

A Happy New Year to everyone and welcome to the 2012 blog (eagle-eyed readers of last week's offering will have noticed I didn't seem to know what year it was!).

December has been and gone, and taken its 'close to average' temperatures with it. Now the environmental news is taken up with counting the cost of the gales that have battered most of us in the past 48 hours. Scotland, of course, got a preview – a friend in Kintyre reported a wintry and windswept scene on 2 January. Today was our recycling collection day, so the bin and paper bag had to go out willy nilly. I think the bag and its contents are somewhere in Burnley, but I managed to rescue a neighbour's bin before it caused a road accident.

What is so alarming about what could be described as simply winter weather is the fact that it's the wrong kind of winter weather. January should be bitterly cold with maybe some snow but certainly plenty of ice: what we have got is more reminiscent of the tail end of the Atlantic hurricane season. You don't have to be an environmental news commentator to realise somfink ain't right.

The Guardian's environmental news tweet (@guardianeco) reported that climate change had rendered the Canadian commercial seal cull "unnecessary" this year. That might sound like good news for the seal pups, but the reality is the opposite – the thinning ice has resulted in catastrophic rates of death among the pups.

On a more positive note for cute and cuddly creatures, the same site reported the launch of a campaign by Compassion in World Farming to limit the time sheep and calves can be transported live to eight hours. The launch was fronted by Joanna Lumley, who is used to getting her way!

"We don't have to illustrate how simply ghastly this trade is," she said. Last year saw a resurgence in numbers of both animals being exported live, a sign that "...our eye has been taken off the ball", according to Ms Lumley. "This year, 2012, is the year of powerful change ... we can do it. We can make it happen," she added.

In contrast, lugging pet animals around Europe is now cheaper and easier from 1 January,

according to DEFRA. The UK, together with Ireland and Sweden, has brought its travel rules into line with the rest of the EU.

According to DEFRA: "The Pet Travel Scheme has been successfully operating across Europe since 2004, and will allow the UK to maintain high levels of protection against animal disease whilst bringing it into line with scientific advances and updating a system first devised in the 1800s." Quirkily, the article on the DEFRA website claims to explain what people and their vets need to do to bring their "...pet dog, cat or ferret (HONEST!) into the UK." Too late for poor Compo, of course.

The article doesn't mention what to do if you have a truckload of pet sheep or calves. As always, one of the specialists on the environmental directory of this site will be able to supply an answer.