

August 2014

Weather



Above average sunshine and below average rainfall, those are the sort of summers that we like! Every month this year has been warmer than average, resulting in an early harvest. It has been a good growing season for our crops and I am sure it has been a good breeding season for most species of birds.

On the farm

Many parts of the world have also had a good growing season, which has resulted in reduced world prices of grain, potatoes, sugar beet and milk. If prices continue to drop much further, they will be below the cost of production. We will continue to grow the same crops despite the price drop, as we cannot suddenly grow a different range of crops. We are growing the crops that are best for the land. The land needs to have crops grown on it to keep it in good heart but it would be better if many farmers had a wider rotation.

Across the eastern side of the country there is a build-up of a grass weed called Blackgrass. This is brought about as a result of growing too many crops drilled in the autumn. A heavy infestation of blackgrass can halve the yield of winter wheat. An ear of blackgrass can contain 400 seeds and it is quite common this year for there to be 100 ears per square metre. 4 seeds per square centimetre will be dropping, which is a hundred times more seeds than we will be drilling our wheat.

If the sprays don't work well in those fields this autumn, the blackgrass will smother the wheat. The blackgrass is becoming resistant to the sprays that we use to kill it unless we can apply them at the correct time. Last autumn was very kind to us until around the 10th October when it rained which we welcomed. However, the rain continued for another 6 weeks and we were unable to apply the blackgrass sprays at the correct time.

Other farmers have started harvesting their potatoes and have a good crop, however it is difficult to get orders as everyone else also has a good crop and there are many farmers trying to sell their potatoes. The ones that are being harvested at the moment are Maris Piper and they are going to fish and chip shops.

Wildlife on the farm



In general, birds are breeding as well as can be expected but on the whole they are suffering from a lack of insects. There seems to be an increase in butterflies this year and it is great to see a cloud of them rise up from a buddleia or a stand of thistles. There have been two rare butterflies recognised on this farm this year, one in particular from Southern France.

As previously reported, barn owls are having their best season since I have been monitoring them, and that encompasses around 10 years. The first brood for the 2 pairs I have on the farm reared an average of just over four chicks per pair and it looks as if there will be 1 pair that are having a second brood.

I don't know how the other birds have been faring as I have been so busy with farming. I would imagine that they have been doing reasonably well.