

Christmas  
2011

# The Knowle Farm Newsletter

It's a small one again this year I am afraid. This is entirely because Liz bought small cards, (the envelopes for which just won't contain the big newsletter) and absolutely nothing to do with us getting old, more boring and therefore having less to report. Indeed, our exploits this year would easily have filled twice the normal sized newsletter, and now, sadly, you will never know.

The farm was again run for minimum maintenance. Andy kept a few sheep and lambs, here, enough to produce some lamb for the freezer.

We have new tenants in the cottage - Tim and Rachel who Liz has known for some time from her church. They hope to settle here long term, and, at least in part because Tim is a handyman, Rachel cooks and they both love gardening, I think everything will work out to suit us both.

So from all of us, a **Merry Christmas**, and a happy and prosperous New Year to all our readers.

## Zoo Keeper

In August, I had the chance to be a zookeeper for a day at Chester Zoo. (A Christmas present from Terry.)

I could have chosen reptiles (yuk), big cats (too dangerous), or



## A New Bit

Some of you may be surprised that a farm house with 4 bedrooms and three reception rooms needs an extension but then have you ever been into Terry's office?

It's a nightmare. It is currently in one of the bedrooms and Liz is not allowed to enter unless invited and if she should take a small duster or even the plug attached to the Hoover, she is summarily thrown out! Pat (Our Beloved Cleaner) has been longing to 'get in there' and has had to restrain herself on a number of occasions, knowing she wouldn't live to tell the tale should she try while we were on holiday, for example.

Yes, we have been in this house 15 years but the surfaces in there have rarely been dusted or the carpet Hoovered! This is

largely because the floor is covered in Stuff, Important Stuff (of course), which might be moved should anyone enter unaccompanied.

There are the skeletons of flies which died in the Dark Ages sitting on the windowsill. There are balls of fluff on the floor large enough to make nests for eagles....

Something had to be done! So we thought about moving house (a bit over the top) and then Liz pointed out this odd bit of land behind the downstairs loo and bordering the vegetable garden.



So we have filled this space with a new office for Terry. This has a number of pleasant consequences:

1. Lots of storage space so that the Significant Amounts of Stuff can be filed and put away (yes I know, I live in Cloud Cuckoo Land).
2. A sensible floor covering so the minimum of Hoovering is necessary (it'll be none if I get my way - T.)

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elephants (too big) but I went for primates. I spent about an hour with each of the seven keepers, looking after whichever species they were in charge of that day. I had expected it to be mostly mucking out, but actually I spent more time feeding, checking on the animals and interacting with them, where possible. Most of the primates are quite dangerous and there are some you mustn't even look in the eye, but I got very close to them all and actually had a ring tailed lemur sitting on my shoulder while I fed him and his mates with bits of banana.

The chimps were wonderful and, though I couldn't touch them, I got right up close. While I was chatting to one of the keepers, a chimp called Rosie poked a long twig through the bars and gently prodded me in the leg as if to say 'You are supposed to be looking at me, not him!'

The chimp enclosure is surrounded by a moat (chimps

can't swim) and wild ducks often make nests on the chimp side of the moat and raise ducklings. Chimps are omnivorous and will eat the ducklings if they catch them, but there is one, called Winston, who has learned that if he catches a duckling and doesn't hurt it, he can bang on the window and exchange it for a banana! He prefers a big banana to a small duck!

The orang utans have a wonderful purpose built enclosure with lots of things for them to do and an amazing amount of engineering to enable the keepers to get in and out without disturbing the animals too much. At night, they go underneath the enclosure to sleep on platforms, with bits of sacking to simulate the banana leaves they would use in the wild. One large male posted his piece



of sacking through the bars of the cage. We had to post it back to him before he would settle.

I had been quite worried that my energy wouldn't last the day, and have to admit being completely flat out by the end, but I managed. The worst bit was walking through the crowds from enclosure to enclosure.

It was a wonderful present and I can recommend it to anyone who loves animals. The fee goes towards funding research and trips to areas of the world where the animals are endangered.

## Sundry Comings and Goings



New Life 1

Well, we started and ended the year with four cats - however, not the same ones! Mitzi the Mega Cat (renamed Mickey after we found out she was a he) was always a bit of a nomad and has moved on - probably for more food!

Sad to report that we lost Shreddie in May - he was run over by a bicycle, but on the same day Heidi gave birth to three kittens - all boys, called Hubert, Gerald and Raymond.

We had suspected she was pregnant for some time, but Terry (in his never ending quest for rat catchers) determined that she was to be left entirely to herself. She would

have the kittens in a place of her choosing (outside) and raise the kittens untouched by human hand. As a result of this policy, we didn't know a) if she had had her kittens and b) as she disappeared for some time, if she had even survived. It transpired that she had hidden them in the loft over the kitchen, and we knew all was well when she finally dumped them on the back door mat at about 4 weeks. Sadly, Raymond didn't make it, but Hubert and Gerald are well and growing fast. Since she had the kittens, Heidi seems to have turned into a hunter, and is training Hubert well. They have started leaving various entrails and bits of dead



New Life 2

body outside the back door - poor Rachael, our house sitter - she's a vegetarian! However, Gerald remains a little too woosy. We can only hope.

On the poultry front, we successfully raised 6 ducklings and five guinea fowl - when I say 'we', I mean they were fostered by a hen. Poor woman, she couldn't cope when the ducklings, unlike chickens who are very dainty drinkers, started to throw water about everywhere. We had to take her away from them after about 4 weeks, before she had a nervous breakdown! We also spent a couple of days in Melton Mowbray, coming home via the 'fur and feather' market with four gorgeous Black Rock hens and 8 Maran (grey and black striped) 'growers' - chicks about 3 weeks old. Amazingly we



ended up with 7 hens and one cockerel (who's fate, while known in general terms, has not been decided in detail).

So we have plenty of all kinds of poultry, including Wilma, the Wellsummer hen who is, we think getting on for 10 years old!

## A new Bit

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3. Terry's office will be now out of sight so that even if it does get a bit messy again (surely not- L.) (very likely- T.) no one will see it.
4. A messy bit of garden will be tidied and (Liz hopes) a greenhouse may be introduced into the space.
5. We will gain a spare room, which we don't currently have as those of you who have been to stay and had to kip in a tent will attest to.

6. Finally, Pat will be able to blitz the old office. This will make her year, even her century.

We have been very pleased with the builders who are extremely tidy and only require tea and chocolate biscuits occasionally. A friend who works for Ikea, designing show areas, is coming to help us fit out the interior, so by the New Year we may be well on the way to facing the Large Almost Insurmountable Mountain which is 'Moving Terry's Office' - Just the five or six computers, three printers, two telephone lines, two complete networks, 200 CDs, all the photos we have ever taken in 35 years and All That Stuff. Something to look forward to.

## Philosophical Thought of the Year

As I sit in the kitchen and ponder young Shreddie's grave, (see comings and goings, above) I feel sad that he is no longer with us. And yet is here still, in the orchard. Here, yet not here - what an entirely fitting end for a cat called Schrödinger.

## Bad Decision of the Year

A friend round the corner raised some pigs, and we had half a one for the freezer. It was good, but the sausages were to die for (particularly so in the case of the pig). So this year when we were offered another one, we said we would like the basic chops and joints, but make the rest into those delicious sausages. We went round to collect it and found 65lbs of sausages. Have you ever *seen* 65lbs of sausages?

## Book of the Year

I read a fascinating book this year called "How We Decide" by Jonah Lehrer. It describes how your brain works when you are making decisions, which parts do what, and how to take advantage of it's strengths and weaknesses. Your decisions are not always what you think they are, and, interestingly, the rational part of your brain makes worse decisions than the emotional part. Read the book and find out why.

## Quote of the Year

Sophia, the two-and-a-half year old granddaughter was asked "What do we get from bananas?". She replied "energy". "What else?" from dad. "Potassium" came the confident reply. Guess whether dad is an arts or a science man...

## Apposite Aphorism of the Year

"The society which scorns excellence in plumbing as a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy: neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water." John William Gardner (8 October 1912 - 16 February 2002) was President of the Carnegie Corporation and Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under President Lyndon Johnson.

## Giveaway of the Year

The builders had filled the skip and the man had come to take it away. As he loaded it onto the lorry, something slipped and the skip wobbled. I didn't see exactly what happened and before I knew what I was doing, my hand had pointed an imaginary remote control and pressed the "rewind" button. Trying to replay real life? Maybe I watch my Sky box too much.