

Tam O'Shanter Times

Summer 2012

Issue 58

Birdwatching at the farm

Exciting news – Tawny Owls have nested in the tree right in the centre of the farm yard. During the week of 20th May volunteers saw the young owls perched on the branches of the tree. There may be three young.

While walking my son's dog along the bridleway behind the farm near the pig shelters and heard what I thought was an owl – they make a noise like *kee-wick* or *kee-yip*. I had my binoculars but I thought I wouldn't be able to see anything in the huge beech tree, but I did! It was perched quite low down: it was so cute.

About 9:30 the same evening we went again and saw it much higher in the tree. Every evening we took the same route 'owl hunting' but the best was on Tuesday 29th – a lovely summer evening. We saw and heard two



young owls perched side by side in the woodland near the same pig field; then another owl flew by – what a lovely experience. Even the dog was quiet while we watched.

There are many different birds on and around the farm and on the hill, and we regularly have swallows nesting in Jacko's stable. If you walk a dog on the hill, bird watching is a lovely hobby. It is so surprising what there is to see and hear: wrens, robins, bullfinches, blue tits, great tits, black caps, dunnocks, greenfinches, goldfinches, woodpeckers and the occasional buzzard, kestrel and many more. As well as birds, there

are also butterflies, moths, dragonflies.

So always be on the watch at the farm: you never know what might fly past you!

Kath Stephen



Joan O'Neil

1927 - 2012

We are sad to announce the death on 1st July, peacefully in Arrowe Park Hospital, of veteran volunteer, Trustee and Friend of the Farm, Joan O'Neil. She helped at Tam O'Shanter for many years, first with

husband Reg, then on her own after he died. In particular she loved seeing the children enjoy the farm, and hearing about their experiences; she enjoyed sharing anecdotes about the funny things they told her. Her common sense and dry humour will be missed; our thoughts are with her family.



Jubilee Barbecue

To celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, Bidston Community Archaeology group decided to organise a special barbecue on the farm, open to members of groups associated with Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm, Flaybrick Memorial Gardens and Bidston Hill and Windmill. They hoped this would give members of the different groups a chance to mix socially and get to know each other a little better. Funding was granted from Wirral Council towards the cost of running the event, and donations from local businesses were received.

Bob's pigeon

"Bob, I've got a racing pigeon following me around," said my friend Ray.

"Well, it will do if you keep feeding it," I replied jokingly. But this backfired; when Ray took my advice and stopped feeding him, he moved across and adopted me on my allotment just across the drive from Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm. He was a handsome bird, much bigger and stronger looking than the local feral pigeons, with perfect plumage. He must have. By feeding him for a day or two I was able to lure him into the allotment shed and get his telephone number. Yes, if you ever catch a lost racing pigeon you will find a telephone number stamped onto the wing feathers. Otherwise you have to send the number on the ring to the Royal Pigeon Racing Association in Cheltenham, and it can take ages to find out where it's from.

Anyway, we telephoned through from the farm and found he should have been in Wolverhampton, or just outside. He was three years old and had been on a race from Bath. The advice was again to 'stop feeding him - he'll come home eventually. Or perhaps better, take him a few miles away from your allotment and he'll find his way home from there.' So off I went on the 437 bus to West Kirby with the pigeon very quiet and settled in a big cardboard box. I took him right out onto the sea wall round the Marine Lake. On releasing him, he circled a few times and then headed off - ominously - in the direction of Bidston Hill. Sure enough, by the time I got back to the allotments, he was waiting for me - inside the very shed where I had caught him.

All we could do was agree to ignore him and not feed him. We tried chasing him off but he would



just circle for a while and come back and land on the allotment shed. But one day we couldn't see him anywhere. Then about a week later, I was down at the farm and saw about ten of the local feral pigeons by the duck pond. With them was Herbert (as we'd called him) mixing with these local ruffians and no doubt getting into some bad habits - Perhaps he's still around the farm - look out for a very handsome pigeon with pink rings on both legs.

Bob Hughes May 2012



Bob's book

A Ramble Round Wirral – a tour in pictures around the Wirral peninsula. 40 pages of pen and ink pictures by Robert Hughes for £3.75 to celebrate Wirral's Year of Coast and Countryside 2012. Limited number of copies available from the farm's Gift Shop

The Secret Life of Farm Animals

by Russ Cottrell

Hello! Welcome to the first edition of 'The Secret Life of Farm Animals'. Each newsletter, we're going to look at the secret life of one of our farm animals – firstly, chickens.

Our day starts as normal: a peaceful morning. Or is it? The wind is blowing, the snow is falling, the birds are singing... and the chickens are still giving it large! You see, most people

think that chickens just eat corn and lay eggs but when all the people go home and the animals are locked away the chickens take on a new life! One so unbelievable that it has to be seen to be believed!

Our chickens are underground hardcore rave addicts – yes, that's right! When everybody else is asleep, our chickens are giving it beans!

I spoke to the resident D.J, D.J Free Range (the scratch master) and this is what he had to say, "Most people think we're borin' lookin' birds who can't fly, but we're not! We have a life and we like to live it up, dya na wa'a mean? We do what we've

gotta do through the day, by laying eggs and eating corn, but we need to blow off steam just like any other living thing!"

I asked the club bouncers, Corn and Flake, a few questions about the problems with the club and they replied "We don't have any problems here. We have a strict dress code and that goes for any bad dancers too!"

After seeing this amazing sight with my own eyes I have come to the conclusion: Chickens Rule!

Join me next newsletter for another edition of *The Secret Life of Farm Animals*.

Animal update

Five new pigs came from Mold in May. They are Tamworth's crossed with Oxford Sandy and Black and Saddleback. Born in early April they arrived here when they were just two months old and are a bundle of joy, getting fatter as we speak munching on potatoes and there feed.

One of our Golden Guernsey goats, Marigold, continues to think she is pregnant. Though we definitely know she is not! Despite injections and ointments administered by the vets, her false pregnancy seems to be ongoing. She appears prone to this condition as she suffered from a similar delusion last year. However, we think the condition is not painful for her but she is very uncomfortable with a very large udder. She is still got her same personality, outgoing and active and will soon be back to her normal sized udder, we hope.

Also here at Tam O'Shanter, we have 4 Manx Loaghtan ewes, shorn of their fleeces in May by a professional shearer, Lloyd Williams. Due to their high quality wool they are much sought after for spinning and we are looking forward to seeing an end product later this year.

We have had lots of chicks and ducklings hatched in many schools and have many more to come of the little fluff balls. Moving on to the favourite animals of the farm, Arnie and Jacko are healthy and active and continuing to thrive on the plentiful grass thanks to our wet English summer of rain. The weather, although having the advantage of giving us a lot of grass which is good for the grazing animals, will not suit the honey bees. A lack of sunshine, constant cloudiness and rain is not what they want or us too! Many people have asked us about nests of bees in their garden this year. With over 20 species of Bumble bee in this country (though many fewer on Wirral) it is very likely that if you do have a bees nest in your garden it is one of these rather



than a swarm of honey bees from someone's hive. Bumble bees will build a nest and probably complete their breeding within a couple of months and will not return to the same spot. They are unlikely to sting you unless you threaten their nest by disturbing it and they are vital for human survival on this planet! Without

them many of our crops would not get pollinated and we would probably starve. So if you are lucky enough to have somewhere that has been chosen by a queen bee to make her home, please try and enjoy one of nature's small but vital components in our complex, interconnected world.

Currently, we have lots of eggs selling at various prices all from our very own free-range hens and ducks sold from the Rangers Office and Gift Shop. However, a menacing, stray dog entered the farm recently and terrorised our guinea fowl, this proved to be too much for two and they were lost. The ducks and geese are all happy and lively, with all the geese being there cheeky selves.

Lastly you may have noticed that our regular weekly pat-a-pet sessions have been suspended. We hope to be able to resume them soon when our long term volunteer, Trustee and friend June returns. We wish her a speedy recovery.



green pennant  award

Stop Press

We have just heard that we have been awarded a Green Flag Community Award 2012/13 for the seventh successive year.

Events and activities

All events are free unless otherwise stated.

Summer Playscheme

Monday – Friday from July 23rd – August 17th

Join our playleaders on this year's scheme with games, arts and craft activities. Suitable for 8-12 year olds. Register from July 23rd onwards for a summer of fun. Times to be confirmed. The activities are free, apart from possible trips out to various attractions. Once registered, children can take part in as many of the activities as they want.

Crafts for kids

Monday August 20th

Thursday August 23rd

Friday August 24th

Saturday August 25th

Bank Holiday Monday August 27th

Tuesday August 28th

Thursday August 30th

Saturday September 1st

10.30 – 12.30

Suitable for youngsters of all ages. Using all sorts of materials to make all sorts of things.

Traditional Storytelling

Tuesday August 21st

Wednesday August 22nd

Wednesday August 29th

Friday August 31st

1pm – 2pm and 3pm – 4pm

Come and be entertained by our storyteller Fiona Angwin. Be amazed by tales of Fire, Earth, Air and Water. Hear stories brought to life from all over the world from the Isle of Man to the Native Americans. Designed for ages 4-11 but suitable for all the family. No need to book, just come in and take a seat anytime during the sessions to be whisked away to the land of make-believe.



Face Painting

Thursday August 2nd

Thursday August 9th

Tuesday August 14th

Thursday August

23rd 12 – 4.30 £1.50

Fundraising by the International Youth Exchange Project

Carousel Ride

Every Tuesday and Thursday from July 24th – August 30th

10am – 4pm

80p / ride. Suitable for small children only. This event is dependent on good weather.

Flaybrick History Walks

Saturdays August 11th and September 8th

11am – 1pm (approx)

Run by the Friends of Flaybrick these walks take you on a stroll through the memorial gardens looking at the fascinating local history, stories and characters of people remembered in the cemetery through their memorials. Free, meet at Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm but please book to avoid over crowding. Tel 653 9332

Bidston Windmill Open Days

Saturdays August 11th and

September 8th

10am – 12noon

Run by the Friends of Bidston Hill. Last entrance to the mill 11.45am. There is a minimum height restriction for access to the higher floors (1.06m). Children under 11 years old must be accompanied by an adult at all times

Thanks to:

The Oxtou Society and everyone who volunteered on our behalf to help with the Secret Gardens day in May. Your generous efforts will enable us to arrange children's activities such as a playscheme, storytelling, craft activities and incubation projects for the next few years.

The P.H. Holt Trust for £1,500 for educational work. Everyone who nominated us for a Wirral Tourism Award for which we were shortlisted and received a Certificate of Merit.

Gavin Parkinson for managing our website.

All our many volunteers who help in a variety of ways, your generous support is much appreciated. Thanks in particular to Chris Holmes for organising the Spring Fair. A lot of time and effort goes into these events and Chris very ably organised the vast part of it.

Friends of the Farm is the working name of the Wirral Urban Farm Association (Charity number 515789) based at: Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm Boundary Road Bidston, Wirral CH43 7PD Tel: 0151 653 9332 Fax: 0151 652 4236 Email: tamoshan@wirral.gov.uk

For further information about the farm and past history look at our

old newsletters on the website. www.tamoshanterfarm.org.uk

Membership renewal

An addressed envelope together with a renewal slip was sent with the last Newsletter to those whose membership was due for renewal. If you haven't renewed your membership, please do so by the 31st July. After that date, it will be assumed that you no longer wish to support the Farm and your name

will be removed from the list of members. Please note that for £5 per year you are entitled to 3 newsletters to keep you abreast of developments at the Farm and, in addition, if you are on line you will receive information of forthcoming events for children.

Don't forget your £5 makes a valuable contribution to ensuring the farm remains accessible to all free of charge.