theater history, try on costumes, and see one of Shakespeare’s First Folios.

If you’re dead set on seeing a show, it’s smart to book tickets ahead. But for last-minute decision makers, day-of tickets are often available. On a past visit, on a sunny Friday in June, I stepped into the RSC on a lark to see if they had any tickets ... an hour later, I was watching King Lear lose his marbles.

Beyond live performances, the prime sight in town is Shakespeare’s Birthplace, a half-timbered Elizabethan building where William grew up. This is also the house where Shakespeare and his bride, Anne Hathaway, began their married life together. I find the birth-

place itself a bit underwhelming — everyone is shepherded along the same path through the house, and it’s as if millions of visitors have rubbed the rooms clean of anything authentic. Still, the sight makes for a good introduction to the Bard, largely thanks to its thought-provoking modern exhibit (which you see at the start of your visit) and the well-versed (and often costumed) docents who frequently reenact famous Shakespeare scenes in the backyard.

To get a sense for the playwright’s early education, visit the Shakespeare’s Schoolroom and Guildhall sight. You can test a quill pen, play Tudor games in his classroom from the 1570s, and explore a guild headquarters and chapel to learn about social infrastructure

in Shakespeare’s day.

Nothing remains of the house the Bard inhabited when he made it big (it was demolished in the 18th century). But the atmospheric mansion grounds, now adorned with modern sculptures and traditional gardens, form another tourist sight: Shakespeare’s New Place. Contemplating him writing “The Tempest” in the place he called home for nearly 20 years is an enjoyable experience.

The only sight that’s outside of Stratford’s walkable town center is Anne Hathaway’s Cottage, the 12-room farmhouse where the bard’s wife grew up. It’s a mile out of town, in Shottery — a 30-minute walk from central Stratford, a stop on the hop-on, hop-off tour bus, or a quick taxi ride from town.

William courted Anne here — she was 26, he was only 18 — and his tactics proved successful. (Maybe a little too much, as she was several months pregnant at their wedding.) The Hathaway family lived here for 400 years, until 1911, and much of the family’s 92-acre farm remains part of the site. The picturesque, thatched cottage looks cute as a fairytale, with tranquil gardens and charming sculptures. It’s fun to imagine the writer of some of the world’s greatest romances wooing his favorite girl right here during his formative years.

Shakespeare’s grave is back in town in the riverside Holy Trinity Church, where he had been serving as a lay rector in his last years. While the church is surrounded by an evoca-

tive graveyard, the Bard is instead entombed in a place of honor, inside the church and right in front of the altar.

Shakespeare’s hometown is seventh heaven for English majors and actors, but Stratford-upon-Avon’s half-timbered charm, with colorful canal boats and punts plying the river, makes it a fun stop for anyone. You might even come home with a new appreciation for the enduring impact made by history’s most remarkable playwright.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Yee touts history, beauty of Kyoto

By Jae-Ha Kim
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY

Born in San Francisco and raised in Millbrae, California, and Las Vegas, singer-songwriter Travis Yee now calls Nashville, Tennessee, home.

“Each place shaped me differently,” said Yee, whose latest singles are “Neon Light Year” and “Prove Em Wrong.” “Growing up in the Bay Area exposed me to a lot of different cultures and perspectives. Las Vegas taught me that entertainment is both an art and a business. Nashville challenged me to take songwriting and country music seriously. Being an Asian American artist in country music isn’t something I saw much growing up, so all of those experiences have influenced the stories I tell and the perspective I bring to my music.”

This interview with Yee has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: What do you remember about your first professional gig?

A: It was July of 2020, when I was invited to be on a Fox television show called “I Can See Your Voice.” Talk about just throwing myself into the middle of it all. It was scary, but I gained a lot of experience quickly from it.

Q: How do your travels inspire your songwriting?

A: Ideas rarely show up when I’m sitting at my desk trying to force them. Most of my ideas come from conversations, observations and experiences while traveling. I’ll record voice notes, save lyric ideas on



Country singer Travis Yee has his eyes set on performing at the Grand Ole Opry one day. **TRAVIS YEE**

my phone or write down random phrases that catch my attention.

Travel has taught me that people are more similar than different. Whether I’m in Tennessee, California, South Carolina or somewhere else entirely, people experience the same things — love, heartbreak, self-doubt, family struggles and perseverance. Those shared experiences often find their way into my songs.

Q: Did you enjoy country music the most growing up?

A: I didn’t grow up listening to country music. I grew up listening to a lot of pop and R&B because that’s what my parents listened to. I was a kid during the Usher and Christina Aguilera era, so that’s the music that was constantly around me. Shout out to both of them for providing the soundtrack to a good chunk of my childhood. The funny thing is that country music didn’t really enter my life until about 10 years ago.

Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?

A: Tokyo. I visited for the first time in April 2026 and it was also my first time traveling outside of North America. The culture, the food, the people — everything felt completely different from what I was used to. I probably gained five pounds while I was there and have zero regrets. The food quality was incredible, the prices were surprisingly affordable and even in the busiest parts of the city

there was a sense of order and calmness that I really admired. It’s one of the few places I’ve visited where I was already thinking about my return trip before I left.

Q: What is your bucket-list venue that you have yet to perform in?

A: The Grand Ole Opry. As a country artist, that’s one of the most iconic stages in the world. It’s a place that represents the history and tradition of country music and stepping onto that stage would be an incredible milestone.

Q: What untapped destination should people know about?

A: Kyoto. Tokyo gets most of the attention, but Kyoto felt special in a completely different way. It’s beautiful, peaceful and full of history. Also, if you’re someone who takes way too many photos on vacation, Kyoto will absolutely destroy your phone’s storage capacity.

Q: What is your best or worst vacation memory?

A: When I was a kid visiting the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose, I accidentally got separated from my family and got lost inside. For a kid, a giant mansion with endless rooms and hallways is basically a real-life horror movie. My parents found me after a few minutes, but at the time it felt like I had been lost for three business days.

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Guest leaves New York City hotel that felt unsafe, but denied refund

By Christopher Elliott | KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

I booked a room with two queen beds through Booking.com at a hotel in Brooklyn. I needed the queen beds, and the room was clearly advertised as such. However, when I checked in, the beds were obviously smaller. I later measured them to be approximately 50 inches wide, which is a full-sized bed, not a queen. To make matters worse, the room was disgusting. The sheets had grease stains, hair, and what looked like suspicious red stains.

I asked for a new room, but the second one was worse, featuring a clear splatter of red stains across the floor. I didn’t feel safe or comfortable and left that night to find another hotel. I immediately contacted the hotel and Booking.com. The hotel denied my request for a full refund. Booking.com gave me the runaround for weeks and offered a mere \$106 goodwill credit.

I disputed the charge on my credit card. Capital One initially credited the \$922 charge, but then rebilled it after the merchant responded to the chargeback. I’ve sent all my photo and video proof to all three parties, yet I’m still out almost \$1,000 for a service that I never used.

What can I do to get my full refund?
— *Rebekah Singleton, in Alexandria, Virginia*

A: This is an infuriating bait-and-switch case compounded by a gross disregard for public health and safety. The hotel falsely advertised accommodations with two queen beds, then gave you a room with smaller beds and alarming, unsanitary conditions. Ugh.

Despite your exhaustive paper trail that documented multiple attempts to resolve the issue with the hotel and Booking.com, both companies refused a full refund.

The hotel simply denied your photographic evidence, and Booking.com attempted to settle the matter with a meager credit, claiming that your valid health and safety concerns were merely a matter of opinion.

With the hotel refusing to budge, and Booking.com failing its duty to ensure accurate listings and customer satisfaction, your most direct path was to resubmit a dispute to Capital One, focusing on

the contract violation of the room and bed size. This documented pattern of deceit and poor customer service should have ultimately won your chargeback. Incredibly, it didn’t. Capital One sided with the hotel, claiming that you had “used” the services. Could you have avoided this? Reviewing the hotel’s ratings might have kept you away. It currently has 2.5 stars out of 5. (I asked you about this, and you said that at the time you booked, the reviews were “a mixed bag, but nothing completely egregious.”)

In a situation like this, you can escalate your complaint to Booking.com. I publish the names, numbers and email addresses of key Booking.com executives on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org. Or you could ask a consumer advocate for help. You chose door number two, and I reached out to Booking.com on your behalf to find out if

it really planned to force you to pay \$922 for these shoddy accommodations. The answer, thankfully, was “no.”

“After a full review of the case, our customer service team has engaged directly with both the guest and the accommodation to resolve the situation,” a representative told me. “Given the concerns raised around room conditions and the customer’s overall experience, we’ve issued a full refund.”

I asked Booking.com if the hotel would be removed from the platform, and it said that it’d work directly with the property to make improvements. I guess everyone deserves a second chance ... maybe.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliot.org/help or chris@elliott.org.