

Poultry keeping lays way for return to the good life

By **JANE CONNOLLY**

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MORE people in Kent are striving for the good life as the popularity of amateur poultry keeping continues to rise.

In recent years the growing demand for ethical, free range and organic produce has really ruffled feathers in the food industry, as consumers have become more discerning about what makes it onto their plate.

Many have even taken matters into their own hands by turning back gardens and allotments into their own personal food factories.

Along with growing fruit, vegetables and herbs, keeping chickens is a popular way for people to enjoy their own fresh produce.

According to Simon Broad, owner of Broadfeed equine and pet supplies in Tunbridge Wells, the county has been no exception to the rule.

"The popularity of keeping chickens has exploded in the last three or four years," he said.

"It's quite funny, because keeping poultry in the back garden is not new.

"Going back to wartime, I should think that most people with a decent-sized garden would have kept them for eggs and meat.

"With the rise of supermarkets and conven-



SAVIOURS: British Hen Welfare

ience stores it died off. But over the last five to 10 years, people have become more and more aware of where their food comes from and they are looking for a return to the good life."

The business has been running for 26 years, so Broadfeed staff have been well-placed to notice changing trends over the decades.



Trust's Kent team have saved many chickens from slaughter; and Simon Broad (right)

As poultry keeping becomes more popular Mr Broad has been helping a wide variety of people to take their first steps into animal husbandry.

Reward

"Many people keep them for eggs, so it's the same as keeping a pet. I would say the majority of people are complete novices and that's where we can help," he said.

"If your garden is big enough for a rabbit, it's big enough for a chicken. In that sort of space you would use an ark, and the more space you can give it the better its life will be. But even if it is confined to an ark it will have a far better life than in a battery cage because it can exhibit its natural behaviour, like scratching and stretching."

Collecting up the free eggs, with the knowledge they have been laid by happy hens, is not the only reward for chicken keepers.

Mr Broad believes that chickens make fun



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The BP oil spill is an environmental disaster that has serious financial implications for investors. As one of the UK's top 100 companies BP will feature in most investors' pension funds and investment portfolios.

'**Knowing your exposure**' is probably something that many investors have not considered before now; but with BP being the single largest dividend yielding stock in the UK, we will all feel the impact. To what degree will be determined by your exposure to BP, but this is not always obvious.

Of the 85 funds in the UK Equity Income sector over half have BP as the biggest holding with the majority of the remainder having it in their top 10 – so diversification is as key as ever.

We all hope BP and it's dividends will bounce back in due course, but in the interim, **do you know the likely impact for you?**



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THE BRITISH HEN WELFARE TRUST

• When Jane Howorth started the venture alone in October, 2003, she rehomed 425 birds that year. The following year, the number increased to more than 5,000 and in 2009, the Trust found new homes for nearly 62,000 commercial laying hens.

• There are approximately 16 million laying hens in cages in the UK and most of their eggs end up in processed foods such as cakes, quiches, pasta, ready meals and confectionery.

• Earlier this month the charity's 200,000th hen was rehomed with eight-year-old Sam Bradley from Devon, who has been crazy about chickens for some time. He first rehomed a bird from the Trust with the gift money he received on his sixth birthday.

• No charge is made for chickens from the Trust, but donations are welcome and the average gift is about £3 per bird.

• Anyone who cannot take on their own chicken can still help by sponsoring one of the Trust's hens. Full details can be found at the website www.bhwt.org.uk.



has since found new homes for 200,000 birds which would otherwise have faced slaughter.

The trust has representatives throughout England, Scotland and Wales, offering animal lovers the opportunity to provide these chickens with happy homes for the rest of their lives.

"Why should people buy ex-bats [battery hens] in preference to other hens?" said Rebecca Ross, the Trust's Kent co-ordinator.

"Because saving a hen from slaughter is a lovely thing to do, they make fabulous pets and they often provide a tasty egg for breakfast. I would highly recommend it."

The charity's founder, Jane Howorth, had been affected by the plight of commercial laying hens long before she set up the Trust seven years ago.

Welfare

"Predominantly I did it because ever since I saw an edition of Panorama called Down on the Factory Farm in 1978 or 79, I wanted to do something to help laying hens," she said.

"In 1995 I got my first battery hens from a local farm, and in 2003 I had that light bulb moment. I wanted to find homes for some more, like the RSPCA does for cats and dogs.

"So I placed adverts locally and the phone has not stopped ringing since."

Although the Trust aims to see all consumers and food manufacturers buying only UK-produced, free-range eggs, Mrs Howorth stressed she understands the challenges faced by today's egg farmers.

"We're proud of our policy to support British egg producers and we would rather see caged egg production here, than caged egg imports come into the UK from countries outside our welfare control," she said.

"We want to see consumers supporting British free-range egg farmers, which will result in more British laying hens enjoying access to fresh air and sunshine."

To find out more about the British Hen Welfare Trust, go online at www.bhwt.org.uk. For information about Broadfeed visit www.broadfeed.co.uk.

and educational pets for children, with greater appeal than some of the more traditional choices. "They are no more high maintenance than a rabbit. Before committing to any animal you have to be certain that you have the time, inclination and enthusiasm for it, but with chickens you just have to check on them once or twice a day and clean them out once a week," he said.

"They are perfect in that they give children responsibility. They are better than rabbits because they are far more interactive. You can watch chickens for hours. They are busy all day, scratching around and picking things up."

Broadfeed does not sell birds, but recom-

mends local poultry supplier Anne Edwards, of New Park Farm in Groombridge.

When looking for a breeder, Mr Broad advises novices to inspect the quality of the environment before agreeing to purchase birds.

"The best thing to do is to look at the surroundings the bird is coming from," he said.

"If it is a nice field with grass and it looks clean and tidy they will probably be healthy."

Buying from a breeder is not the only way of finding chickens and keepers can do their bit for hen welfare, even as they look forward to enjoying tasty boiled eggs in the mornings.

Set up in 2003, to rehome commercial laying and battery hens, the British Hen Welfare Trust

Twin town's trip

STUDENTS from Heusenstamm – the German town twinned with Tonbridge & Malling – are taking part in an exchange trip.

The Mayor of Tonbridge, Cllr Sue Murray, joined students at the Judd School to welcome the group from the Adolf Eichwein Gymnasium at a reception at Tonbridge Castle on Monday.

She said: "It was a pleasure meeting the students who are visiting our borough for the first time and I look forward to visiting their school on a future trip to Heusenstamm."

The towns have been twinned since 1984.

Pub counts the cost

ROBBERS grabbed a bag containing takings from a village pub after attacking a man as he sat in a car.

Police said the man had been sitting in the parked car near a post office in Knockholt Road, Halstead, near Sevenoaks, last Saturday at about 10am, while holding the bag of cash.

Two men opened the car door and repeatedly punched the victim in the face, before demanding he hand over the bag.

After grabbing it the offenders, both described as black and aged 20 to 30, ran down Otford Lane and got into a purple Ford Fiesta.

Friends no more

FRIENDS star Matt LeBlanc seduced an actress from Tunbridge Wells while filming a new TV show in London it's claimed.

Local Holly Magrath, 30, spent three nights with the American actor after appearing as an extra in the new BBC2 comedy Episodes, in which he plays himself.

The actress and model told the Mail On Sunday how she was seduced by the star, who is best known for his role as hapless Joey Tribbiani in the US sitcom. But she claims that after sleeping with him on the third date he called off their relationship.

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