



Brockleby's Winter 07/08 Newsletter

It's been a year since I last brought you news from Goosenest Farm – a disgracefully long time but I hope you'll forgive us when you hear what a busy year it's been. 2007/2008 had its low points (mostly caused by weather, and unpredictable animals) but they have been more than made up for by its high points – topped in January this year by the arrival of a new addition to the Jalland family. More of baby Tabitha later!

Farmyard tales

Down on the farm, we've said a fond farewell to our herd of pigs. Debbie at Mill House, Melton Mowbray, has taken them on. Just as well, as the sheep have kept our hands full over the past year. Our lambing season is supposed to start at the end of April but, as usual, our contrary flock had other ideas and we had our first lamb born in March! Prior to lambing the whole flock came down with viral pneumonia, which affected a number of flocks in the area and was probably down to the mild weather. It caused quite a few miscarriages which was pretty heart-breaking as there was nothing we could do to help. Despite that, we had a very successful lambing season and Annette and I only had to intervene in two of the births.

The lambs were turned out to our land at Kirby Bellars but, in the space of two or three weeks in May, we found six decapitated carcasses. Joe, who helps look after the flock, decided to camp out one night try to discover what was happening to them. Unfortunately, he did not see anything but must have frightened off whatever it was as we had no more incidents after that. I later spoke to a member of the local Panther Watch group, who are convinced that a colony of Black Panthers is living wild in the Leicestershire countryside. They said that the clean bite which had decapitated our lambs was indicative of a panther attack, and that there had been previous sightings just over the railway line from our land at Kirby Bellars. Perhaps it's just as well that Joe didn't come face to face with our nocturnal visitor!

Our sheep created more trouble when we took a small flock to Lincolnshire to graze land overgrown by brambles as part of a conservation grazing project. We had to bring them back three weeks later as 15 had become entangled in brambles, leading to us launching a rescue mission to detangle them.

Weather Woes

The weather caused us all sorts of problems in 2007. The River Wreake broke its banks for the first time in 10 years and we had to move the sheep to Widmerpool. Most of them happily obliged, except for a breakaway gang led by Lambo, a ram donated to the flock by my father in law and "the only gay sheep in the village". They decided to decamp to the bottom of the meadow, became surrounded by water and had to be rescued by Darren, Katie the Canadian and I. We literally pushed them through the water to safety.

The rain also turned our haymaking into a disaster. It was a very wet summer causing the hay to go black and mouldy and, in the end, we admitted defeat and brought in haylage from a neighbouring farm.

Wild and Wet!

In November, we had a very successful Wild Game Evening when more than 70 people turned out for free wine and nibbles before listening to talks from experts including professional deer stalker David Stretton from Donington Deer Park, in Derbyshire. Unfortunately, just as we were packing up, news reached us that ten rams had decided to throw themselves into the River Wreake in a battle for pecking order. Another rescue mission was launched (can you see a pattern emerging here?) and, thankfully, no-one, Jacob or human, was hurt.

Pie prizes

On a more positive note, the summer saw Brockleby's launch the world's first organic Melton Mowbray pork pie, which scored a double whammy of prizes at Melton's Fatstock Show and scooped the prestigious Roper Challenge Cup (log on to our website www.brocklebys.co.uk to see the silverware). If you haven't tried one of our pork pies yet, you don't know what you're missing! Well done Suzy!

Staff news

The year also saw the welcome arrival of Katy the Canadian the third who follows in her compatriots' footsteps as one of the worst drivers in the world. She was told that she was allowed three crashes before she was sacked and promptly smacked one of our vans into the other in her first three days. She's got just one crash credit left!

Darren, our butcher, successfully completed his NVQ2 from Brooksby Melton College and passed his driving test, so you'll be seeing him more regularly at farmers' markets from now on.

Yorkshire lass and Brockleby's shop manager Jane is off work due to ill health at the moment. We all miss her noisy northern banter and look forward to her return in the near future.

Diary Dates

We already have three dates for your 2008 diary. Don't miss our Cheese and Wine Evening on Thursday, August 7, 2008, our Wild Game Evening on Thursday, November 6 and our Taste of Christmas event on Saturday, November 29. Also in the pipeline are plans for a cheese and charcuterie evening, designed to teach you everything you'd ever wanted to know about local cheeses and cured meats. The date is May 29. Watch the website for further details.

The Home Front

We celebrated our third Christmas in a mobile home and are still trying to build a house at Goosenest Farm. We successfully gained planning permission on the third attempt for our farmhouse but progress has now stalled again on the design front. We'll get there one day, hopefully! In the meantime, we have acquired another four fields adjoining Goosenest Farm, including three ancient rig and furrow fields and an owl box, complete with resident Little Owl.

This brings me to the year's most important news - the birth of our daughter, Tabitha. Apologies to those of you who turned out to Broughton Astley Farmers' Market on Sunday, January 13 especially for Brockleby's sausages. Much as I love BA on a frosty Sunday morning, the speedy arrival of our 7lb baby girl at 2.30am meant I was rather busy elsewhere!

Wishing you a very happy and prosperous 2008,
Ian Jalland and the Brockleby's team