

December 2009

Watercolour sky over Jinks's Field, velvet gray like sea pebbles. Beneath, the level brown mark of the plough on which (as I walk towards the marsh) pinpricks of light appear to scatter like stars. I've known those wings before, known and admired them though not in this light nor from this perspective of the wild sea wall.

Curlew's wings. That's what they are, And when they close they're lost. They *become* the plough. The birds, the beaks of the birds, the coal dark eyes of the birds, everything disappears. But I know they are there and this knowledge is like a secret.

When they're startled, you see the stars again.

This ebbing and flowing. It's twelve months since we drilled beans, twelve months since winter wheat last showed itself in the row or since we trimmed hedges above which the kestrels flew. Andy reports how three of these birds – shards against the sky – flew over Crossgate Hill and Hemplands, following the gleaming dyke and the golden grass, darting like acrobats while (you can only imagine) field mice crouched deeper and out of view, aware, self-conscious, afraid.

They soon reached a sea of a different order. Emerald greens, sage greens, the greens of Italy and of Russia. Cavelo nero, kale, there's activity in the field below as the crop is harvested by Simon, Adam and Marcin, gathered and bagged and placed in trays. Today it's wet and the ruts overflow with water, sucking in feet as if to swallow them. I sometimes think such work is shaped by the elements more than any other. For this reason it's impressive and special.

The kestrels make for Whitehouse, now so high they're almost invisible. Half way over the field called Seven Sisters they're way above the beehives beside my mother's trees. The light turns gold. The birds are gone.

Moving on: clover field, tractor pulling mower, smell of grass which despite December seems spring-like. I wave to Chris as he finishes the field, tidying it up in anticipation of growth. The light's dimming quickly. The moon rises from the east. There's the glitter of frost.

Lammings now, the red-gold glory of beast and bedding, the sweet smelling bales of haylage. The animals are abed, all but Meshach who refuses to be caught and stays in the field as proud as a chaffinch. Bruce weighed the animals when they came in. The steers (young males) already average 450 kg (they need to be 550 kg for market). We're pleased with that. Lorca, our young bull named after the Spanish poet, weighed the full 550 kg. We need to find a home for Lorca, so should you know of anyone...

Still space for the turkeys. Stella and I start plucking on Saturday. As ever I confess to feelings of ambivalence here. But the birds have lived well at Woodlands, and fully. Even so, I'll miss them.

Just room to mention the BBC Food and Farming Awards in which, much to my surprise, I was nominated in the Farmer of the Year category. I was even more surprised to win. (I still am). The ceremony took place at Broadcasting House in London where I accepted the award on behalf of the team at Woodlands without whom this award would not have been possible. So well done everyone!

Market Garden News

Simon's getting well caught up in the garden. The bare ground's been ploughed, disced and dragged, the polytunnels have been cleared and drilled with vetch prior to early sowings of radish and salad leaves; the blackberries and raspberries have been pruned. This see-saw wet-dry weather has meant we've needed to squeeze things in when we can.

Cropping-wise, we've two weeks limited supply of spinach and chard which we hope to reach before our nibbling resident roe deer (not to mention the muntjac living in Mark's garden). We also have good supplies of winter brassicas. The mealy aphids are still about so we're needing to wash the sprouts.

Biodynamic pilot project update

The Bd vegetables are looking fine and still surprisingly clean. It won't be long before we start harvesting the biodynamic January King Cabbage in Chicken Holt. Today we began making the homeopathic tonics or 'preparations' we'll be using on the land next year. These are wholly manure based (made from our own farmyard manure). Meanwhile Mark's biodynamic cauliflowers, both white and green, are doing great.

TURKEYS! TURKEYS!

Christmas orders for Turkeys and Lincolnshire Buff cockerels are now being taken. You can order on-line or by phoning Rachel or Claire on 01205 724778.

BEEF, LAMB AND PORK

Individual cuts of meat are also available to order. Best to check the Extras page of our website and then phone as above.

With warm wishes from us all for a Happy Christmas and lots of luck in the New Year!!

Andrew Dennis

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