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WELCOME



JULIE HARDING
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FOR A brief period a few years ago, I ventured into egg sales after finding myself with a surplus. My ex-bat eggs flew off the shelves, but the element that I found the most tricky was knowing how much to charge – too much and you frighten your customers away; too little and you find yourself out of pocket. Looking back, I probably erred on the side of the latter, and I wish I had been able to read Debbie Kingsley's sage advice in this month's article 'The price is right' (Supplement, page 3) which reveals how you can work out your costing structure without causing your potential buyers to run for the hills. Vet fees are another thorny finance-related subject, but Charlotte Cooper has plenty of money-saving tips for you, including joining a practice scheme or a 'co-operative' (page 12). ■



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IN THE NEWS

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Goat tests positive for CAE in Northern Ireland

GOAT FARMERS in Northern Ireland have been put on alert after a disease that affects the joints and brain of the animal was found there for the first time. Caprine Arthritis Encephalitis (CAE) is present in about 8% of the goat population in England, Scotland and Wales, but it had not been present in Northern Ireland, and it is a notifiable disease there.

An infected female Boer goat (*a healthy Boer is pictured above*) was identified on a holding in Co Londonderry during routine testing and all goats on the holding have been culled. The animal had been imported from Great Britain and is thought to have brought the virus with it.

Dr Robert Huey, the chief veterinary officer for Northern Ireland, said: "This is the first ever confirmation of the CAE virus in Northern Ireland, other than those recorded at post-import checks. The virus is found worldwide, but until

this detection, the disease has never been recorded on the island of Ireland. While CAE certainly adversely affects the health of goats due to pain and disability, [its] presence could potentially have serious economic implications. The impact of CAE includes reduced productivity, early culling, paralysis and death in kids, a gradual drop in milk yield due to mastitis and potential damage to export sales."

Dr Huey said that keeping disease out was vital for trade and he urged Northern Irish farmers to continue to practise good biosecurity measures.

The main clinical sign of CAE is lameness caused by arthritis in the older animal. Most goats are infected at an early age, remain virus positive for life and can transmit the virus. The disease develops months to years later. Other signs include hard udder syndrome, poor coat, loss of hair and paralysis in kids' legs.

New campaign aims to persuade gardeners to go peat free

A NEW month-long campaign has been launched to persuade more gardeners to go peat free. #PeatFreeApril, which has been organised by a group of gardeners and garden writers, is intended to encourage gardeners to make the all-important but easy switch to peat free and also ask questions about labelling.

Britain's gardeners are still using billions of litres of peat compost every year despite clear evidence that peat bogs play a crucial role in the battle against climate change.

The eco-campaign will also draw attention to the fact that many potted plants are currently grown in peat-based composts, meaning that many gardeners are unwittingly perpetuating the trade in peat.

Peat bogs are among the UK's rarest and most fragile wildlife habitats and they store twice as much carbon as all of the earth's standing forests.

"There was a global clamour against the burning of the Amazon rainforests, but not a murmur was heard in favour of protecting peatlands," said campaign spokesperson Sally Morgan. "While peatlands may not look as inspiring as a rainforest, the role they play in helping us to fight climate change, protecting against flooding and supporting wildlife is just as important."

During April 2020, #PeatFreeApril will raise awareness via promotions at garden centres, open dates at peat-free gardens and even visits to peatland reserves.

Chris Collins of Garden Organic, which is supporting the initiative along with IUCN UK Peatland Programme and the Soil Association, said: "It's surely not beyond our gift to find alternative means of growing our garden plants that does not involve the wholesale destruction of one of the planet's most important ecosystems."

For more information on #PeatFreeApril go to Twitter and Facebook: @PeatFreeApril



Spring Tractor World Show gears up for 2020 fixture

THE SPRING Tractor World Show will be taking place at the Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire, on 22-23 February 2020.

Using all the site's four halls, the Spring Tractor World Show is a popular event that boasts in excess of 100 specialist tradestands, showcasing tractors and agricultural machinery of all ages.

There will be vintage and classic tractors, horticultural machinery, model displays, miniature steamers and stationary engines, as well as the latest models. Visitors can also shop for that elusive part or restoration product among the suppliers, or browse the

'On Saturday, the HJ Pugh & Co annual auction will take place with more than 100 tractors and 2,000 lots'

tools and garage equipment, tyres, workwear, clothing and gift stands.

In addition, classic trucks and vans will be on display, with a classic commercials drive-in day and vintage sort-out and spares day on Sunday.

The special themes in 2020 are '75 years of the Fordson E27N', '50 years of the International Harvester World Wide Series' and 'Conversions'.

On Saturday, the HJ Pugh & Co annual auction will take place with more than 100 tractors and 2,000 lots expected to be on sale.

Admission prices are £12.50/£10.50 (for adults on the gate/in advance); £20/£15 (weekend). Under 15s are admitted free.

For tickets, tel: 01697 451882; visit the website at www.tractorworldshows.co.uk

RBST Primitive Produce Project shows the financial benefits of keeping native sheep

WHILE BRITAIN'S smallest native sheep breeds are often overlooked, the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) has been working hard to set the record straight via its year long Primitive Produce Project, the brainchild of Lake District hill farmer Maria Benjamin, which concluded in August.

The project aims have been to both demonstrate the varied flavours of primitive hogget and promote the profitability of primitive sheep breeds, showing that they are an excellent choice for farmer and consumer alike, with the potential to give in excess of £140 profit per head if all the produce (including the skins and fleece) are used and marketed effectively.

The seven native primitive breeds involved in the project were the Boreray, Castlemilk Moorit, Manx Loaghtan, North Ronaldsay, Soay, Hebridean and Shetland, with the last two classed as 'success story' breeds as they are no longer rare.



As part of the project, commercial hill farmers John Atkinson and Ms Benjamin of Coniston in Cumbria, who have a strong interest in rare and native livestock, reared two wethers (castrated males) of each breed for 12 months so a true comparison of flavour between them could be made.

"I've always thought that primitive breeds were an underrated resource," said Ms Benjamin. "And through discussions with our local RBST field officer we decided to try to prove that they can be commercially viable as well as a very low maintenance option for marginal land."

It was decided early on in the project to make as much use of all the produce from the lambs, so the fleece was kept and the skins will be sent away for tanning.

"There's a real interest in rare and native breed wool," said Alice Underwood, who masterminded the fibre aspect of the project and who runs her own business specialising in native breed yarns. "We're seeing a growing body of consumers who want to know where their wool comes from, and want to be able to buy single-breed fleece and yarn."

Through butcher Andrew 'Farmer' Sharp, there will also be events run in Newcastle and, in conjunction with Slow Food, at one of its partnership restaurants in Birmingham.

RBST CEO Christopher Price said: "We need to be shouting about fantastic high quality, slow grown meat and fibre with provenance, and this project does that perfectly."

SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH GIVES HOPE FOR ASH TREES' FUTURE

THE FUTURE of the ash tree is beginning to look more secure now that scientists believe they can breed ash dieback resistant varieties. Ashes are the third most common trees in the British landscape, but they are being threatened by a fungus that arrived in the UK in 2012.

Now experts at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and Queen Mary University have identified the genes that give some ash trees resistance to the disease.

Professor Richard Buggs from Kew said: "There's no cure for ash dieback and it threatens to kill over half of the 90 million ash

trees in the UK. This will have huge impacts on the British landscape.

"Our new findings of the genetic basis of natural resistance found in a small minority of British ash trees help us to predict how ash populations will evolve under ash dieback. While many ash trees will die, our findings are encouraging from a long-term perspective and reassure us that ash woodlands will one day flourish again."

The discovery cannot help those trees already affected by the disease, but it may ensure that we still see ash trees and their distinctive keys in our woods and gardens for centuries to come.

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Research points to the rejuvenating power of pony grazing

PONY POWER could hold the key to regenerating biodiversity on moorland, initial results from a research project into the benefits of pony grazing have shown.

Researchers at the University of Plymouth have been working with the Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust (DPHT) for the past three years to gather scientific evidence about conservation grazing for Defra and Natural England to assist with the planning of future stewardship schemes such as ELMS (Environmental Land Management System).

The government particularly wanted to find ways to reduce the dominance of purple moor grass (molinia) and encourage more traditional dwarf shrubs, such as common heather (calluna).

Prof Paul Lunt of Plymouth University said: "The findings from this study suggest that salt blocks can be used to attract ponies to targeted areas of molinia-dominated moorland, where other management strategies are not sustainable. The increased grazing and trampling activity of the ponies can lead to a reduction in sward height and molinia cover, facilitating increased germination and the establishment of calluna seedlings and plant species diversity."

The project is ongoing.

Dorset smallholder receives ban

A DORSET smallholder has been banned from keeping animals for a decade after council officers found the bodies of 20 domestic fowl and two ferrets on land he rented. Dennis Thorne, 43, from Kington Magna, Gillingham, admitted six animal health and welfare offences and was sentenced to 14 weeks' imprisonment, suspended for 12 months, as well as 200 hours of unpaid community work, 20 days' rehabilitation and fines of £715. Live goats and chickens were taken into the care of the RSPCA.

Farmers set to benefit from government woodland scheme

THE GOVERNMENT hopes to fight climate change with a £50 million scheme to pay farmers and landowners to plant more trees. The Woodland Carbon Guarantee will help land managers in England invest in carbon sequestration – the process by which trees lock up and store carbon from the atmosphere.

A Woodland Carbon Unit (WCU) is a tonne of CO₂ which has been verified as being sequestered in woodland. It can be used by companies to report against UK-based emissions.

Successful participants in the Woodland Carbon Guarantee Scheme won't receive immediate payments, rather they will be offered the option of selling WCUs to the government at agreed dates over 35 years at a guaranteed price.

Forestry and Climate Adaptation Minister Zac Goldsmith said: "Woodland creation is an excellent way to help combat the effects of climate change. By supporting farmers and land managers who decide to invest in tree planting, we are making sure that we tackle climate change through nature-based solutions and – as part of our 25 Year Environment Plan – help to leave the environment in a better state than we found it."

Tim Breitmeyer of the Country Land and Business Association said: "Delivering a guaranteed price every five to 10 years will help tree planting to



become a more realistic long-term option, while the flexibility offered in the trading of Woodland Carbon Units will ensure a financial return for farmers who will be offsetting society's more carbon intensive activities.

"However, it is clear that £50m is a drop in the ocean as far as incentivising the planting at a scale that is needed and expected of farmers."

For more information, visit www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-new-scheme-to-boost-tree-planting

■ The Forestry Commission has also released a new guide advising landowners how to adapt their woodland management to cope with climate change. To download, visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-englands-woodlands-in-a-climate-emergency

DRASTIC INSECT DECLINE 'CAN BE REVERSED'

DRASTIC DECLINES in insect numbers will have serious consequences for British wildlife and people, a new report commissioned by a group of Wildlife Trusts in the south west has warned. The report, *Insect declines and why they matter*, by Prof Dave Goulson of the University of Sussex, highlights the effects of insect declines upon birds, bats, fish, lizards and amphibians.

Prof Goulson said: "Insects make up the bulk of known species on earth and are integral to the functioning of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, performing vital roles such as pollination, seed dispersal and nutrient

cycling. They are also food for numerous larger animals. If we don't stop the decline of our insects there will be profound consequences for all life on earth.

"Causes of decline include habitat loss and fragmentation and the overuse of pesticides. Wild insects are routinely exposed to complex cocktails of toxins which can cause death or disorientation and weakened immune and digestive systems."

Now Wildlife Trusts across the UK are calling for a new environment bill to reverse the decline.

They believe that with coordinated and concerted

action from government, local authorities, food growers and the public, insect populations can recover and thrive once more.

Dr Gary Mantle of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust which sponsored the report said: "This unnoticed apocalypse should set alarms ringing. We have put at risk some of the fundamental building blocks of life, but, as this report highlights, the main causes of insect declines are known and we can address them. Insects and other invertebrates can recover quickly if we all take action now in our gardens, parks, farms and places of work."

FARMING GROUPS CRITICISE BBC'S *MEAT: A THREAT TO OUR PLANET?*

FARMING GROUPS have criticised a BBC documentary on meat production, saying that it made no attempt to distinguish between the way livestock is farmed in the UK and in other countries.

Meat: A threat to our planet? was shown on BBC1 on 25 November. It focused on the scale of production, impact on the atmosphere and the pollution caused by intensive beef and pig rearing in North and South America.

The presidents of the National Farmers' union (NFU), NFU Cymru, NFU Scotland and the Ulster



Farmers' Union said the programme did not explain the vast differences between American and UK meat production, leaving viewers with the impression that all meat is produced in the same way.

They say beef production in the UK is already 2.5 times more efficient than the global

average and four times more efficient than places that are deforesting land.

"Beef production systems across the globe are too often portrayed the same, which is far from the truth," said Chris Mallon of the National Beef Association.

"The UK is one of the most sustainable places in the world to produce red meat because 60% of the land that makes up our agricultural landscapes is unsuitable for planting crops."

NFU president Minette Batters stated that she intended to make a formal complaint to the BBC.

Halt in fracking welcomed by CPRE

BANNING ALL new fracking is a fundamental step towards net zero carbon emissions by 2050, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) has said. "This is a fantastic win for local democracy and everyone who cares about protecting the countryside from climate catastrophe and mass industrialisation," said CPRE director of campaigns Tom Fyans. The move to halt fracking in the UK was announced by the government in November after research claimed that "unacceptable" consequences for those living near fracking sites could not be ruled out.

How do you cope in a crisis?

HAVE YOU coped with running a smallholding while suffering from illness or injury? What are the keys to getting through it? And when is the time to call in outside help, and who? If you would be happy to share your story with *Country Smallholding*, contact Helen Babbs on hv.babbs@gmail.com.

And finally... French farmers in the dock

FRENCH COURTS have been going quackers with two recent complaints about farm animals. In the first, a flock of 60 ducks and geese belonging to Nouvelle-Aquitaine farmer Dominique Douthe narrowly escaped the chop when a neighbour complained that they were too loud. Luckily, the court in Dax ruled that their quacking and honking was within acceptable limits.

However, Nicolas Bardy, a farmer in the Cantal, was not so fortunate when his neighbour objected to the smell of his cows. The 10-year wrangle ended up in court with the neighbour complaining of "strong, irritating odours" from the haystack and cows.

Mr Bardy was not a-moo-sed to be found guilty of causing "abnormal neighbourly disorder". He was fined €6,000 with €2,000 costs.

New Joint Unit on Waste aims to fight scourge of fly-tipping



A NEW national waste unit is being set up this month with the intention of helping in the fight against the scourge of fly-tipping which continues to blot Britain's beautiful landscape. The Environment Agency will set up the Joint Unit on Waste with involvement from the police and HMRC.

The latest fly-tipping statistics show that for the year 2018/19, local authorities in England dealt with just over 1 million incidents, an increase of 8% from the 998,000 reported in 2017/18, although the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) has stated that these figures don't reflect the true scale of the crime as they fail to include reports of fly-tipping on privately owned land.

National Farmers Union (NFU) vice president Stuart Roberts said: "These

new figures highlight a situation that continues to spiral out of control, now affecting two-thirds of all farmers with potentially a large number of unrecorded incidents taking place on private land. Many do all they can to prevent fly-tippers, such as installing gates, barriers, warning signs, security cameras and lighting. However, in many cases we have found that deterrents don't work. In some cases, farmers also experience intimidation, violence and threats on their doorstep from criminal gangs.

"We need tougher penalties for those who carry out this crime. It's not widely known that 95% of fines for fly-tipping are lower than the cost of hiring a skip. What we need are punitive, exemplary fines to ensure that the people who are fly-tipping don't see fines as an irrelevance."

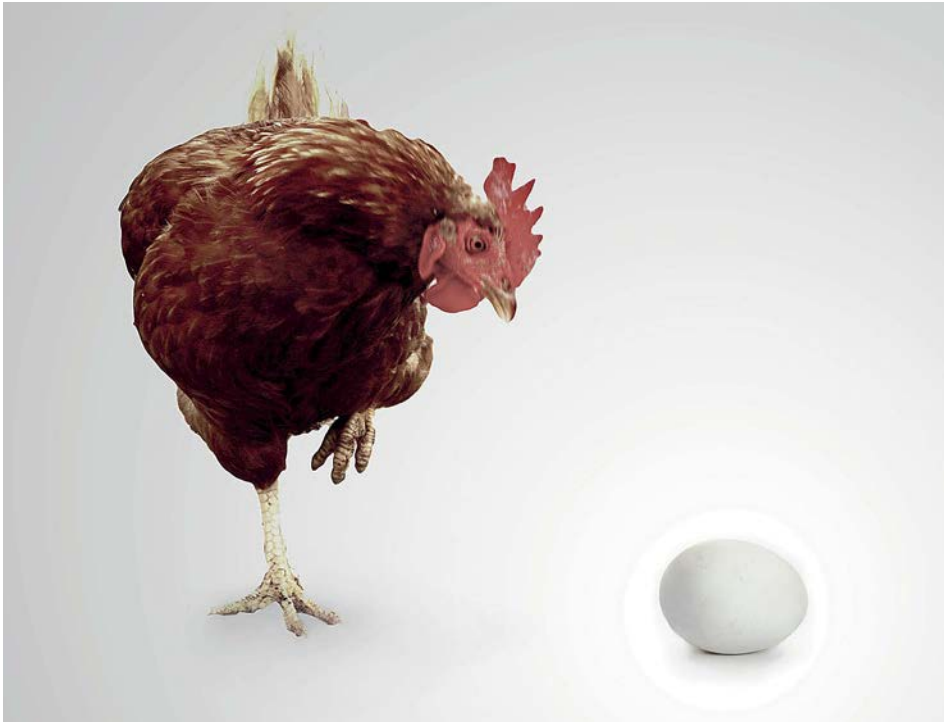
The NFU is calling for farmers and landowners to be involved at every stage of the process of the Joint Unit on Waste.

"By working together, we can tackle this continual blight on our countryside," continued Mr Roberts.

■ *Farmers and growers are urged to report rural crimes to the police, or to give information anonymously to the Rural Crime Hotline, run by Crimestoppers in partnership with the NFU; tel: 0800 783 0137; or visit www.ruralcrimehotline.co.uk*

POULTRY NEWS

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Groundbreaking ChickenStress project aims to improve hen welfare

A NEWCASTLE University academic is leading a Europe-wide investigation into the genetic and neurobiological markers of stress in chickens. A neurobiologist and evolutionary neuroscientist, Dr Tom Smulders will coordinate 14 different projects over the next four years to look at how greater understanding of these stress markers might ultimately be used to improve welfare for commercial egg laying hens.

Dr Smulders said: “We know quite well how mammalian brains regulate

the stress response. The direct regulation of the hormone release, adrenaline release, cortisol release – those things are very evolutionarily preserved, so birds and mammals all do that in a very similar way.”

Where birds differ – or at least, according to Dr Smulders, appear to differ – is through the parts of their brains that interpret the world and identify the stressors that activate that system in the first place.

In addition to genetics, the ChickenStress project will also look at the impact of early life experiences

on the development of the stress response. It goes without saying that the early life experiences of a commercial laying hen are nothing like those of their ancestral red jungle fowl, or even backyard hens. Born in large, dark spaces with nothing to explore, without their mothers to guide them or feed them when they first hatch, chicks are often left in hatcheries for as long as 24 hours while the whole batch hatches before being transferred to a barn. The project will explore how this impacts on brain development. It

is understood already, for example, that bird’s brains develop in response to light coming through the egg – something commercially hatched chicks miss out on.

Dr Smulders said:

“The two hemispheres in the bird’s brain develop differently because one of the eyes is pointing to the shell and the other eye is pointing into the body of the bird when they’re wrapped up inside the eggshell. We know that light actually makes a difference because chicks incubated in the dark don’t have some of the asymmetries in the brain that the ones that have light coming through the eggshell do have – so the asymmetries are presumably the more natural state.”

With this information to hand, the study’s scientists will aim to find out whether this difference in neural development affects a bird’s ability to cope with life as an adult laying hen.

The project has already received buy in from some big hitters in the industry – Hendrix Genetics and Vencomatic are just two of the industry suppliers linked to it – as well as a €3.9m cash injection from the EU Marie Curie Fund.

Brain development of birds has never been fully understood before, so the work of the ChickenStress project could have massive implications for both the welfare of commercially farmed hens, but also those kept in much smaller scale operations as research reveals more about what causes their stress response to activate.



RENT THE CHICKEN SERVICE TAKES OFF IN THE US

A FARM in Pennsylvania has its own chicken rental service, according to a report on NJ.com. With 66 affiliates around the US, Rent The Chicken, owned by Jenn and Phillip Tompkins, delivers chickens around North America, complete with everything required for six months of care, including the coop, food and a care manual. They have also recently launched a new Hatch The Chicken package, a five-week experience whereby renters receive all they need to experience the progression of egg to chick, this one being particularly aimed at families, schools and care facilities.

Why? Because there has been a marked increase in the number of people buying chickens without knowing how to care for them. With Rent The Chicken, renters receive everything they need to get off on the right foot, in addition to a 'get out of jail free card' – they can give them back in six months' time. Adoption is also an option for those who love their new birds. Could it catch on in the UK? Time will tell.

BEIC SETS NEW STANDARDS FOR COMBI CAGES

FOLLOWING A consultation period and after close work with Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) and Tesco, the British Egg Industry Council (BEIC) has now developed a new set of standards for barns that will see combination cages banned.

Combination or 'combi' cages are multi-tiered aviary/cage hybrids of a kind. They are built with doors so that while the doors are open the birds can move freely, but when closed they are effectively caged again, and at a stocking density comparable to the banned former system.

The commitment comes following a number of major retailers announcing that they will sell only cage-free eggs from 2025, allowing producers to invest in different aviary designs

with confidence that they will meet the new welfare requirements.

Dr Tracey Jones, director of food business at CIWF, said: "We've worked closely with the BEIC and are fully supportive of this new barn standard. It significantly improves on weak legislation that otherwise permits the use of high stocking densities and highly intensive systems such as combi systems. The new standard will not only deliver better welfare for hens, but will help to create a level playing field for those far-sighted producers converting out of cages before the 2025 deadline."

All converted and new barn units will have to comply with the new standard immediately, while existing units have until 31 December 2025.

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The right medicine

Calling the vet can be stressful because it is expensive. So how can you budget for veterinary fees on your smallholding, asks **Charlotte Cooper**?

When you run a small farm there are many demands on your money – both from expected costs and those that appear out of the blue. One of the “known unknowns” – to quote a certain American politician – is veterinary fees. You can budget for routine vet visits, for vaccinations and treatments, but there will always be unforeseen emergencies.

As yet there are no insurance policies covering farm animals for vets’ fees in the same way that your dog, cat or horse may be covered, so how do you ensure that you can put enough by for those contingencies without wiping out your savings?

GET THE BOOK

A useful budgeting tool for the penny conscious farmer is the *John Nix Pocketbook for Farm Management*. This annual publication sets out the average costs and returns for each type of farming enterprise, from goat dairying to glamping, and includes the running expenses for most farmyard animals.

The information is gleaned from official figures from Defra, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) and other sources, so it is geared to the more intensive farmer, but it gives a handy clue to expected outlay (see opposite, far right).

According to the *Pocketbook*, a ewe costs the farmer an average of between £8 and £11 each year in vet routine fees – for wormers, vaccines and flystrike and foot treatments. However, farmers with smaller numbers in their flocks will not have the same economy of scale as bigger farms when treating their sheep. Buying a wormer that will treat 50 sheep for £55 is less economical when you only



ABOVE:
A smallholder can reduce their veterinary costs by clubbing together with neighbours

have six to treat, for example. Therefore, the cost to the smallholder is likely to be higher.

ECONOMIES OF SCALE

So how can a smallholder reduce their costs? One way is by clubbing together. Your local smallholding or farming association can offer you a useful network of other similar small farmers who may be interested in sharing costs and products. Sharing the outlay between two or more small farms could save you cash. However, do remember that a visit from your vet at least once a year will be necessary if you need prescribed drugs, so another way is to join a group organised by your local vet practice.

A 2009 UK government report on veterinary expertise in food animal production highlighted that approximately two thirds of sheep farmers only contacted their veterinarian for emergencies and only a fifth had a year-round

contact, so it’s very much in vets’ interests to encourage farmers to consult them.

Flock Health Clubs are an idea introduced in 2016 to make veterinary advice and services to sheep farmers more affordable and attractive. It was the brainchild of Teesdale vet Fiona Lovatt and since then she has encouraged around 60 vet practices across the country to set up their own clubs.

Members pay a monthly subscription to be a part of their local group and they receive certain services, ie, a specified number of vet visits, monthly meetings, health checks and tests. Each vet creates a plan suitable for their clientele.

Ms Lovatt said: “Flock Health Clubs allow their members to spread the costs of sheep-keeping across the year and that’s important. However, I think the chief strength of these groups is the peer-to-peer learning, but with a vet in the

middle to keep things evidence-based. Farmers are great at thinking anecdotally, but they are generally speaking from a sample size of one farm, so it's important to have a vet involved.

"Vets spend a great deal of time talking to clients one-on-one, but very few of us can afford many hours of veterinary time and advice each month. That's why these meetings can be particularly beneficial."

Vets offer a variety of benefits to their clubs. For example, for £18.75 you can join the club at Scarsdale Vets in the East Midlands and receive two one-hour non-emergency farm visits a year for disease monitoring and three faecal egg counts.

And at Hafren Vets in Newtown, Shropshire, club members receive two farm visits a year and a written health plan, as well as coccidiosis and external parasite testing, abortion screenings and half price post-mortems. The membership subscription also covers four faecal egg counts per year.

Other Flock Health Clubs have monthly meetings about disease and other issues and members receive discounts on services and products from their vets. Other practices offer lambing clubs, where, for your monthly fee, you receive significant savings on vet fees during the lambing season.

Another great benefit is being able to spread the costs between members.

"An important perk for small farmers is that practices can split bottles of drugs (which merchants are not legally allowed to do) so membership of vet-organised groups can make medicines a lot cheaper," added Ms Lovatt.

ALL CREATURES

Concerns about farmers not consulting their practices have also led to a wider range of farming packages being offered by practices and not only for sheep farmers, but also including smallholding packages.

Molecare Farm Vets, based in Devon, offers tailored packages to its smallholder customers that cost between £16-28 a month, depending on the number and type of animals.

Clinical director Andy Adler said: "We have quite a number of smallholder clients – Devon is the sort of place people dream of moving to – and we find that they like the support and security a package offers them.

"They have a number of visits in the bank, so to speak, and access to a vet and advice when they need it. It also suits us as, in order to prescribe medicines, an animal has to be 'under our care' and British Veterinary Association regulations mean that we have to see those animals at least once a year. The package allows us to get on farm, to create flock plans and answer questions and it's also a good way for our young vets to get experience and meet the customers."

Other practices have beef and dairy clubs and Scarsdale Vets in Nottinghamshire even runs a group for alpaca owners which has led to a special blood bank for cria emergencies.

So, while the plans, groups and packages vary, the message is clear – an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and, although you can't budget for every eventuality, if you work with your vet to create a suitable package you can remove considerable uncertainty. ■

The 50th John Nix Pocketbook for Farm Management (for 2020) is out now. Cost: £29, plus P&P. Buy it at www.thepocketbook.co.uk/product/john-nix-pocketbook

AVERAGE VET EXPENSES PER ANIMAL PER YEAR (ALL FIGURES FROM THE JOHN NIX POCKETBOOK FOR 2019)

Sheep

Spring lambing ewes (lowland): £8-11
Spring lambing ewes (upland): £9-11
Rearing ewe lambs to 12 months: £7

Finishing meat lambs (from weaning to sale): £3

Dairy sheep and goats (females)

Around £25 a year

Angora goats

£12

Cattle

Dairy cows: £41-77

depending on breed and calving time
Heifer rearing: £22-26
Beef calves: £17 (to three months), £19 (six months)
Store cattle: £12-14

Camelids

Llamas and alpacas: £26

Pigs

No information in *Pocketbook*, but they need vaccinations and wormers

Egg hens

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'An important perk for small farmers is that practices can split bottles of drugs, which can make medicines a lot cheaper'



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A WHITER SHADE OF PALE

Before the crocus yellow of February comes the early year snow that may be welcomed by invertebrates, says Paul Hetherington

JANUARY IS a month of white; snowdrop white even if there is no snow. Originally snowdrops were a joyful sight for the early year, but now they have become an important source of food for our bees who are so frequently active due to the weather often rising above 5°C. It is also the time to spread out snowdrop clumps as movement in the green is by far the best way to expand their range as long as the ground is not frozen solid.

Dragonfly and other larvae will now be resting at the bottom of ponds hoping to escape a solid freeze. Worms and slugs have tunnelled deep into the soil well below the frost line.

However, if you dig around in warmer, damper parts or raise a slab you are likely to find other bugs sheltering: snails sealed in their shells, woodlice, centipedes and millipedes who are slow but active. You may even discover ground beetles sheltering to keep warm, although, of course, the beetles and centipedes will also be looking to potentially snack on the other invertebrates as they seek suitable plant matter to keep them going.

A blanket of snow can be good for invertebrates, providing shelter from the coldest nights like a giant blanket, although a fast thaw can lead to danger from flooding and the moulds



Ground beetles will shelter during January to try to keep warm

that damp can spread. And when the white fades to the promised yellow of aconite and crocus, the garden will truly come to life, but that is

definitely a tale for February.

Paul Hetherington is director of communications at Buglife, www.buglife.org.uk

OUT OF THE WOODS

Good woodland management will help the rare hazel dormouse to thrive, says Ian White

IN BRITAIN a well-structured woodland should consist of four layers — the ground layer of woodland mosses, the field layer of herbaceous plants, the shrub layer of young trees and scrubby vegetation and the higher 'canopy' layer of mature trees. Hazel dormice are a rare, native woodland species that hibernate on the ground in

winter, but when they are active in spring, summer and early autumn they usually live in the shrub layer to feed and raise their young as they will be well protected in the dense scrubby growth.

Unfortunately, many of our woodlands have lost this structure and only the ground layer and canopy layer persist.

This is the result of allowing a lot of canopy trees to grow and expand, reducing the amount of light getting through to the woodland floor. This, in turn, inhibits the development of the field layer and shrub layer, added to which such regrowth that does occur may be browsed by deer or rabbits.

Any woodland management should aim to restore the woodland layers and you can do this by:

- Undertaking any tree, scrub or coppice work between November and March to avoid disturbing nesting dormice.
- Keeping fire sites, paths and trackways to a minimum to avoid harming hibernating dormice.
- Felling or coppicing in small non-adjacent blocks (no larger than ¼ha, depending on woodland size) to ensure a complete dormouse home range isn't destroyed.
- Retaining arboreal connection between habitats, such as coppice blocks,

to allow dormice to travel throughout the woodland without coming to the ground.

- After felling, plant both shrubs and canopy trees, if necessary, to encourage an age structure to develop within the wood.
- Managing the impact of deer and rabbits.

Dormice are really good indicators of the health of a woodland for wildlife. Management work to suit dormice will improve things for lots of other species too.

Ian White is dormouse and training officer for PTES; tel: 0207 498 4533; email: enquiries@ptes.org; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ptes.org>



After felling, plant both shrubs and canopy trees to encourage an age structure to develop within the wood

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The Twitter bio of the Prince's Countryside Fund says: 'We believe in the UK's rural communities and want to secure a brighter future for the British countryside'

At the heart of a charity

Why not welcome in the New Year by joining a truly inspirational charity with the UK countryside at its core, says **Adam Henson**

I'M STARTING the New Year wearing a brand new hat, but I'm not talking about some sort of fancy headwear, or even one of those flat caps that were once so popular with country folk and have recently become a bit of a hipster fashion statement. You might already know that I wear lots of different hats: sheep and arable farmer, rare breeds enthusiast, Cotswold Farm Park proprietor, TV presenter, author and supporter of all kinds of worthwhile campaigns from UK Wool Week to Open Farm Sunday. Well now I've added another role to the list after accepting an invitation

to become an ambassador for the Prince's Countryside Fund. It's a remarkable charity that was set up 10 years ago by the Prince of Wales after serious concerns were raised about the future of rural Britain in the wake of the devastating Foot and Mouth Disease crisis.

If you want to understand what's at the heart of the Prince's Countryside Fund, you could do a lot worse than look at the charity's Twitter bio. It says: "We believe in the UK's rural communities and want to secure a brighter future for the British countryside." So how does it put that vision into action? In several ways, in fact: through a grant

programme that distributes about £1m a year to rural projects; with research into ways to help the countryside thrive; by offering free advice and training to family farmers; and finally via an emergency fund that helps people to survive a crisis (recently it came to the aid of farms and families hit by severe flooding in the Yorkshire Dales).

I've been aware of the charity and its aims from the very outset thanks to the fact that Prince Charles chose an interview on *Countryfile* to reveal details of his new venture back in July 2010 (a great privilege for us and more so when we discovered that HRH

is a keen viewer of the programme).

As an official ambassador I'll be joining an illustrious, talented and incredibly diverse bunch of well known people who already wave the flag for the charity. They include the TV and radio presenter Alan Titchmarsh, Olympic gold medal-winning athlete Sally Gunnell and the chef/restaurateur Heston Blumenthal. I was delighted and extremely honoured to be given the opportunity to become the fund's newest ambassador. Rest assured that this is one hat I'll wear with responsibility, dedication and a great deal of pride. ■

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WHAT'S ON

IN JANUARY FOR SMALLHOLDERS

COMPILED BY: Lydia Tewkesbury



LAMMA is now in its 38th year. It's 11 halls are packed with more than 700 exhibitors

7-8 JANUARY **LAMMA 20**

*National Exhibition Centre,
Birmingham, West Midlands*

It's hard to beat LAMMA when it comes to the sheer amount of agricultural machinery, equipment and technology in one place. Now in its 38th year, the show regularly attracts more than 40,000 visitors to its 11 halls that are packed with more than 700 exhibitors selling the best and latest in tractors, combines, drills and cultivation kits, as well as services and tools.

TICKETS: FREE
www.lammashow.com

7-9 JANUARY **OXFORD FARMING CONFERENCE**

Oxford University Examination Schools, Oxford, Oxfordshire

The 2020 theme of one of the biggest conferences in the farming calendar is 'Growing a healthy society'. This year speakers will focus on ways we might strengthen the relationship between the

population, the land and the people who produce our food.
TICKETS: £325 plus VAT
www.ofc.org.uk

8-9 JANUARY **OXFORD REAL FARMING CONFERENCE**

*Oxford Town Hall,
Oxford OX1 1BP*

Delegates at the Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC) are generally innovative farmers with a particular interest in sustainability issues. Expect farmers working in unusual spaces, others putting pioneering models into practice, inspiring old hands and, of course, plenty of politics.
TICKETS: Waitlist only
<https://orfc.org.uk>

18 JANUARY **NANTWICH VEGAN FAIR**

Nantwich Civic Hall, Nantwich, Cheshire

The town's first vegan fair will fill the Civic Hall with stallholders selling a range of goodies

from burgers to cakes and everything in between. Come with an open mind and find plenty of ideas as to how to utilise the non-meat produce from your holding.

TICKETS: FREE
www.nantwichveganfair.co.uk

20-21 JANUARY **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SMALL-SCALE AGRICULTURE AND FAMILY FARMING**

Novotel London Wembley, London

One for the scientifically minded, this conference brings together leading academics, researchers and research scholars to share experiences — anecdotal and scientific — from the world of small-scale farming, both at home and abroad. It'll be an inspiring, multi-disciplinary platform for researchers and practitioners to share innovations and trends, as well as practical challenges faced by the industry.

TICKETS: Prices vary

<https://waset.org/small-scale-agriculture-and-family-farming-conference-in-january-2020-in-london>

20-22 JANUARY **BRITISH CATTLE BREEDERS CLUB CONFERENCE**

Telford Hotel and Golf Resort, Shropshire

The British Cattle Breeders Club (BCBC) Conference this year will be all about moving with the changes facing the industry. Sustainability and Brexit-related concerns are on everyone's minds, but this year the BCBC wants to take a positive look at the opportunities to be found within both. Speakers will debate crafting a means of breeding cattle that will suit systems, meet consumer demand and fulfil market requirements.

TICKETS: £159 per day
www.cattlebreeders.org.uk/conference

25 JANUARY **STROUD VEGAN FAIR**

The Subscription Rooms, George Street, Stroud, Gloucestershire

Celebrate Veganuary with a visit to the Stroud Vegan Fair. Now in its third year, the fair offers a fun range of goods for sale — vegan food, cruelty-free cosmetics and ethically sourced clothing — along with talks, demonstrations and hands-on workshops.

TICKETS: Adult £2;
accompanied under 14s FREE
For more information, search *Stroud Vegan Fair* on Facebook

27-28 JANUARY **DAIRY SHEEP AND GOAT CONFERENCE 2020**

St Pierre Marriott Hotel, Chepstow, Wales

The fifth annual conference on the development of small ruminant dairying in the UK. Aimed at producers, processors, vets and all industry suppliers, it features an exciting line up of national and international speakers involved in the growing field of sheep and goat milk production.

TICKETS: Prices vary; check online for more details
www.dsgc2020.co.uk



'If you google "turkey housing" you get some lovely rental properties in Istanbul'

Designing and creating housing for the new arrivals brings plenty of challenges, confesses diarist **Corinna Bull**

I can't believe that it's autumn already – or, in fact, more or less winter – particularly as I have yet to finish the tasks on my spring to-do list. I wonder if it's too late? Perhaps they can wait until next spring? After all, I never got around to finishing last autumn's tasks...

Walking around the holding can sometimes be quite depressing as I see lots of half finished jobs and even more projects that haven't even begun. Particularly depressing is the empty pig field, now full of weeds, that I had wanted to sow with wild flowers and instead is just full of thistles that I must tackle before they seed all over our land and that of our neighbour. On days like this I find it helps to invite a friend or relative for coffee as if they haven't visited for a while they are always amazed by the

progress that has been made and kindly don't point out the unweeded vegetable garden or the bare patches of grass I have been meaning to sow for nine months. Plus, if I show them around outside, they can't see how little progress we have made in the house!

ALL ABOARD THE TURKEY BUS

The turkeys have now recovered from their M25 adventure (*Country Smallholding*, November 2019) and have settled well into their new home. They are a firm favourite with my husband, James, for their puppy-like curiosity, following him around the garden gurgling and cackling as if they are providing a running commentary on his activities. Our dogs, however, aren't so sure about the new arrivals. All previous animals

have kept a healthy distance as if understanding the distinction between 'pet' and 'livestock', but the turkeys don't respect these boundaries and get as close as possible to the dogs, even pecking at their tails as they lay sunbathing on the lawn.

In keeping with my disposition as an enthusiastic newbie, I had done lots of research ahead of the birds' arrival. I was pleased with the large run they had – in addition to plenty of free ranging opportunities – but I was struggling with their housing.

If you google 'turkey housing' you get some lovely rental properties in Istanbul, but very little on the best accommodation for turkey poults. I therefore turned to my *Storey's Guide to Raising Turkeys* and its design for a step-ladder type roost.

It seemed relatively straightforward, plus James loves a carpentry challenge, and so he set to work in the shed, happily sawing and hammering. We even took note of the advice that turkeys don't like the wet and fitted the roost with an Onduline roof which dropped down on one side to protect them from prevailing winds, but what James created looked less like the design in the *Storey's Guide* and more like a 1970s bus shelter that had seen better days. We set it up inside their run and waited for the evening before returning to see if they were enjoying their new roost.

For the first few days the turkey bus shelter was completely ignored by the birds, but then one evening I was delighted to see one poult

OPPOSITE:
The turkey bus stop; The greenhouse; A glorious glut of late summer tomatoes

BELOW:
Building a turkey roost





roosting on top of the structure. Soon all the poults had taken residence on the Onduline roof, which surely wasn't as comfortable for their feet as the beautifully sanded perches, but they would not be moved despite James going into the run after dusk and lifting them off the roof and onto the perches.

Night after night they roosted on top of the shelter, even when they grew so large that their heads almost hit the roof of the run. Clearly they hadn't read *Storey's Guide* to know that they should prefer dry, sheltered step-ladder type roosts.

FABULOUS COUNTRY FOLK

We are very fortunate to have some excellent neighbours who have helped us out of several tricky situations, from towing vehicles stranded in the mud to capturing escaped animals. We are therefore always happy to repay the favour whenever we can. Looking after a few chickens seemed a rather small ask in comparison to helping us load reluctant pigs into a trailer and so when our neighbours

announced that they were going away for some autumn sun I had no qualms about looking after their three bantams.

For the first few days it was perfectly straightforward. I popped over at dawn and dusk to let the chickens out/put them in and top up their food and water. On day four, however, when I went to let them out, only two chickens appeared through the pop hole. Opening the shed door, I found that one had – quite literally – fallen off her perch. I checked for bite marks or some obvious cause of death, but there was nothing. Next came the moral dilemma... do you text your neighbour on her holiday to inform her of her loss or wait for her return? I decided to message and spent ages crafting something that was sympathetic, but also absolving me of any wrong-doing. The reply soon came back: "These things happen, not to worry. Just toss the body into the field as a present for the fox. Don't attempt mouth to mouth!"

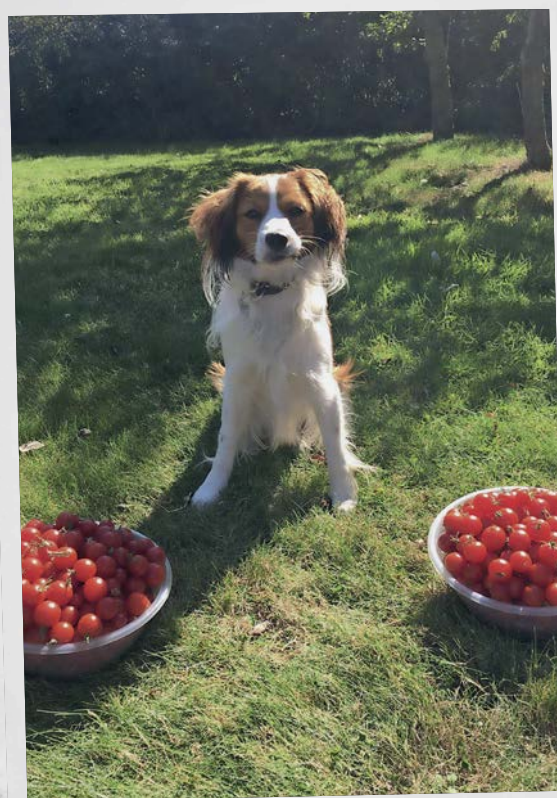
I'm so glad to be surrounded by country people. They are just incredibly down to earth. ■

OF MICE AND TOMATOES

After my hard work restoring the greenhouse over the winter, I was keen to put it to use this summer and stocked up on tomatoes, chillies and peppers. Having never been good at remembering to water plants (my mother long ago banned me from keeping house plants), we decided to invest in a growbag watering system so all I would have to do would be remember to turn the tap on (and off!) each day. We got off to a strong start and the tomatoes flourished, soon giving us enough for litres of passata, as well as salads, soups and chutneys. As the weather turned more autumnal, the crop reduced and I could afford to become more negligent with my watering.

One beautiful September day, however, I decided to water the

greenhouse and harvest the final fruit before the winter. I turned on the tap and the grow bag watering system sprung into life. As I bent down to adjust the hosepipe, a mouse stuck out its nose. I'm not sure who was more surprised – him or me – and he soon made a swift exit out of the greenhouse door. Much to my amazement, the same thing happened on the second growbag. It seems that a whole family of mice had taken residence in the growbag trays and by turning on the tap I inadvertently waterboarded them while simultaneously rendering them homeless. They all made a swift exit via the door into the garden and I very much hope that they have now found more suitable – and less damp – accommodation.



Open for business

Working from home sound appealing, but are you really equipped for the challenges of running a business on site? **Liz Shankland** looks at the pros and cons of inviting the paying public onto your smallholding

If you are someone who hates the routine of leaving your smallholding every day in order to make a living, you have probably daydreamed about what it might be like to run your own business right on your own doorstep.

Home working can cover many different things, but for a growing number of landowners, setting up a money-making enterprise which allows customers to come to you is an appealing idea. That could, for instance, mean selling your own produce from a farm shop, creating a visitor attraction involving livestock or land-based activities, providing holiday accommodation, or running educational, creative, or experiential courses.

Getting hugely enthusiastic about a brilliant idea after a bottle of wine is all well and good, but making a go of a business venture – particularly one that involves playing host to the public – can be quite a challenge. Aside from the small matter of how you are planning to finance the venture and whether or not you might secure planning consent, there are numerous things to consider, including:

Health and safety. Words to strike fear into anyone's heart! Keeping visitors safe involves a multitude of things, from minimising the risk of accidents to making sure that they are not injured by animals or poisoned by food or drink you serve. Remedial work to improve safety in public



areas can be costly and you will also have to factor in public liability insurance.

Accessibility. Have you thought about the implications of making your premises suitable for visitors with mental or physical disabilities? Providing disabled access isn't just about making premises wheelchair-friendly; the Equality Act 2010 was introduced to protect the rights of disabled people and to ensure that they are not treated less favourably than other customers. Depending on what type of business you run, you may be required to make

'reasonable adjustments' to your premises and the services you provide. Visit Britain has a vast amount of information on the subject (*see Useful Resources, right*).

Publicity. You have to be good at marketing what you have to offer. Simply having a website is no longer sufficient. In addition to understanding how to use conventional media outlets to generate publicity, you also need to know how to use social media to your advantage. What's more, you must keep producing new content for your followers on a regular basis. Be aware that the internet

can work against you, too. Disgruntled customers are quick to post comments and bad reviews on sites like Trip Advisor can seriously damage your reputation in a short space of time.

Personal relationships. Working together day in, day out can put a strain on even the strongest of relationships, particularly if you're putting in ridiculous hours to get your business up and running. Switching off at the end of the working day can be difficult when you live on site, too, so remembering to set aside some quality time for a partner or other family members is essential.

Staffing. Do you really want to be a boss? If you get to the stage of hiring helpers, you will need to know your legal responsibilities as an employer and you will also have to understand how to manage people. Recruiting – and retaining – good staff is often tricky in popular tourist areas where there are plenty of jobs on offer and you may find yourself competing against other businesses for the right people. ■

USEFUL RESOURCES

National Farm Attractions Network, www.farmattractions.net
Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF), www.leafuk.org
Farms for Schools, www.farmsforschools.org.uk
Farm Retail Association, www.farma.org.uk
Social Farms and Gardens UK, www.farmgarden.org.uk
The Business Barn, www.thebusinessbarn.co.uk
Visit Britain, www.visitbritain.org
Health and Safety Executive, www.hse.gov.uk

CASE STUDY: CARE FARMING

Having to satisfy the planning restrictions on their Devon smallholding helped to focus Brenda and Phil Leonard's plans for a home-based enterprise. The couple bought the nine-acre former alpaca farm in February 2018 knowing full well that it only had temporary planning permission and that they would have to establish a successful business on site if they wanted to carry on living there.

Almost two years later and Apple Tree Farm Services is doing exceptionally well, operating as a care farm which provides therapy services for children and adults with disabilities. The family's animals, which include alpacas, sheep, pigs, dogs and poultry, play an important part in helping clients to overcome their various challenges and difficulties and sessions are tailor-made to suit individual requirements.

The impetus for the move from Surrey to High Bickington came when daughter Millie, now four, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at a few months old. Brenda and Phil felt that growing up in a more peaceful



and relaxing environment than a London suburb could offer would aid her development.

"As soon as we saw this place, we knew it was the one," Brenda remembers. "We loved everything about it. We knew about the planning restrictions from the beginning, but if the conditions had not been there, it would have been two or three times more expensive and out of our price range. We knew that we had to set up a business – that was the trade-off – so I re-trained, doing a course in animal-assisted therapy, and we started taking in visitors four months after moving in."

The Leonards were fortunate in that the smallholding had excellent outbuildings and the land was incredibly flat, so adapting facilities for visitors with a variety of special needs

wasn't too onerous. It hasn't all been plain sailing, however.

"There have been times when both Phil and I have felt that we're close to having breakdowns and we've said to one another, 'we've taken on too much'," Brenda confesses. "We've planned open days when we've had more than 300 people turn up and we just weren't ready for it. There have been times when I've said, 'right, that's enough. I need two nights in front of the telly to recover'. But now we're reaching a point where we might just be able to sleep at night. Phil has been able to give up his job and work here, so that has taken a huge amount of stress away as we can share the responsibilities."

"On the plus side, we're so lucky. Even though we have to work quite hard most of the time, we have the luxury of being able to pick up Millie from school at 3.30pm and we get to spend far more time with her than many parents might."

Find out more: www.appletreefarmservices.co.uk; or www.facebook.com/APPLETRECAREFARM/

CASE STUDY: A BIG ADVENTURE?

Since setting up Brimham Rocks Adventure Farm two years ago, Becky and Richard Burniston put heart and soul into making it a successful tourism business in an area that was already well served by several similar attractions.

The busy visitor centre near Harrogate, North Yorkshire, occupies just one of their 43 acres, but welcomes a steady stream of visitors of all ages, enticed by the prospect of getting close to a whole range of animals. Indoor and outdoor play areas are available, themed days and seasonal attractions are provided and there is a café on site selling home-made produce. Animal therapy sessions, designed to help everyone from children with disabilities to adults suffering



from mental illness, have also become a major part of the business.

But success comes at a price, Becky warns. "Running a business like this takes a toll on relationships. In our case, it has practically destroyed our marriage," she openly admits.

"It's probably our own fault because the business takes up all of our time and it's really hard work – and we also have the additional 42 acres to farm. When we get back to the house after the visitors have gone, the work doesn't end there. We have a 10-year-old and a five-

year-old and there are meals to make, washing to sort out and no time for anything else. When we sit down, we find that we have nothing to talk about apart from the business.

"Don't get me wrong, it provides a living for myself and my husband, but, personally, I would prefer to have a poorer living and an easier life than a better living and all of the hassle," Becky continues.

"If any of your readers are thinking of setting up something similar, they are more than welcome to get in touch with me and come and visit. They can then see the day-to-day difficulties for themselves."

Find out more: www.brimhamrocksadventurefarm.co.uk; or www.facebook.com/Brimhamrocksadventurefarm/

CASE STUDY: PASSING ON RURAL SKILLSETS

Realising how much of his precious time was spent handing out free advice to would-be smallholders, Andrew Rock decided to launch a range of training courses in self-sufficiency, animal husbandry and rural skills.

Although he bought his four-and-a-half acres in Grantham, Lincolnshire, 11 years ago, it was only in 2017 that it dawned on him that tuition could be a valuable income stream.

"I was breeding Oxford Sandy and Black pigs and selling a lot of weaners to people who were new to pig keeping," he says. "Naturally, I would end up spending a lot of time showing them where I kept my pigs and explaining what they needed, but it would sometimes take up a couple of hours and they might not end

up buying any pigs. You have to strike a balance — of course, you want to help people who are just starting out and offer advice, but where it starts to rub a bit is when there is an expectation that they can just turn up and have the benefit of your experience while someone else would charge them for it."

Depending on the time of year, Andrew can run courses every week, or just one a month, with the summer being the quietest time. In order to preserve a good work/life balance, he arranges all events on week days, keeping weekends free.

"My wife, Hazel, works full time as a nurse during the week," he explains. "She has a very demanding job and it's understandable that when she has the weekend off she



doesn't want the place full of people and for me to be busy running courses. I may be losing customers, but I believe it's important to make sure that the work you do doesn't

have a negative impact on your private life."

Find out more: www.sunnysidesmallholding.com; or www.facebook.com/sunnysidesmallholding/

CASE STUDY: HIGH DAYS AND HOLIDAYS



Esther Howie has an eight-acre smallholding on the island of Anglesey, North Wales, where she keeps a flock of Jacob and Shetland sheep, along with poultry, horses and ponies. Although currently working at the local university, she is in the process of setting up Island Farm Living, a holiday business offering a range of accommodation — from shepherd's huts to off-grid roundhouses. She plans to run leisure breaks offering

opportunities to learn craft skills and animal husbandry.

"I gave up my career in primary care management and education with the intention of working from home and making the smallholding earn its keep," she explains.

"Over the years, I've accumulated a fair bit of knowledge about keeping livestock and have learned a number of skills and crafts," she adds. "You get to a point when you realise that you are no



longer a beginner and people are coming to you for advice. I'm by no means an expert and there will always be more to learn, but having been helped by a long-time smallholder when I first started out, I would like to be able to pass that on to the next generation of smallholders."

Planning permission to convert the farm's former dairy and create the accommodation units is likely to be the biggest challenge.

"We already have a static caravan on site, but under the guidance of a local planning adviser we are about to put in for planning permission," Esther says. "At the same time, I'm also developing a business plan that can be used to support the application and any funding applications that we might need to put in. I've been building up networks in the local farming and craft communities and have shared the idea with a few of these people who have expressed an interest in being a part of the venture. I've also consulted with a local tourism adviser."

"The planning permission, however, will be key. This will determine whether I can run the project year round. If it isn't successful, I will be limited to a more scaled-back, seasonal venture."

"As I will be developing the business alongside my job initially, I will be in the fortunate position of being able to grow it slowly and change/adapt things that don't work so well."

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FUN IN THE COUNTRY

Liz Murray's quirky paintings are highly sought after by countryside enthusiasts. **Susie Kearley** discovers how the former NHS doctor's inspiration was originally sparked by visits to a family smallholding.



Former NHS doctor Liz Murray turned her attentions to painting and went on to create a hugely successful business selling fine art that is fun, unusual, unique and with a definite appeal to small farmers. Since becoming a full-time artist in 2016, Liz has created beautiful paintings of every British countryside animal imaginable, but these artworks are extra eye-catching and appealing because every single one of the animals she portrays sports some form of human clothing. Highland cattle wear wide-brimmed hats; pheasants can be seen in wellies, dairy cows in farmers' caps and hares in scarves or gilets.

As I peruse her pictures, my eyes are drawn to a painting of geese getting married. One is sporting a top hat, the other a bridal veil. Liz shows me a similar painting of two loved-up pheasants, also in wedding garb, and she goes on to point out that her painted pictures of dogs in Wellington boots also wearing bow ties or caps are popular among dog owners. Sheep, in boots too, are firm favourites among her clientele as well.

Liz began painting at a young age and was constantly creative during any spare time she found



herself with. She worked on fine art commissions part time while studying at university; she qualified as a doctor in 2011, worked in a hospital for six years, but eventually gave all that up to pursue her dream of spending her days with a paint brush in hand and a rainbow of colours in a palette by her side.

"I loved working with patients, and I felt privileged to be able to assist people who were at their most vulnerable," says Liz, who spent a year in A&E at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, before a stint in obstetrics and gynaecology at King's Lynn's Queen Elizabeth Hospital. A year in paediatrics followed and then two years of senior house officer work and, subsequently, training to be a GP. However, the long hours and demanding work took their toll.

"I loved my time in general practice, but was facing another two years minimum of training. I was also working silly hours

and had no control over my annual leave in a department that was overstretched. I chose to leave. My husband is still a doctor and I continue to see the daily struggles he faces. It reminds me why I made the right decision to quit."

Painting is unequivocally a more relaxing pursuit. But what inspired Liz to paint animals in the countryside? She grew up near the North York Moors and visited her great aunt's smallholding regularly.

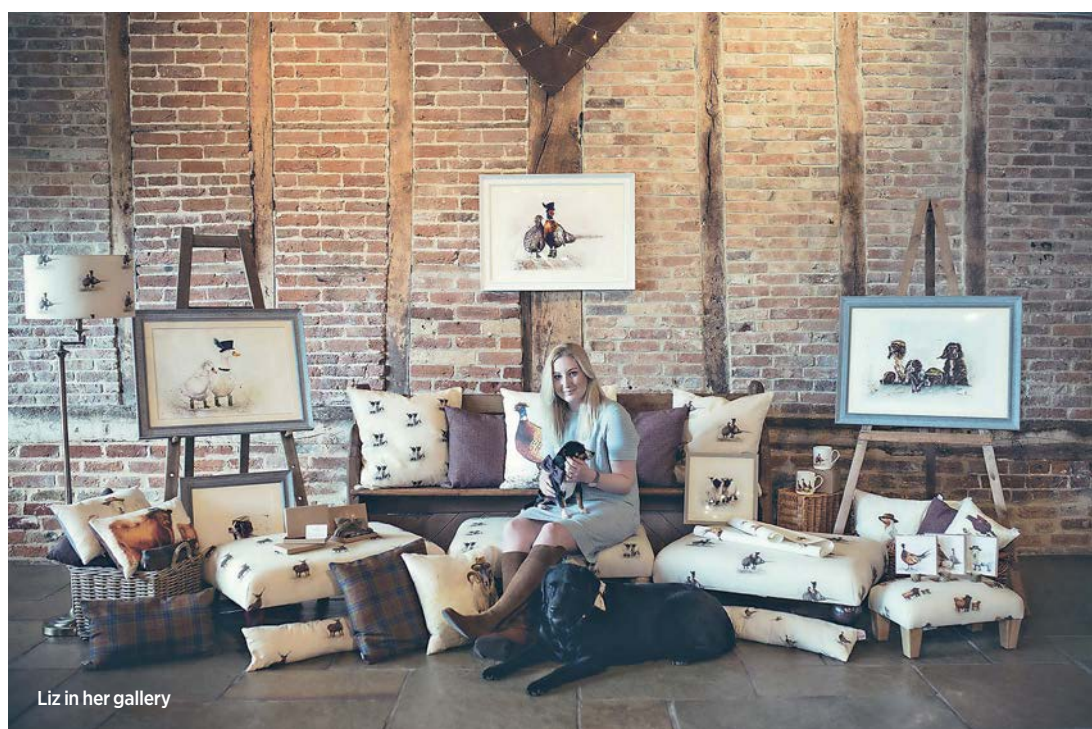
"My daughter now visits the farm next to her school," says Liz. "She sees the effect of the changing seasons on the countryside as well as new pigs being born. It's lovely."

Family friends who own smallholdings allow Liz to visit with her camera when she's looking for inspiration.

"I don't have to travel far to find cattle, pigs or sheep, and watching them inspires me. When I'm in my wellies taking photographs of these beautiful animals, I have to pinch myself. I feel so lucky to be able to do what I do now for a living," she smiles.

Through her artwork, Liz has met many owners of smallholdings and small farms.

"It's a real privilege," she says. "I've been so inspired by ▶



Liz in her gallery



them that I'm now looking for a smallholding of my own where I can have a small out-house studio and a few rare breeds."

Liz has a penchant for Swiss Valais Blacknose sheep, a cute and shaggy breed that she painted in the snow wearing Wellington boots.

"I love painting game birds, too, but I think my finest works are my paintings of spaniels," she admits. "The breed is particularly photogenic and it's easy to capture their soulful eyes. My Friesian cow painting is another favourite of mine."

Liz's grandfather was an avid painter and art teacher – hence her talent maybe – and she learned her craft from him.

"I was young when I first had a paintbrush in my hand. I was taught the 'rules' before I could read and write," she notes, adding that her grandfather painted myriad wildlife and country scenes at that time, at which point Liz wasn't keen on the genre, although it grew on her as she matured.

Liz found herself being commissioned to paint artworks for friends while she studied medicine. It was at this point that she discovered painting was a natural stress buster and so she reduced her working hours after the birth of her first child and used the extra time to expand her artistic portfolio and develop an online presence.

"I painted the country collection at the end of 2016 when I broke my leg and had to take time off work. I'd been

ABOVE:

Liz's artworks are always eye-catching due to the fact that all of her subjects sport human apparel

toying with the idea of leaving medicine for a few years before that, but I just didn't have the courage or artistic inspiration to do so. When I was housebound with that fracture I couldn't paint large canvases, so I revisited watercolours. That's when I discovered my new love for country wildlife paintings, injected with a sense of humour. My painting of a pheasant in wellies went viral on social media, so after that I painted sheep, a spaniel and the famous wedding pheasants.

"I quickly discovered a niche in the market and an online interest in this new take on a traditional muse. By the time I

went back to work, I had planned my first official collection and I handed in my notice, leaving medicine entirely and never looking back."

Liz's first three years as a full-time freelance artist have been thrilling and she says: "It's been a whirlwind. I first exhibited at the Royal Norfolk Show, which was nearly a sell out. I was taking international orders within a year and my commission diary for pet portraits quickly developed a six-month waiting list. The value of my originals tripled."

Liz launched an online shop called LALOA, which stands for Live A Life of Art.

Building up a business hasn't been all plain sailing, however. Growth was almost too rapid, but, says Liz, "I had to learn to control my desire to expand too quickly. Seeing your designs on a new product is so thrilling".

Now focusing on limited edition prints and original artworks rather than the merchandise she had made for the gallery/shop she ran until ill health intervened, Liz says: "I'm excited to be moving forward and focusing on the art itself, as well as pushing myself to a new level of creativity." ■

For more information and to purchase Liz's artworks, visit www.laloe.co.uk

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YOUR DAILY BREAD

I love to make bread in my AGA cooker because it's quicker, cheaper and better than buying it. When I learned to cook at Ballymaloe with Darina Allen, she always said, "it takes time, but it's not your time". That's so true because you can quickly make a batch of dough and sit it next to the AGA or on a cloth on the simmering plate lid and it will prove quickly and then you can pop it in to bake. It costs about 60p for a basic loaf, which is almost half of a shop-bought version and without any of the additives.

The AGA cooker is brilliant for bread for many reasons. It's so much better than other types of cooker as you have the all-round radiant heat. When you put your bread in, you get a really lovely oven spring. There's no need to put in ice cubes, water or anything else – you just need to let the AGA do its thing.

With bread, it's important to be accurate, so I weigh everything, including the liquids, because the percentages matter a lot for bread, and measuring liquids in a jug can be a bit haphazard.

Home-made bread tastes delicious, makes the kitchen smell gorgeous and is cheaper and healthier than shop-bought loaves. Here AGA demonstrator Naomi Hansell gives us her top tips...



DAILY BREAD

On a daily and weekly basis, I make what I call daily bread. It's really simple – you just mix 450g of water, 750g of strong white flour, a couple of teaspoons of dried instant yeast (or fresh if you prefer) and a teaspoon of salt. Then knead it by hand, in a machine, or mixer.

You'll know it's ready to prove when you press it with your thumb and it springs back. You can prove it either on the top of the AGA on the simmering plate on a cloth or, if it's warm in the kitchen, then just beside the AGA until it's just about level with the top of the tin.

Once it's proved, place a piece of Bake-O-Glide (cut to fit a 2lb AGA loaf tin) on the worktop so that it's flat. Shape the dough into an oval on top of it and then lift the Bake-O-Glide and drop it, with the loaf on top, into the loaf tin. Dust the top with some flour, slash the top with a knife to give it your baker's signature and then pop it in the roasting oven for 40 minutes.

FAMILY FAVOURITE

I make pizza in exactly the same

NAOMI HANSELL PICTURE: TIM JAMES/MABEL GRAY

way, but I add around 20% more water. I let it rise for an hour, then spread it out until it fits the cold, plain shelf. I spread some toppings on it, put it at the very top of the roasting oven and have pizza in 10 minutes.

I went on a brilliant course at the School of Artisan Food and we spent all day just making one pizza. I learned the simplest way is not to cook the tomato sauce, but just to pop a tin of plum tomatoes in a dish, add half a teaspoon of salt, a teaspoon of sugar, a good glug of olive oil and some basil stalks. I mix it up by hand then spread it really thinly and add some mozzarella from a ball and then a sprinkle of grated mozzarella. It's quick and easy and tastes amazing.

SPEEDY SOLUTION

When I'm in a hurry, I'll often cook soda bread as you don't even have to wait for it to rise. I use 500g of flour, made up of 250g wholemeal and 250g of plain white flour, then I add 450g of buttermilk or plain milk with some lemon juice and a

teaspoon-and-a-half each of salt and bicarbonate of soda. I stick all the ingredients in a bowl and mix them all together with my hands. It's quite sticky, but don't be tempted to add anything.

I then pop it on to a floured surface, shape it into a round and score an Irish cross with a knife. I dust it with a bit of flour and pop it into the baking or roasting oven of the AGA for 25 minutes. After that time, take it out, turn it over and tap the bottom. It should sound hollow like an oak beam.

I often cook focaccia too. The main difference between this and ordinary bread is to add more water. It's stickier to handle, but it will give you a more open texture. Leave it to rise for an hour and then get the half-sized roasting dish that fits on the AGA runners and put a good three or four tablespoons of olive oil into the bottom. Stretch the bread out with oily hands and, to get those nice focaccia dimples, plonk your fingers into the dough, all the way through to the bottom of the roasting dish.

You can stick tomatoes, olives, bits of rosemary or anchovies into the holes. Leave it to prove, so that when it rises they're inside the bread rather than just sitting on top. You can be really creative with fillings. I've even done it with balsamic caramelised onions and strawberries. Once your bread is filled, sprinkle it with some sea salt, then leave it to rise for another half an hour before you bake it.

RICH AND BUTTERY

Enriched breads, like brioche, croissant and all those buttery types, need to be cooked at a slightly cooler temperature, so use the baking oven or the cold, plain shelf right from the start so that you don't scorch the dough.

There was a great brioche festive wreath recipe in the AGA Christmas leaflet a few years ago and I've made it loads of times. You make a standard brioche dough, rise it, cut it into two A4-sized sections, whizz up some icing sugar with some spices, such as cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg, then take some dried apricots and cranberries and scatter the icing sugar and the fruit. Roll them up from the long side, twist them both together and form them into a circle. It's very easy, but it tastes delicious and looks very impressive.

Filled breads, like calzone or stromboli, are great for a quick supper. You just make a pizza dough and roll it out and then fill it with things like Parma ham, artichokes, sun-dried tomatoes or mozzarella. Fold it into three using the long sides and bake it like that for 20-30 minutes.

If you have a bit of time on your hands, it's worth part-baking some loaves and then freezing them. I'll often make the dough and pop it in the fridge to rise overnight and then I'll cook the bread in the morning. Put it in a bowl with a shower cap on top or in a box with a clip lock lid. You can even make a batch of dough on a Sunday and leave it in the fridge all week and then bake it as you need it through the week. ■

This feature first appeared in AGA Living magazine.

“It costs about 60p for a basic loaf, which is almost half of a shop-bought version and without any of the additives”



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PERFECT PUDS

The best part of the festive season is surely the puddings, and they can consist of so much more than currants...

THE BRITISH can proudly lay claim to the steamed pudding as a major part of their culinary heritage. An appreciative French visitor in the 17th century was heard to remark: “Blessed be he that invented pudding!”

Apparently, the pudding can trace its ancestry right back to Roman times when it was more of a sausage and closely related to the Scottish haggis. The modern boiled or steamed pudding began to take shape in the 17th century when an unknown pudding pioneer invented the pudding cloth. The pudding basin is an even more recent newcomer and has only been in use for the last century or so.

These days our puddings taste better than ever. Thankfully we can even microwave them, cook them in a slow cooker or ‘steam bake’ in the oven.

SECRET INGREDIENT CHOCOLATE PUDDING

You can't taste the beetroot at all in this deeply chocolatey, light yet moist pudding (above) that is perfect for guests who aren't so keen on traditional Christmas pudding.

Ingredients

(Serves 4-6)

- 110g cooked beetroot, diced
- 110g soft dark brown sugar
- 70g salted butter, softened
- 20g cocoa powder
- 100g plain flour
- ½ level teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
- 1 level teaspoon cream of tartar
- 2 medium eggs
- ¾ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 50g dark chocolate chopped



- into ½cm pieces (or use half dark chocolate and half white)
- 40g dried cranberries

Method

Preheat the oven to 160°C (fan oven) or equivalent.

You will need a buttered 900ml/1ltr pudding basin, the bottom lined with a circle of greaseproof paper, and a roasting tin.

Whiz the sugar and beetroot together to a puree. Sieve in the cocoa and add the butter. Whiz to combine.

Add the raising agents to the flour and sieve half over the mixture; add the eggs and vanilla. Sieve in the remaining flour and whiz again until smooth and glossy. Remove the processor blade and stir in the chopped chocolate and the cranberries.

Pour into the prepared basin. Cover loosely with greaseproof paper, pleating the top to allow for expansion. Tie with string and stand the basin in a roasting tin containing 2cm of warm water.

Bake for 45-50 minutes or

until a skewer inserted comes out virtually clean. Serve with cream or a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

TIP

Make ahead and reheat for 10 minutes in a preheated oven at 160°C (fan oven) or equivalent when you need it.

TRUFFLE CAKE BALLS

This is a great way to use up any spare or ‘didn’t quite work out’ cake, but it is especially fun to serve at Christmas as they taste festive and look a bit like mini Christmas puddings.



Ingredients

(Makes 10)

- 2 tablespoons dark rum (or apricot or raspberry seedless jam for a non-alcoholic version)
- 250g sponge-type cake crumbs
- 100g dark chocolate, finely chopped
- 25g salted butter, finely diced
- Chocolate strands for finishing (add a few festive sprinkles as well if you like)

Method

(You will need 10 standard cake cases)

Combine the rum or jam with the cake crumbs. Melt the chocolate for up to 2 minutes in the microwave. Add the butter for the final 30 seconds. Stir the crumb mix into the chocolate. Add a drop more rum or jam if it's too dry.

Chill the mix for 20-30 minutes before moulding into 10 balls (larger than a ping pong ball, but smaller than a billiard ball) with wet hands.

Roll in the chocolate strands and sit in the paper cases.

Store in an airtight container in the fridge. Alternatively, wrap in greaseproof paper and freeze in a plastic lidded box.

COUNTRY Smallholding



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Product: HJ Hall's Shooting collection combines a quintessential country theme with a touch of modern style and print. Made from the finest merino wool that provides both comfort and strength, the socks have been fitted with a soft grip top and extended high heel for comfort. Designed for warmth, these stylish and practical socks are ideal for countryside pursuits. Available in dark olive, vintage brown and country wine.

Cost: £36

Tester Lee Toole says: "These socks are great quality and I like the variety of styles and colours available in the range. I've worn them a number of times on shooting days and they were really good at keeping my feet warm in some extreme weather, but they also didn't make my feet overheat on warmer days. There are small signs of wear, such as on the heel, and they have a tendency to slip down towards the end of a day's shooting and would benefit from a garter for longer periods of use. They wash well, however, which other socks haven't done in the past, plus they are good value for money."

Star rating: 4/5

To sum up:

Great socks for the beginning of the season that keep your feet warm even in icy weather.

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COMPILED BY: **Stephanie Bateman**

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Cost: £69

Tester Jo Whitaker says: "I

loved these trousers from the moment I took them out of the packaging. They are soft to the touch, but really hard wearing, and I love that they are waterproof and breathable. The cargo pockets on the legs are perfect for keeping dog poo bags, mobile phone and keys without bulking out the hip pockets. The stretchy material means that they are super comfy and fit me really well. I struggle to find trousers to fit my long legs, but the extra-long length

means that I no longer have that issue. They look trendy enough to wear to the shops, meaning that I don't have to change every time I need to pop out. After several washes and everyday use, they still look like new. Highly recommended!"

Star rating: 5/5

To sum up: A functional, trendy pair of waterproof trousers that are perfect for today's busy female smallholder.

www.acaiactivewear.com

MEET THE TESTERS**Lee Toole**

Engineer Lee Toole lives on a four-acre smallholding in

Castlemorton, Worcestershire with his wife Sophie and two children. They keep two ponies and in his spare time Lee enjoys shooting.

**Stephanie Bateman**

Worcestershire-based Stephanie

Bateman is a keen horse rider and freelance journalist. She enjoys growing vegetables and flowers in her garden.

**Jo Whitaker**

Jo Whitaker is the manager of Mere Lane Riding School

in Leicestershire, and a keen backyard chicken keeper who grows her own veg.

**Ben Hitchcott**

Groombridge-based farrier Ben Hitchcott owns a 12-acre

smallholding where he keeps a variety of livestock, including, sheep, pigs and horses, as well as chickens and ducks. Loving the life, Ben has been a smallholder for a quarter of a century.

CHICKENGUARD LOCKING COMBI PREMIUM DOOR KIT

Product: This chicken coup door boasts an automatic opener and self-locking system that opens and closes the chicken coop using a timer and light sensor. It



comes with a fully featured LCD display for ease of use and is powered by four AA batteries (included) or electric powered via USB (cables not included). It includes an aluminium door, two oak runners, six screws and a pre-drilled hole for attaching the ChickenGuard cord. The wooden runners are handcrafted from American white oak.

Cost: £165.99

Tester Ben Hitchcott says:

"This door kit is compact, sturdy and neat looking, and I fitted it to my chicken house to shut in my free range hens at night. It performed perfectly and on time every

day. It is a really robust item and I would definitely recommend it. It fitted my hen house well, although it might not fit every house design. Even after months of use and tonnes of rain, it still looks in good condition and it can easily be wiped over for a spring clean. My favourite thing about this kit is the peace of mind it gives me that my hens are tucked up in their house at night, safe from predators."

Star rating: 5/5

To sum up: A durable, efficient piece of kit that offers peace of mind when it comes to chicken safety. www.chickenguard.co.uk

FORD RANGER LIMITED 2.0L ECOBBLUE 10 SPEED AUTOMATIC

Product: With Stop/Start technology and all-wheel drive, this updated 2019 Ford Ranger pickup truck is not only more fuel efficient, but also boasts a number of driver assistance systems. The revamped Ford Ranger has gained a new powertrain in the form of a 2.0ltr EcoBlue four-cylinder diesel engine which delivers better fuel efficiency when combined with the new 10-speed automatic transmission. Offers a 800mm wade depth, towing capability of up to 3,500kg and payload capacity of up to 1,252kg.

Cost: From £35,764.64

Tester Stephanie Bateman

says: "This truck comes with all the gadgets you



would expect from a 2019 vehicle, including electronic stability control and rear parking sensors. Considering it's a beefy utility vehicle, it drives well, and the high cab offers superior vision. As is typical with 4x4s with high suspension, there is a degree of 'rolling' when going around sharp bends. The double cab means that the whole family can enjoy a ride, and the load

box is perfect for carrying bags of feed, bales of hay and fencing stakes. With 229mm ground clearance and 800mm wading depth, there are no concerns about getting around the smallholding whatever the conditions."

Star rating: 4/5

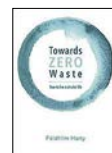
To sum up: A cool, efficient work vehicle that is ideal for every job on and off the farm. www.ford.co.uk

READERS' CORNER

Title: Towards Zero Waste

Price: £9.95

Find it at: <https://permanentpublications.co.uk/port/towards-zero-waste-how-to-live-a-circular-life-by-feidhlim-harty/>



The perfect gift for Christmas for the environmentally-conscious smallholder

— or those who need a little persuasion — *Towards Zero Waste* has 148 pages that contain handy tips for leaving waste behind and moving towards a 'greener' lifestyle. Why? As author Feidhlim Harty says, "Our present course is with disaster" and "much of our recyclables end up as litter in far flung countries and make their steady way to the oceans..."

There are chapters on composting, room by room waste elimination and waste solutions whose terms invariably begin with an 'R' — returnables, reusing, repairing, recycling and research. We also love the experiment 'cutting out packaging completely for a week', which, says Feidhlim, is easier than it sounds. It involves elements such as taking a large lunch box to the butcher to avoid plastic bag use, down to simply not buying tea bags containing plastic. Scattered throughout the book are facts and figures — such as 7% of all the plastic on our beaches comes from our toilets. Frightening and thought-provoking stuff.

THE PERFECT GIFT FOR CHICKEN KEEPERS

Fancy spicing up your egg boxes to make the perfect country gift, or need some gift inspiration? The Fraser & Parsley Egg Box Stamp is the ideal present for any chicken lover. It is a self-inking stamp that comes in a muslin bag. Either stamp directly onto a blank egg box or onto a label if you are recycling a box. Stamp the name of your layers, your own name, or the name of your house — or whatever takes your fancy — for appealing marketing and to impress your customers. Priced at £39, with black, navy or pink ink, and only available at www.fraserandparsley.com





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Cutting-edge developments for the year ahead

With a bright, shiny new year just around the corner, what new-fangled ideas to benefit our animals and our holdings can we look forward to? **Stephanie Bateman** investigates

Francy yourself as a budding farming entrepreneur, have some super ideas for sustainable farming but need a suitable base and research assistance? Perhaps Farm491 could be the solution. Farm491 is a leading UK-based agritech incubator and innovation space based at the Royal Agricultural University (RAU). It supports entrepreneurs as they advance their business with the potential for impact in the agricultural sector. Through membership, entrepreneurs are rooted in the Farm491 ecosystem of farmers, industry partners, investors, mentors and like-minded entrepreneurs, enabling them to create a business that works for the agricultural sector.

"We help to break down complex business development obstacles into more simple challenges," says Luke Halsey,

head of Farm491 and programme manager. "During 1-2-1 business support we will help to find the root cause of hurdles and establish a plan of action to increase the probability of success."

At the core of Farm491 is ensuring that agritech businesses are working alongside farmers right from the idea stage, to ensure that an agritech ecosystem is created that is beneficial to all farmers and which can empower them in their decision making. Farm491 provides high-spec facilities, including 491ha of farmland for research and testing.

Farm491 is offering start up space on-site at the RAU's main campus in Cirencester and at the farm-based workshops at Harnhill. These are affordable and flexible working environments where agritech innovators can run and grow their businesses.

ABOVE: Farm491 members have access to business support and a knowledge network that includes farmers, investors and expert advisers

Luke Halsey continues: "Farm491 members have access to the business support and a knowledge network that includes farmers, investors and expert advisers, as well as open access to farming data. Members can test, refine and grow their propositions.

"We plan to assist in excess of 55 new agritech companies and help them to create over 200 new jobs over the next five years. The objective of Farm491 is to create a collaborative agritech community of businesses. We want to help innovators convert their ideas into reality and support their growth by providing offices, workshops and expert advice. This centre of excellence promotes cutting-edge technology in all growing environments in order to sustainably feed a growing population and maintain a healthy planet."

For those who are unsure, agritech is the use of technology in a growing environment – including agriculture, horticulture, forestry, fruit, viticulture and aquaculture – that will assist in feeding the projected 10 billion people by 2050 and maintaining a healthy planet.

"If your idea can help any growing environment via the use of technology then you have an agritech business concept that may be worth pursuing and which could benefit greatly from the specialised support of Farm491," Luke notes.

"It might be that you are a thought leader within one industry, but now realise that the benefits you are offering can be applied to farming," he adds. "If so, Farm491 can help established businesses investigate and migrate into this new field.

"Agritech provides solutions to the increasing population and growing environmental concerns, such as food security, managing resources effectively and reducing pollution."

WHAT IS ON OFFER?

- 491ha of farmland for research and testing.
- Over 100 business spaces, including start-up incubator units. ▶



NOW THERE'S NOWHERE FOR REDWORM TO HIDE

Horse owners will now be able to use a new blood test to diagnose encysted small redworm burdens, thanks to Austin Davis Biologics (ADB).

The test, which was launched in September and is available to horse owners via their vets, can diagnose all stages of the small redworm lifecycle – including the encysted larval stage, which has previously been undetectable.

A spokesman for ADB says: “Until now it hasn’t been possible to test for encysted small redworm as faecal egg counts only detect the presence of egg-laying adult worms. This has meant that a routine winter treatment to target this lifecycle phase has become the recommended practice.

“Small redworms are the most common gastrointestinal parasites to infect horses. When horses harbour a large burden of encysted larvae that emerge on mass from the intestinal wall, clinical signs develop, such as diarrhoea and colic, which can be fatal.”

Due to worm resistance to the active ingredient fenbendazole, moxidectin is now the preferred choice of active ingredient to eradicate the encysted stage.

“To protect the effectiveness of moxidectin, targeted treatment programmes are required to ensure that the drug is only administered when it is really needed. The commercial availability of a diagnostic test to detect all intra-host stages of small redworm will be of great value to vets, enabling them to make a diagnosis, as well as informed treatment decisions.”

The test has been developed by Prof Jacqui Matthews’ group at the Moredun Research Institute, with the main funding provided by The Horse Trust.

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- Funding opportunities via various sources.
- Practical workshops at the new Harnhill facility.
- Research with RAU students and academics.
- Promotion within the marketplace.

For more information, visit www.farm491.com

WILD AT HEART

For wildflower enthusiasts, two innovative new products – Meadowscape Pro and Wildflower Turf Finisher – have been launched by UK wildflower specialist Wildflower Turf Ltd just in time for sowing next spring’s wildflower meadows.

Wildflower Turf Ltd MD James Hewetson-Brown says: “We’re committed to continually improving and widening our product and service offering and supplying our customers with innovative, research-led wildflower solutions.”

Meadowscape Pro

Used and approved by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Meadowscape Pro is an enhanced growing medium used by landscape professionals for effective wildflower establishment. It is the ideal medium for creating wildflower spaces in a variety of settings with minimal ground preparation, thus saving time and money.

The tested formula supports good water percolation and retention, stabilising the growing medium and allowing for optimal seed germination on a variety of sites.

Meadowscape Pro comes in different varieties, including Meadowscape Pro Landscape, Meadowscape Pro Shade Tolerant, Meadowscape Pro Native Enriched, Meadowscape Pro Annuals and Meadowscape Pro Species Rich Lawn.

A bespoke version of Meadowscape Pro can also be made available to a more specified brief.

Wildflower Turf Finisher

Wildflower Turf Finisher is designed to fill joins, edges and small gaps for Wildflower Turf projects and it will eradicate the need for wastage when laying complex areas.

Suitable for application during or after the installation of Wildflower Turf, this complementary product can be used to dress small bare patches



WHY SMALLHOLDERS ARE FLOCKING TO TURMERIC

An increasing number of smallholders are now adding The Golden Paste Company’s turmeric supplements to the diets of their livestock to improve general health and wellbeing.

Already widely used on humans, horses, dogs and cats, turmeric supplements bring the same benefits to other animals,

including goats, sheep, llamas, alpacas and poultry.

The active compound in turmeric, known as curcumin, has anti-inflammatory, anti-oxidative and anti-microbial properties. Many smallholders are using natural turmeric supplement TurnerAid to support healthy joints, aid digestion and promote a healthy skin and coat or fleece.

The complete turmeric pellet contains a minimum 5.1% curcumin, yucca, black pepper, linseed and apple cider vinegar.

Many smallholders are also using Golden Paste, which is added to the daily feed ration and also contains a minimum 5.1% curcumin.

For more information, visit www.goldenpastecompany.com



OPPOSITE BELOW: Meadowscape Pro is an enhanced growing medium used by landscape professionals for effective wildflower establishment; Wild flowers grown using Meadowscape Pro

that may have been created within a wildflower meadow design.

Supplied in convenient 20kg bags, it is perfect for use around trees, plants and areas of defined shapes where cutting the Wildflower Turf becomes more complicated and could create expensive wastage.

For more information, visit: www.wildflowerturf.co.uk ■

A RODENTICIDE THAT RATS WILL GENUINELY LOVE

BASF Pest Control Solutions UK has recently launched Storm Ultra Secure, a new rodenticide that contains 25 parts per million (ppm) of the active substance flocoumafen. Available in a variety of pack sizes, it is also wax free, making it more palatable to rodents.

A blight for many smallholders, rodents consume and spoil stored produce, spread disease, attack growing crops and damage buildings. It is therefore essential for smallholders to find the right bait with a high efficacy and palatability.

"Since second generation rodenticides were released in the 1970s and '80s to combat rodent resistance to the early anticoagulants of the 1950s, complacency about rodent control has developed," says Sharon Hughes, global technical marketing manager for BASF. "It's believed that all second-generation actives have a high rate of efficacy and that rodents have little or no resistance to them. However, this isn't the case because rats have already shown resistance to difenacoum and bromadiolone."

Resistance is only one factor in the efficacy of a rodenticide. Palatability is an equally important consideration. After all, if the rat won't eat the product, it is useless.

"It's clear that rodents will continue to adapt, but none have built a resistance or tolerance to the flocoumafen active in Storm," adds Sharon. "By making Storm Ultra Secure more palatable, we've created a 25ppm product that smallholders can use to effectively control rodents on their farms."

For more information, visit: www.basf.com



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The world's first 'tractor'

An Ivel Agricultural Motor, the first lightweight petrol-powered tractor manufactured on a commercial scale, recently sold for an eye-watering sum at auction. **Kevin Alviti** delves into its fascinating past

IN OCTOBER an Ivel Agricultural Motor was put up for auction, causing quite a stir. Machines like this come up for sale around once in a lifetime and so it attracted plenty of attention. In the end, when the hammer fell, a buyer pledged to pay an eye-watering £328,600. Luckily for the tractor and industrial history fans, the 1903 Ivel will be staying in the UK, although said buyer wishes to remain anonymous.

So what's all the fuss about? This vehicle in particular, No 131, is believed to be the oldest working tractor in the world. It's not often that you come across a machine that predates the word that was coined to describe it, but the Ivel Agriculture Motor was so called because the term 'tractor' hadn't come into common parlance when it was rolling off the production line.

The potential of a steam engine on a farm was massive and was the catalyst for huge changes. Stationary engines mounted in barns soon became mobile. Going to the fields to work these big engines had drawbacks, however, and due to their sheer size and weight even mobile traction engines were just too heavy for some jobs. Ploughing on certain types of land would be almost impossible. The Ivel, the first ever lightweight petrol-powered tractor that was sold on a



ABOVE AND BELOW:

The Ivel Agricultural Motor was named after the River Ivel in Bedfordshire, which was just a stone's throw from its manufacturing base

commercial scale, started to change all that.

The Ivel Agricultural Motor was named after the River Ivel in Bedfordshire, which was just a stone's throw from its manufacturing base. It was invented by Dan Albane, who, as well as possessing a passion for inventing, was also keen cyclist who set records. But his talents didn't stop at his inventions – he also had a bent for marketing. He showed the machine working at night, as a fire engine, as an armoured vehicle and doing farming tasks that hadn't been undertaken by powered vehicles at the time. Sadly, he died young, suffering from a stroke aged 46.

The inaugural model could be termed the first ever British tractor, although the Ivel doesn't look like anything we would recognise on a holding today. With its horizontal steering wheel and a mass of exposed gears and pulleys, it looks of its time. It boasted three wheels, a water-cooled engine (using evaporation) and driving was kept simple as there were just

two gears – forward and reverse! A large pulley wheel on the left meant that it could still be used as a stationary engine, driving a range of implements common on farms at the time. In 1903 it cost £300 (about £37,000 in 2019 money). Around 500 were built and shipped globally.

Paul Jarman from Beamish Museum used an Ivel during the 2000s when it was kept at the museum, on loan from collector John Moffit.

"You don't forget driving a vehicle from 1903," says Paul. "We did some ploughing with it and it was so suited to the purpose. I've driven other ploughing vehicles and the Ivel was one of the most docile and easy to drive. You could see how it was a step up from the horse."

Sadly, however, owning an Ivel was a mere pipe dream for many early 20th century farmers, for whom £300 was a fortune.

"It was the first machine to boast this new technology and people were suspicious of it," adds Paul, explaining why sales failed to boom. ■



PICTURES: BEAMISH MUSEUM



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The GWTS15 has a sprung-bolt tipping mechanism

SMALLHOLDERS CAN get the most out of their ride-on mowers, compact tractors or ATVs by speeding up winter clearance and significantly cutting time and labour costs all year round.

Like all of SCH's machines, the company designs and manufactures its wooden trailer range in Britain. These trailers can carry 500kg, 760kg, or 1,000kg, depending on the model. All chassis are formed from a welded steel construction, while the wooden floor and panels are made of high-grade phenyl ply. The ply's coating is water resistant and particularly durable, meaning countless years of hard use.

Featuring four wheels, the SCH GWT415 is a heavy-duty turn-table trailer. Four contact points with the ground give the trailer stability over rough and wet terrain, with the wheels' wide-profile design reducing ground pressure. Consequently, the risk of getting bogged down in muddy conditions reduces significantly. A detachable handle allows you to easily pull the trailer by hand, which is useful for short journeys or when manoeuvring it into tight spaces.

The SCH GWTS10 and GWTS15 both feature two wide-profile wheels and a sprung-bolt tipping

Let the trailer take the strain

With an SCH wooden trailer on your holding, moving items around will be child's play



ABOVE FROM LEFT The GWT415 features four wheels, giving it stability over rough and wet terrain; The HTRL is the largest of the wooden trailers and it boasts four hydraulic options

mechanism. The rear tailgate folds down and is also removable so that you can tip the trailer at a steep angle.

There are four hydraulic options for the largest of the trailers, the HTRL. Each version features a powerful hydraulic ram that can lift the unit's 1 tonne capacity. The most cost-efficient model utilises a compact tractor's single or twin line hydraulic system. Alternatively, a manual pump or a 12V electric pump is available for those towing with a garden tractor or an ATV. A jackleg welded onto the towbar increases tipping stability. It also reduces the load on the towing vehicle's hitch.

All trailers have their wheels mounted under the chassis so that the sides can be dropped down unhindered, or you can remove them entirely to make a platform trolley. The high mesh covered extension sides more than double the trailer's carrying capacity, making it perfect for bulky cargo and winter clearance.

A variety of hitches can be fitted to the towbar, making it suitable for all types of towing vehicle.

SCH trailers quickly become an essential part of many everyday tasks, whether it's transporting green waste, animal feed, building materials, or machinery. ■

For a free 80-page brochure featuring more than 200 British-built machines designed especially for smallholders, contact SCH; tel: 01473 328272; email sales@schsupplies.co.uk; visit www.schsupplies.co.uk



Accommodation al fresco style

UK farm campsite bookings are soaring, so why not diversify and welcome the paying public to your smallholding, says **Pitchup.com**

EUROPE'S LARGEST outdoor accommodation specialist Pitchup.com has reported the strongest year to date for farm bookings on its website. The business, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary and represents 464 farms across the UK, took more than 66,222 bookings on farm sites alone over the past year, an annual increase of more than 25%. This means that the average UK farm site is receiving 183 bookings per year, generating an average revenue of £12,422.

Commenting on the growth, Dan Yates, founder of Pitchup.com, said: "As we head towards Brexit, farmers are being told that they need to be flexible and plan ahead, yet not even the politicians know what's around the corner. Farms are looking at new ways of generating extra income and the outdoor accommodation sector is one of the simplest and most financially viable options, with high success rates.

"As an example, one of our working dairy farms took 989 bookings and nearly £100,000 in revenue over the past year. Another picturesque wild camping site in Hampshire, offering just a toilet and drinking water in terms of facilities, took 101 bookings in its first month on Pitchup.com, bringing in almost £3,500 in revenue. Given that average Farm Business Income (FBI) was £56,500 in England in 2017/2018, this is a real opportunity for farmers to invigorate their business and reap the rewards diversification brings.

"Parts of the farming industry have struggled in recent years and 62% have now embraced diversification



Smallholders can use their space to create camping, caravanning and glamping sites, says Pitchup.com

to sustain their agricultural businesses," continued Dan. "Of the remaining farms, a fifth are planning to diversify. Indeed, at Pitchup.com, we've seen a 43% increase in farm site listings over the past year alone. Many farmers' main asset is their land. We are encouraging farmers to use the space to create camping, caravanning and glamping sites. It's relatively inexpensive to set up a basic site – planning permission and licences are not always required – and the returns are immediate. Running a farm-based campsite is relatively straightforward and, by working with us, many farms could see their income rise dramatically." ■

To find out more about running a campsite or caravan park, including planning and licensing, visit www.pitchup.com/how-start-campsite-caravan-park/ or, to get started, tel: 0208 434 7444; or visit www.pitchup.com/join/

PITCHUP.COM FACTS AND FIGURES

- The average farm campsite earned £12,422 in bookings on Pitchup.com over the last year.
- **14.76 million domestic trips were made to campsites and caravan parks in England, Scotland and Wales in 2018.**
- Overall, Pitchup.com receives up to 182,000 visits per day, with the average UK Pitchup.com listing receiving 1,437 views each year. The sites with more diverse facilities and excellent images are the most popular.
- **In the 12 months to 27 October 2019, Pitchup.com took 66,222 bookings for UK farm sites.**
- The average value of each booking is £68, amounting to £12,422 per farm campsite per year.
- **Campsites listed on Pitchup.com have received up to £564,000 in bookings over the last year, with the average farm campsite receiving £12,422 and the most successful almost £100,000.**
- There is no cost involved in listing a business on Pitchup.com. Farms simply pay a commission on bookings received. There are also no exclusivity clauses, no penalties, no minimum tie-in periods or fees.
- **Many companies now build and deliver glamping options such as camping pods, meaning that farmers can set up with little effort.**

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Caught in the act

The **uWatch Cube**, used and recommended by many police forces, is a versatile, portable and affordable rural crime solution

“THERE IS nothing like [the uWatch Cube] on the market and it will help to solve, reduce and prevent crime.” These are the words of a police ‘secured by design’ panel. In fact, the Cube is used and recommended by numerous police forces, including Police Scotland, Staffordshire, Bedfordshire, Suffolk, SPARC and many more.

So what is uWatch Cube? It is a multi-purpose monitoring and security device that is battery or mains powered and which provides instant and portable security. The Cube has an inbuilt cross-network SIM and it uses the cellular network so that it works in the most remote locations – so no need for wifi.

CASE STUDY 1: SHIPPING CONTAINERS

The nature of a shipping container is to protect high value items. Therefore, it presents as an attractive risk for thieves who know that the rewards of breaking in will be high.

As the uWatch Cube can also work using an external GPS/GSM aerial, which lies flat on top of the container hidden from sight, you can have the device mounted inside the container itself and it will send you alerts



The uWatch Cube can be battery or mains powered and it provides instant and portable security



ABOVE:
No matter how remote, the Cube can help to keep your valuables secure

as soon as someone attempts to break in.

Dave Wrighting from To Die For Events uses the system to protect high-value items in his container, which is kept in an isolated rural location. The Cube gives him peace of mind as he knows that before anyone breaks into his container he will be alerted. This 24/7 monitoring is required for insurance purposes.

CASE STUDY 2: REMOTE SHED/OUTBUILDINGS

In another case study, the Cube was mounted inside a remote forestry shed with a uWatch Bluetooth shock tag attached to the inside door handle (see website for details). There was an attempted break in, but because the thieves tried to use the door, which activated the tag, the

Cube alerted the owner who arrived at the shed with dogs, frightening the thieves away.

CASE STUDY 3: PEST CONTROL

While the system can be used for security, it is also employed for pest control. Simply mount the Cube in your garden or loft and it will send you photos in real time of foxes, rats, mice, etc. If you want to be extra clever, numerous users attach the Bluetooth shock tags to traps, ensuring that they are notified as soon as a pest is caught. This saves busy smallholders time as it means that they only need to check traps once they have caught something. ■

To find out more, visit www.uwatch.co.uk

Celebrating 20 glorious years

Siromer Tractors' MD **Louise Howard** reveals how the company plans to celebrate two decades of successful trading by helping good causes



NOTHING IS permanent except for change, as the saying goes, and as we celebrate 20 years of Siromer Tractors, this is especially true. As I look back to what we, as a family, started in December 1999 to the thriving company that we now are, it is a fitting time to acknowledge the achievement of not only Siromer but the agricultural community as a whole.

I am especially proud of the service we have consistently provided, proud of the 20-year-old tractors that are still working hard in the fields and the returning customers who continue to come back to us for extra pieces of equipment and upgrades. It is wonderful to hear from our customers as their needs change and their

own companies and smallholdings grow.

Unquestionably manufacturing has updated over the years, as have our tractors. Our compact tractors are all 4wd with power steering and have a fully opening bonnet for ease of maintenance. Individual dash gauges have been replaced with a complete instrument panel, a foldable roll bar has been added for more convenient storage and 4-in-1 buckets for all loaders. We class these as necessary requirements for our tractors. Our range has grown to cover 25-75hp, with fully air conditioned cabs for those tractors 40hp and above.

We have so much in store for our 20th birthday and intend to celebrate this accolade all year long – and

why not; you only turn 20 once! For the 12 months of our 20th year we will be supporting the charity Farm Safety Foundation (FSF). There will be a whole host of fund-raising events and opportunities to amass the cash for this amazing charity.

FSF supports the physical and mental health of the UK's farmers through national campaigns, such as Farm Safety Week, Yellow Wellies - Who Would Fill Your Boots? and Mind Your Head.

Founded by the NFU, it tackles the stigma around risk-taking, ensuring that the next generation of farmers are resilient and equipped with smart strategies and specific skills to live well and farm well. Here at Siromer we couldn't agree more.

Raffle tickets are available to buy for £5 each. All proceeds will go directly to the FSF. The raffle will be drawn at the end of our birthday year and our lucky winner will be awarded with a voucher for £500 to put towards any Siromer product. ■

Contact Siromer or check out its Just Giving page (www.justgiving.com/fundraising/siromer-tractors) to donate and maybe win the raffle. For more information, tel: 01253 799029; visit www.siromer.online



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NEXT MONTH



IN THE FEBRUARY ISSUE

(on sale 9 January)

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Julian Hammer tackles 'behavioural
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‘We actually bought a really expensive Rayburn that happened to come attached to a house’

The Rayburn in **Stephanie Boxall's** kitchen in Bridgnorth radiates much-needed warmth, as do many of the other treasured elements in her life

It was during an internet trawl that Stephanie Boxall's mother, Maggie Harris, discovered Park Farm, a smallholding near Bridgnorth in Shropshire, up for sale. The property consisted of a 200-year-old farmhouse, a two-acre level pasture field with another two acres surrounding the house, plus some “decrepit” barns. A phone call immediately followed.

“As soon as mum told us about it, we went to see it immediately, along with several others now that Shropshire was on our radar,” says Stephanie, who, with salesman husband Luke, had originally been searching for a small farm in Herefordshire. “This place was exactly what we were after, though – enough land, a study for Luke, isolated but not impossible to get to, Rayburn. Amazing view. It felt like home immediately.”

The couple and two children, Rosie, six, and George, four, moved in 18 months ago. It was a big life change for everyone, but especially for Luke who had faced a tortuous daily journey into London from their previous commuter zone Kent home.

“Moving has meant that Luke now works from home and he actually gets to spend time with the kids,” says former librarian Stephanie, who confesses that their transition from east to west wasn't without issues. “Adapting took a while as it was so different, plus we moved just in time to welcome the Beast from



ABOVE: Luke and Stephanie Boxall; The Rayburn is the ‘only reliably warm thing’ in the family’s home

OPPOSITE (FROM TOP): Sealskinz gloves; The chicken ‘cleaning out kit’; Stephanie’s Woof Wear yard boots win the award for ‘most worn item’ in her wardrobe; Stephanie often finds herself reaching for her Haynes manuals

the East. We were snowed in for four days with temperatures in the region of -5°C , and a wind chill to boot. When you’re used to a modern house with insulation and central heating... well, the change was interesting! We had to drastically upgrade our winter clothing and found that we were much more reliant on the car than we had been in Kent, which isn’t good for our carbon footprint. On the flip side, however, I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else now. Sometimes it hits me and I have to stop and acknowledge how lucky we are to be doing this. It’s almost too much fun to be



real life and I even have stress dreams occasionally about moving away.”

Stephanie and Luke ventured into livestock keeping almost from day one, taking on six pedigree Shropshire sheep, including Denis the ram, as well as two Tamworth x British Lop pigs called Sausage and Pinky.

“They were great fun and did a fantastic job of rotovating next year’s new vegetable plot,” says Stephanie. “But they are now residing in the freezer. This was the first time we had ever taken any animal to an abattoir and I found it incredibly hard. It was a pivotal moment for me – either

STEPHANIE DESCRIBES THE THINGS SHE LOVES

I had to come to terms with raising animals for the table or turn vegetarian, as there was no way I could ever buy anonymous supermarket meat again. My love of sausages won out in the end, but the whole experience has made me value meat so much more."

Park Farm is also home to a "mongrel group" of chickens, plus two beehives.

"We had two honey crops this year: one in May to extract all the oil seed rape honey that can crystallise and ruin the frames if it's left for too long, and one in August for the more floral honey from the summer flowers. I find it fascinating that both crops are so different and have very distinctive flavours. My favourite is the OSR honey as it is more granular and crystallises quickly – perfect on porridge or yogurt. We are experimenting with making beeswax wraps and will soon be selling them at our local Christmas market."

Additionally, the couple has opened their gates to glamping enthusiasts, with visitors writing effusive reviews about their shepherd's hut accommodation. One project they have put off, however, at least for a while, is the conversion to holiday lets of their "decrepit" barns.

"After speaking to people who know what they're talking about, that will have to wait until we win the Lottery!" ■

For more information, visit www.parkfarmglamping.co.uk



The Rayburn

When I asked six-year-old Rosie what she couldn't live without, she came straight out with: "The Rayburn. It's soo warm!" She isn't wrong. It's the only reliably warm thing in the house. It's red, probably older than me (over 30 years at least) and it sits in the kitchen where it's a magnet for guests. Nothing can shift my dad from it when he comes to stay. I also love cooking on it and it's invaluable for drying wet coats/socks/hats/gloves/wellies. In my opinion, when we bought this house, what we actually bought was a really expensive Rayburn which happened to come attached to a house.



Sealskinz gloves

Luke gave me this pair of gloves (above) last Christmas. He had a pair when he was in the Army and so when I put 'gloves for dog walking' on my Christmas list he knew exactly what to get. They are black Sealskinz and are warm as well as waterproof. They have revolutionised cold weather dog walking, gate opening, bucket shaking... you name it!

Chicken 'cleaning out kit'

My chicken 'cleaning out kit' is cobbled together from random bits found in the shed when we first got the chickens, but together they function extremely effectively. The wallpaper scraper does a good job on the removable base of the coop, the dustpan picks up

the bits and I use the brush to scrub the feeders. The gloves are old gardening ones and are a bit holey, but perfectly fit for purpose.

Woof Wear yard boots

My Woof Wear yard boots have to win the award for 'most worn item' in my wardrobe. I bought them originally for walking the dog last autumn when it was still too warm to wear wellies but too muddy for trainers. I now put them on to do the chickens in the morning (often as an accompaniment to PJs), wear them on the school run (not in PJs), use them for dog walking, pop them on to run out over a muddy yard to greet delivery drivers... In fact, I use them for almost anything that involves going outside around the holding. They are so much easier than having to extract your foot from a tall welly using a boot jack, and obviously better than tiptoeing outside in my slippers.

The voice of experience

One thing we now know to be invaluable is the voice of experience. We are lucky to have a sheep farmer called Ian living next door. We bought our house and land from him and he continues to farm all the land surrounding us. He is a fount of knowledge, generous with his time, answers our

many questions and knows our house inside out (being over 200 years old, it has a lot of quirks). He also knows everyone and is pretty good for a few drinks at the pub – or so Luke has found out.

Hot water bottles

Moving here has meant a huge lifestyle change, not least of which is moving from a nicely insulated, centrally heated house to a draughty old farmhouse with no on-demand heating to speak of. Therefore, hot water bottles have become a necessity. We have one each and really need more to avoid sharing (or stealing the kids') when guests stay the night. My favourite part of going to bed is knowing that I will have warm toes at last.

Haynes manuals

Before we moved, during the agonising period between finding the house and actually completing on the sale, we kept our spirits up by buying and reading Haynes manuals on bees, sheep, smallholding, chickens and pigs. They were so interesting and really kept the dream alive, reminding us what we were aiming for. Now they have come into their own and are incredibly useful. Even in this day and age when the answer to everything is only a quick google away, I still reach for one of these books first.



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You can teach a dog new tricks! Our fantastic new series (page 6) will help you to train your sheepdog to round up your flock (or other animals)

All the articles in this supplement – and often elsewhere in the magazine – are colour coded according to which of the above categories they fit into, enabling you to instantly identify the features that most interest you.



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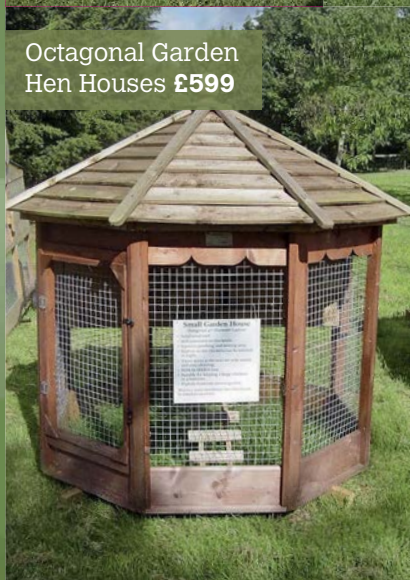
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It can take a few years or just a single season as a smallholder to start wrestling with the dilemma of how to go about pricing surplus produce. Should you grudgingly charge a nominal amount that leaves you out of pocket, subsidising someone else's premium dinner? Could you dare to charge the same as the local butcher or greengrocer? Who should you model your prices on? And would anybody be interested in buying your produce anyway?

Sometimes smallholder surplus is unexpected – those two weaners have resulted in 120kg of pork in your groaning freezer and now you've no room for storing anything else – and sometimes it's planned, but either way small-scale farmers are invariably stumped at how they arrive at a sensible sale price.

Smallholders sell an amazingly rich array of products and in a range of ways – from the honesty box offering a few eggs, a tangled heap of runner beans and golden jars of honey at the gate, to year-round meat box businesses and market gardens.

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

Too cheap, too expensive or on the money? A smallholder's worst nightmare is often setting the price of their home-produced goods. **Debbie Kingsley** offers some valuable advice



Those in the latter category will have had to grasp the concept of pricing or will go to the wall; those in the former, or edging towards a more business-minded way of smallholding, frequently struggle.

MARKET PRICES

One of the most shocking elements for smallholders who come to this life from a commercial background is that much of the farming sector is built on a system where you have no wiggle room regarding the given market price for the goods you produce. If, for example, you take your fat lambs to market to sell, you have no control over what they are sold for, other than watching the market reports in the days and weeks leading up to your likely sale date, managing your lambs' growth and presenting them well. How many films based on Wall Street have you seen where suited, red-faced stockbrokers are yelling about the price of pork bellies – their futures and dollar worth considered on a global level, determined far away from any pig farm? ▶

Selling your livestock direct to the abattoir may give you a slightly better return than the market as there is no middle man, but the price they pay is predetermined, depending on the date, trade and grade of what you are selling. In similar mode, selling your meat direct to the local butcher (and that's not always easy) is unlikely to give you any negotiating power – they will tell you how much they will pay, not vice versa, unless you have a unique or highly desirable product. Unless you've incurred minimal costs in raising those meat animals, you're not likely to be going home with a profit.

BENCHMARKING

If you are selling direct to the consumer, you do have control over your pricing as long as it's competitive. So what are the sensible benchmark prices against which your offering can be judged?

Smallholder Carole Cochrane in North Devon had this dilemma, and she asks: "How do you price up your home-grown veg to sell? A local pub wants me to pick and deliver a few specific things fresh twice a week. Do you compare home-grown to Waitrose prices or do something different?"

If Carol is selling asparagus in May, she has a whole range of potential benchmarks, of which Waitrose retail price could be one if she's selling to the end consumer. However, her pub would be buying their veg from a wholesaler, not a top end supermarket.

For an accurate benchmark, check weekly wholesale veg prices here www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/wholesale-fruit-and-vegetable-prices-weekly-average.

In 2019, asparagus wholesale prices varied from a high of £15 down to £3.50 per kilo between March and early July, which is a huge variation, whereas carrots ranged from a more modest and level 43p to 57p per kilo across the year. Carol might be able to add in a premium for local provenance, extraordinary freshness (pulled from the plot and in the pub kitchen within the hour), or because she's selling a heritage variety and the carrots are red, purple, orange, yellow and white, or are particularly young and sweet.

If Carol was supplying local homes rather than the pub, research into the pricing for veg box schemes would be helpful, as would those charged in local shops, from greengrocers to supermarkets.

There are no shortcuts and the research has to be carried out seasonally, but you might sensibly choose half a dozen or so appropriate sources and check against these regularly.

Celine Peniston-Bird, a nature photographer and smallholder, has a thought-provoking approach to pricing veg. Taking a veg box scheme as her starting point she says: "They charge £1.50 for an aubergine, but they're organic, so I'd charge £1.20 (take off 20%). But that's retail, so take off another 20% – which makes 95p – but then round it up and call it £1 for an aubergine."

Not everyone agrees with this approach, however. Smallholder Luke Adamson points out that "it's surplus to requirements, usually grown out of love and passion and not to make a buck. It does grate when people want shop/above shop prices for things. If I had a surplus I'd rather it was sold cheaply and be used than wasted".

Experienced smallholder and sous-chef Hannah Hampshire offers a helpful insight.

"I work in a village pub and my boss has the veg delivered by a wholesaler and I'm horrified at the prices he pays," she says. "Carrots cost £1.45/kg,



LEFT: You must learn about pricing if you plan to do more than sell your eggs at the gate

leeks £2.50/kg, onions £1.50/kg, iceberg lettuce £1.50 each, cucumbers £1.50 each, broccoli and cauliflower £2.95/kg. This is for bog standard, not locally-grown produce. Lidl is a third of the price, so don't sell yourself short. As for my own smallholding produce, I have a different kind of problem with my home-grown pork. The local hotels and B&Bs want it and want to advertise the free-range, rare breed, local aspects of it, but want to pay the same for our dry-cured nitrate-free bacon as they do in Bookers the wholesalers (about £7) rather than the £11.50 we charge."

New smallholder Sophie Milligan is looking for guidance on pricing her pork.

"Our first two Saddlebacks are approaching the right weights and a local farm shop may be interested in buying one straight from the abattoir. Any thoughts on pricing?" she ponders.

Sophie may be able to negotiate, but the butcher will be clear on the maximum they are prepared to pay her. If she checks with the levy body AHDB Pork, the average dead weight for pork (at August 2019) is around £1.50 per kilo, which is the price the abattoir pays. A butcher may pay up to £2.50 and then charge the customer £5 (belly) to £11 (tenderloin) per kilo depending on the cut. If Sophie wants to make a better return on her pork, she should consider selling it direct to the consumer, in which case she will need to benchmark against what other small-scale meat box producers are charging.

What has it cost you to produce?

A critical element of selling your surplus is having a proper understanding of the cost of production. You may decide that including your time is a step too far and that capital items (a polytunnel, sheep hurdles, pig ark, fencing, wheelbarrows, etc) will last you many years and shouldn't be taken into account. That would not be a sustainable model for a business, but may be acceptable if smallholding is first and foremost your hobby.

However, there's no shirking when it comes to consumables such as pig feed, medication, vet bills, butchery and packaging.



ABOVE: You have to include many factors, such as vet bills, feed and butchery, when pricing meat

These all need to be included. If it costs you £4.50 per kilo to produce your own pork, including the purchase of weaners, feed and slaughter, selling it to your butcher for £2.50 is illogical. It's clearly unsustainable to make things too cheap, and keeping a proper record of your costs is the first step to knowing the minimum price you can charge and at least break even. When my husband Andrew and I were starting out in farming, we sold our surplus meat at a very reasonable price that still covered all our pig production, slaughter and butchery costs which meant that the meat we kept back for our own use was effectively free – and better quality than anything we could buy at the supermarket.

BEYOND PRICE

A word of warning about using established producers/retailers as a definitive guide for arriving at prices. It's not just price similarities – you have to be sure that the product quality matches too, and that includes the whole buying experience. Purchasers bring their eyes, ears, taste buds, emotions, politics, principles and intelligence to the buying of food, as well as their wallets.

If you seek out smallholder produce, the story behind the product is important, as is the ability to talk to the producer and to have questions answered openly and willingly. Your produce has to look good and be good, presented well and exactly as described. Make it as simple as possible for people to buy your goods and do it in a way that makes sense of what you're producing. We won't, for example, sell a whole beef fillet

despite regular enquiries to do so as it would mean that all of our beef box customers would go fillet-less in their mixed beef boxes.

APPRECIATING YOUR OWN SKILL SETS

Not every smallholder is a marketing whizz, wants to interact with customers or spend Saturdays at a farmer's market. You might be perfectly content selling a few boxes of eggs at the gate and giving presents of the occasional pack of sausages to neighbours and friends. Embrace this and plan to minimise surplus so that the pressure is off you to perform on the open market. It's extremely hard work, takes a great deal of time and might be forcing you into activities that you specifically aimed to avoid by becoming a smallholder.

If, however, you do see selling as part of your smallholder experience, then learning how to pitch your prices is an integral part of the process. And don't be all secret squirrel about prices – being up front is part of the technique for securing customers.

Making it legal

There is a range of legislation involved in selling produce, particularly food, so register as a food business with your local authority at least 28 days before selling your first foodstuffs. Talk to your council's environmental health/trading standards department about what you are planning to do and implement their advice, not least adhering to the requirements for labelling, including weights and ingredients.

The Food Standards Agency website is helpful (www.food.gov.uk) and remember that you can't label items as organic or free range or any other legally defined description unless you abide by the necessary requirements. For example, to be organic you must register with and pay a fee to one of the organic control bodies and meet their standards and inspections. Lastly, you need to keep track of your income as well as your expenditure. Your smallholder income is taxable and no one wants to fall foul of HMRC. ■

Emulating One Man and His Dog

Any sheep-owning smallholder has probably dreamed of having a dog to work their flock. In the first of a new mini-series, experienced sheepdog trainer **Dudley Edmunds** helps you to get started

When I first entered the wonderful world of sheepdogs, I assumed that all farmers' and shepherds' dogs were of the level that I saw on *One Man and His Dog* and most of the people I first met were sheepdog people who trialled on a regular basis. However, as my circle widened, I quickly realised that this was very much not the case and that the popular idea that sheepdog pups came fully trained wasn't quite right!

So how do you train a dog to work sheep? Of course, if you have cattle, the basics are probably the same. Certainly any proficient sheepdog will be able to help you with your chickens, ducks and even geese.

The first thing you need to decide is what you want your dog to do. Do you have a dozen sheep on five acres or 50 sheep on 20 acres? Are you planning to extend your flock and know that you will need a good herding dog? Are you not just interested in an extra pair of hands, but also in the working dog in its own right? Do you have recollections of watching *One Man and His Dog* and have the dream that you would like to trial with your dog? Have a hard think about what you want from your dog now and in the next five years or so.

We all have to start somewhere so you will either already have a dog you think you can train or you have plans to get one. If you already have a dog, there are some basic factors to consider, the most important being age, health and breed. Age is



important, but you can teach an old dog new tricks so, provided it is healthy and active, it is always worth trying, depending on the breed. Personally, I wouldn't try to teach a Springer Spaniel or an Irish Wolfhound to herd! However, if you own a herding dog breed then have a go with your existing dog. If you are planning to acquire a dog especially for herding then it makes sense to go for a herding breed – for example a Border Collie, Australian Sheep Dog or Cattle Dog, Working Bearded Collie, Welsh Collie, Kelpie or Huntaway.

ABOVE: Dudley Edmunds with Keira (left) and Beth. Dudley has been a hobby shepherd and sheepdog trainer for 15 years. A business consultant in wealth management, he started working life as a chemist and microbiologist in the wine trade. He runs a mixed flock of sheep which he keeps purely for training sheepdogs

You have a number of options open to you:

- Buy a fully-trained sheepdog.
- Buy a part-trained sheepdog.
- Buy a puppy from working stock.
- Get a rescue from a specialist rescue organisation.

Clearly the most obvious choice is the Border Collie, the all-round working farm dog, but you may prefer a Kelpie, or a Huntaway, or perhaps even a Bearded Collie from working lines. Research your breeds, think hard about what you want and need and then talk to people who already have the breed and ask their opinion.

In the main, I will be discussing the Border Collie as it is a world class all-rounder and is very adaptable in terms of fulfilling the role of part working dog and part family pet.

COST AND THE FULLY-TRAINED DOG

The definition of 'fully trained' is open to interpretation. I have come across dogs who have cost their new owner a lot of money, but certainly are nowhere near fully trained! If you are going for this option then it will generally be expensive and you may not actually receive what you are expecting.

If you do decide to go down this route, I strongly advise plenty of research on who sells the best dogs and, particularly, the best dogs for an inexperienced handler. There are a number of good online sites and the International Sheepdog Society (ISDS) may also be able

to help with information on breeders in your area.

Expect to pay a lot of money for a good, well-trained dog – upwards of £2,000. Try and buy on a personal recommendation or following in-depth research rather than from an auction. Leave the auctions for the very experienced. There is one cheaper alternative, however, and that is a retired sheepdog who will benefit from some regular gentle work and a kind retirement home. Farmers and shepherds will often have such a dog for sale, usually at a reasonable price and they will be delighted to sell to someone who can keep the dog active when it is no longer fit for the life of a professional sheepdog. The disadvantages are that you may well find the dog somewhat set in its ways and it will quickly control you. It is also likely to have lived outside for most of its life and so bringing it into your home (if that is the plan) may present some issues.

THE PART-TRAINED DOG

This type of dog will cost you less than the fully-trained version, but, again, determine what is meant by part-trained as your idea and the seller's may be somewhat different!

PUP OR YOUNG DOG?

This may well be your best option as buying a young dog does have a number of advantages, including the fact that he knows you from his early days and will grow up with you. You are also not buying someone else's issues and you will have



ABOVE:

Beth coming around on a tight right flank. I was happy with that as these sheep are inclined to be 'heavy' (difficult to move) and she knows that

BELOW:

Vic on one of his first sessions around a small pen, with Dudley teaching him 'sides' (flanks). The sheep are safe and contained so that Dudley can work on the dog's directions and stops in a relaxed manner

a better idea of what to expect. The ISDS will be able to provide you with a list of breeders in your area and some online research will also be advantageous. If you happen to live in an area that hosts sheepdog trials then go along, introduce yourself to the club secretary and ask for advice. Take the opportunity to talk to some of the handlers – although not before they are about to run! Listen to everything that you are told and then put the information together like a jigsaw puzzle.

You need a working dog so it will be preferable for you to buy from working lines. Personally, I would avoid the 'show bred' lines. I've come across a few of these and with one possible exception I've never thought that they act or look the part.

It may be worth mentioning here that there are a few ideas in the sheepdog world that are more old wives' tale than fact. Some will tell you that unless the roof of a dog's mouth is black, it's no good. Many don't like a 'gay tail' – a curly tail held high – but there is some sense in this as the tail does help with balance and a high tail can sometimes indicate that the dog is more into fun than work. However, my finely bred young dog is inclined to hold his tail high when not working and it goes right down when he is.

Red and whites have a reputation for being more

difficult, but then a dog called Milo won the English National Sheepdog Trials and more red dogs appeared. I had a red dog and she was difficult, wilful and utterly wonderful, but a nightmare to train. However, she leads us nicely on to the next category – the rescue.

TAKING ON A RESCUE

I took Keira from a general rescue when she was around 18 months old and she taught me a lot. Therefore, don't overlook a rescue dog, but do make sure that you get one from a Border Collie specialist and one who knows working dogs. There are a few around and my first port of call would always be the Freedom of Spirit Trust for Border Collies (FOSTBC), run by Barbara Sykes. Giving a good home and a job of work to a rescue could be a satisfying option.

HERDING ESSENTIALS

So having decided to train your herding dog, what do you need?

- **Sheep obviously and a field or paddock** is the minimum requirement. Three to five acres is sufficient and you can get by in an acre or even less. The bigger the field, the more space you have to work of course, but if it's too big you are going to find yourself with a lot of walking to do.
- **A smallish pen** made out of hurdles can be useful – I have





one made up of 10 standard hurdles. Some people use a much larger ring. I have one that is about 30ft across, although I'm in the process of taking it down as I don't find it particularly useful.

- **A stick or crook** is handy as an arm extension.

- **A long line** – old style washing line length – can also come in handy when teaching your dog some control and walking on. The issue with a long line is that if you are going to use it when teaching flanks and walking on when you are at the head of your sheep, it does take a lot of practice to get it right. You will invariably find that you have tied up at least two or three sheep and very probably yourself as well.

THE KEY TO SUCCESS IS CONSISTENCY

The basic training requirements are quite simple, but the key to success is consistency in approach and instructions/commands and a lot of repetition, although not so much that the dog and you

ABOVE:

By teaching Vic to stop behind the sheep, Dudley can encourage him to walk on and then stop again. By walking backwards, Dudley can control the pace of both the sheep and Vic

become bored. A world class handler and trainer called Julie Simpson-Hill has developed a training method called The Natural Way. Her book of the same name is well worth reading. Julie uses an interesting approach when dog training – ask, tell, insist.

This is an excellent way of working and it is all done through voice and body language. You are constructing a working partnership with your dog and that has to be built on mutual respect and understanding. There is rarely any need to shout (if the distance is great then you're better off with a whistle). I always talk quietly to my own dogs and those who I'm training as it helps them to listen. Equally, always try and stay calm. That can be difficult sometimes when your training session develops less like a text book lesson and more like a scene from Henry Brewis' book *Little Bit O'Nonsense About Sheep*.

Equally, never forget that training your sheepdog can, in certain circumstances, be dangerous. I know a number

of people (me included) who have broken bones or damaged backs simply in the course of training. You do spend a lot of time walking backwards and the sheep that slips around behind you can soon catch you out, as I know to my cost.

Therefore, to recap: you have decided on your dog; you have some sheep and a paddock or field to practise in; you have probably read a book or two on sheepdog training and have been left wondering about the differences of opinions and approaches. One vital thing to remember when training your dog is that it is not a black and white experience. In fact, there are many shades of grey.

I was told in my very early days to listen to the advice given by experienced sheepdog people, take what works for you and file the rest away for reviewing at a later date. It was very good advice indeed. ■

NEXT TIME: The basic commands and the general approach to training for your own needs.

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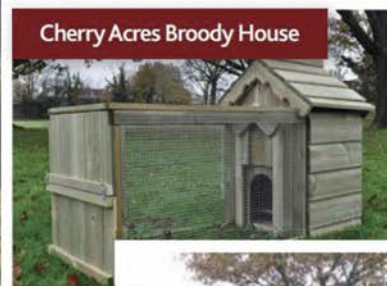
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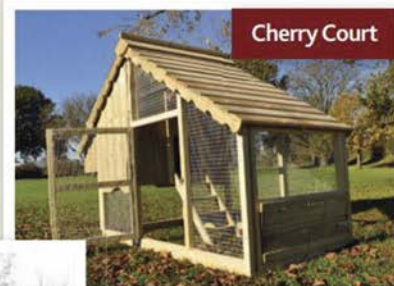


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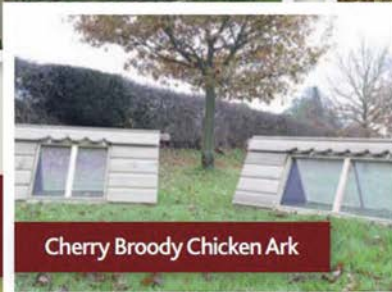
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Spoilt for choice

History and fate have combined to give Britain an enviable wealth of sheep breeds. In an introduction to his new series on breeds and their characteristics, **Tim Tyne** ventures back into the past and also looks at the 21st century picture

It's not for nothing that the UK has at times been dubbed 'the stud farm of the world', with a wide diversity of sheep breeds being exported to all parts of the globe during the heyday of agricultural innovation. Our 50 or so native types, each of which is itself the result of years of crossbreeding and development, are now being added to by importations from abroad of breeds which in many cases owe their origins to the exportations of an earlier era. For example, the Texel, first imported during the 1970s, is now the most popular terminal sire in the UK. It's a Dutch breed, often thought of as 'modern', but, in fact, it's been around in an early form since Roman times. Over the centuries it has been improved by the use of Lincoln, Border Leicester, Southdown, Hampshire Down and Wensleydale genetics – all traditional UK breeds. (Although it's questionable whether there really is such a thing as a 'traditional' or 'native' UK breed as we've been invaded so many times over the years, and for some reason invaders do like to bring their own sheep!)

I believe that the number of different breeds now found in the UK stands at around the 80 mark, which makes for a bewildering choice if you're a newcomer to sheep keeping. What makes it even more bewildering is that each and every breed is represented by an organisation or society that does its utmost best to convince you that theirs are the only ones worth having!

A BRIEF HISTORY

About 8,000 years ago in Asia the wild Mouflon sheep was first domesticated, primarily for its meat and hide, although presumably for milk as well. The Mouflon had a hairy coat, so



ABOVE:
Welsh Mountain
sheep in
their native
environment

wool was unheard of. However, at some point it was discovered that it was possible to pluck soft fibres from a living animal in order to make garments while allowing the animal to continue to grow, breed and produce milk. In consequence, selective breeding began, and by the time sheep arrived in Britain in around 4000BC they had wool rather than hair, although it took us another 2,000 years to work out how to make proper use of it. Eventually we got it sorted and by the end of the Bronze Age spinning and weaving had become important activities, with wool and milk then superseding meat and hides as the main products. At this stage the sheep would have looked

very similar to the Soay breed of today, and by the beginning of the Iron Age they had spread to all parts of the British Isles.

Meanwhile, considerable advancements in animal husbandry were occurring on the Continent and when the Romans invaded Britain in 43AD they brought with them new improved breeds of sheep who had white fleeces and required shearing rather than plucking. These were the ancestors of breeds such as the Cotswold and the Lincoln Longwool. Where the Roman sheep were crossed with the existing Soay-like animals more regional breeds were created. These local types which gave rise to some of our hill breeds, were eventually

PICTURES: TIM TYNE/SUE TRIMMINGS

displaced from southern regions of Britain by the improved sheep of the Saxon invaders. While all this was going on in the south, Viking raiders were introducing their own multi-horned sheep to the northern regions. Their influence can be seen today in the Hebridean, Manx Loaghtan and other Northern short-tailed breeds.

Wool continued to be the principal output of British sheep flocks until the 18th century when rising population increased the demand for meat. Breeders therefore began to move towards producing stockier, fatter animals and another lot of new breeds came into being as a result. Inevitably, some breeds fell by the wayside completely and became extinct, but others that are no longer commercially viable have been preserved by enthusiasts, many of whom are smallholders. It was the plight of one of these breeds – the Norfolk Horn – that led to the formation of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) in 1973.

Modern dietary trends have resulted in further developments, with a move away from heavy, slow maturing, fatter breeds to faster growing animals that produce a leaner carcass at a younger age. This requirement is primarily what has led to the introduction of Continental breeds that have displaced our own traditional terminal sires.



BELOW:
A Herdwick ewe
and lamb

BRITISH BREEDS TODAY

Due to the diversity of land type and husbandry techniques found in the UK, breeds evolved to suit the prevailing conditions of different regions. However, the current distribution of breeds is not strictly limited to the areas in which they originated as pretty much any breed of sheep can be kept pretty much anywhere, provided that they are managed accordingly.

So, for example, in the hill and upland regions, where constant close shepherding and supplementary feeding has historically not been possible, we find thrifty breeds that are capable of looking after themselves to a large extent. However, these hill ewes are equally suited to low input 'easy-care' style farming systems in the lowlands. Similarly, many of the down breeds of sheep can be successfully kept at high altitudes, under adverse climatic conditions, provided that the level of shepherding is consistent with their requirements.

Typically, British breeds are categorised according to the environment in which they evolved (eg, upland/lowland) and their fleece type (eg, longwool/shortwool). In addition, there are primitive breeds, Continental breeds,

composite breeds and recognised crossbreeds.

MOUNTAIN AND HILL BREEDS

True mountain breeds tend to be small and hardy, with dense yet longish weatherproof fleeces containing a high proportion of kemp. At low stocking rates they are able to exist on very poor quality sparse pastures at high altitudes and under adverse weather conditions. Prolificacy is low, although they make great mothers. If moved to better pastures, productivity increases considerably, which is why draft mountain ewes are often purchased by lowland farmers for crossbreeding purposes. Breeds in this category include the Welsh Mountain, Scottish Blackface, Herdwick, Swaledale and Rough Fell.

UPLAND AND HEATH BREEDS

These breeds form an intermediate type between the true mountain sheep and those who evolved in lowland areas. There seems to be a lot of flexibility within this classification, which I think depends upon current industry trends. For example, there's the Lleyen breed, currently very popular in extensive low-input lowland flocks, which ▶



CHOOSING A BREED

As a starting point, before making any choices as to breed or husbandry, you must ask yourself why you want to keep sheep and what the end product will be. This could be meat, milk or wool, either for sale or for home use (or both), or you may want to compete at shows and sell breeding stock, or you might just want a few woolly lawnmowers. You also need to consider whether your flock is expected to generate a profit, or simply break even, or whether you're happy for it to be an expensive hobby. Next think about how the flock will fit in with the other enterprises on the holding in terms of availability of grazing at key times of year, housing requirements, winter forage and so on. Having first answered these questions it's not too difficult to decide upon an appropriate management system and then, finally, choose a breed or type that will fit into that management system and suit your purposes. This is infinitely more sensible than choosing a breed simply because you like the look of it, and then wondering how best to fit it into your life.

■ Native Sheep Breeds

with Tim Tyne

really ought to be listed in this category. Other breeds that I would list here would include the Kerry Hill, Clun Forest and Llanwenog. Also the Norfolk Horn, which is a heath breed, and the Jacob.

LONGWOOL BREEDS

As suggested by the name, these large bodied sheep have long, lustrous fleeces. Although some types of longwool sheep have fallen out of favour over the years, to the extent that they're now considered to be rare, others have maintained their place within the industry as crossing sires – that is, they're mated to mountain ewes to produce 'mules', which are the most popular commercial crossbred ewes in the UK. The longwool category includes breeds such as the Lincoln Longwool, Wensleydale and Greyface Dartmoor.

SHORTWOOL BREEDS

The shortwool breeds, primarily lowland types, have fleeces that are in striking contrast to the longwools mentioned above. Short, dense coats of very fine, high quality wool with no kempy fibres characterise them. It was breeds in this category that generated such wealth for the powerful monastic orders of mediaeval England. Examples include the Ryeland, the Devon Closewool and the Dorset Horn/Polled Dorset. Interestingly, the Wiltshire Horn is also generally slotted into this category, despite not being a wool producing breed.

DOWN BREEDS

These are our traditional meat-producing breeds, some of which are now fairly rare. Others have survived and thrive due to their usefulness as terminal sires, although competition from Continental breeds is tough. Breeds in this category include the Southdown, Hampshire Down, Dorset Down and Suffolk.



ABOVE:
Coloured Ryeland
ewes

PRIMITIVE BREEDS

Here we're talking primarily about the Northern short-tailed group of sheep. Generally small, multi-coloured and sometimes multi-horned (with horns usually present in both sexes), these breeds are characterised by having naturally short tails. As improved breeds of sheep spread throughout the UK, the Northern short-tailed types became restricted to offshore islands, as is evidenced by their names: Shetland, Hebridean, Manx Loaghtan, Boreray, etc.

CONTINENTAL BREEDS

Continental breeds have generally been imported for use as terminal sires due to their superior carcass qualities with the two most popular being the Texel and the Charollais.

COMPOSITE BREEDS

Some traditionalists are rather scornful of the appearance of new composite breeds, but they shouldn't be as all of our current sheep breeds were generated in exactly the same way, ie, by repeatedly crossbreeding until a type became fixed and bred true. A popular composite breed is the Easycare, which was developed

to reduce shepherding costs. More recently the Exlana has been created along similar lines.

RECOGNISED CROSSBREDS

The majority of commercial lowland ewes in the UK are crossbreds, but these are by no means the result of ad-hoc matings. There are very definite crossbred types that have stood the test of time and form an important part in our stratified industry. Most of the crossbred ewes are Mules, which are produced by putting a Bluefaced Leicester ram onto a hill ewe, but there are also Halfbreds (sired by Border Leicester rams) and Mashams (sired by Teeswaters or Wensleydales). At one time there was also a popular type of ewe known as the Kent Halfbred, which was produced by crossing the Romney Marsh with the Lley. I'm not sure why we don't seem to hear about them these days, as they sound to me like they'd be very good sheep. (Incidentally, I first read about them in this very magazine back in the early 1980s!) ■

NEXT TIME: Diverse UK sheep breeds and their suitability for different management systems.



All about Tim Tyne

Career smallholder Tim Tyne was brought up on an eight-acre holding in East Anglia. He studied agriculture at Aberystwyth and then spent a few years living self-sufficiently on an offshore island. He now farms on a small scale in North Wales together with his wife, Dot, and their three children. Tim believes passionately that smallholding should be a financially viable lifestyle choice for young families



AS LAMBING approaches, it is crucial to feed pregnant ewes appropriately. Statistics show that 75% of lamb growth occurs in the last six weeks of gestation, therefore leading to a huge increase in energy demand.

As the lambs grow, the space within the rumen decreases, reducing the ewe's appetite at precisely the point when she needs extra energy.

Correct ewe nutrition ensures optimal growth of the unborn lambs – this is particularly important because birth weight is highly correlated with lamb survival.

Ewe feeding is also vital for udder development and production of good quality colostrum, ensuring that lambs get the best start and continue to grow well. Additionally, several preventable diseases of ewes are associated with nutritional issues in late pregnancy:

1. **Pregnancy toxæmia** (twin lamb disease) occurs in late pregnancy due to insufficient energy intake. Affected ewes are dull, off feed, may grind their teeth and 'star gaze'. If untreated, this can quickly progress to recumbency and death. Risk factors include ewes carrying multiple lambs and not being fed accordingly; inadequate quantity or quality of feed; insufficient trough space; sudden diet changes; or stresses such as handling or extreme weather. Treatment, which can be unrewarding in severe cases, consists of administering oral drenches, high-energy feed and intravenous glucose injections by your vet. If the ewe is unresponsive to treatment, induction of parturition or



The right recipe

The importance of the correct nutrition for ewes in late pregnancy cannot be underestimated as it can be linked to lamb survival rates, says vet **Bella Lewis**

ABOVE: Pregnant ewes must be fed a good quality, high-energy, palatable diet

caesarean section may be necessary.

2. **Hypocalcaemia** presents similarly to pregnancy toxæmia. Older ewes are particularly likely to be affected, especially if there is a sudden change in feed or other stress. Treatment is calcium supplementation. It is recommended to seek veterinary advice if either hypocalcaemia or pregnancy toxæmia are suspected since the clinical signs are so alike.

Often both calcium and energy will be supplemented while waiting for laboratory confirmation of the specific diagnosis.

3. **Vaginal prolapse.** Although it is essential that pregnant ewes get adequate dietary energy, they mustn't be allowed to get over-fat. Over-conditioning, along with carrying multiple lambs, high fibre diets and calcium deficiency are some risk factors for vaginal prolapse in late pregnancy. Ewes that have had a vaginal prolapse are highly likely to suffer with this in future pregnancies so they shouldn't be bred again.

Pregnant ewes must be fed a good quality, high-energy, palatable diet. Consult the concentrate manufacturer for guidelines on feeding rates and ideally have ewes scanned so that single, twin and triplet-bearing ewes can be fed accordingly. Body condition scoring is an invaluable method of assessing fitness for the stage of production. For example, lowland sheep should be around score 3 at lambing. More information on body condition scoring can be found by searching 'sheep BCS' on www.beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk.

Ask your vet about blood sampling ewes four to six weeks before lambing. Bloods may be tested for various analytes, including protein, minerals and trace elements, but most importantly energy status can be assessed by measuring ketone levels.

To get a good representation of the flock status, choose an equal number of twin and triplet-bearing ewes to sample and avoid sick or elderly ewes as they may skew the results. High levels of ketones indicate underfeeding of energy which puts ewes at risk of pregnancy toxæmia unless dietary changes are made. Assuming blood sampling is carried out in good time then issues identified by the results can be corrected before lambing. ■

'Several preventable diseases are associated with nutritional issues in late pregnancy'

Winter weather woes

As winter conditions continue to be unpredictable, **Liz Shankland** offers advice on planning your pig paddocks to make life a little easier

Every winter presents new challenges for even the most seasoned pig keepers, and we can all learn from one another's experiences and misfortunes. There is no doubt that UK winters are getting wetter and colder so we need to learn to cope with tougher conditions.

One of the biggest mistakes made by newcomers to smallholding is overstocking. When you first become a landowner it can be tempting to start filling the fields straight away, rather than taking the sensible and rather boring approach of waiting to see how the land performs over different seasons. Everyone should be allowed the occasional impulse buy, but taking on too many too soon is a sure-fire recipe for disaster – particularly when you are keeping pigs.

Pigs can churn up a grassy paddock in a very short space of time regardless of the weather, and constant rooting during wet weather will quickly create a quagmire in which both pigs and pig-keeper will struggle. You may not have much choice as to the location of your paddocks, but, if you can, create a number of small enclosures rather than one big one so that you can rotate your stock, leaving damaged, waterlogged areas to rest and drain. Multiple arks



ABOVE: Rigging up a heavy wooden feeding platform using an old pallet and some lengths of wood isn't difficult

THE BIG FREEZE

Given comfortable accommodation, traditional breeds can live happily all year round – even when temperatures plummet. The biggest problem when freezing weather arrives is likely to be keeping your pigs supplied with water. Automatic drinkers are a brilliant invention, but when they freeze up thirsty pigs may get frustrated and try to wreck them. Supplying water manually is never easy. Pigs are notorious for tipping over any container put in front of them and, when you have struggled with heavy containers of water across snow and ice, it can be soul-destroying to see a trough emptied with the flick of a

snout. If you can manage to run a hosepipe to your pens, leaving it running very slowly so that the water isn't able to freeze solid may be an option.

Deep troughs are best because the shallower the water the quicker it will freeze. In bitterly cold weather, you may have to visit your pigs several times a day in order to break through the ice and be sure that they have the opportunity to keep drinking. Some pig-keepers switch from feeding solid sow rolls to a porridge-like pig meal in winter. Mixing it with warm water instead of cold makes a more comforting meal, and the water also helps to keep the pigs hydrated.



Straw pathways are a quick temporary solution, but they need to be topped up regularly

PICTURES: LIZ SHANKLAND

may seem a bit of a luxury when you're just starting out, but being able to move pigs from one paddock to another without also having to transport their house makes a massive difference. It also allows you to clean out the empty house and do any necessary repairs at your leisure. Sometimes it makes sense to invest a little more to make life a whole lot easier for yourself in the long run.

Think carefully too about where you will position your arks in relation to gateways. Carrying buckets of feed past hungry, pushy pigs is tricky enough, but when you are also battling your way through the kind of mud that holds your wellies in a vice-like grip, the shorter the route, the better.

Feeding in a trough over the fence may be an option – if you can find a trough that's heavy enough not to be turned over and tossed about like a toy – but inevitably the biggest and bossiest in the herd end



FROM TOP: Site the opening of the ark away from the prevailing wind; Constant rooting during wet weather will quickly create a quagmire in which both pigs and pig-keeper will struggle

up dominating it and eating most of the food. Broadcasting feed widely over a large area may work in drier weather, but pellets and even the bigger, chunkier sow rolls quickly disappear into mud leaving disappointed pigs and wasting your money. If you've struggled with feeding this winter, plan ahead for the next one. Perhaps consider laying slabs of concrete or hardcore in a few areas, or rig up a heavy wooden feeding platform using an old pallet and some lengths of wood (pictured opposite).

Another dilemma is how to reach the arks when you need to add more bedding. Smallholders are full of enterprising ideas and visiting friends to see how they tackle problems can be worthwhile. Straw pathways are a quick temporary solution, but they need to be topped up regularly and, unless you have a ready supply of cheap straw, could prove too costly to be practical. ■

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

If your pigs have any slight health problems, cold and wet weather will further weaken their immune systems, making them more prone to illness. Young pigs are most at risk, particularly soon after weaning, so if you're buying in pigs make sure that they come from a good breeder and are not showing any tell-tale signs of ill health, such as coughing or diarrhoea.

Older pigs should be fairly robust through the worst of the weather, but think about the risks of trauma injuries, should big, heavy sows or boars slip in mud or on frozen, rutted-up ground. Animals who are already suffering from lameness or other injuries are not going to improve if they

need to drag their limbs out of heavy mud or snow. Similarly, if a heavily-pregnant sow were to fall and injure herself in a pretty inaccessible paddock, how would you or your vet be able to get to her in order to treat her?

If you have the option of housing vulnerable pigs through a period of extreme weather then do so.

If you don't currently have an outbuilding or field shelter, this might be just the time to start thinking about building one. As well as giving you peace of mind that your pigs are at less risk of injury, it will make feeding and watering a lot easier and more pleasant for you and your stock.



DRAUGHT-PROOFING

Pigs naturally huddle together for warmth and, as long as their ark is filled with sufficient bedding and isn't too big for the number of animals in it, they should generate a good amount of heat to keep one another warm. It's important, however, to keep the ark free from draughts. It makes sense to site the opening of the ark away from the prevailing wind to reduce the amount of rain getting in, and you might want to think about suspending a few strips of heavy plastic or carpet from the top of the door (above).



All about Liz Shankland

Liz Shankland has been a smallholder for 20 years, keeping prize-winning pigs, sheep, goats and poultry. A journalist and broadcaster by profession, she has written four books, including the *Haynes Smallholding*, *Pig* and *Sheep Manuals*. She is a qualified lecturer, running courses in smallholding and pig husbandry at Humble by Nature — Kate Humble's rural skills school in Monmouthshire — and she teaches at agricultural colleges in Wales.



A HEAVY worm burden in pigs can cause obvious signs, such as weight loss or diarrhoea, but it is the hidden signs that end up costing dearly, as worms can cause a reduction in growth of up to 10%, with a 13% reduction in feed conversion.

One of the key parasites is the large white roundworm. Living in the small intestine, they can grow up to 40cm long and produce up to 200,000 eggs a day, but intermittently so they aren't consistently found in faeces. These eggs are virtually indestructible and can survive in the ground for up to seven years. The larvae penetrate the gut wall and migrate around the body, typically through the liver, causing what is known as 'milk spot' due to scarring. This can be seen at the abattoir, so take note of any reports back about your pigs. The liver does heal, so if milk spot is seen, it suggests that the larval damage occurred in the previous 6-8 weeks.

The larvae travel to the lungs and are coughed up, swallowed and return to the gut to mature as adults within 10 weeks of eggs being shed. In many cases there will be no clinical sign of infection until the burden becomes high. They can significantly reduce the growth rate of young pigs and in rare cases may obstruct the intestine.

Other endoparasites include red stomach worms, nodular worms, whip worms and, in the piglet, threadworm. The lifecycles of these are direct from eggs in faeces to adult in the intestine.

Lungworm has an indirect lifecycle that requires eggs coughed up from the lungs of a pig to infect the earthworm to develop into the infective stage which is then eaten by the pig. The larvae then penetrate the wall of the pig's gut and migrate back to the lungs where they mature to complete the lifecycle. This affects mostly growing pigs outside (or pigs housed on earth floors) and causes coughing and weight loss. Infected earthworms can survive in the soil for more than three years.



The timing of worming

Vet **Liz Bennett** explains how and when to treat pigs for a worm burden

ABOVE:

Growing pigs should be treated for worms from eight weeks old and then every two months until maturity

TESTING, TESTING

This usually involves testing faeces to measure the number of worm eggs present. However, as some worms are intermittent shedders of eggs, a negative or low count doesn't mean no problem. Take note of any post-mortems or reports back from the abattoir about milk spot and monitor for signs of weight loss, diarrhoea, coughing, or reduced growth rates.

HYGIENE

All worm cycles are maintained by faecal-oral spread to some degree and so any system that separates the pig from its own and others' faeces will help. Regular removal of faeces from paddocks and moving pigs to clean ground is vital to avoid parasite build up. In housed animals, regularly pressure wash. The use of detergents will help to remove roundworm eggs, but their destruction can only be reliably achieved either by burning (flame gun) or lime washing. It is almost impossible

to achieve a totally worm egg free environment.

Isolate incoming stock too and worm them before introducing them into the herd.

ANTHELMINTICS

Anthelmintics should be used at the correct dosages, so getting an accurate weight for your pig is vital. Two classes of chemicals are available for the worming of pigs – avermectins, that are given either by injection or orally in feed, and benzimidazoles that are only available in oral format.

Adult pigs should be wormed every six months and ideally moved onto clean pasture or their housing steam cleaned. Growing pigs should be treated from eight weeks and then every two months until maturity. Sows and gilts should be treated 7-14 days before farrowing. Gilts should also be treated 7-14 days before going to the boar.

Pigs that are kept outdoors should also be treated against lungworm every four weeks and ideally moved to clean ground. ■

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Highway to heaven?

There are some simple steps smallholders can take to keep people and livestock safe if a public right of way runs through their grazing land, says the RBST's **Tom Blunt**

As a livestock keeper, you have a duty of care to your animals, but you also have to consider that any people who may have cause to interact with or encounter them are not exposed to risk – particularly if you have land with public access.

What is a field with public access? It is any field where the public has a statutory right of access or has been given permission by the landowner to enter it. Public rights of ways can be footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic. Public access is common on land owned by smallholders, with many public footpaths going through fields of livestock, but it is fields with cattle that generally give the most cause for concern.

If a member of the public is injured as a result of your livestock, you may face civil and/or criminal proceedings (*Country Smallholding*, August, Legal). The level of liability you have for someone on your land depends on their reason for being there. You don't owe a duty under either the Occupier's Liability Act 1957 in relation to visitors, or to trespassers under the Occupier's Liability Act 1984 where people are using a public right of way. However, this doesn't exclude you from all forms of liability for an injury caused by livestock or by any breach of health and safety legislation.

Knowing if you have any public rights of way running across your land is obviously vitally important, and your local authority should have definitive maps which will highlight these paths.

It's important to remember that the general public doesn't always have the experience or knowledge you have when it



ABOVE: Be prepared to engage with the public and supply them with information on your cattle

comes to cattle. For example, they may not be aware that cattle with calves at foot can present a risk due to their protective maternal instincts which can be increased when a dog is walking along the path with them. There are also a number of things that can cause an animal distress – being chased by a dog, the weather and fireworks to name just three – all of which may result in aggressive behaviour. You will know the temperament of your animals, which can vary depending on your breed selection as well as with individuals within that breed, but a stranger won't know them

at all, so if you think that your stock will be disturbed by public access, you need to consider keeping them elsewhere.

Whether you're putting livestock into an existing field or a new site, regularly monitor public access. For example, use of a footpath through a field may increase dramatically if a new housing development is constructed nearby – with more people, there is obviously more risk.

You also have obligations regarding public rights of way which you are required to keep clear of obstructions. Failure to do this is a criminal offence and

PICTURES: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO/RBST

the highway authority has the right to demand that you remove any obstruction you cause. If you fail to remove the obstruction, the highway authority can remove it and then seek to recover the cost from you. The obvious obstructions that need to be avoided are permanent or temporary fences across the route, locked gates, barbed wire, walls and hedgerows. It is also important to ensure that the right of way is accessible and not overgrown with vegetation. And if it is used by horse riders, you need to ensure that vegetation is cleared to an ideal height.

REPLACE AND REPAIR

As well as keeping the public right of way accessible, it is also your responsibility to maintain any stile or gate so that it is safe and easy to use. If any access point needs replacing or repairing, speak to the highway authority as it may be able to assist with materials and undertake the work required.

Although all sensible smallholders will make every effort to ensure that any potentially aggressive animals are kept away from public access sites, it is good practice to display signage informing people when a bull or cows and calves are in the field. In an ideal situation, signs would be displayed at gates, stiles or other entrance points. Displaying signs is particularly important when cattle are in the field, but it is also good practice to remove the signs or cover them up when the fields aren't being grazed. This ensures that you aren't being misleading and will also mean that your signage will be respected when it is actually needed. And remember, although good practice, a warning sign doesn't remove potential liability.



ABOVE: Why not hold an open day to encourage those who use your land to meet you and your livestock

If a bull is in the field, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) advises that a suitable sign would be a black-edged yellow triangle with a bull's head within the triangle. With signage you should avoid using wording such as 'danger' or 'beware' as this could be evidence that you thought the animal was dangerous. It is sufficient to simply state that a bull is present in the field.

'We have mentioned signage alerting the public to cattle, but you are also required to display warning signs for any electrified fencing used near public rights of way'

BELOW: The general public doesn't always have the experience or knowledge smallholders have when it comes to cattle

The HSE also advises that bulls of recognised dairy breeds (eg, Ayrshire, Friesian, Holstein, Dairy Shorthorn, Guernsey, Jersey and Kerry) are in all circumstances banned from being at large in fields crossed by public rights of way, statutory or other types of permitted access. However, those under 10 months of age or with cows or heifers are permitted.

Cows with calves at foot have been known to be the cause of injury or death, so where possible they should be kept in fields away from public access, although this is not always possible. Ideally avoid calving on sites with public access as individual cows can be extra protective at this time, so if an

animal shows signs of aggression it would be advisable to move her to another site.

There is often the perception that the combination of cattle and public access creates lots of problems, but the risks can be reduced. Engaging with the public and supplying them with information on the cattle, why they are there and requesting that dogs are kept on leads can help. You could even go as far as holding an open day to encourage those who cross your land to meet you and your livestock. Sharing information and discussing the livestock and explaining their behavioural traits can help to prevent future issues.

Another way of sharing this information is through the use of social media. Most areas have a local online group which will prove useful for sharing information, such as when your livestock move to a field with a busy footpath running through it. You could also use these platforms to show images of the stock so that they become a recognisable part of the local community.

The mix of grazing cattle and the public is not something that needs to be feared if approached in the correct way, but you and members of the public need to share the responsibility for ensuring that both people and livestock stay safe. ▶



MEET THE BREED: IRISH MOILED

The Irish Moiled — known to enthusiasts as ‘Moilies’ — is the only surviving domestic livestock breed native to Northern Ireland. The breed gets its name from the Gaelic language and it refers to the distinctive mound on the top of its head. Its origins are surrounded by myth and legend, but it is believed that the Vikings raided Moilie cattle from Ireland as today there are cattle in Scandinavia with similar colour markings in a breed called the East Finn.

A naturally polled (hornless) breed, the Irish Moiled was popular throughout Ireland in the 1800s. They were kept on a wide variety of habitats, but thrived on the ground of the hill farmer, particularly in the drumlin country of South Ulster. In common with many traditional breeds of cattle, the Irish Moiled is a true dual-purpose breed, being used for both meat and dairy. Its decline began with the introduction of more specialist beef and dairy breeds.

The Moilie is very distinctive, with characteristic colouring typified by red ears and nose and a white stripe along its back.

Handling

The Moiley is described as an easy to handle breed. Bulls normally have excellent temperaments and so it isn't uncommon for them to be used even in the smallest herds.

The fact that Irish Moiled cattle are naturally polled means that the need to de-horn is avoided, thus eliminating any risk involved with keeping horned livestock in close proximity to other animals.

A medium-sized breed with a placid, docile temperament, the Irish Moiled is an ideal choice for smallholders.



Input

As a breed of cattle that was traditionally kept by subsistence farmers, the Irish Moiled doesn't need good ground, although as one leading breeder says: "If a retired dairy farmer with lots of grass wanted some, they'd still be perfect."

Moilies are easy to maintain on a smaller acreage and steers can be fattened on good quality forage without the need for concentrates. The Irish Moiled has been described as "big bellied", which enables them to consume and digest large amounts of poorer quality forage. They are good browsers, especially of willow, ash and ivy, which makes them suited to extensive systems or conservation grazing.

They will out-winter happily even in cold and wet weather, given access to some natural shelter, although as a heavier animal there is the risk of them poaching the ground in wet conditions. Silage or hay will be needed in most situations,

together with a mineral supplement, but concentrates should not be necessary if the cattle start the winter in good condition.

Output

As dairy animals, Irish Moiled cows are capable of yields of up to 5,000ltr on an extensive system. An Irish Moiled cow can produce a calf every 12 months and, if not kept in the herd, there is a ready market for female calves with pedigree breeders. Cows can breed successfully until at least 10 years of age and many have continued to 15 and beyond.

For those looking to market grass-fed beef, the Irish Moiled is a good choice as it can be finished on 100% grass and while it may take a little longer to mature compared to other breeds, the slow-maturing process results in rich marbling to give a succulent flavour. Steers generally achieve carcase weights of 220-280kg typically at R and O grades.

Health issues

Irish Moiled cattle are sound in hoof and leg, which enables them to cope with most types of terrain without lameness concerns for the smallholder. They grow a thick winter coat which helps to see them through the winter outdoors.

In 2008, the Irish Moiled Cattle Society launched a breed conservation strategy to help maintain the genetic base and reduce to a minimum any increase in inbreeding to ensure the long-term genetic health of the breed.

Getting started

The Irish Moiled Cattle Society (www.irishmoiledcattlesociety.com) provides a wealth of information on the Moilie and carries details of stock for sale on its website. The society has a well-established DNA testing programme to ensure the validity of pedigrees and, before registration, every animal has to be DNA profiled and have its parentage proven. ■



Tom Blunt

Tom Blunt has been a field officer for the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) for four years. He works with rare and native breeds of farm livestock. He keeps sheep and Red Poll cattle at his family's smallholding in North Buckinghamshire and has a degree in agri-business from Harper Adams University





Kaz Strycharczyk is a vet with Black Sheep Farm Health, a dedicated farm practice serving farmers located in Northumberland and beyond



VET'S VIEW
with Kaz Strycharczyk



THE UK has a hard-won reputation for animal welfare and traceability. In the wake of the BSE and Foot and Mouth crises, requirements were tightened in the interest of tracking how animals moved between farms and into the food chain. This is the context for identifying cattle on your farm even if the rules may seem draconian at times, or overly prescriptive for smallholders who may even know their animals by name.

Correct identification is not only a legal requirement, but it also crops up in farm assurance schemes, such as Red Tractor or the Soil Association. Failure to follow the regulations will land you in hot water with Trading Standards as well as the Animal Plant and Health Agency (APHA).

RULES ON TAGGING

In cattle the main method of identification is through ear tags. You may have seen cattle with brisket tags in the past, but this has now been clarified as a non-permitted mutilation.

When born, calves must be given a 'primary' ear tag within the deadline, which differs according to whether it is a dairy or a beef animal (see below). This primary tag must bear the crown logo, the country code (UK), the herd number and a unique six-digit individual number. They must also be yellow, plastic and readable from a distance. This tag can go in either ear.

A secondary tag must be placed within 20 days of birth. This bears the same information as the primary tag, but it can be of a different style and/or material. You may see metal tags, or a plastic 'button' style – see which takes your fancy. The secondary tag must go in the opposite ear to the primary tag.

Both tags must be inserted before the animal moves off the holding. If a calf dies before it is tagged (before the deadlines) there is no need to tag it, although the details (date of birth and date of death) should be noted in your holding register.



What's in a number?

All cattle in the UK must wear ear tags for traceability. Vet **Kaz Strycharczyk** explains how to tag youngstock safely

ABOVE:
There are two ridges of cartilage visibly running along the inside of the ear and the tag should sit between these two veins

TECHNIQUE/HYGIENE

Good restraint is the key to tidy tag insertion. If you have enough calves each year to justify the investment, a calf crate is useful and can be used for other procedures, such as disbudding. If not, manual restraint is fine, although enlist help to avoid having to restrain and place the tag simultaneously. Remember the cow. She may be protective of the calf, so separate the pair for tagging and don't take any unnecessary risks.

Hygienic application includes making sure tags are visibly clean, as well as washing hands or wearing gloves before insertion. Clean tags if dropped; some producers spray the tag with an antiseptic solution. The area of insertion should also be

clean. Load your tags carefully, matching the two sides and making sure that they meet when the applicator closes. Ensure that your pliers match the brand of tag – don't try and bodge it. The 'female' part of the tag should sit on the inside of the ear, with the 'male' on the outside.

There are two ridges of cartilage visibly running along the inside of the ear and the tag should sit between these two veins, about a third to a half of the way from the head and the ear tips. You should feel and hear a satisfying click once the tag snaps together. Once inserted, ensure that the tag can rotate freely. Check the calf's ears a few days later for any signs of infection. ■

Calf type	Deadline for fitting first tag	Deadline for fitting second tag	Deadline for passport application to BCMS
Dairy	within 36 hours of birth	up to 20 days from birth	within 27 days of birth
Beef	up to 20 days from birth	up to 20 days from birth	within 27 days of birth



Use simple fencing to keep out unwanted guests

I have noticed ever more pheasants sharing the field with my chickens. Should I be worried about diseases they may be bringing in?

BEN SOUTH SAYS: At this time of year shooting estates across the country are well into their season and game birds are in peak condition. Birds will range further afield as the season progresses and this may mean that they end up sharing the ranges with your chickens. There are a number of diseases that I would be considering as a potential threat to your birds. The most likely threat is that of parasitic worms that will either inhabit the gut or trachea in most birds or cause clinical disease.

Viruses, such as turkey rhinotracheitis (TRT) and avian rhinotracheitis (ART), are found in pheasants and chickens, so there is the potential for cross species movement of these pathogens. Bacteria found in



the environment will infect game birds and chickens equally whenever they have the opportunity to do so. With this in mind, if the game birds

entering your range are causing stress to your chickens then there is potential for disease to be an issue. If you find you are attracting many game birds to

your property then my advice would be to stop feeding your chickens outside and use simple fencing to keep out unwanted guests.

ISOLATE A MOULTING CHICKEN TO MAKE THE PROCESS EASIER

How do I make moulting as comfortable as possible for my chickens?

BEN SOUTH SAYS: Moulting is often triggered as the days become shorter and the birds are exposed to less and less light. Chickens will frequently moult at around the age of 18 months depending on stressors and their environment. It is often the case that a moulting hen will stop laying as she uses a lot of body reserves and energy to grow new feathers.

Moult begins with a rapid feather loss and then the regrowth of new follicles. This process can take up to three months. The newly forming feathers are soft and vulnerable to being pecked at

by other hens, so my first piece of advice would be to isolate her from non-moulting hens, but keep her in a place where she still feels a part of the flock. Often simply erecting a small fence can help, or place her in a large dog crate with feed and water.

Growing new feathers takes a lot of energy and protein. You can slowly switch your hen to a higher protein diet or simply add mineral and amino acid boosts to the water. Stress levels can be elevated during the moulting process too, so try to reduce environmental stress, such as competition to feed or increased handling. Cold weather will speed up the feather growing process, so don't be tempted to bring the bird indoors where it's warmer.

EGG BLOCKAGE MAY BE CAUSING CROUCHING BEHAVIOUR

One of my Light Sussex chickens is walking strangely and crouching, plus her tail is down. She is seven years old and has been a great layer. What do you think could be causing this strange behaviour?

BEN SOUTH SAYS: A common presentation of chickens at the practice is just as you are describing. I suspect that your Light Sussex is suffering from abdominal pain or colic which in chickens often presents with an apparent lameness or the penguin stance you describe. Of the birds I see showing this behaviour, the majority are struggling with either an egg blockage or have been blind laying (when dominant follicles

fail to enter the oviduct and fall into the bird's abdomen). Infection or inflammation within the fallopian tubes can cause this and this is what we describe as Salpingitis. Older hens who have spent a lot of their life laying are more susceptible to this issue.

I suggest isolating her in a safe area, but still allow her to see and communicate with the rest of the flock in order not to stress her more. Provide clean water with added vitamins and only allow her access to layers' pellets or mash. If it is a simple blockage or a displaced dominant follicle then the egg will either be excreted or absorbed over time. If she doesn't improve over five to seven days then a veterinary examination would be prudent.

ABOUT... BEN SOUTH

Ben studied veterinary medicine at the Royal Veterinary College, London. Poultry health became his primary focus and in 2016 he joined the St David's Poultry Team. He has a lead veterinary role in its subsidiary company, The Chicken Vet. www.chickenvet.co.uk

Pathogens can challenge the upper respiratory system and cause increased mucus

My chicken seems slightly lethargic and also has a continuously runny nose. What should I do?

BEN SOUTH SAYS: It would be hard for me to diagnose the issue without further information or a physical examination of your bird. However, I can give you guidance into likely causes and to do this it is important to understand basic anatomy and physiology.

Birds have complex respiratory systems that have evolved over millennia to allow efficient gas exchange while in flight. The chicken, despite its limited flying capabilities, is no different. Following the path of fresh air, it is drawn in through the nostrils which are joined via the choanal cleft and sinuses to the top of the trachea and the air flows down into the bird.

The trachea is long and stretches from the back of the beak all the way down into the chest cavity where

it splits into many small airways. We can group all these sections under the term upper respiratory system.

The lower respiratory system is within the bird and is comprised of several large, air-filled sacs and the lungs. Unlike in humans, birds cannot increase their depth of breathing by simply expanding their chest. The lungs are a fixed volume, so the air sacs ensure that both during inspiration and expiration the lungs have fresh air passing through them.

The upper respiratory system has high numbers of mucous-producing cells. This mucus traps dirt, pathogens and particles and small hair cells move the mucus up and out of the bird through the nostrils.

There are a number of pathogens, including bacteria, viruses or parasites, that can challenge the upper respiratory system and cause increased levels of mucus as the bird responds to try and excrete the alien pathogen. This leads to discharge from the nose.

My advice is to ensure that the bird is kept in a well ventilated coop where fresh air is readily exchanged. If the bird deteriorates then contact your nearest chicken friendly vet who will be able to run diagnostic tests to distinguish which pathogen may be challenging your bird thus allowing a treatment plan to be put into action.



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Start doing your maths!

If you are contemplating setting up a breeding business, the margins are tight so it's wise to tot up potential profits (or losses) before you begin, says **Andy Cawthray**

For many people the natural progression after keeping chickens for a few years is to move into hatching and rearing replacement stock as a cheaper alternative to buying in growing stock. For those who are fortunate to have the kind of location where cockerels don't present a noise nuisance, then you can use fertile eggs from your own stock which keeps the cost down further – or does it?

On paper it might look like an economical option when compared to the purchase of a point-of-lay pullet, but unless you are using a broody hen there can be quite an initial outlay on incubation and brooding equipment. This is along with

the cost of things like feed for the growing stock and electricity for heat lamps and the like, not to mention your time.

That said, the increase in poultry keeping in recent years has seen a proliferation in small-scale poultry breeding businesses, and why not? Previously pure breeds could usually only be sourced from the relevant clubs or exhibition breeders, but now they can often be found just a short drive away. If worked at carefully, there is a level of profit that can be achieved from building up a breeding business, but putting aside the short-lived trends associated with hyped breeds or colours that can drive prices through the roof, the margins

are extremely tight. The rule is that anyone intending to set up such a business certainly needs to do their maths.

Keeping a good line of laying or dual-purpose breeds as part of their setup can make good sense to a smallholder who manages a diverse business. Breeding and growing on some extra birds each year for selling as livestock (rather than for consumption) can certainly bring in a bit of extra income. The value of a good quality trio of Rhode Island Reds, for example, could well be in excess of four or five times the value of three roast dinners.

That said, if you are someone who now sees a £20 price tag attached to each chick that hatches then a step back needs

ABOVE: After a while, a smallholder may be tempted to progress from just keeping chickens to hatching them and rearing replacement stock

to be taken. Seeing poultry breeding as a sole source of income can be a risky business. For starters, demand fluctuates throughout the year and not in a manner that most small-scale breeders can compensate for. Come the spring, there is a demand for point-of-lay pullets, but most small-scale breeders will not have such stock available as the hatching season has only just begun. By late summer, the small breeder will have plenty of POL birds, but so will everyone else who has been busy with their breeding operations. Couple this with the fact that heading into the winter is not a peak buying period for poultry purchasers and you start to see the supply and demand issue, and the potential build up and bottleneck of stock you could be left holding, or selling on at a loss.

This leads to the next limitation – capacity, not so

much in terms of the size of the incubator being used, but, more importantly, the space available to rear the stock (and keep your breeding flocks). And while on the subject of flocks, careful thought needs to be given to the capacity to manage multiple breeds and yet still be able to produce consistent quality stock.

Some businesses have thought it through and established a safety net of supplying other

‘There is a level of profit that can be achieved from building up a breeding business, but the margins are extremely tight’

poultry products, such as feed, housing, drinkers, etc, but to do so needs storage premises and if that isn’t available on the

holding then a site will need to be rented. The property could well be sited away from the poultry on the holding and all the jobs that need doing there. Being in two places at once isn’t possible so that means staff. Start adding this and the bottom line of the business could soon become significantly squeezed. Get it right, however, and

BELOW & BOTTOM: Many backyard keepers allow access to unlimited food during daylight hours; How to store hatching eggs correctly to avoid crooked toes

there’s no reason why a poultry breeding business can’t turn a profit, but think in terms of percentages and plan carefully. Farming livestock for profit no matter what the scale takes skill and is like a living stock exchange – it requires eyes to be kept on what has happened, what is happening and what will happen, not only within your own stock, but within the wider poultry market. ■



ASK ANDY

No hard and fast rules for chickens’ rations
I frequently see and hear of people advising on daily rations of feed for their chickens. Is there an advisable quantity of feed I should be giving my birds each day?

There are no hard and fast rules that state precisely what each chicken’s daily feed ration should be. The quantity of feed required each day by a chicken varies depending on the time of year, the weather, the temperature, the rate of lay of a hen or pullet, the bird’s age, its weight, the amount of effort it needs to expend during its day and, of course, the nutritional value of the feed it’s receiving.

The feed could be commercially made, mixed at home, or even home-grown and, as such, the nutritional content will vary even if all other factors are equal. This is in part why commercial

poultry farms spend significant amounts of money managing the precise conditions in which their chickens are kept so that the exact quantities of feed can be closely monitored (it’s also why the breeds that are used are so uniform in size), plus it is to gain the best possible feed conversion ratio within the flock and hence produce eggs or meat at the most economical level.

From a backyard chicken-keeping perspective, this level of environmental control or uniformity is rarely used, required or present, hence feed consumption can vary. This is why many keepers elect to allow access to a relatively unlimited supply of food for their chickens during daylight hours. This doesn’t mean, however, that you shouldn’t try to establish an average range of daily feed consumption for your stock. This will enable you to

budget correctly and also spot excessive (or reduced) feed intake, which can be a signal that a flock member may not be their usual self – so possibly broody or ill.



Poor egg storage can lead to crooked toes
Out of the chicks I recently hatched, some have crooked toes. I’ve been told that it’s genetic and I shouldn’t hatch from them again. Is this true?

No, not entirely. Not all deformities that occur in chicks can or should be put down to genetics (although a number can be). The manner in which

eggs are kept prior to setting (*correct version shown left*) can also be a cause and deformities such as crooked toes and splayed legs can often be attributed to poor egg storage.

Henny feathered cockerel will resemble a female

I was at the National Poultry Show last year and I heard someone refer to a small bantam cockerel as looking a bit ‘henny feathered’. What does this mean?

On occasions, and more often in some breeds such as Sebrights, males will develop feathering that not only matches the plumage colour markings of the female, but also the female structure. This will mean that the cockerel resembles, to all intents and purposes, a young female and hence ‘henny feathered’, ie, have the feathers of a hen.

Feeling blue?

To some poultry breeders, the emergence of three colour variants of a plumage pattern is a royal pain – and it happens when breeding blue birds. **Grant Brereton** reveals why this occurs and what you can do about it in his new series on birds breeding ‘true’

If a variety of pure-breed poultry breeds ‘true’ then it produces offspring consistent with its own features, ranging from the comb right through to plumage colour/pattern in male and female respectively. In basic terms, the sons should all look similar to their father and the daughters like their mother. And you could be forgiven for thinking that this is a prerequisite of being bestowed the honourable title of ‘pure breed’, but it isn’t necessarily the case.

Some colour options across the different chicken varieties won’t breed true, which is also the case for certain physical features we find in our chickens in the exhibition world; for example, really short legs. Sometimes nature won’t allow certain factors to ‘lock in’ because it would be to the detriment of the survival of the breed.

Many newcomers to the hobby (me included) start

by purchasing a breeding pair or trio and then are soon perplexed by the variability witnessed in the offspring, often with only half of them looking like their parents.

In this series, Will my variety breed true?, I will examine a cross-section of pure breeds and mutations closely to determine what you can expect from breeding together fowl you believe will breed ‘true’.

THE BEAUTY OF BLUE

There is little doubting the sheer beauty of any form of blue poultry, which has feathering akin to pigeon blue, with the exception of a degree of darker-coloured black edging to each body feather in some varieties – depending on what is called for by the official breed standard.

All-over blue fowl (*opposite right*) are called ‘self’ blues, the prefix meaning that the birds are predominantly blue throughout their plumage.

However, the corresponding self blue males generally have an almost black contrasting overmantel formed by a darker neck, shoulder and saddle feathering. This is because in nature they would be orange/red in such areas, but mankind has come along and selected for an overlaying black pigment (to make self black fowl), but diluting it to blue highlights in these areas.

The blue gene was discovered in 1906 by geneticists William Bateson and Reginald Punnett, who observed the effects of diluting black feathers to a blue colour. And it isn’t limited to birds that are the same colour all over. Wherever there is black pigment in a fowl’s plumage, it has the potential to be diluted to blue. However, even though we have been in possession of the gene for well over a century, some blue varieties of poultry have only emerged in the last couple of decades. An example would be the blue partridge in Brahmas and Wyandottes.

DOES BLUE BREED TRUE?

Sadly, the blue gene doesn’t breed true and this is because it is regarded as incompletely dominant – meaning that its effects are much more sought after when in its impure (rather than pure) state. This is because a hen or cockerel can possess up to two copies of the blue gene. And they look really attractive with

just one copy of the gene, but two copies of blue over-dilutes the feathers, giving them a whitish cast with the odd blue feather randomly splashed across the body. This is where the name ‘splash’ for such specimens comes from. Genetically, they are double blues, so two of these type of fowl bred together will produce consistent results in their offspring. This is because each chick has no choice but to inherit at least one copy of the blue gene from both mum and dad and so becomes genetically double blue.

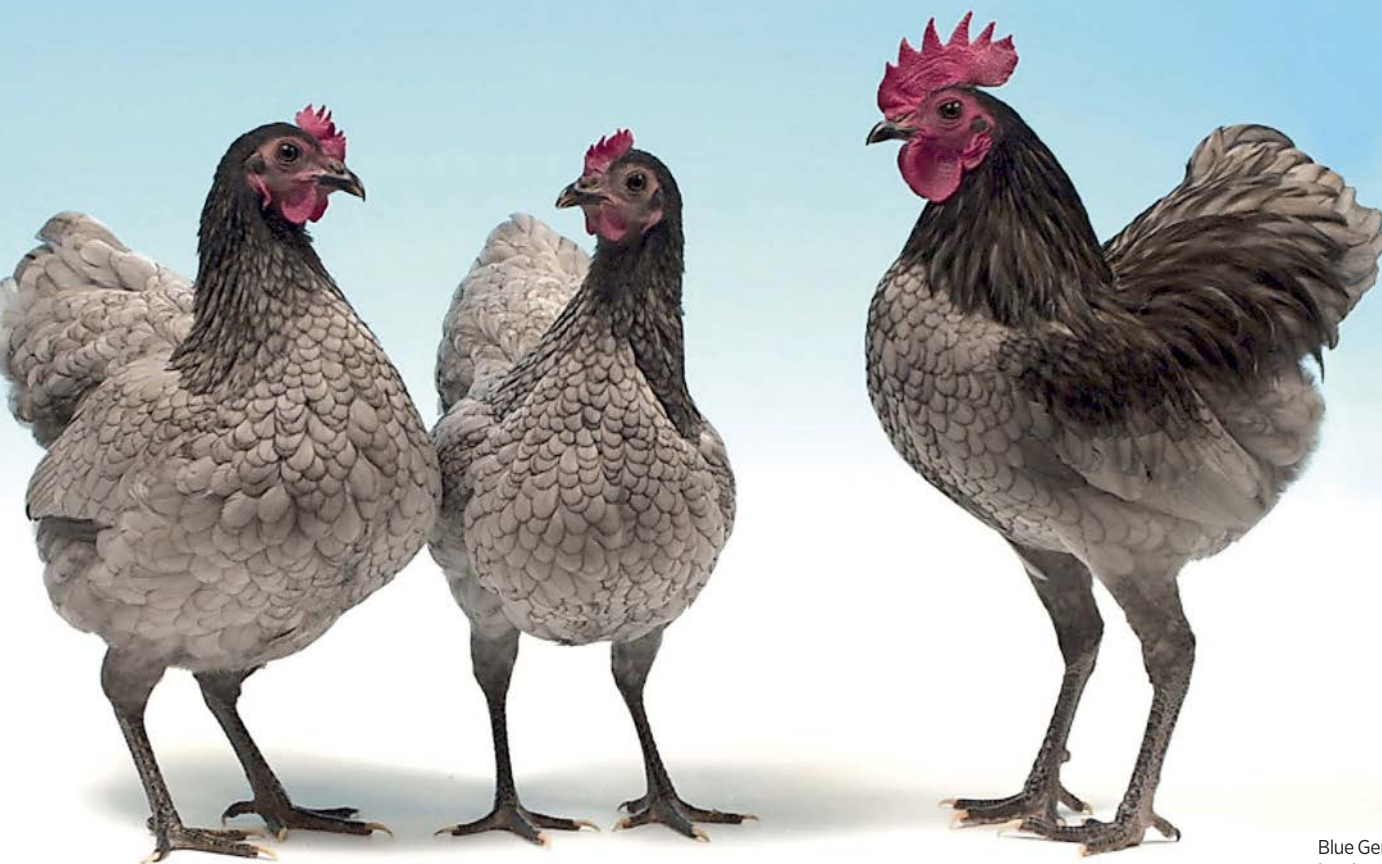
Therefore when you breed blue fowl together, the results will always be predictably unstable, in that you get three different colour outcomes. Invariably, half of the offspring will be blue (inheriting just a single copy of the blue gene), one quarter will be splash (inheriting both available copies of the blue gene) and one quarter will be black (not inheriting the blue gene). And this applies to all plumage varieties that rely on the blue gene for its pastel effect in the otherwise black areas of their feathering – blue partridge, blue laced, blue light Sussex (known as Coronation) to name but three examples.

A CURSE

To some people, the emergence of three colour variants of a plumage pattern is a royal pain and a curse, whereas others really embrace it. Many



A self black male with a splash (double blue) female



Blue German
Langshan bantams

serious show people regard the double blues (splashes) and non-blues that emerge from a blue breeding pen as waste, whereas others will cherish at least the non-blues (self blacks, partridge, gold laced), as well as the blue versions. It all depends on the line in question and the preferences of the breeder as to whether the non-blue versions measure up in terms of showing attributes, or whether a specific, separate non-blue line is required. An example would be partridge.

Sadly, this failure of a pure breed to breed true is what puts many people off blue varieties of poultry. They know immediately that half of any offspring produced won't be blue, and anyone with just a little experience appreciates that the blue offspring who do emerge won't necessarily be consistent in shade,

meaning that selection for the most desirable tones will be required.

INTERVENTION

It didn't take this budding genetics enthusiast long to work out that by breeding a non-blue (black) to double blue (splash), you could force the outcome with all the offspring having just one copy of the blue gene (inherited from the double blue parent). In effect, this meant 100% blues could be produced instead of just 50%. And breeders have already been making use of this knowledge, so that those breeding large blue Orpingtons were putting splash males onto black females to produce their blues. Silkie breeders were putting splash females in with their black breeding pairs knowing that all blue offspring must come from those splash females.

The danger of understanding such principles is that they can be too loosely applied. If one isn't careful, the notion that any old splash bred to any old black [producing all blues] is believed. However, this doesn't quite work out in reality, as I discovered personally. The significance of selection within each specific blue line was overlooked, which proves that theory and practice don't always go hand in hand.

The reason many breeders opt to breed from blue parents – whether that is self blues, blue partridge or blue laced, etc – is the ability to assess the parent stock for colour faults. They can also breed from show winners. Even if they put up with the double blues and non-blues, they have a degree of control in their breeding endeavours.

Blue fowl often have colour faults in the form of unwanted white patches, particularly in their wing feathers. However, such problems are masked in splash fowl (particularly those from self blues), which can lead to disastrous results in their offspring when bred to blacks. So my advice is to try it and see how you get on, but beware that your blues may suddenly show unwanted white patches in their wings – or you just might get lucky!

THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER

So, to conclude, blue birds absolutely don't 'breed true', but you can have a lot of fun with them and they are very beautiful birds, whether with completely blue feathers all over, or the blue just forming part of an established pattern. ■

Why the Plymouth Rocks!

Grant Brereton takes an in-depth look at the imposing and active Plymouth Rock, a dual-purpose breed with a wow-inducing barring pattern that enjoyed huge popularity across the Pond before World War II

Solid, attractive, active and productive, the Plymouth Rock also boasts rather familiar headgear – a medium-sized single comb not unlike the one on that famous breakfast cereal packet. And who wouldn't recognise the Kellogg's bird? This comb sits above a short, stout and slightly curved beak, which, in turn, helps to form a strong head. Its eyes are bright and prominent and its legs the colour of sunshine. Regarded officially as a soft feather heavy breed, its subtle curves define its desired type (or shape, if you prefer) and its breast is well rounded. Its stance is well-balanced, bold and upright, and it never fails to be imposing – large fowl males weigh in at over 7lbs, with females hitting the scales in excess of 6lbs.

The Plymouth Rock has been hailed as one of America's oldest breeds. It is thought to date back to the 1850s, with links evident to a breeder called Dr John Bennett of Plymouth Bay, Massachusetts – hence the name. The Barred variety of Plymouth Rock was admitted to the American Poultry Association in 1874, with stock arriving on British shores some three years earlier. With its dual-purpose qualities of meat and egg production, it was the fowl of choice for many, particularly in the years leading up to World War II, its only rival being the formidable Rhode Island Red.

Plymouth Rocks, like Indian Game, formed the foundation of broiler industry birds back in the 1950s. It was a line of White Plymouth Rocks bred to Indian Game that kick started the beginning of the well-known Cobb broiler that is still produced in unimaginable quantities today, supplying the unending demand for cheap chicken.



ABOVE: Barred bantam pullets. The Barred Plymouth Rock bantam is particularly popular with British poultry-keepers

As with many breeds, the Plymouth Rock has a variety of ancestral pure breeds in its make up, including Cochins, Dominiques, Brahmas, Rhode Island Reds and Leghorns, to name but a few. It just depended on what each new variety required in terms of plumage colour/pattern and features, such as leg colour, laying capabilities and comb. Once these factors were introduced from other breeds, the correct shape and attributes were then selected for until each new variety of the Plymouth Rock was born. Officially these are now Barred, White, Buff, Blue, Black, Columbian, Partridge and Silver Pencilled. However, the Black and White Plymouth Rocks came as sports from the Barred variety of the breed, so no infusion of other breeds was needed in those colour options.

The beautiful show specimens of Barred Plymouth Rocks that we see today have been to the detriment of the breed's utility qualities in some people's eyes. Perhaps feather improvement to the point of obsession comes

at the expense of meat-to-bone ratios and egg production? However, many breeders would cite the Rock's laying abilities as respectable, expecting upwards of 180 eggs per year.

BRILLIANT BARRING

When you spot an exhibition Barred Plymouth Rock in the flesh for the first time, it can be a real eye-opener to see just how far Mother Nature can go from a feather pattern perspective. In my view, the Barred Plymouth Rock has by far the best barring you will ever see on a chicken, where every single body feather is made up of precise, transverse black and white bars of pigment (actually, the white bars are the absence of pigment).

PRIMARY FOCUS

The original variety of Plymouth Rock comes in the barred plumage pattern, and is by far the best known of the available colour options in the breed. Because of its historical significance as a phenomenal egg producer and meat bird, as well as its uses in the

development of other breeds and hybrids (such as the Black Rock), the Barred Plymouth Rock tends to get most of the coverage in breed focus articles.

The Barred Plymouth Rock is also renowned for its introduction of the barring factor to many of the autosexing breeds which, by their very existence, have sex-linked offspring. So, basically, the factor that causes the black and white stripes in Barred Plymouth Rocks can be transferred to any plumage variety. Really Barred Plymouth Rocks are black chickens that have their plumage pigmentation process interrupted and restarted several times on each feather (by the barring gene), and this causes the black and white striping effect.

It is called 'autosexing' because the male of the breed can have up to two doses of the barring factor (which has a lightening effect), while the female only has one dose, resulting in different coloured and 'sexable' day-old offspring. Autosexing breeds were first developed by Reginald Punnett as far back as the 1920s. In Barred Plymouth Rock chicks, the females are black and the males are lighter, with a yellow headspot.

However, while there is no doubting the Plymouth Rock's utility attributes (when crossed with other breeds), many people would remind you that the Barred Plymouth Rock was a formidable dual-purpose variety of the breed in its own right for over a century and also the most popular breed in the United States for much of the early 20th century.

Even today work is still being carried out on breeding programmes to produce dual-purpose Plymouth Rocks with large, fleshy carcasses and I bore witness to this on a trip to a breeder in North Carolina. I held a large Barred Plymouth Rock male that I could barely lift, the bone and meat on the bird being phenomenal.

PRACTICALITIES

For any smallholder keen to take them on, the Plymouth Rock is regarded as a hardy breed, with a

docile temperament and it is fairly easy to keep. It lays a tinted egg and is available in both large fowl and bantam varieties. Like many breeds, it benefits from access to outdoor foraging and essential greens, such as grass and, of course, fresh water.

Good feed is important too, such as quality layers' (or even breeders') pellets with a scattering of mixed corn in the evening. If exhibiting, adding scratch feed, such as maize, in the corn will help laying females to retain that required yellow leg colour as a chicken's body not only depletes itself of protein for egg production, but also carotenoids that will be taken from the legs and other areas for yolk colour. The chlorophyll in grass will also help to retain the yellow leg colour.

In practical terms, the Plymouth Rock is one of the most fuss-free creatures on the planet. There is no foot feathering to worry about and no crest or long feathers.

ON THE UP

Some of the other large Plymouth Rock varieties have also enjoyed a resurgence in recent years, with imports from America providing a much-needed infusion of fresh blood into the available British strains. An example would be the White, where American imports have been crossed to a French meat breed (in one breeder's case) to really bring back the fleshy

carcasses while retaining the breed's features in terms of shape and conformation.

Some of these newly developed Whites have also been bred to British Barred Plymouth Rocks to reintroduce the meat on their carcasses and this is evident in some of the specimens currently being shown – you have to be quite strong to lift these out of their show pens at exhibitions!

However, good meat quantity and egg production is what Plymouth Rocks were originally developed for, after all. Of course, with the hybrid vigour now in some of these invigorated lines, their breeders/owners have also benefitted from an increase in egg production and are enjoying the true dual-purpose qualities of the breed they so dearly love.

POPULARITY

In terms of Plymouth Rock popularity, the Buff bantams are probably the most sought-after, followed closely by Barred bantams.

However, breeding the Barred variety of Plymouth Rock for exhibition isn't always easy. The show males and females are expected to display black and white barring on their feathers, but when these exhibition specimens are bred together, as well as roughly half of the offspring looking like their parents, you also get lighter males (grey and white barring) due to a dosage effect, and some females that have completely black plumage.

Suffice to say, unless you are content with experiencing three different types of offspring from your show Barred Plymouth Rocks, then breeding from the correctly coloured exhibition specimens will always pose a challenge in producing enough birds from which to pick the best. There is a little trick, though, to increase the chances of producing all show stock – and that is to breed a light male to a black female that has emerged from show Barred Plymouth Rocks. ■

Interested? Then consider joining the thriving Plymouth Rock Club: theplymouthrockclub.co.uk.

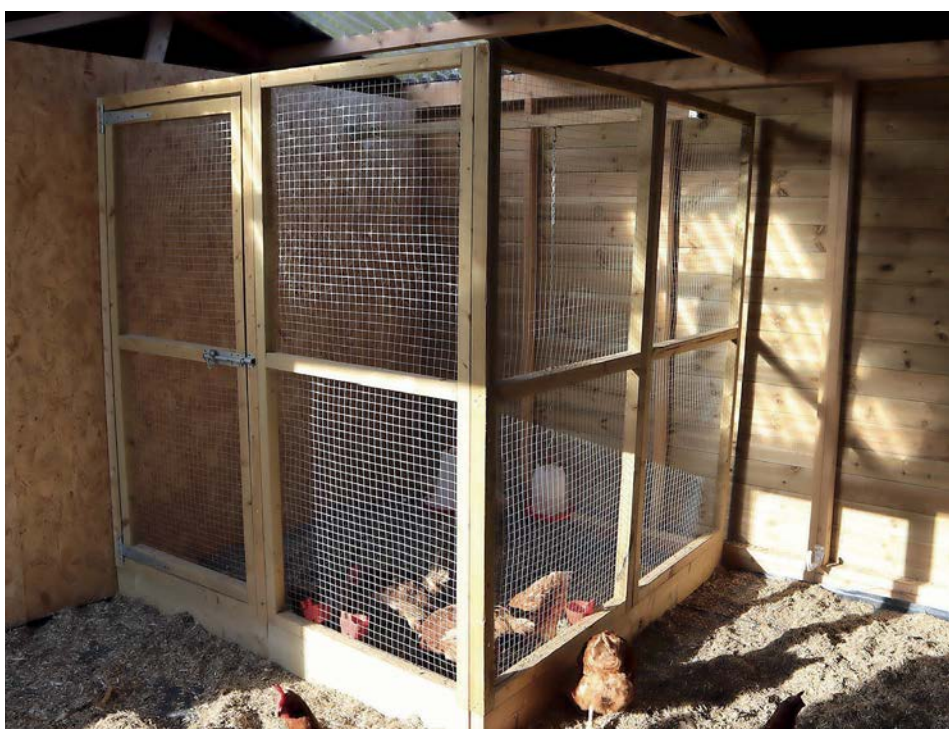
ABOVE:
A Barred Plymouth Rock female. The Plymouth Rock is a hardy breed with a docile temperament



HOW TO MAKE...

AN AVIARY

An enclosure within a barn, shed or garage can make the perfect temporary accommodation for poultry. **David Marek** guides you through the construction process



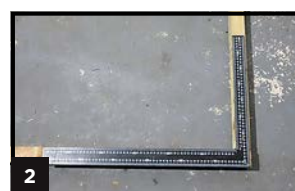
TOOLS REQUIRED

Saw (a mitre saw or circular saw is ideal, although a hand saw will work too), stapler, drill, driver, pencil, tape measure, square, clamps, sander or sandpaper and pliers.



METHOD

1. Start by cutting the framing timber to length. A mitre saw is ideal for this and if you're making several panels, set up a stop block so that repeated cuts are consistent. This will save time as each piece then doesn't need to be measured individually. For a standard frame with exterior dimensions of 900x1800mm (3x6ft), cut two pieces of 50x50mm (2x2in) timber to 1800mm (6ft) and then three pieces to 800mm (2.7ft).



2. The framework is fitted together with simple butt joints

Chicken owners often need to be able to section off a corner of a shed, garage, or barn for temporary accommodation, or to construct an outdoor run that can be attached to a shed or coop, or surround a poultry house.

I have found that the best way to do this is to construct modular aviary panels that can be used to create the shape you need easily. It can be temporary or permanent, depending on the situation. Generally, I look out all of the materials I'm going to use and I size the parts to make the best use of them. In this case, the weldmesh that is used on the panels comes in a 900mm (3ft)

width and I've therefore chosen to make the panels 900mm (3ft) wide and 1800mm (6ft) tall.

I have opted to use pressure-treated timber for the framework so that the panels can be used outside if required, although if these were only to be employed indoors then regular timber would suffice. All fixings are galvanised, again with outdoor use in mind. It's worth noting that if these panels are only to be used indoors within a secure area, chicken wire could be employed for this project rather than weldmesh which would reduce the cost.

However, to make these as flexible as possible, I've used weldmesh, which

is considered fox proof. When selecting weldmesh to protect chickens from predators, it needs to be a minimum of 14 gauge (2mm thick) – the lower the gauge number the thicker the wire. For example, 12 gauge has a diameter of 2.5mm and 10 gauge a diameter of 3mm.

MATERIALS REQUIRED

For a single panel: 6.3m (21ft) of 50x50mm (2x2in) pressure-treated timber.

For a door panel: 10.9m (36ft) of 50x50mm (2x2in) pressure-treated timber.

Plus: Exterior screws, exterior staples, galvanised hinges, galvanised bolts, reusable cable ties

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

and, as the timber may be prone to bowing, use a square to get the joints to 90 degrees. If you find that the wood is off-square, you may need to add corner braces, but the wood I used was relatively straight and this wasn't required. Make a rectangle by attaching the pieces together with 75mm (3in) exterior screws, using two for each joint, and measure the centre of the long edge and use this as a guide to then fix the third 800mm (2.7ft) piece of timber exactly in the middle of the panel.



3. You will need a large roll of 900mm (3ft) wide weldmesh. This is widely available from stores and online and costs around £120 for a 30m (82ft) roll, with 25x25mm (1x1in) holes, which should be the minimum required to keep out predators. To ensure that rodents can't get in, smaller holes are needed — 6x6mm (0.25x0.25in).



4. The weldmesh is stretched out over the framework, but as it's been rolled you may need to weigh it down with a brick or something heavy until the wire has been stapled in place. I used an air compressor with a stapler to fix 40mm galvanised staples over the weldmesh into the framework. To ensure the strongest possible fixing, staple at every square of the weldmesh on the top and bottom of the panel and then every second square along the edges. Cut any excess weldmesh with pliers.



5. All of the standard panels are constructed in this way, but to make the system modular, create some door panels too. These are constructed in a similar way: ie, they have an exterior measurement of 900x1800mm (3x6ft), but with a door inside the framework and the weldmesh fixed to the door.

Make the framework for the door panel the same sized rectangle, but without the central bracing piece. Construct a second frame for the actual door, with exterior measurements of 790x1690mm (2.6x5.6ft) with a 5mm (0.25in) gap between the framework and the door to allow the door to move freely.

For the door frame you will require two pieces of 50x50mm (2x2in) timber cut to 1690mm (5.6ft) and three pieces of 50x50mm (2x2in) timber cut to 690mm (2.3ft). Fit these together in the same way as the regular panel, again fixing a central brace to the door.

Attach two 250mm (10in) hinges to the top and bottom of the door frame and a strong 250mm (10in) bolt to the centre of the door.

These panels can now be configured as you wish. I used two standard panels and a door panel to section off the corner of a barn to create a 1.8x1.8m (6x6ft) pen for my chickens. The panels can be screwed together for a permanent setup or if the structure is to be temporary, reusable cable ties are a good option for securing the panels to each other.



6. As they are, the panels and the door are fine, but to stop litter getting kicked out, or to raise the panels off the ground, add a 150mm (6in) pressure-treated board to the bottom of each panel. These are cut to size and fixed with two screws to each panel. They bring with them the advantage that if the timber were to rot outside, the boards can easily be replaced without affecting the panel itself.

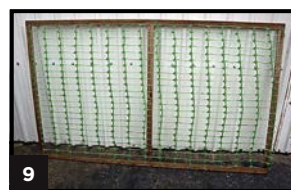
Also, if you're making a permanent run with two, three or four panels fixed together, the bottom board should be cut to the overall size required — 1800mm (6ft), 2700mm (9ft), or 3600mm (12ft) in these examples. This will give greater overall strength compared to fixing a single 900mm (3ft) board to each single panel and door.



7. Fit some mini joist hangers to the centre of some of the panels so that feeders and drinkers can be suspended from them, which adds to the functionality of the structure. With these components a standard size, in this example the support for the feeders is 1800mm (6ft) long with hooks fixed at regular intervals that chains can hang from.



8. While a solid framework and weldmesh gives a good range of indoor and outdoor options for making panels for a variety of purposes, if all you need is a simple solution to separate some chickens in an already secure environment, there are other ways to achieve this. Temporary fencing from builders merchants and online is cheap and can be used to fence off an area. A 50m (164ft) roll costs around £20 and, while it's only around 1.2m (4ft) tall, it should be of a sufficient height to keep most chickens separate.



9. You could make a simple framework that has exterior measurements of 1800x1100mm (6x6ft), constructed in a similar way to before but this time using lightweight pressure-treated battens of around 50x25mm (2x1in). The fencing is attached to the framework using 10mm (0.5in) staples. Several of these panels can be made relatively quickly and attached with reusable cable ties to create a simple pen.

Note again that this type of structure and fencing isn't fox proof and I only use this in an already secure indoor environment or outdoors within an area that is surrounded by electric fencing. ■

David Marek lives in Cheshire with his wife, Sarah, and a large flock of adopted ex-battery hens whose tales are told on their website, www.undermywing.org.uk, and social media channels. David and Sarah are both volunteers for the British Hen Welfare Trust and they co-ordinate the Cheshire rehoming.

Founding fathers

Morag Jones delves into the dim and distant past of Britain's domestic waterfowl

DUCKS AND geese are hardy, easy to keep and become trusting and responsive. There are a wide variety of breeds of duck, from the smallest Call that is no larger than a pigeon, to the majestic Aylesbury.

Geese are useful as friends, guards and lawnmowers, but they require a larger enclosure than most ducks.

All waterfowl should be protected from predators, but they only need simple housing. Keeping pure breeds of ducks and geese gives us the opportunity to take part in preserving some of our traditional breeds. After all, it is no more effort to keep good examples of a breed than poor ones!

Domestic ducks and geese (there are no domestic swans) have been selectively bred for meat, eggs or exhibition purposes. It is widely thought that all domestic ducks, with the exception of the Muscovy, have been bred from the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). Even in the wild Mallard there is some variation in shape, size, temperament and plumage. Mankind has exploited these traits through selective breeding to develop duck breeds for all purposes. Perhaps most widespread and numerous of all ducks, the Mallard succeeds by its ability to adapt to areas that humans use. Although principally located in the Northern Hemisphere, the Mallard has been introduced to many countries south of the Equator, including South Africa, Mauritius, Australia and New Zealand.

STUNNING SHIMMER
The wing speculum, or



mirror, is present on both male and female Mallard. It is a patch of iridescent feathers appearing blue/green. This shimmer is caused by refraction of light on the structure of the feathers, rather than a pigment. Many breeds still show the speculum. In some the blue colour is masked and the speculum appears brown. Iridescence has developed over the years in some black ducks, most noticeably in the heavy Cayuga and the bantam Black East Indian.

The Cayuga, first developed in the southern United States, is sometimes thought to be partly descended from the American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*). This is the closest wild relative of the Mallard. The Cayuga drake develops a tail curl like a Mallard, which the American Black Duck does not. The breed was first mentioned in 1809, with other records mid-century. Since that time the fabulous beetle-green lustre on the black plumage has been much sought after.

The magnificent Muscovy (*Cairina moschata domestica*) is a heavy species of duck which

originates from central and southern America. Historically, it was placed in the group known as the Perching Ducks. Both sexes have bare red facial patches and develop wart-like 'caruncles' as they age, especially the drakes. With an erectile fore-crown crest and these sometimes sinister lumps and bumps, they can look rather fierce. Despite this, they have calm temperaments when domesticated; the Muscovy is prized as a broody. She will put her heart and soul into defending her young of course. Exhibition Muscovies have nine colour classes in the UK, but in the United States, where they are hugely popular, there are many more.

AN ANCIENT LINK

Most European breeds of geese are descended from the wild Greylag (*Anser anser*), which breeds in the north, nesting on moorlands, in marshes and around lakes and on coastal islands. Wintering birds migrate south to semi-aquatic habitats, estuaries, marshes and flooded fields, feeding on grass and often consuming agricultural

crops. The plumage pattern is clear to see and is familiar to domestic goose enthusiasts. Paintings of birds resembling the Greylag and also the Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) have been found on ancient Egyptian tombs.

Tall and elegant, the wild Swan Goose (*Anser cygnoid*) comes from central Asia, from Siberia to Mongolia and northern China. It is almost entirely vegetarian, eating sedges, along with other grasses in the summer. Its bill is not really adapted for grazing very short turf, but more for grass that can be sheared off with a sideways motion.

The Swan Goose (*above left*) has been domesticated for several thousand years in China and is prized as an egg layer. The domestic breeds known as African and Chinese geese are descended from the Swan Goose. These breeds in their wild-type plumage look similar to the Greylag descendants, but their bills tend to be longer and wedge shaped. A large bill knob, barely perceptible in their wild ancestors, is a key part of the exhibition breed standard for the African and the Chinese Goose.

The domestic geese originating from the Greylag and those descended from the Swan Goose do interbreed. These crosses have produced different breeds of Russian geese, such as the Tula, Asamas and Kholmogory, plus the beautiful Blue Steinbacher. ■

Morag Jones is president of the British Waterfowl Association (BWA). The BWA has launched a new website full of waterfowl information. Visit www.waterfowl.org.uk

New year, new resilient resolutions

Now is the perfect time to consider a hardy overhaul of your growing efforts in 2020, says **Kim Stoddart**

Climate change is hardly out of the news nowadays. As increasingly extreme weather events become a part of our future landscape, it can all seem a tad doom and gloom, especially at this decidedly murky time of year. And yet there are actually a number of simple but positive actions we can all take to shore up our natural defences. The good news as well is that nature holds a lot of the answers and by kicking back and relaxing our grip on tidiness and order, we can save time and money while also building a greater degree of resilience overall.

So how do you become more resilient for the growing season ahead with little to no effort at all?

DON'T PULL PLANTS OUT OF THE GROUND

The desire to yank old crops out of the ground once they have produced their main harvest is strong. After all, it's what we've been taught we should do to keep our plots show garden tidy. Yet as well as making more



ABOVE:
Go perennial where possible

LEFT:
Self-seeded coriander



work for ourselves in this bid for perfection, many plants will in reality keep on providing that bit longer if we give them the chance. From pick and come again lettuce leaves, herbs like parsley and brassicas such as chard, kale and purple sprouting broccoli, there is often more life in the plant if you leave it to grow on for as long as possible.

LET PLANTS SELF SEED

Speaking of this, many of your crops will readily provide you with an ample bounty of viable seed if they can follow their natural instinct to flower and set seed. Lettuce and salad leaves like rocket, radish, calendula, nasturtium and coriander are among the easiest and best with which to work. Try leaving some parsley and leeks in the

ground too until their second year for further free seedling opportunities.

GO PERENNIAL WHERE POSSIBLE

The more established the plant, the deeper the root structure will be and therefore the better able it will be to fend for itself; to search further afield underground for nutrients and water during a dry patch and to better see off pest attack overall. These are often the ultimate in low-maintenance grow-your-own. Choose from staples such as rhubarb, asparagus, Jerusalem artichoke and sorrel and add wider choices, including Daubenton kale, ova, horseradish, globe artichokes, seakale and Egyptian walking onions.

■ Resilient Growing

with Kim Stoddart

GROW WILD AND FREE

From mixing up your planting on the veg patch (which, I strongly believe, helps to reduce pest build up), to allowing areas of your land to grow nettles and long grass, this will help predators to benefit from your natural resilience. Add in a small makeshift pond and leave some dead branches on trees, or create natural hedging or a wood pile and you'll be providing a valuable habitat to pollinators and pest control heroes alike.

NON-INVASIVE WEEDS MOVE ON IN

Ground cover is useful as it helps to protect soil from the risk of excess rain, which will wash away vital nutrients, as well as from the drying glare of the summer sun. While you don't want the weeds taking over, not meticulously removing every single invader has benefits.

GROWING UNDER COVER

At this time of year I get green-finger fidgety. Amid festive frivolities, the desire to ground myself by working the soil becomes incredibly strong. With a polytunnel or greenhouse there are opportunities even in the depths of winter. Although anything you plant now will take a while to get growing, the pleasure of doing so is hard to beat. Try covering an undercover patch with some horticultural fleece to help warm the ground for a few weeks and then choose from any of the following early-year activities:

NEW POTATOES

Later planted tubers will, of course, burst into life much more quickly, but I take real pleasure in planting some first earlies out now. It will buy you a few weeks of early harvest come spring, and no, you don't always need to chit your potatoes first. Tubers overwintered in the ground will spring into life when they see fit, so under a layer of fleece yours will be coaxed into growth and a promise of spring baby potatoes to come.



ABOVE:
Kim among her perennial and self-seeding veg

HERBS

I know I've written about this before, but try separating and planting out supermarket herb pots like thyme, parsley and coriander in your polytunnel beds for slow but constant growth.

WINTER SALAD

It's worth planting more now for investment in a hungry gap-ready harvest. Choose from winter leaves or hardier pick-and-come-again varieties like salad bowl. Planted under fleece or within a cold frame in your polytunnel, they will soon poke their fledgling heads around the soil. ■

BELOW:
Vietnamese coriander — plant out in your polytunnel for slow but constant growth



IN THE NEWS - FOR PEAT'S SAKE!

Peat bogs store carbon emissions as well as supporting a wealth of plants, birds and insects — and yet more than 95% of the UK's has been degraded or destroyed. As Garden Organic points out in its new campaign to build awareness around horticulture's continued use of peat-laden compost, for 30 years the sector has ignored targets to promote and use alternatives. Garden Organic is campaigning to put an end to this and to encourage peat-free growing across the board.

If you want to get involved, or to read more about viable alternatives (including advice on making your own compost), see www.gardenorganic.org.uk/peat-free-growing. (See also News, page 5.)

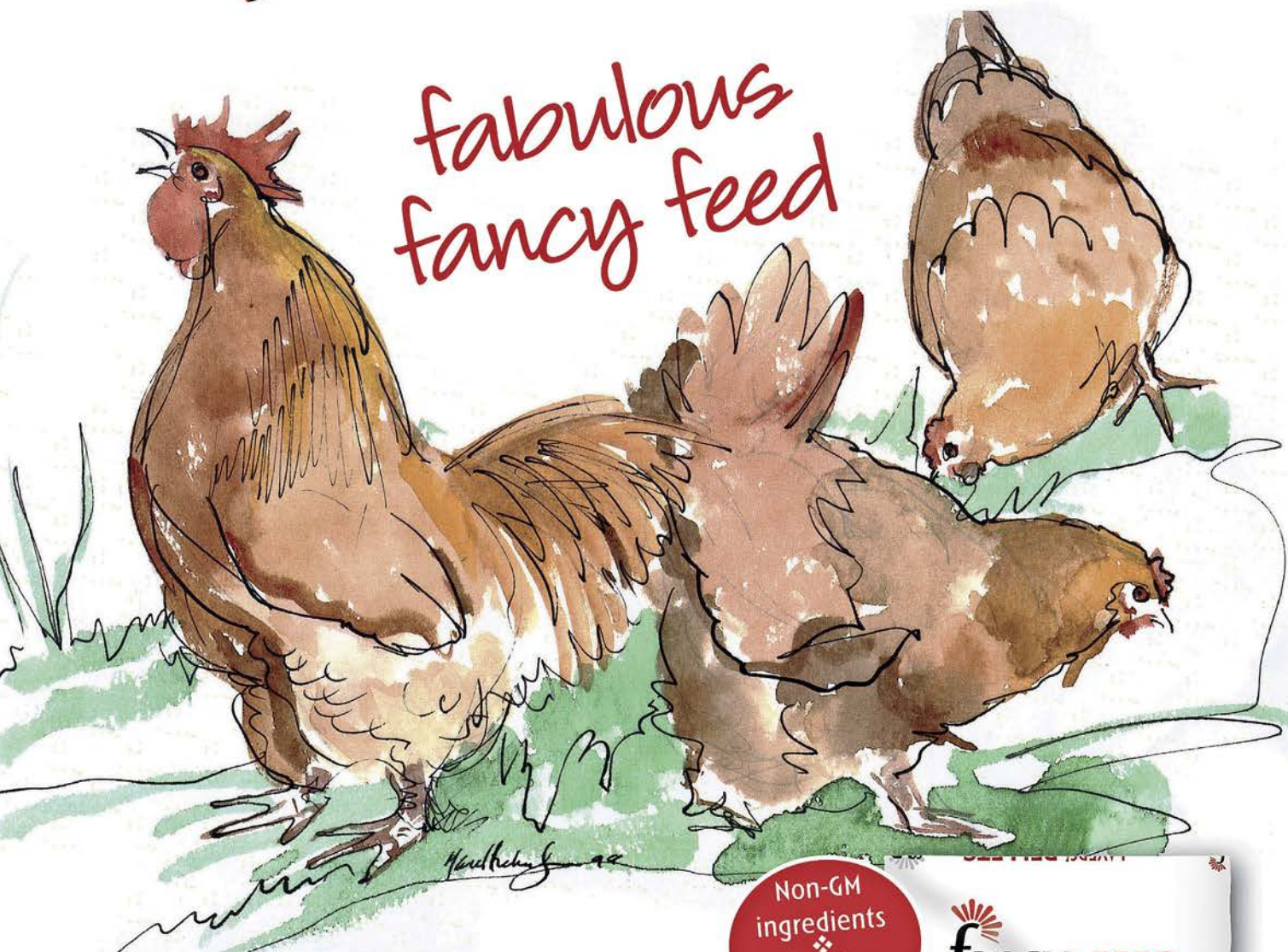
THE WONDER OF WORMS

There is value in all creatures great and small and certainly in every gardener's friend, the earthworm. The UK has 27 varieties and, as well as helping to turn household waste into crumbly compost 'gold', these wonders help to aerate and fertilise our loam. It's worth noting that a soil full of worm burrows will not flash flood. Also, worm casts contain an array of goodies, including nitrogen, phosphorus and bacteria to the benefit of your soil and growing efforts.

To encourage them in, avoid using any chemicals on your patch and ensure that your beds have an ample layer of compost. Digging or (even worse) rotating your ground will potentially damage these wriggly beauties and so is really best avoided if you want to encourage more creatures in. Although wormeries are popular for their production of 'worm tea', a potent liquid fertiliser, you can arguably create the same benefits from super sizing your home compost-making efforts which have many worms within.

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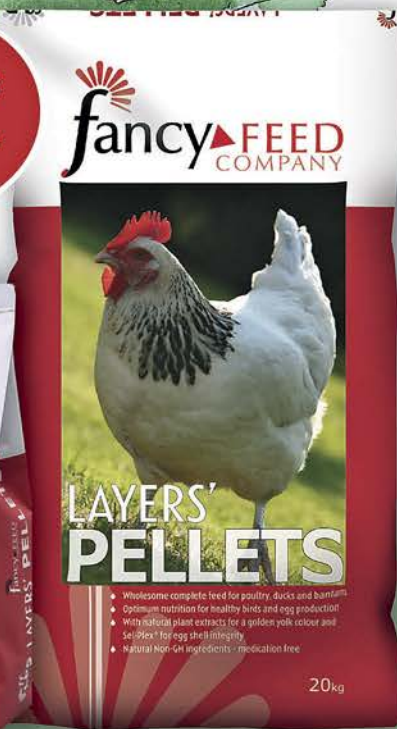
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