

Summertime in the countryside... the roses and elderflower are filling the hedges with blossom and the hay meadows are coloured by grass seed heads and the red tints of sorrel.

Time flies by; the first swallow broods are already whizzing in and out of the buildings, honing their new found flying skills.

First cut silage was very late - mid June - due to the weather delaying the contractors. Although this will have resulted in a higher yield as the crop has bulked out, the quality will not be as good and we shall have to adjust for this in our winter feeding. As soon as silaging was finished, the aftermaths were fertilised to get the next crop growing on.



Topping up with fertiliser

This coincided with a school visit, which generated much excitement as the children had the chance to see some bigger machinery than ours in use! Our contractor kindly took the time to talk to the children and to show them the product that he was putting on.

We are just starting to dry the earliest calving cows off and the heifers are starting to look heavy in calf, with first calves due in just over a month.

At present they are down on the river grazing with the sheep and beef cattle. The youngest cattle were only turned out a few weeks ago, having held back until they had their second bluetongue vaccination. We have now completed all of our vaccination so if the disease reappears this summer, our stock should be safe. Lamb prices peaked sharply this spring, partly due to continental buyers coming to the markets in response to shortage of their own stock after last year's bluetongue epidemic, but values soon dropped back to more normal levels.



Ewe with lamb in the morning mist

We have just sold the last of the Spring beef and the first lambs and are currently making lists for the next batch of freezer lambs for July delivery, please get in touch if you want to order. The lambs have done well on Spring grass and many are ready for market now - it's good to reduce the grazing pressure as growth slows in the summer heat.

During May and June we have been very busy with visits, and the weather has generally been kind to us. The children have really enjoyed exploring the grass fields and meeting some of the cattle. It is quite an eye-opener for many of the children that grass can look very different when it is being grown for hay, with a variety of colours, distinctive seed-heads and broad-leaved species, not the same at all as a mown lawn or playing field!

A visit from a Nottinghamshire Rainbows group



St Francis RC School up close and personal with the cows



We have also hosted walks from a range of adult groups including the Leicestershire Community Heritage Initiative and the Leics and Rutland Wildlife Trust. On Farm Sunday, we welcomed a select group on a 7am walk in the rain, during which we met up with our bird ringer - and also saw 2 kingfishers; then the rain had stopped for the mid morning walk, which included a star appearance from our barn owl at 11.30am!

We still have places available on our public walk on June 30th (7-9pm) - ring or email for details.

Inevitably, as well as the wildlife around the fields, we share our house and garden with many creatures, some more welcome than others.

This little fellow appeared with his siblings from a nest in the stonework above one of our windows and sat in the buddleia watching this world to by, whilst waiting for the next feed to appear.

Baby blue tit



It's also a good time for insects (well, until they get eaten by the birds at least!) and I have been trying to identify some of the more recognisable ones found around the farm. So here is a scorpion fly - *scarey!*

Scorpion fly



Best wishes, Julia Hawley
June 2008