

Monday 2nd July 2012

Dear Customer,

Oh will it ever stop raining. I am fed up with it now. I have just returned from my summer holidays - two days in Wales where it poured down the whole time and a day in Somerset where it poured down the whole time. Myfa and I sat on the bed in the B & B looking out the window, watching it come down. We sat in the car on the front in Aberystwyth and watched the waves crashing onto the road. I didn't take my Wellingtons and Myfa hurt her back jumping into the car. From time to time when the torrential rain let up to heavy drizzle, there were some lovely views. I turned up at the Bear Inn in Crickhowell and the lady on reception asked if I'd stayed there before. I've been going there for 20 years. It's always the same lady, same question.

On a positive, we did manage to get the hay made in that 60 hour rainless window we had last weekend. I spent baling day staring at the sky and with mental willpower, kept pushing the heavy black clouds away from Richmond over towards Darlington. I can't see when I'll get the sheep sheared though. If the rain ever stops again, every farmer in the Dales will want the sheep shearer.

Ernest has come to terms with the new lambs. We have deduced that it cannot have been Mrs Bennett and must have been the newly castrated group of ten - still fertile a month after their operations !

I found it fairly remarkable that in three days of driving round Wales, Somerset and Devon, I didn't see one rabbit. The only birds I saw were a flutter of sparrows waiting for sandwich crusts at the services. The only other wildlife I saw that was alive was a squirrel. I saw three dead badgers on the road - a species likely to soon be culled out anyway but not even one dead rabbit. It really disturbed me and brought to mind Rachel Carson's book 'The Silent Spring'. It was a book which caused a lot of controversy over the use of pesticides when it was published in 1962. She presented case studies on the harm pesticides were causing, especially DDT, and pointed out the long-term effects they could have on the environment. When excerpts of the book started appearing in the New Yorker an executive of the American Cyanamid Company complained.... "if man were to faithfully follow the teachings of Miss Carson, we would return to the Dark Ages, and the insects and diseases and vermin would once again inherit the earth". Scientists and farmers argued that the world would not be able to feed itself without pesticides. George Decker an entomologist said..." if we in North America were to adopt the policy of 'let nature take it's course', it is possible that these would-be experts would find the disposing of 200 million surplus human beings even more perplexing than the disposition of America's current corn, cotton and wheat surpluses".

All the controversy raised public awareness, pressure was brought to bear at the Department of Agriculture and an investigative committee was formed. They found that there were immediate and long-term hazards to man and other animals and the government had not been protecting against them or learning exactly what they were. It eventually led to new legislation regulating the use of chemical pesticides. DDT was not banned until 1997.

"for each of us, as for the robin in Michigan, or the salmon in the Miramichi, this is a problem of ecology, of interrelationships, of interdependence. We poison the caddis flies in the stream and the salmon runs dwindle and die..... We spray our elms and following springs are silent of robin song, not because we sprayed the robins directly but because the poison travelled, step by step, through the now familiar elm leaf - earthworm - robin cycle. These are matters of record, observable, part of the visible world around us. They reflect the web of life-or-death that scientists know as ecology." Rachel Carson

"There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings.....then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change.....there was a strange stillness....the few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of scores of bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh" Rachel Carson

What I encountered on my 'holiday' was in stark contrast to here in the Dales, where one has to drive extremely slowly for the teeming wildlife - the rabbits, hares, stoats, families of curlews, pheasants etc. It really did alarm me. I worry about 'green fatigue' and how economic woes are forcing such issues and animal welfare issues into the shadows. The progress made in the previous 20 years could so easily be reversed and is being reversed as organic sales drop and by consequence, land being farmed organically reduced. On the motorways I saw the usual stomach-wrenching lorries crammed full of cows, lambs, sheep, the frightened eyes looking through the slats. It's our own species which should be compromised during these tough times, it is we who are responsible.

Hopefully the Welsh wildlife was merely depressed, staring out of their burrows watching the rain pouring down, boiling the little kettle and tearing open another teabag sachet.

Here's to next week and hoping my opening line will not be " I can't believe it's still raining !"

Kind wishes,

Isobel