

# RED CARD FOR GOVERNMENT ON ENVIRONMENT

**THE ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE'S** recent 'Environmental Scorecard' report on the government's performance with regard to the environment has been rather scathing – something of a blow to “the greenest government ever”. Areas where shortfalls have been pointed out include reducing air pollution, protecting biodiversity and flood protection. An earlier report in June of this year by the National Audit Office also flagged up poor performances on the very same issues and suggested that the total spend on environment

protection had “probably declined since 2010/2011”. Consequently, the Committee has called for the creation of a new Office for Environmental Responsibility to ensure that government policies are compatible with environmental commitments and targets backed up by an Environment Strategy which would set out principles and priorities and act as a link between local and national government and the wider community. With the election just nine months away, Joan Walley, Chair of the Environmental Audit



Committee, suggested that all the major political parties should be considering credible environmental protection in their manifestos.

## FOOD PRICES AT FOUR-YEAR LOW

**ACCORDING TO THE** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), food prices, based on a range of staples, dropped to a four-year low in August – the fifth month in a row during which food prices have fallen. The falls are largely said to be the result of good weather and bumper crops, but a Russian embargo on EU, US, Canadian, Australian and Norwegian food is also said to have depressed dairy prices. Meat bucked the trend, rising by fourteen per cent in the last year, and rice saw no real changes in price, but dairy products were down by over eighteen per cent and cereal prices were down by almost twelve per cent over the year.

# WATER CONTAMINATED BY WEAK WELLS, NOT FRACKING

**IN A MASTERLY** exercise of creating a distinction where none actually exists worthy of ex-Environment Minister, Owen Paterson, a US study has concluded that contamination of drinking water (itself an admission which Lord Lawson should acknowledge) was down to weak wells, not fracking. Examining a

hundred and thirty wells in areas with elevated methane levels in drinking wells, researchers traced the methane to problems with the casing or lining of wells drilled for the purpose of gas extraction. One of the authors of the report, Professor Robert Jackson of Stanford University, said: “In about half the cases we believe the

contamination came from poor cementing, and in the other half it came from well casings that leaked.” It is understood that the wells are failing due to the large volumes of water going through them at very high pressure – a critical part of the process of extracting gas from the shale rocks; a fact which makes it very difficult to differentiate between well integrity and the fracking process as the source of the contamination. Advocates of the industry maintain that with proper regulation this will not happen in the UK, but there will be no less pressure on the industry to be profitable here than in the US. In addition, if gas prices were to drop, as the government has suggested – a highly unlikely prospect given the international market – this would create even greater pressure on the wells to produce more, further increasing the risk to well casings; in other words, a recipe for disaster if it is ever permitted to happen.



Photo obtained from the website <http://inafutureage.wordpress.com/2010/06/22/your-land-my-land-gasland/>



# HONEY MAY HELP FIGHT ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT BACTERIA

**IT SEEMS AS** though the long-suffering honeybee may provide an alternative to antibiotics. A bacteria found in the stomachs of honeybees which contains a unique mix of thirteen types of lactic acid may well be the reason why honey has long been used to treat infections, and may in the future provide a new weapon in the fight against MRSA and other increasingly resistant strains of bacteria. Scientists at Lund University in Sweden

found that applying this bacteria proved successful in fighting a range of infections, including MRSA, and see potential for its use in developing countries where honey is readily available, and in countries where antibiotic resistance is rapidly becoming a major problem. Its effectiveness is attributed to a wide range of active substances, unlike man-made antibiotics, which have just one single active substance which is effective against a narrow

spectrum of bacteria. Clearly this research is at a very early stage, but certainly gives considerable new ammunition to groups campaigning to protect pollinators against neonicotinoids and other chemicals and fungicides.

But before you go out to invest in jars of honey, be aware that the team behind the research point out that this bacteria is no longer active in shop-bought honey, which is a great reason for seeking out local bee-keepers in your area.



## WORKER BEES ENJOY SOCIAL MOBILITY

**CONTINUING WITH NEWSWORTHY** bee stories, recent research has shown that beehives offer residents a degree of social mobility.

Researchers at the University of Illinois discovered that just twenty per cent of forager bees actually do fifty per cent of all the foraging, but found that if the foraging elite was somehow adversely affected, other less capable bees will rise to the occasion to create a new elite. The research used techniques pioneered in Internet research to understand individual shopping behaviour and patterns, combined with tiny ID-tags and laser scanners, which tracked the entry and exit of individual bees from the hive – all made possible by the participation of a retired computer entrepreneur.



## OZONE LAYER – SIGNS OF RECOVERY

**THE OZONE LAYER** has shown signs of recovery since the 1987 Montreal Protocol ban on damaging gases such as CFCs, and the ozone hole over Antarctica, which caused much of the original concern, seems to have stopped growing. Although the news seems good, scientists state that it will only be in 2025 that they can fully confirm the improvements – the time it will take for any signs of shrinkage to become evident – but they acknowledge that it seems to be thickening. The existing hole would apparently be great enough to allow the Moon to pass through!

Signs of improvement are all put down to the action taken on man-made gases, described by the World Meteorological Organization as a major environmental success story which should inspire us to show the same levels of commitment and urgency to tackling the even greater challenge of climate change. We could do better, though – progress could apparently be speeded up by as much as eleven years with the destruction of existing stocks of ozone-depleting chemicals, which are often stored up in fridges and fire extinguishers.



There are also concerns about greenhouse gases still in the atmosphere which have the capacity to undermine progress; the solvent carbon tetrachloride, for example, was supposed to have been phased out, but is still being released into the atmosphere, which implies that illicit production of this harmful chemical still continues today.

## NOVEMBER EVENTS

- 8/9 **ANGLESEY WINTER SHOW** – LL65 4RW  
Tel: 01407 720072  
[www.angleseyshow.org.uk](http://www.angleseyshow.org.uk)
- 8/9 **CHRISTMAS CRAFTS, FOOD AND COUNTRY GIFTS AT THAME** – OX9 3JL  
Tel: 01283 820548  
[www.livingheritage.countryshow.co.uk](http://www.livingheritage.countryshow.co.uk)
- 8/9 **NEWARK VINTAGE TRACTOR & HERITAGE SHOW** – NG24 2NY  
Tel: 01636 705796  
[www.nottinghamshire.countyshow.com](http://www.nottinghamshire.countyshow.com)
- 15/16 **ENGLISH WINTER FAIR** – ST18 0BD  
Tel: 01785 258060  
[www.staffscountyshowground.co.uk](http://www.staffscountyshowground.co.uk)
- 15/16 **NATIONAL POULTRY SHOW** – TF3 4JH  
Tel: 028 2074 1056  
[www.poultryclub.org](http://www.poultryclub.org)

# SHOULD TTIP INCLUDE OR EXCLUDE HEALTHCARE?

**WE HAVE FEATURED** the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) on a number of occasions in the news pages, and it refuses to go away, with current interest focusing on whether or not to include healthcare. Campaigners argue that a final deal allowing US health firms to

compete more freely in the UK will undermine the National Health Service, while ministers argue that to exclude healthcare will put our pharmaceutical companies, which currently face trade barriers in the US, at a disadvantage. The TUC Congress called for an exemption for the NHS recently, which

brought a response from EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht that public services were always exempted, which creates something of a dilemma in that the NHS is a public service in the UK, at least for the time being, but it is not perceived as a public service in the US, which could lead US companies to challenge our regulations as restrictive under the TTIP proposals for addressing disagreements, something viewed as being a charter for suing governments for huge financial redress, as the Australians have learnt from tobacco restrictions. A deal is unlikely in the near future, but if it comes to sacrificing the well-being of the NHS for the financial benefits of a handful of pharmaceutical companies, I would regard it as a very high price to pay for access to markets in a country with which we apparently enjoy a 'special relationship'. Please make this an issue at the general election.

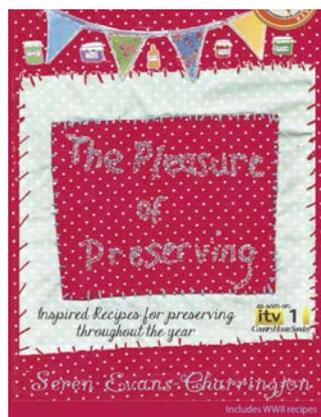


## FOOD CROP 'WILD RELATIVES' THREATENED

**ALL OF THE** fruit and vegetables we enjoy today stem from a 'wild relative', and it is these wild relatives that we consistently fall back on if ever there is a problem with the more familiar marketed produce, but many of these wild relatives are currently under threat. Many of them grow naturally in what have come to be referred to as 'hotspots', and many of these so-called hotspots are in conflict zones such as the Middle East. Scientists have recently put together the most complete database of these wild relatives, citing their traits and their locations, with a view to planning and coordinating conservation efforts to target their survival. The inventory lists 173 crops and their 1,667 priority wild relatives, and found that as many as twelve per cent of wild relatives are currently threatened by extinction, and all have most likely suffered due to urbanisation, climate change and conflict. The hope is to create a gene bank to save these precious plants, but Nigel Maxted of the University of Birmingham, said: "It is also critical to conserve them in their natural habitat as well so they will continue to adapt to changes in the climate as well as threats from pests and diseases."

## THE PLEASURE OF PRESERVING

**SOME MORE CYNICAL** readers might suggest that what the world really doesn't need is another book on preserving, but the value of any book is really dependent on the new angle it presents to a particular topic, and Seren Evans-Charrington certainly has the preserving 'X Factor'. A food historian and cook, her passion, in addition to preserving, is exploring and using historical recipes, reviving the way preserves were enjoyed when they were actually the meal rather than a condiment to accompany it – this is confirmed by her appearances in historical costume at many festivals up and down the country, where she creates delicious recipes from our culinary heritage. To confirm her present-day status, she is also a Bronze Award winner for her Bergamot Marmalade at the World's Original Marmalade Awards in Cumbria. Seren's book,



*The Pleasure of Preserving*, emphasises the accessibility of preserving: the fact that it is the mastering of a technique and the acquiring of confidence rather than collecting lots of expensive equipment, and also that it can be done by and large with what you probably have lying around in your

kitchen. And, as with any good recipe book, it has you deciding which of her chutneys, pickles and jams you are going to do first. The recipes include banana jam, sticky salted caramel apple jam, pear and pumpkin chutney, pickled apricots and pickled elderberries and fruit marmalades (including strawberry and cherry), and the book also has information on preserving and using edible flowers. In addition, there are tips, recommendations, solutions for when things go wrong, and a fascinating set of historical themes which run throughout the book offering unique ideas such as those made essential during wartime. With 140 pages and colour photography and illustrations, the book is published by Bubbling Stove Publications and costs £12.99. Email [hello@bubblingstove.co.uk](mailto:hello@bubblingstove.co.uk) for further information. The book is also available to buy from Amazon.

# THE '14 GOOSE SURVEY



Brecon Buff geese. Photo courtesy of Benjamin Crosby and Britannic Rare Breeds.

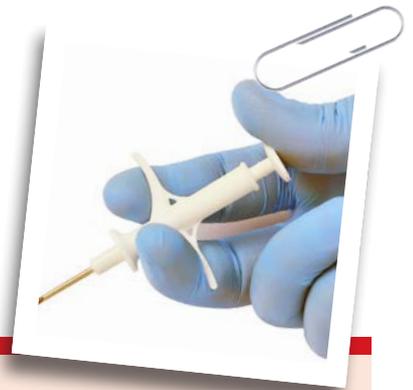
**GEESE KEEPERS WILL** be aware that the number of pure-bred geese in the UK is very low, and this is recognised by all the UK waterfowl groups, including The Goose Club, the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) and Defra. A survey conducted by Defra in 2013 showed that numbers of pure-bred geese had fallen since an earlier survey in 2003, and both Defra and the RBST have compiled a list of 'at risk' breeds, which currently includes the Brecon Buff, the Grey/Buf Back, the Pilgrim, the Shetland, the West of England, the Sebastopol, the Embden and the Toulouse. The aim of this survey is to gain a better estimate of the number of these geese in the UK by contacting as many keepers as possible. From the acquired data

it is hoped to ascertain the UK population of each of the listed breeds; to compile a list of all keepers; to identify, if possible, distinct bloodlines; to determine whether surplus stock is likely to be available; and to attempt to supply newcomers seeking foundation stock. If you keep any of these breeds of geese, please will you assist by completing the RBST survey. Visit <https://www.rbst.org.uk/2014-national-geese-survey> to complete the survey, and visit <http://www.gooseclub.org.uk/> for more information about keeping geese. The Goose Club would like to thank the RBST ([www.rbst.org.uk](http://www.rbst.org.uk)) for funding this important survey.

# ANTIBIOTIC RESTRICTIONS

**RECENT EU PROPOSALS** on veterinary medical products and medicated feed will now include domestic pets and Internet sales of veterinary medicines, but the proposals only "introduce the possibility of restricting" authorisation for veterinary use of certain treatments that are vital for fighting infections in humans. There was also criticism for the statement that the proposals "aim in particular to make more medicines available in the EU to treat and prevent disease". It was acknowledged that the pharmaceutical and animal feed industries would both be beneficiaries of the proposals. Alison Craig, Campaign Manager for the Alliance to Save our Antibiotics, commented: "The European Commission and the British government have both stated they don't support the routine preventative use of antibiotics on farms, but both still back legislation

which makes it legal." Although the use of antibiotics as growth promoters is nominally banned in the EU, the same drugs can be administered to animals showing no signs of disease. In fact, the use of tetracycline has increased nearly tenfold and the use of penicillin-type antibiotics has increased fivefold since they were banned as growth promoters. Criticism was also made of the British government's five-year strategy for tackling antibiotic resistance, with no commitment to reducing farm antibiotic use, but targets for reducing use in humans.



## SAD DEATH OF ROB JEFFERY

**HOME FARMER CONTRIBUTOR,** NewLandOwner partner and all-round nice guy, Rob Jeffery, sadly passed away on 11th September. Rob had a great way with people, and even seeing him in the distance at a show when you were harassed would put a smile on your face. A third-generation farmer, he spent many years helping new entrants into agriculture and smallholding. Rob will be greatly missed.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

- \* **Congratulations to Long Clawson Dairy, Supreme Champion at this year's Global Cheese Awards. Their kind comments on twitter about Ruth's home-made Stilton-type cheese were an encouragement to her.**
- \* **With limited agricultural land and resources, urban agriculture is being proposed as a sustainable solution to feeding our ever-growing cities.**
- \* **According to Reuters, major US poultry firms are administering antibiotics to their flocks far more pervasively than regulators realise, and not just to combat sickness, but as a standard practice over most of the birds' lives.**
- \* **Research suggests that global forest loss per annum is running at about 125,000<sup>2</sup> kilometres – equivalent to around half the size of the UK.**
- \* **The Freedom Food scheme is being rebranded to make links to the RSPCA clearer and increase awareness of what it stands for. Next year, the logo will be replaced by a more eye-catching version and the phrase 'RSPCA Assured'.**
- \* **Two of the world's foremost advocates of GMOs are locked in a legal battle after China refused to accept ships of Syngenta seed loaded by Cargill – according to Cargill, Syngenta shipped the corn without checking if China would accept it. Oh to be a legal eagle in that fight!**
- \* **The World Health Organization is concerned by the number of farmer suicides. Apparently, one farmer a week commits suicide in the UK.**
- \* **An industry and retailer scheme to make the labelling and sourcing of sustainable fish clearer and more consistent for shoppers has been unveiled, and comes with the backing of the 'Fish Fight' campaign set up by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall.**
- \* **Recently, nearly 500 bumblebee queens were found dead and dying on the outskirts of London. They were contaminated with high levels of a partially banned neonicotinoid insecticide and two types of fungicide.**