

Welcome

What a wet summer! Fortunately my neighbour managed to dodge the rain and produced some small bale hay for me. I hope you have been so fortunate. In the poly tunnel the tomatoes are going mouldy on the vine before they are ripe, despite good ventilation. This also happened last year and any suggestions on a cure would be welcomed.

Again the future of the association is being debated. Please read the article on page 2. At the last committee meeting it was decided that if at least four new committee members and a new chairman did not come forward at the AGM then we would have to wind up the association at the end of this years programme.

Whatever happens we will be running this year's programme and subscriptions are now due if you are not paying by direct debit, so get your cheque books out.

Kevin (Chairman)

Lectures and Visits

September 29 - TBA. Even at this late stage we have not been able to confirm a speaker, every one is still on holiday. Watch the web site where details will be posted. I promise not to get my holiday slides out.

October 27 - AGM and talk on Eco Building

November 24 - BASC - Shooting and conservation

January 26 2009 - Ask the Vet. John Yarwood will again answer our questions, entertain us with his experiences and provoke controversial debate.

February 23 2009 - Farm Shops - The experiences of a successful farm shop operator

Doors open 7.30 for 8pm start. Entry £2. Notice board for ads, sales table, tea and coffee available. Room L3/L4 The Leverhulme Centre, Reaseheath College, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6DF. Come early and have a chat.

Future of Association

Yet again, I am sorry to say, we return to the perennial topic of the association's future.

One of the main reasons for the creation of the association was the educational aspects of animal welfare. There are a number of commercial organisations now providing training in these areas for smallholders, including Reaseheath. These commercial courses remove one of our core reasons for existence.

The last year has not been very successful in that we have made a loss from the lectures and have made a small loss overall, subject to final accounts being prepared.

The committee now consists mainly of long standing members who have already committed considerable amounts of time and effort to the association. (Our treasurer has been in the role for nearly 20 years) If we are to continue we need new members of the committee. In addition my tenure as chairman expires this year, how the two years have flown! There are no members of the existing committee who want to take the position. In fact most of the committee have already been chairman at some point.

Following all that negativity I should say that being on the committee is an excellent way of meeting people, obtaining information and all the committee are very supportive. The telephone polls of people who have not renewed their membership showed they were satisfied with the association and had either forgotten or had other commitments which took their time.

Also we have had a lot of interest from the Cheshire show and new members resulting from the Sheep tasks course.

While it would be a great shame for the association to close, without volunteers we will have no option.

If we do wind up the association we are committed to running this year's programme.

So I put it to you the members - if you want the society to continue you need to attend the AGM (October 27) and volunteer for the committee. We will also need someone to take over the role of chairman. You will have the support of the existing committee members so it will be relatively painless.

DATES

18 October (Saturday)

Visit to Farrall & Roberts Agricultural Engineers.

Moston Road, Ettiley Heath, Sandbach. CW11 0SY

10:00 am to 12:00 followed by lunch in local pub.

Contact Tony on 01925 730530 if you want to come. We need numbers to book tables in pub. Ladies, attend to get ideas for Christmas presents. (Also known as toys for boys)

15 November (Saturday)

Rare Breeds Quiz - 7:30 PM - Hotpot and Apple Pie

At Toft Cricket Club, Toft, Near Knutsford.

Contact Ruth Roberts for tickets £8.00 (payable in advance) 01925 266208

Last years do was an excellent occasion with the opportunity to natter to lots of people as well as having a good meal.

Summer Barbeque

Apart from myself, Margaret and Gill only two other people braved the unseasonable sunshine for the Barbeque. We had a good time and it was a shame that more people could not attend.

One of Gill's longhorn calfs with a very protective mummy.



Bluetongue has it lighter moments:

Lawrence, our treasurer, penned the following anecdote which shows even Bluetongue has its lighter moments:

Believe it or not, the curse of Bluetongue and the need to vaccinate can also bring some humour. I collected the vaccine for my sheep from the vet, and with it collected certain pieces of paper which I studied as soon as I got home. One sheet of information said that if the animals were to go to Scotland it was necessary to provide a certificate of vaccination that requires a vet to administer the vaccine. The Derbyshire Gritstone Sheep Society has members in Scotland who may want to purchase some sheep so I duly asked for a vet to come.

The vet was due to arrive at 9.30 am and at about 10.30 the phone rang. My wife took the call and reported to me that a vet with a heavy foreign accent was lost so she gave him instructions. I stood in the narrow track waiting for him to arrive. At about 11.15 I heard a motor approaching at some speed. Round the corner came a small battered Peugeot with the engine revving. The car swerved into our entrance and came to a halt - yes, I said, you have found the right address. The engine, which was still revving fast, spluttered to a stop.

My vet apologised for being late and in so doing I realised he was Polish. His throttle cable had broken on the way and I could see a piece of plastic tube and a wire coming from under the bonnet and into the passenger's window. On the end of the wire were a pair of "mole grips" which he was able to pull with his left hand to open the throttle.

After administering the vaccine I offered any help I could to improve his temporary throttle control. He declined saying he was already late for his next appointment. He started his car and with excessive revs started off in reverse at a rate that put him quickly out of sight going the wrong way. Almost at the same speed, he appeared again and stopped close by saying he had better put his seat belt on, as he didn't want to be stopped by the police! Considering the state of his vehicle, I agreed. With the engine revs set suitable for about 50mph in third gear, he turned to look at me, and with a grin that would befit a Tom & Jerry cartoon, he let in the clutch. He was still smiling sideways as he shot off. I was left looking across an empty lane through a cloud of smoke. With two strides I was quickly in the space he had just vacated and as I watched him disappear down our single track I thought I could also hear a tractor coming up the track. I decided it was time to put my hands over my ears and go back into the house.

Lawrence

Mole Catching

First remembering Sue Tateman's lecture, moles are territorial so if you get rid of one another will usually come into the area to replace it. So if you don't actually need to get rid of them it is better to leave them.

However we are not all able to ignore their activities for a variety of reasons so I have prepared the following tips from advice given to me over the years and from talking to a few people about their experiences. I should say that my one effort at catching a mole failed, I think the cat got it in the end as it has disappeared.

The Mole

Knowing the prey may help you so remember a mole can eat the equivalent of its own bodyweight in worms in 24 hours. It needs to do a fair amount of digging to get these and a field full of molehills may only contain a few individuals as a mole can produce over five mole hills in a day. The mole is territorial and will generally keep away from another mole's territory which can cover up to 4 acres.

Methods

Poison

The use of Strychnine is now illegal and its replacement, aluminium phosphide, is more expensive and only available to professionals. The use of poison is becoming severely restricted due to the knock on effect to the environment.

Trapping

There are two main types of trap, Scissors and Tunnel. While the scissors trap appears to be the most common a few people have told me that the tunnel trap is better with a higher success rate if properly set and the spring is strong enough. Test by GENTLY releasing trap onto your finger. If you can get your finger out the trap is useless, the more it hurts the better the trap.

You will probably need to tune the trap so that it goes off easily, as a mass produced device is unlikely to work really well straight off the shelf. I will leave this to you as how will depend on the type and model of the trap.

Trapping is the preferred method for most mole catchers and their use is described below.

Repellent Devices

The various devices for repelling moles have various reports on success rate and if they do work they will only move them away from the repelling device which will probably not resolve the over all problem. Jasper Carrot says they like eating the sticks from the Woolworth windmills!

Shotgun

I am told that if you observe the production of a mole hill and wait until the third push of soil onto the hill before you shoot you will succeed! Good luck. Don't forget the probability of lead poisoning from the volume of lead you will be pushing into the ground if you are not successful. I wish you more luck than Jasper Carrot had. (see www.dtep.com/mole-in-the-hole.htm for the his mole catching epic)

Flammable Liquids

I have extracted the following from www.molecatchers.com/doesn't_work.html His description on the perils of using petrol are better than anything I could pen: "Igniting gasoline poured down mole tunnels is a proud tradition of imbeciles everywhere. However, we recently met a practitioner who took this tactic to the next level. After flooding the runs with multiple gallons of gas, he proceeded to pump oxygen into the burrows for the next several hours. When he finally lit it, he boasted that flames flared out in his neighbour's yard some 300 feet away! In a near head-on collision with the process of natural selection, this sharp tack would surely have ignited himself had the moles been tunneling differently."

Using a trap

Firstly find your run. It is easiest to start from a recent mole hill. The runs are usually about 6" under the surface but may be deeper or shallower. Shallow runs are not usually successful due to their less frequent use. Use a sharp stick pushed into the ground around the hill to find a run, there should be a sudden give as the stick enters a run. Once found push the stick in again to find the direction of the run. Sometimes you can feel the soil give way under your feet as you walk around the hill but this does disturb the run so be careful.

Once a suitable run has been located, dig a hole the size of the trap using a trowel or knife. Remove loose soil or other material taking care not to disturb the tunnel more than necessary. Align the set trap with the bore of the tunnel and place it into the hole with the lowest part of the mechanism lightly pressed into the tunnel floor. Exclude light from around the trap using turf, vegetation and soil. Do not let this material fall into the tunnel or prevent the trap from operating. Traps should be checked at least once a day to reset any that are sprung and to remove dead moles. Continue trapping until all activity in the area ceases. If mole hills are flattened and surface runs pressed down, it will be easier to detect continuing presence of moles.

Some say that you do not need to take any precautions about smell on the trap but most people recommend that you make sure the trap has been rubbed in soil and that your hands have been rubbed in soil to remove/reduce any smells. To further reduce the risk of tainting you should keep unused traps in a box of dry soil until they are wanted.

Mark the position of the trap especially if you are using a tunnel trap.

Good luck

Ulrika's story. (Dogs & Sheep don't mix)

Ulrika is a pedigree Ryeland ewe, born in March 1998. She came to us in November 1999 from North Wales, when her owners gave up their Ryeland flock. She delivered us twin lambs every year from 2001 onwards.

In the winter of 2006/7 she was in our neighbour's field, together with all our other 16 pregnant ewes. Imagine our horror on New Years Day 2007 when we visited the flock at about 9 am to find that Ulrika had been attacked, and had a huge flap of skin hanging off her shoulder down to the floor, as well as bite wounds on her rump and neck. We called the vet to come and put her down, as we thought she was beyond any medical help.

The vet turned up within a few minutes, as it was very quiet in the surgery on New Years morning. She examined Ulrika, and asked if she could try to sew her up, as she thought that given the right care and attention Ulrika might pull through. Ulrika was duly carefully loaded into the trailer and driven very slowly to the surgery, where she was left in the Vet's care. Later that afternoon, we were called to come and pick her up, and she was put in a stable of clean straw and left to recover.

The vet considered that the attack had been made by a dog, since the damage was too severe to have been caused by a fox or badger on a mature ewe. The police were notified, and promised to send someone to investigate in due course. A young policeman did turn up about a week later, was taken to the scene, and concluded that there was nothing to be done, given the lack of CCTV cameras! He was surprised to find that the ewe was still alive, having assumed she had been put down or died.

Ulrika eventually went on to make a full recovery, though she lost the lambs she had been carrying, and went on to produce a fine pair of twins in February 2008. 6 other ewes failed to lamb in 2007, representing a severe set back to our production, and hence to our income. The dog was not traced, though coincidentally a spaniel from a nearby house was run over on the main A49 road a few nights later.

If you keep dogs in a rural area, please do not just throw them out loose at night; you do not know what they will get up to if left to roam, and you could be the cause of pain and stress to livestock in the fields nearby, together with the financial loss and anguish to the owners.



Ulrika's wound, after stitching.

Tony Moore

Courses



Sheep Tasks

This was the only course run this year (apart from the transport exam) and 12 people attended the excellent course run by Mike and Sue Shimwell.

The course covered all the key aspects of keeping sheep and included hands on hoof trimming, drenching, ageing and dagging.

Everyone reported a very enjoyable and informative day.

Getting the sheep to sit calmly while having their feet trimmed was a skill we all learnt. The hands on aspect gave everyone confidence they could actually do what we were learning.

Preparing Cattle for Showing

Unfortunately this course had to be cancelled due to only two people being available to attend. Robert Boote, our tutor, was preparing his animals for the Flint & Denbigh show and would have demonstrated his winning techniques.

Unfortunately the change in the Bluetongue boundaries meant that he could not exhibit at the show so I am unable to report on his success.

We will see if we can run this course in November when Robert will be preparing some of his animals for market, Bluetongue etc permitting.

While on the topic of sheep - The national sheep association recommendations on drenching are:

- 1 Dose to the heaviest in the group and weigh - don't guess.
- 2 Calibrate and maintain the drench gun.
- 3 Ensure the nozzle is over the the back of the tongue.

Useless Information

Did you know that in Norway the round silage bales are wrapped in white plastic?

This is to stop the cattle finding them in the snow, if they use black plastic the cattle find them and start eating them, thereby spoiling the whole bale!

I did not ask how the farmer found them in the snow or why the cattle were allowed loose in the snow to find them.

DEFRA Whole Farm Approach

Back in July I tried to enlist in the online Whole farm Approach from DEFRA using the secure Government Gateway. This was so that I did not have to complete the paper version annual random surveys that I am always selected to complete under pain of prosecution if I don't

After filling in the online application form I got an email saying my details do not correspond to the data held by DEFRA. Being completely unorganised I had got the data off old DEFRA letters! Replying with the same details again I heard no more and eventually sent in the paper form.

Last week (mid September) I received a very nice booklet from DEFRA telling me how to register for the Whole Farm Approach complete with CD ROM. From the information supplied it appears to be a good attempt to reduce paperwork but it requires me to use Internet Explorer, I use Firefox, and I have to agree to the data protection policy which appears to allow DEFRA to share data with Regulatory partners which I am not happy with. Apart from which I have not received the password or welcome pack so they appear to have forgotten about my application.

So I will have to continue with paper forms as the paperwork is not a big issue for me, apart from the surveys.

If you are not as perverse as me about software monopolies, privacy and duplicating effort have a look at www.wholefarm.defra.gov.uk It may help reduce your paperwork. Let me know your experiences.
Kevin

Future Courses

We have two courses currently planned:

Lamb Butchery - This is planned for February 2009, dates to be confirmed, we know all those who have registered an interest and Maggie should be getting in contact with you nearer the time.

Beekeeping - Maggie has kindly agreed to organise this course as well, it should be run March/April 2009.

We will of course run other courses depending on demand and availability of course tutors and facilities. As we no longer have a training officer (volunteers wanted) it falls to individuals on the committee to set up and manage the courses. Organising courses is a very time consuming activity so please help by paying promptly, returning phone calls and letting the organiser know if you are unable to attend.

Lawrence has been busy again with the DIY and has penned the following description of how he has solved the problem of weighing his sheep. If you have any DIY solutions to smallholders problems please let me know.

Sheep Scales

Following my previous offering to the smallholder DIYers, this time I give you my design for sheep scales. In the days when food was cheap (!) being overweight was a common problem. The old bathroom scales were often replaced to be sure we could get a weight reading we could believe. There must be many households with an old set of bathroom scales. Use these old scales to make a set of sheep scales. The older design often had a screw to adjust the zero which is handy when integrating into the device shown.

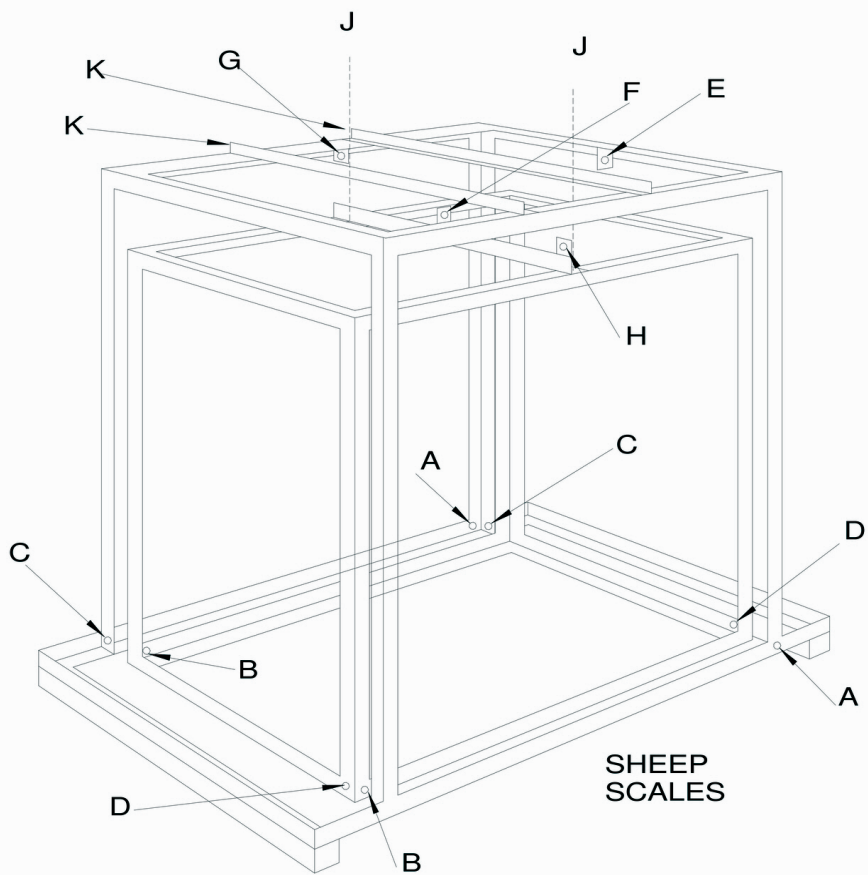
I have welded the scales up out of 40x40x3 Mild Steel angle and they consist of two main fabrications which I have indicated in the diagram. The outer frame sits on a wooden batten at each end, and the inner cage takes the sheep. For clarity I have not shown some details such as the netting used for the sides of the cage, or the doors at either end. The entry door is of wood and the exit door is of netting to encourage the sheep to face the way out. Both doors are secured by the typical gate catch which is secured automatically by closing the door. The floor is of plywood however I plan to add some non-slip surface in the future.

The inner cage is guided up and down by links as follows. Two bottom side links pivot on the frame at A and locate the cage at B. Two bottom end links pivot on the frame at C and locate the cage at D. The top of the cage is located by a longitudinal link between E on the frame and F on the cage and a transverse link between G on the frame and H on the cage. All links are also of 40x40x3 MS angle. The bottom links from C to D also fill the gap to prevent the sheep getting its feet caught! The pivots are set bolts with a nut to tighten the head onto the frame and a pair of nuts locked together to provide clearance on the cage.

The cage is supported on its centreline by two chains which terminate at their upper ends with screws and wing nuts for assembly and adjustment. The bathroom scales (not shown) are supported in the centre of the frame by the transverse sections K. Across the scales I have mounted a beam which takes the load from the chain at either end. A pad in the centre of the beam ensures a point load on the old bathroom scales.

Obviously, dimensions can be chosen to suit individual requirements but the inside of my cage is 100 cms long by 98 cms high by 53 cms wide. This accommodates my larger ram which last weighed 95 kilos. During operation use the zero adjustment to offset the weight of the cage and be sure to prevent debris from getting trapped under the cage and thereby giving a false reading. A final detail is the addition of eyes top and bottom of each corner of the frame for the attachment hurdles to control the sheep.

L.E.B. Heyshead Farm 2008



Rare Breeds Survival

The Rare breeds trust conducted a survey of 350 members with 288 valid responses asking about the members intentions for the future.

13% indicated a intention to give up keeping livestock in 2008 and 43% intend to give up livestock in the next three years.

Some of these being natural wastage due to retirement etc the general problem appeared to be the bureaucracy and in particular the transport regulations accounted for 34% of keepers saying they were giving up keeping livestock.

Given the precarious position of some rare breeds this could be disastrous for rare breeds in the UK. The RBST will be monitoring the position.
See www.rbst.org.uk for more details.

Other Stuff

Gate

The next Gate will be produced in December. Please send me any articles, pictures, adverts etc for the next issue by the end of Nov 08. (phone 07773780722 for email address).

Web Site (www.cheshiresmallholders.org)

If you have any articles or adverts for the web site let me know, pictures of your activities always welcome. I will continue updating the web site so keep on looking at it for latest news.

Subscription Renewal NOW DUE!

Subs are due in September, don't forget you can pay by standing order, this makes admin much easier.

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Fallen Stock

The following is an extract from the Defra 'Farming link' magazine for Aug 08

"Defra have issued a reminder that fallen sheep and goats over 18 months of age can be collected free of charge. They must have died naturally or been culled (other than for human consumption) within the previous 24 hours. If you have any suitable deer, sheep or goats, call the TSE Surveillance Helpline on 0800 525 890 for free seven days a week collection, disposal and testing."