

# HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES

## Charlotte Hollins on countryside and cattle



I often think it would be nice to live the simple life of a cow. I would spend the day munching various grasses and herbs from organic pastures and sitting down to chew the cud. Then, if I fancied a quick tipple, I would wander to the spring-fed pool, stroll into the woodland for a bit of shade from the hot summer sun before returning to graze the pastures again. It's all fairly tiring stuff!

My love of these domesticated ungulates stems from my earliest childhood memory. All I can remember is a vast landscape of grass, cows and of course the inevitable cow pats. I grew up on an organic farm in rural Shropshire and was inspired by my late father, Arthur Hollins, whose passion for the English landscape knew no bounds. Arthur was an eccentric man with a true love for Mother Nature and everything she created. He was continually surprised and excited by the miraculous way in which nature just takes care of itself. And, every time I wander through our fields, so am I.

With its varied habitats, unpredictable wildlife and stunning topography, England spoils us. I love the fact there is always so much life to look at wherever you are. I love the amazing way that each little bird, cow, small rabbit, each dung heap and tiny worm are all inextricably linked through the landscape; a landscape they have helped to create. I used to go for walks with my father and it wouldn't take long before he was down on his knees pulling apart a cow pat. He would talk for hours about

the efficiency of worms in creating food for his pasture out of animal manure, and about the millions of other organisms that lived in that hidden and somewhat magical world beneath the surface of every landscape we see. For him, that was what made the landscape real and was why diversity in his grass pastures and a sustainable extensive grazing system for his cattle became so important. I love this world of hidden dimensions he created for me – and the fertility it provides. Without it, I wouldn't be able to watch my wandering cows and escape from the characterless urban scene.

It is not hard to see the attraction of lazy days in the pastures. But you would be wrong to think of it as a mindless activity. For it is the intelligence of these gentle giants that really fascinates me. When a calf is asleep in the grass visited by surrounding butterflies, the mother will go and graze in another area of the field. If she feels that danger may be approaching – such as an unsuspecting human – she does not walk up to her calf, but will often walk in the opposite direction to attract attention away from her baby. It's a great trick – unless you are a farmer trying to bring the cattle in for checking and need to find the calf.

Without a doubt, my favourite time of year is late spring, when the calves are born. As they are out all year, our cattle graze nothing but grass and we are used to seeing them in the fields. But when the cows move into the summer water meadows and the calves arrive, there is nowhere in the world I'd rather be.

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