



# Harrowing Times

**JULY—AUGUST 2014**

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Although things seem to be changing, to date we have been blessed with very good weather and have started our haymaking.

The polytunnel is thriving and at the moment we are eating some very good potatoes, spring cabbages and lots of salads.

Don't forget to check your sheep often,



the flies seem very bad this year!

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## DIARY OF AN INCOMPETENT SMALLHOLDER

from Richard Barr

You learn something all the time. Until recently I thought that laminitis was something suffered by ewes shortly before they gave birth. Now I know that it is a condition that horses catch from – eating grass. Whoever designed horses seems to have overlooked their tendency to graze. The consequence is that up and down the country, and more particularly up and down our little patch of land horses are running the risk of nasty injuries as a direct consequence of doing what comes naturally to them.

The last edition of this diary left my wife lying on the ground with the horse looking on. Since then the horse (Trudy) has continued to absorb our attention (and money), but let me first tell you about the pig and the foxes, oh and the ducks, and the sick hen.

Not long after I filed my last report I opened the front door to check that my car was locked, only to find a small black pig looking up expectantly at me. “Quick, come quickly” I yelled to my wife who was starting to get ready for bed. As she came down the stairs she stumbled and fell. With a grim feeling of history (or diary) repeating itself I started to help her up. She was in a lot of pain and her comments about my late night pig cannot be printed here.

By the time I had got my wife back upstairs the pig had vanished and there was a distinct feeling in these parts that I was having a senior moment and that if there was a pig it had now flown away. I did try to photograph it but the ensuing image was very unpiglike, which did not enhance my credibility.

In fairness to me, I found out the following day that a couple in the next village bred stone age pigs, and that two that they had recently sold had gone missing. They invited me in to see one of the pigs (it was the runt of the litter and had been domesticated). There I was introduced to it as it lay in front of the fire. It looked much like the pig I had seen the night before.



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In the meantime a large area of bluebells had been flattened on the edge of our land and there were some impressive holes in the ground. Intrigued, we set up our Bushnell camera (it is motion activated and can see in the dark). Just 2 nights later we had the complete lifestyle of a vixen and her three cubs on video.



Elsewhere in the garden we have our usual harvest of disappearing ducklings. Their mother proudly marches to our polluted pond (polluted by ducks) followed by 12 or so fluffy charming ducklings. By the next day the duckling count is 8, reducing to 5 the day after and shortly after that just one duckling races after its mother. Then there are none. Two weeks later the whole process

repeats itself. This is no surprise as crows, sparrow hawks and magpies circle overhead. The more intelligent ducks take refuge with the hens.

Our hens live in a run surrounded by a floppy non-electric netting fence. It used to be electrified but the power unit died some years ago. Rats, rabbits, moorhens and ducks have all found ways to get in and out. It appears to be a surprisingly safe haven. Even though the run is just a few yards from where the foxes live, we have so far lost no hens to them. The other animals seem to have cottoned on too, especially as we have to give extra helpings to feed them and the hens.

But that does not prevent other problems. Last year it was the cockerel (see HT December 2013). This year it is his favourite wife. She was recently found opening and closing her beak and breathing noisily. Immediately fowl rescue sprang into operation with the usual TLC accompanied by the kind of food that makes humans' mouths water. She is already responding and hopefully will be back in full laying form shortly.

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And speaking of TLC, let us return to Trudy the horse. She is 28, has no teeth and now has laminitis and (for good measure) Cushings disease as well as mastitis.

The attending vets collectively sucked in their teeth (they are young and still have all their teeth) and talked about it being nearly time for Trudy to “cross the rainbow bridge to greener pastures”.

To prove their point they arrived with an x-ray machine which they set up in the field – powered up by a succession of extension leads that trailed from the house. Because of dangers of radiation I was banned from the field and had to hide behind a tree with my camera (like a stalker) while the others donned lead jackets and beamed radiation at the horse. But the x-rays showed that Trudy had not reached her sell by date.

Despite the grim prognosis Trudy is gradually returning to health. She does not get smoked salmon and prawns (yes that was what the chicken received) but regular trips to the feed merchants along with various herbal supplements that look good enough to eat (we tried them: they are!), and some injections of antibiotics have guaranteed a happy horse and a rapidly increasing overdraft. My wife has also tried out a homeopathic remedy on her – and more on that subject later.



Watch for the next thrilling instalment which promises to tell of the day when my wing mirror disturbed a swarm of bees and how the roof leaked in 3 places when we had our first decent rain for months.