

## **WALK ON THE WILD SIDE**

November 2019

Starlight glimmered in the dark curtain of the sky; its light reflected in the miniature crystals of a grass bound frost. A flock of wild duck passed high over, only discernible by an occasional cackle and the whisper of their flickering wings. The stealth of that first light, the slow giving way of the interface of night and day. Gradually meter by meter the view extends; a Barn Owl drifts about the dairy paddocks, low amongst the placid and content cattle. A mist hangs over them as they lie in groups, comfortable in the grass and by the hay racks; nonchalantly chewing the cud. Rabbits scurry along the hedge margins, their white tails seemingly bouncing randomly as they rush for their burrows amongst the spreading brambles. Hares trot past and pause, sitting on their haunches, lifting a front paw before moving on. The reign of night is past; a brightness glows in the east and sculptured lines of pink cloud advance to fill the void in an otherwise empty sky. The first glimpse of a trembling sun, glowing in the chill as it pulls itself over the wooded horizon. The sunbeams stream to the north where a great column of Beech trees march towards the line of Beacon Hill. They glow with gold and burnished brass, their leaves turning to mark the fall of autumn and the realm of desolate winter.

For the past few weeks, the sunshine has been sparse; a few minutes or at best an hour or two. Consistently, day after day, grey clouds have rolled in from the west, light rain has turned into downpours and the tracks have filled with brimming puddles and the fields have become so wet that the worms are forced from the ground.

The Winter Oats are still stacked in the barn, seed that now may never be sown. This coming year, I may have to plant only Spring Barley, but this will increase the risk posed by the droughts that appear to have become a feature of the main growing period from late March to early June.

One wonders how wildlife can adapt to meet the challenges posed by climate change. It is already a severe stress on agriculture and is becoming more severe year on year. It is affecting the environment in many ways; some unpredictable. This year there was a complete dearth of small insects. Many Swifts failed to arrive and other species like House Martins did not nest. If this is a portent for the future, then it is grim indeed. Climate change will push agriculture onto its back foot as it strives to compensate for the inconsistencies of changing, unreliable weather patterns. Migratory birds will be more vulnerable to unprecedented storm conditions over the ocean and further, to the drastic decline in invertebrates, partly due to pesticides and also to the abnormal cold and dry springs.

Now is the time for radical action. Recognition is needed for those farms that protect and enhance the environment and produce food without recourse to agri chemicals.

Goods should not be sourced from countries that are devastating the environment to produce them and then deployed here as a lever to depress the returns of organic or regenerative farms, below the cost of production.

We have just a few years to turn climate change around but will the political merry-go-round with its lack of unanimity ever be able to win over a somewhat sceptical public? The fact is that our culture and way of living is flawed. The 'smash the environment' and 'grab the profits' western style economics is incompatible with the life and resources of our planet. We must learn to live within the constraints imposed by nature.

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