



## News from Hall Farm

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Harvest time is here and it's beginning to feel autumnal. We are lucky that here in the eastern counties we have had less rain than in the west, where farmers are despairing of ever finishing harvesting. I'm really not quite sure where the summer went, life seems to be a blur nowadays, all of a sudden half the year has gone.

We have a nice batch of freshly calved cows and after a battle with cell counts our mastitis is under control again so milk quality at the moment is fantastic - I wish it was like that all the time! Baron's first calves have been born in a flurry of activity - he was obviously pretty busy as soon as he went in with the heifers - and he is turning into a fine young bull.

The fresh calvers will start to stay indoors at nights now so that they can top up their daytime grazing and parlour rations with silage and extra feed. With the damp summer we had, the grass kept growing throughout, apart from in the hot spell in June, but as autumn draws in it is not rich enough in nutrients for freshly calved cows. We have stocked up with most of our winter feed, including brewer's grains, shown here being tipped before Ian moves them round into the clamp for storage.



Milk prices have slipped back whilst at the same time we are making investment plans for additional slurry storage to comply with new regulations. Fortunately some of the input prices have also fallen, notably fertiliser and feed - although we also lose out on wheat prices on the grain that we sell. Wheat and barley prices have plummeted, in many cases not covering growing costs, due to good harvests around the world and lower demand in the recession. We thought our contractors would never get to us but once they started we were harvested in the space of 24 hours.



Beef and lamb prices remain high due to supply and demand factors, and also aided by exchange rates. We did raise our prices in the spring but are holding them at present.

Apologies to those who have waited a long time for beef - prices rose so high in the spring that Ian sold them all on the hoof as they were ready for marketing. Lambs have been selling at good prices all summer and the next Angus beef animals are now about ready for the butcher.

We have had a busy summer of farm walks, with a mix of history, birding and general social groups coming to us and we also ran our first children's activity morning which went well. I think we provided welcome - and free - support for grandparents in their childminding duties in the school holidays. We will probably run a second event in the autumn half term so watch this space! We have also had students from de Montfort and Loughborough Universities undertaking research on the river.

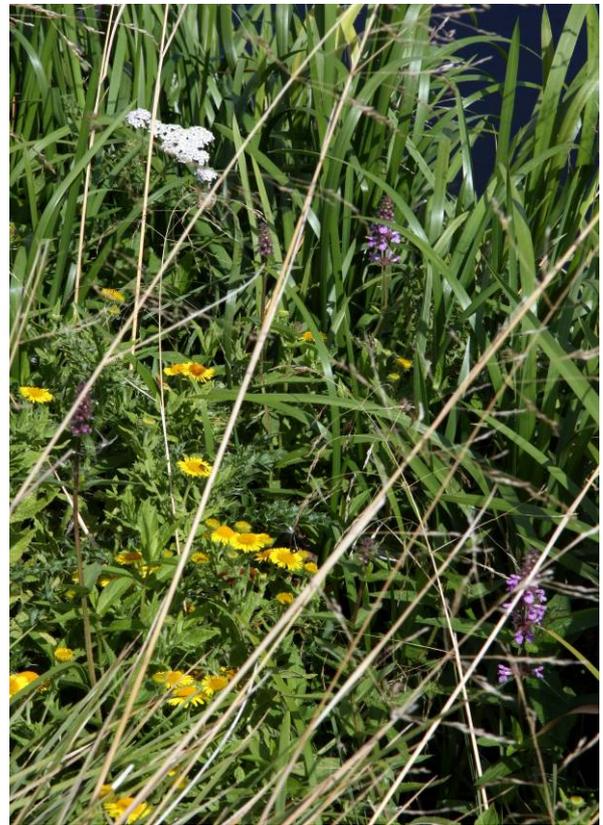
What a fantastic summer for butterflies it has been. Nettles, that most essential of caterpillar food plants, have been covered with caterpillars and our (many) thistles and other nectar-rich plants have attracted many different species, including painted ladies, peacocks, small tortoiseshells and common blues as well as this beautiful comma butterfly, once of many.



The hay meadows were cut very late again, as we missed the early dry slot in June but we were rewarded with clouds of meadow browns, ringlets, skippers, gatekeepers and wall butterflies as well as good numbers of small coppers (below).



Down on the river, there has been at least one family of kingfishers and signs of recent otter activity. Our barn owls also successfully reared three young this year. As the weather lacked the extremes of rain and drought of the last few years the flora also seemed to flourish, with fleabane, marsh woundwort and yarrow shown here growing next to the river.



We are delighted to have been nominated as one of 6 finalists in the FWAG Silver Lapwing Award, for conservation and environmental management in farming and we eagerly await the outcome of the judges' decision in October.

I have several winter talks booked in for a variety of groups and in the meanwhile, we are starting to gather our thoughts and to undertake the work necessary to apply for another 10-year funding package under Higher Level Stewardship to continue and to also expand the work that we have been doing over the last decade.

No wonder time seems to fly, there's always so much to do!

Best wishes and enjoy the autumn.

**Julia Hawley**  
**August 2009**