

BROADLY SPEAKING

Our man behind the gates, **Richard Jordan-Baker**, shares life living at Broadlands



On Sundays, the first thing I read is Jeremy Clarkson's piece in the big, grown-up bit of the *Sunday Times*. He and I went to the same school. I liked it very much. I think he liked it less. I think I am right in saying that he was expelled or, as we now say, permanently excluded. I may be wrong but that is what I heard. I liked him on *Top Gear* and, until it got too silly, *Clarkson's Farm*.

He has certainly helped the cause of the farming community and increased many people's loathing of the planning system. I do like his writing as he often simply says what many are thinking.

Last week it was social media that incurred his wrath, and in many ways, quite right too. Each week there is normally a paragraph or two on what he has discovered as yet another example of why our world has gone mad. And he seems to be right.

Now and again, one needs an antidote to the madness, something to get us back on track, to reset, realign and regain some balance. Birds, for us, are often the answer. They are a big part of our lives on many levels and have been for many years. From tending to hens in the garden, providing what are of course, after the fancy hen house, various accessories and the most luxurious bedding and food second only to Claridges, the most expensive eggs known to man. But they are different colours that match the kitchen cupboards and wallpaper, have beautiful yolks, and are warm when you collect them. And, to be fair, do provide summer evening entertainment when bets are taken when they race for thrown grapes! We have had several cockerels over the years. All called Kenneth.

At this time of year, we are always hopeful that kestrels choose our garden to nest, as they have done now for four years. The original box fell apart but, thankfully, the Hawk Conservancy Trust took pity on us and erected a new one. It is very high up a tree. However, the swift boxes we put up three years ago have sadly remained vacant as yet.

As my granny, Kitty, would say, the 'better weather' is here and visiting our favourite 'birding' spots is now a more palatable day-off, day out. Last week Arne (over the county line) and Blashford Lakes provided our bonkers world bird antidote. There were very few people and the ones we saw were like-minded, calm, peaceful and clutching binoculars rather than their telephones. We were privileged to see oystercatchers, herons and a marsh harrier. Others, probably with better and more expensive kit and some patience saw a merlin, avocet, meadow pipits and a whole lot more besides. The blue sky



Richard finds peace tending to his chickens

Feathered friends

that we had just about forgotten existed, was only interrupted by the sort of white fluffy clouds that look as if they aren't really real as they looked too 'picture book'. It was so un-exotic and unsophisticated but such a joy – sitting in a hide, with some sun, looking at creatures living what appear to be simple lives. But, at the same time it was exciting, exhilarating and simple. Balance, for a short time, was restored.

Back at home and of course what comes with hens, but foxes. Two very pretty girls were lost to the ginger menace this winter. We have a philosophy at this establishment. When any pet succumbs, whether pig, chicken or cat and by whatever way – fox, illness or vet, that same evening we retire to the

Three Tuns for a glass of champagne and toast the life of the creature. It's a philosophy I strongly recommend and reminds me of young Clarkson (he's actually older than me) when he lost so many of his piglets. Here, we felt for him.

Current reading is a novel. Bob Mortimer's *The Satsuma Complex*. Bob knew he had met the right girl when he discovered that she called Sting, *String* and Cher, *Chair*. That has to make sense as does measuring a man's tummy by how many plump pigeons can rest on it. For those of us who were brought up on *Python* he's as close as we have. I write with a glass of red Chateau Thieuley 2019. It's a staple here, made by two sisters. They do a white also worth investigating. ●