

Hopefully winter is now behind us and with the clocks changing all of a sudden we have long spring time evenings enabling us to get more done outside, whether 'business' or 'pleasure' - photography, nature study or just walking the dog. There's always something on the farm worthy of a picture, no matter what the season or weather.

Wintry scenes in frosty weather



A few weeks ago, the Leicester Mercury carried a nice feature about our mutton, which is increasingly in demand.

Ewes gathered for scanning



We have just started lambing - the ewes were scanned and most were carrying twins so hopefully we will have a good lamb crop. The first few hours of a lamb's life are so important, once they come into the world it is vital that they are licked clean by their mother, forming a bond and helping to warm and dry them as well as stimulating them to try and stand. Within minutes, they can be on their feet and looking for their first feed of life-enhancing colostrum, full of energy and antibodies.

After a couple of days, as long as mother and offspring are doing well, they are turned out down onto the river grazing.

Turning to the cows, good news! We had our routine bovine tuberculosis test this week and it was with great relief that we learned on the second vet visit - when any reactors are identified - that we were all clear.

Nationally, milk production is still below usual levels and the industry is still lacking in confidence. Many dairy units will have massive investment requirements when new slurry management rules and the continued rise in feed prices shows no signs of abating.

Ian's breeding strategy for the cows is really starting to show through, with milk butterfat and proteins significantly higher than they were even five years ago, helping to add to the value of our milk. He derives great satisfaction from breeding his own cows and when the results are so visible it makes it even more rewarding.

Within a few weeks, the swallows should be back to tell us that it is time to let the cows back out to grass.

Getting rid of those itches!



We vaccinate all of our female cattle against *leptospirosis hardjo*, which can cause abortion and ill thrift; it can also be a hazard to workers in close contact with infected cattle. Although we do not buy cattle in, *lepto* can be transferred in water and by sheep so on our mixed farm, with the river running through, it would be impossible to keep out. As with many vaccinations, two doses are needed in the first year to establish full immunity, followed by an annual booster. So the heifer calves are being vaccinated, in order that they can have their second jab before turnout in May. We hope that the Bluetongue vaccine will also be available by that time.

There are a handful of fattening cattle remaining in the yards and will have another batch of beef before the summer.

Beefy Boy has had his time with the bulling heifers and is now in with the cows; moving a tonne of beef packed with testosterone could be problematic, but he knows where he's going when we walk him round between the yards; as long as he can see the cows he is joining he soon gets over his reluctance to leave the heifers.

Beefy and some of his young harem



As well as participating in the Bird Atlas and enjoying seeing the results of the attentions of our bird ringer, this summer we will be working with other local naturalists. We will be recording dragon and damselfly populations for their Atlas and key site updates as well as learning more about our moth populations with some night trapping.



Herald moth

Best wishes, Julia Hawley
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