

TAM O'SHANTER TIMES



SUMMER 2006

Animal Update

Our sheep have been given their annual haircut. Their winter coats have been removed (sheared), to leave them cooler and much thinner looking. Lambs produced in spring do not get sheared until next June. The fleeces are sought after by craft workers, as they do not need to dye the wool.

The sheep have returned from Hilbre Island as we unfortunately lost one after she had given birth. The lamb is doing well and is in the care of one of our volunteers.

It is nearing the end of the school year now and most of the chicks and ducklings from our school incubation projects have been returned to the farm. Several hens and ducks have gone to new homes, whilst some hens will remain on the farm to live in our new hen house alongside our recently introduced stock.

Our breeding sow should have produced her piglets by the time this newsletter goes to print. Hopefully, the Gloucester Old Spot will have a bigger litter than last time.

Linda Passey

Living with a Lamb

On the 6th June the farm got a call to say that one of the sheep housed on Hilbre Island had given birth to a lamb. Unfortunately the mother passed away a few days later from a bacterial infection and the lamb was left in need of a surrogate mother. I jumped at the chance to take on the challenge but little did I know how difficult it would be.

On the condition that Annie, another volunteer from the farm could help, I was allowed to bring her home. The first week was the worst; having to force-feed a lamb (who we'd now named Tilly) every four hours in between sleep and a full time job, was not my idea of fun.

I slept in the kitchen with her for the first few nights but that stopped when I woke up to her urinating on my head.

She now sleeps in a shed outside at night with a teddy for company and has the run of our garden in the day. My dad is not impressed by the destruction of all his precious plants but at least she's fertilising the lawn.

Eventually she started to settle in and with the help of my family and Annie we got her feeding from the bottle successfully. As with all babies, the general routine is now eating, sleeping, and playing, along with going to the toilet whenever, wherever. She wants constant attention and cries if she's left alone. As a result she follows you round like a little puppy and even jumps on your knee for cuddles. Fingers crossed she still remembers she's a sheep.

With regards to her future we are going to carry on bottle-feeding her until she takes more of an interest in grass and solid food and then start weaning her off the formula. She will then be integrated back into our small flock at the farm where she will she will hopefully live out the rest of her days. I will definitely miss having her around every day despite how tiring it has been. And it has definitely made me think twice about having children of my own any time soon I think I'll make the most of having some time to myself for a while.

Jenny Cheers



Springwatch

You may have watched the BBC's Springwatch programme from Devon and the Shetland Isles but we had our very own mini version here. A pair of Blue Tits took up residence in a nest box high on the gable end of the cottage, overlooking the picnic area. The box had a small camera inside that relayed live pictures onto a TV screen in the Activity Room next door. Although first signs of a nest occurred in January it was not until April when the nest was complete, and the first egg laid on April 16th. A clutch of nine eggs was laid in total with incubation starting on the 25th April. After only 14 days the first chick hatched on the 9th May. With all the bustling activity of feeding by the parent birds and the confined conditions in the nest, it was not until the chicks were ready to leave that we were sure that all nine had hatched and grown into fledglings. By Tuesday, May 30th all had successfully left the nest for the big wide world. Look out next spring for a (hopefully) repeat performance, which should be improved with a new colour camera, purchased with a grant from The Green Machine funded by Unilever, BHP Billiton and ENI UK Ltd. This £1900 grant has also funded new bird feeders and bird bath to attract a variety of birds to the garden next to the cottage; an information panel about Bidston Hill and small improvements to the Activity Room.

At the end of April 30 lucky individuals were treated to aerial displays of bats on the wing around the farm on our guided 'bat watch'.



Bat detectors (again funded by the 'Green Machine') buzzed merrily with the sounds of echolocation as our furry friends mooched for tasty morsels over the muckheap.

With a cold wet spring, frogspawn was a bit later appearing in our pond this year. In some years it has appeared by the 23rd February, but this year the frogs didn't lay until early March. Our visiting herons had to wait for their annual feast!

Blue and Great Tits, Coal Tits and Robins occupy most of our nest boxes, whilst Wrens have used the farm's walls and trees for nesting. For the second year running we haven't had Great Spotted Woodpeckers nesting on the oak tree on the drive. Last year they were ousted by a pair of Nuthatches and this year they have failed to return, preferring the woodlands of Bidston Hill. A pair of Tawny Owls and the occasional Fox pass through the farm looking for an easy meal, and



Bidston Hill is a typical hive natural activity this time of year. For the last few years Swallows have visited the farm in spring but have never nested. We were

always disappointed that they moved on. However, this year, at the end of June they decided to nest in the pigpen. Not the ideal location, particularly as the sow is due to have another litter, but as this goes to print we are hopeful that they will succeed and that we will enjoy hearing a brood of twittering Swallows on the overhead telephone wires during the summer. So, if Bill Oddie and Kate Humble tire of their Devon farm next spring, we could always accommodate them here in a proper thatched cottage.

Cucumbers! ...and a New Enterprise

It all started with cucumbers! In 1986 my late husband (Reg) and I found Tam O'Shanter Farm by mistake. The first thing we saw on coming out the farm was a very welcome sign 'Tea Room'. Things of course have changed now, the tearoom has been altered a great deal, but originally was staffed by volunteers especially by a very hard working lady whom we will call "Mrs. E". We became volunteers that very day (and I am still here) – but back to the cucumbers..... We brought some to the farm, and sold them there to contribute to the profits. This led to people bringing suitable goods for sale, and so it began! Since then Linda (one of our rangers) buys in toys, books and much more, and so the souvenir stall was born.

Joan O'Neil



Incubation Update

Most of the incubation projects have now finished, with only two schools left who are waiting for hatching. All but one school were successful, having at least one chick hatch, the average being about 5-6 chicks. Most of the birds have been returned to the farm are now looking to be re-homed.

Message from Ken Beard Chairman of Trustees

Next year the farm is celebrating it's 25th birthday, and during the year I am hoping to see events that encourage more people to become 'Friends of the Farm', and help with fundraising to cover the ever increasing cost of keeping our wonderful farm on an even footing. We have survived 24 years from grants and donations, which are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. It costs us a minimum of £20,000.00 each year to survive, with ever-increasing overheads i.e. insurance, maintenance, veterinary fees, power, etc. etc. If you have any ideas for fund raising, sponsorships or wish to join the friends group, PLEASE CONTACT US at the farm office by phone or E-mail

We have a donation box in the animal shed, which I hope you will subscribe to.

One planned fund raising event is a Race Night in April 2007 for which I am looking for sponsors.

If you wish to contact me Personally -



E-mail address:- ken@kenbeard.plus.com

Or phone the farm and leave a message for me.

Please keep enjoying the farm but I need your help!!!!

Friends of the Farm is the working name of the Wirral Urban Farm Association
Charity No. 515789 based at

Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm
Boundary Road
Bidston, Wirral
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Tel: 0151 653 9332 Fax 0151 652 4236

It is with sad regret that staff and volunteers at the farm mourn the passing of Ted Hill, one of our Heswall Centre volunteers. Our condolences go out to Ted's family. He was a much-valued member of the Heswall team and he will be greatly missed.



Events



Wednesday July 12th – *The Scarlet Pimpernel* – an open air walkabout production by the Fools Gold Theatre Company. Commencing 7.30, tickets only. Available from the farm.

Wednesday July 12th – Guided walk on Bidston Hill 10-am – 12.30. Free, no booking required. Meet at the farm.

Saturday July 22nd – Flaybrick – A Musical Play. Performed at Flaybrick Cemetery. Tickets £2.50. Meet and pay at the farm 2pm.

August – Summer play scheme – organized by the Claughton Community Group – look out for more details.

Sunday August 6th – Flaybrick Memorial Gardens History Walk. Free but booking required. Tel: 653 9332 – organized by the Friends of Flaybrick.

Friday August 25th – Bat walk on Bidston Hill. Free but please book. Tel: 653 9332

Sunday September 3rd – Flaybrick Memorial Gardens History Walk. Free but please book. Tel: 653 9332. Organised by the Friends of Flaybrick.

Saturday September 9th – Bidston Hill. A walk with Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society. Free, no booking required. Meet in the car park 2pm.

Tuesday September 12th – Guided walk on Bidston Hill 10am – 12.30. Free, no booking required. Meet at the farm.

Jolly Joyrides small carousel ride will be at the farm every Tuesday and Thursday from July 18th until the end of August, weather permitting, 60p/ride. Suitable for small children only.

Wirral Urban Farm Association

Dates of this year's meetings (7.30pm at the farm):-
July 19th, August 16th

A.G.M - September 20th

October 18th, November 15th and December 13th



Other News

A performance of the Wizard of Oz by the Fools Gold Theatre Company went down extremely well on Thursday May 18th. Despite the chilly weather it was much enjoyed by all.

Over 100 containers (pots and hanging baskets) have been planted up by students on the container gardening course, run by Rob Price of Acacia Horticultural Services Ltd. Most of the containers will be located on the railway station at Birkenhead North and Old Roan in Liverpool in time for the Open Golf Tournament.

The toilets in the Ecobuilding have been modified and improved with a grant from Community Chest.



Students from Birkenhead Sixth Form College visited the farm on June 19th to shoot a promotional video. The video will be aimed at promoting the educational aspects of the farm to secondary schools and colleges in the region. The students were lucky enough to capture our annual sheep shearing and wool spinning on film. Copies of the video will be available shortly for distribution.



Thanks to:-.....

Mr. and Mrs. Taylor for the donation of a fridge. It works well and keeps the milk cool for volunteer's milk and coffee.

The Inner Wheel Club of North Wirral and Heswell Lodge No 9106 for their donation of £100 cash.

Des Dougherty (who runs Jolly Joyrides) for his generous donation of tools and cash.

The Alliance and Leicester Fund for a grant of £1975 for equipment including incubators for hatching projects in schools.

Mr. Les Bradley, Gas Safety for his generous support in carrying out work free of charge.

Mrs. Moira Williams for her knotted chicks and Easter eggs.

Rebecca Miller one of our young volunteers, who raised £15 for the farm through various fundraising activities.

Everyone who makes a donation. Donations are vital to the running of the farm. It costs over £5000/year alone to feed the animals!

Also, a thank you to the police officers and their horses who visited the farm during the Easter holidays, and have come over on a few evenings to patrol the memorial gardens and the surrounding area.



Hamlet and Stirling