

## Bits and Pieces - Collected by Audrey Goodwin

As usual over the weeks since our last publication I've been picking up bits of information of interest to me and I hope you our readers. . . . Remember the ospreys, well this year they have successfully nested again in Aberfoyle Wales but in the Trossachs in Scotland there has been a setback for a returning pair that tried to set up home in their preferred spot. It was also claimed by a single large male osprey (ringed) who ousted the pair and set up home bringing in his own female (ringed), a four year old known to have been hatched in Peebles. This partnership did not last long as they soon quarrelled and split up. Undaunted the male found an un-ringed fancy free lady friend and set up home in the chosen site. When last checked they were soon to be parents of at least one if not two chicks. What happened to our evicted pair? With luck they will be spotted at another site in the Trossachs raising a brood of their own.

From birds to sheep or more to the point their fleece. Wool is making a comeback as a commodity, at least one major independent wool supplier has offered double last year's price per kilo. This has given a boost to our beleaguered hill farmers who have found it hard to make any money from wool in the past as by the time the sheep shearer has been paid they were usually in debt. Now at last there is the chance to make a bit of profit. Good luck to them I say, it may keep them on their farms a little longer, so many hill farmers have given up their way of life recently. I can't help but think it is getting near the end of an era for them.

Thinking about the land brings me nicely to the growing of clover, it's a delicious green crop loved by both sheep and cattle. This green crop is invaluable as part of their diet in the spring and summer also incorporated in hay and silage. It gives a real boost to lambs and calves in the spring as it's tasty and full of protein. So enamoured of clover are animals when they are first turned out in spring that they can give themselves bloat by eating too much and this to a cow with as many stomachs as they have can be a big problem. Stockmen have to ration the herd for a while to avoid this problem. Clover is invaluable in another way, it conditions and enriches the land as do its near relations the legumes (peas and beans). By growing it in a nutrient depleted field it can do the job of expensive fertilizers. Indeed cutting down the use of artificial fertilizers is the aim of many an enlightened cash strapped farmer. Scientists are still trying to find a way to make other plants put nutrients into the soil in the same way. A lot more research has to be done yet, it all boils down to having the money to do it.

Once again we have advice about our diet. Now it's the humble tomatoes turn to come under the spotlight. It has been discovered that tomatoes can lower cholesterol in the blood in the same way statins do, not just one raw tomato a day but two ounces of cooked concentrated tomato paste. This amount daily we are assured by Dr K Ried of Adelaide University will help protect against heart disease. She has advised us to eat tomatoes cooked as that is when they are most potent, so pile on the red sauce folks and you will be doing your body a favour.

Here is a bit of food advice chocoholics will love to hear. A study of 35 to 65 year olds has revealed they have lower blood pressure if they are in the habit of eating chocolate daily. It seems one small bar eaten daily will lower your blood pressure and so lessen the risk of strokes and heart attacks. Dark chocolate is the better as it has more flavanols, milk and white are not so good for you. Does the weight pile on though? It seems it does so you have to count the calories in your diet and not use it as an extra treat, there is always a catch isn't there?

Here's another bit of advice this time about dried fruit. It has been put on a par with fresh fruit when it comes to helping to combat cancer and heart problems. Dr Gary Williams from the University of Leeds tells us that polyphenols found in plants protect us from heart disease, while Dr A Kaliora of Harokopio University in Athens has found they inhibit some forms of cancer. However fruit juice is

not now recommended for children as it's full of sugar. Hans-Peter Kubis of Bangor University Wales calls for sugar to be taxed and fruit juice to be taken out of the recommended five a day health message. So there you have it, dried fruit is just as healthy as fresh and if you want to give your children fruit drinks as a way of getting fruit down them make it your self `sugar free` or just give them water instead.

Here is something completely different. What's the new craze in our high streets and shopping centres? Don't know the answer? Well it's fish pedicures. Yes you read it right, fish pedicures. While on holiday recently I saw it happen in a shopping centre. You put your bare feet in a bowl or pool of warm water and let the toothless fish called `Garra Rufa` suck away the unsightly dead skin from heels, toes and the soles of your feet. It makes me cringe to think about it.

Carrying a key ring with various keys dangling from it could soon be a thing of the past if Cameron Robertson based in America gets his own way. He has created a device that lets you use your iphone to unlock your doors. (This is always assuming you can afford the latest new gadget and can use it in the first place.) Twenty four year old Cameron believes key locks will be a thing of the past, we will all be unlocking or locking our doors via a little gadget on the wall and with our iPhone or over the internet. I saw almost the same thing in futuristic movies many years ago, some ideas are never new. What I'm waiting for is the `beam me up Scottie` type of travel, now that's one thing I'd love to try (after it's proved to be safe that is).

Travel by electric car has been in the news again as the very first journey by electric car from John o'Groats to Lands End began. Although the electric car made by Tesla Motors has a range of only 212 miles per charge the trip was accomplished by using charging stations set up by Zero Carbon World. This charity is dedicated to creating a clean energy future. Its founder Kevin Sharp sat alongside Tesla's driver David Peilow on the 900 mile journey. So maybe some day soon everyone will drive electric cars and that will be good news for asthma sufferers, cleaner air means we all benefit and our dwindling fossil fuel can be phased out. We will have to moved over to `clean energy`. So maybe the government will be funding solar panels on all our houses as well as encouraging more wave and wind technology and what about bio fuel energy. The one thing that worries me about bio fuel is that some companies promoting this form of energy want to use crops grown on land that should be growing our food. I don't know how that would work out, maybe they should just use our waste products. We have plenty of them.

There is another largely untapped form of heat we could be making more use of and that's under ground thermal springs. We are assured that there's lots of boiling water in the earths crust, it's just a matter of finding it. Good luck to them I say, maybe oil companies should be drilling for it instead of looking for more oil.

Talking earlier about things being phased out brings me neatly to cheques. You know those bits of paper that have been around for 350 years. They still help me and 3.5 million of us to buy and pay our debts. I don't trust electronic banking, it seems all too easy for crooks to steal from. We hear all the time how information is taken from computers and even state of the art programs can be got at by hackers. Perhaps when I can be assured that it is secure and safe I will change my mind.

Some people have more money than sense. When the late goddaughter of the Queen Mother, Mary Anna Martin's jade ornaments came up for sale some time ago they were fiercely fought over by Chinese bidders. The 16-piece collection sold as separate pieces brought in a staggering 12 million pounds. This is more than twice what her residence Crichel House is said to be worth. There was no chance for western collectors to own any of the Jade pieces as the Chinese and Hong Kong bidders just kept on going. That part of the world is where the money is now. The payment for the ornaments has only just come through, I hope the sellers were not counting on it being paid quickly.

The Chinese are even propping up failing economies in the European Union, they have fingers in lots of pies, let's hope they don't get burned. It seems it is too easy to lose money now, witness the closure of big name stores in our High Streets.

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