132 PAGES: SHOTGUNS-GUNDOGS-RIFLES

SPORTING Gun

RATED

BENELLI MONTEFELTRO

OCTOBER 2023 | £5.99

CANCEL CULTURE

How to fix shooting's PR problem and get the general public on our side of the argument!

SHOTGUNS

Rough Rovers: fun and games on the first day of the season

GUNDOGS

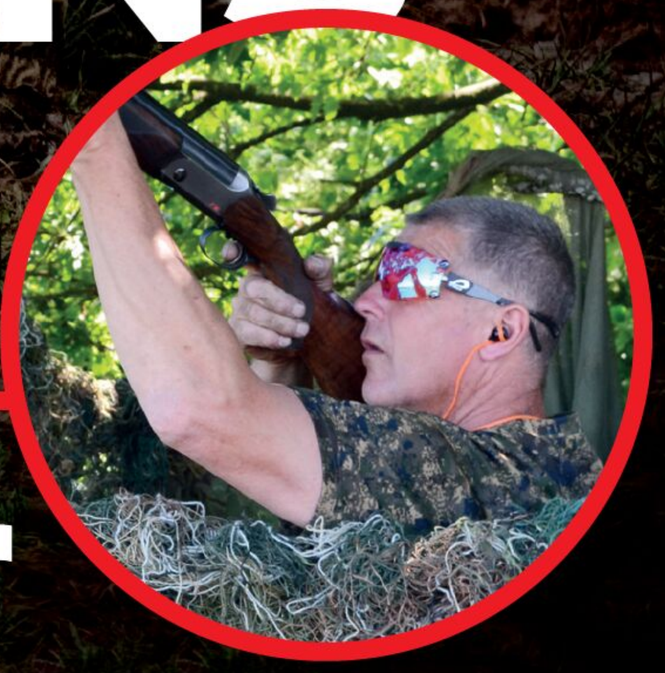
Gundog trainers: spotting a real expert

RIFLES

Fierce Edge: a factory rifle with custom performance

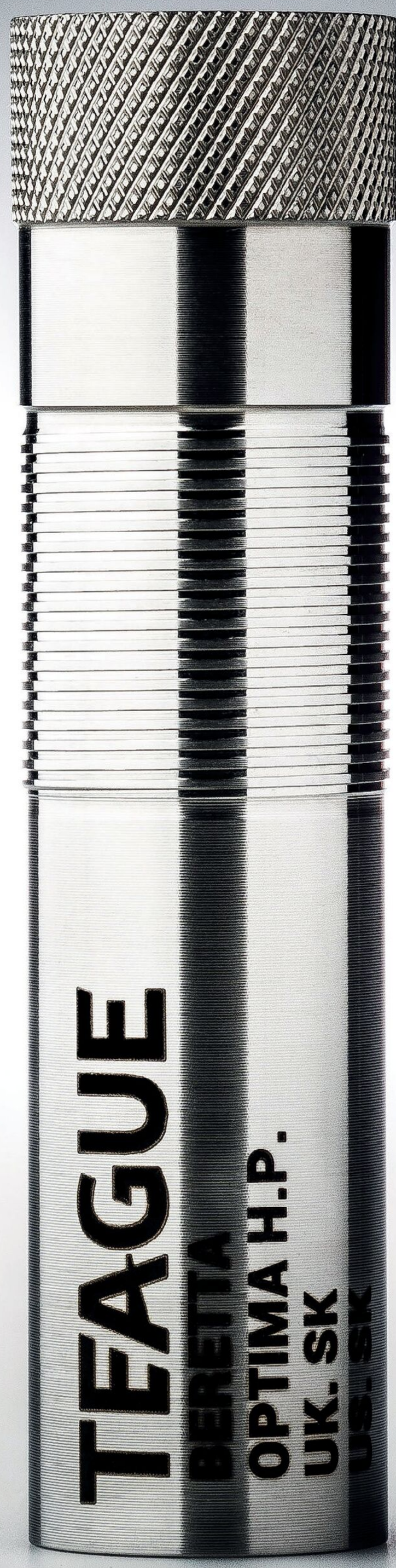
SO IT BEGINS

The game season is upon us and we're gearing up for the adventure



NOW INCORPORATING Sporting Shooter

Precision is our middle name.



TEAGUE Precision Chokes

Engineered in England for World Class Performance

01666 841 496 sales@teaguechokes.com teaguechokes.com

SPORTING Gun

Contents

October 2023

NEWS

04 Editor's welcome, plus all the news you need to know

SHOTGUNS

10 Tony Bracci reports on raptors
14 How to conduct marsh reconnaissance
18 Andy Crow shoots on beans and stubbles
22 Geoff Garrod spots a great opportunity for a substantial bag
27 The art of acquiring new ground
30 The benefits of wild bird mixtures
34 Club Call: High Lodge
36 A look at a lightweight semi-auto
40 Clay shooting kit with Jasper Fallows
44 The Rough Rovers on the Glorious Twelfth
48 Cancel culture: Strategic communication to secure the future of field sports
57 Alan Jarrett bags some early arrivals
60 Essential 'in the field' shotgun gear

INSIGHTS

63 Gaim shooting simulator
68 Recipe: Venison Sloppy Joe
70 Tips on buying a quad bike
74 The long-wheelbase Musso Rhino truck
80 BASC's view on threats to shooting
82 A rusty revolver with a famous prior owner
84 A new column from legend Mike Powell
88 The shooting tradition turned on its head

GUNDOGS

92 The dangers of water for your dog
94 Gundog tuition with Howard Kirby
98 Nick & Ted
100 Ryan Kay on the ability to teach

RIFLES

102 Rat bashing in the sheds
104 Range time before stalking with a new rifle
108 Foxing without breaking the bank
112 The lever-actioned spirit of the Old West
118 Roe deer – a native success story
122 The Fierce Firearms Titanium Edge
126 NGO opinion: Getting the young involved
128 Three legs or four for long range?

REGULARS Shotgun Q&As **09** • Gundog Q&As **91** • Rifle Q&As **116** • Games and competitions **86**

SNAPSHOTS

All the month's news, pictures and more

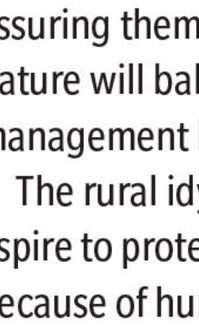
I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce a new word into the UK shooting vocabulary. 'Lingchi': an ancient form of torture employed in China from around 900 CE until the practice was ended in the 1900s.

You might be more familiar with the phrase that acts as a literal translation: 'Death by a thousand cuts'. That is what we're facing from left-wing politicians and antis alike. Not a direct assault, but rather a gradual chipping away at the edges; the delicate removal of one slice of flesh after another.

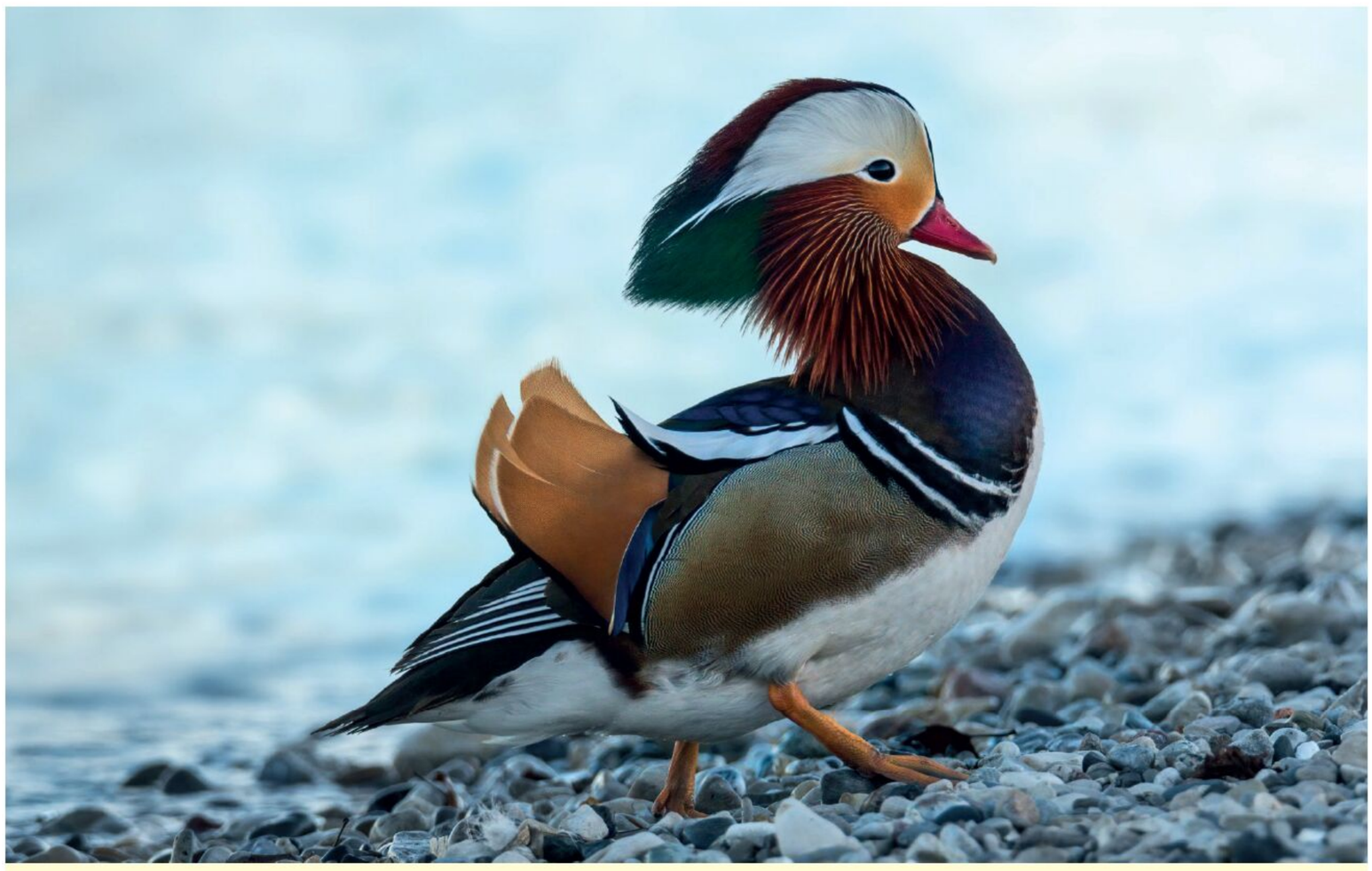
It starts with attempts to curry favour with the ill-informed, assuring them that somehow nature will balance itself and management is not required.

The rural idylls that so many aspire to protect are only there because of human intervention. In fact our green and pleasant land only exists due to the efforts of country people.

It's time we get off the back foot and explain to the wider public that nature can only be rebalanced by man and that shooting and conservation are crucial to that end. I urge you to read our Communications Manifesto and act on it.



PAUL AUSTIN, EDITOR



Attacks on the shooting community

BASC's head of policy and campaigns, Dr Conor O'Gorman, says BASC will challenge government proposals to remove or amend the right to take a sustainable harvest of wild bird species.

The review is likely to focus on duck species such as pochard and pintail, which data suggests are seeing long-term declines. Coots, moorhens, black grouse and ptarmigan will also come under scrutiny.

Allowing harvesting to continue provides an incentive for the shooting community to carry out essential habitat creation and targeted conservation. However, in the current political climate public perception of shooting has grown increasingly polarised as demonstrated by the recent de-banking scandal.

Richard Negus, an award-winning conservationist, writer and wildfowler, expressed his concerns about the accuracy of the data that reviews like this were often based on.

"Wildfowl counting can so often be done with inconsistent methodologies. No single survey should be the sole arbiter of policy."

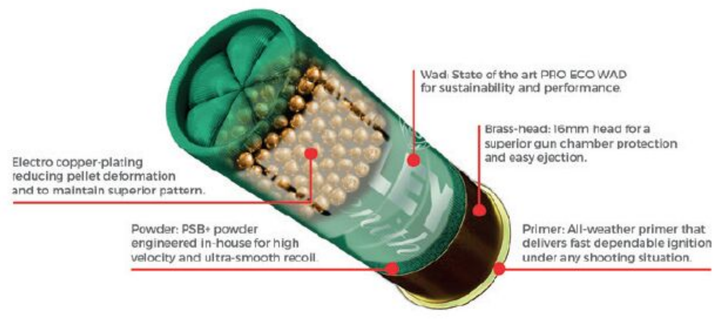
Richard stressed the necessity for regional nuance when coming up with policy. "A carte blanche ban on harvesting a species based on data from one source, such as the BTO, can represents an over-simplification of a complex picture."

Species such as pink-footed geese (of which half a million now winter in the UK), Egyptian geese and mandarin duck may be added to the quarry list in light of increasing numbers in the UK.

Eley cartridges continue to impress

Eley Hawk, the Sutton Coldfield based shotgun cartridge manufacturers, continue to maintain their position as industry leaders. With the ban on lead shot all but settled, Eley's innovative, ecologically sound offerings are more appealing than ever.

The ammunition manufacturer, which has been running since 1828, have worked with copper-coated shot since 1992 and continue their quest for environmentally friendly cartridges with the Zenith Pro Eco. This harder copper-coated shot reduces deformation, so more shot arrives at the target.



GOT ANY NEWS? PLEASE TELL US ABOUT IT:

Post: Sporting Gun, Fieldsports Press, Macnab House,14 Belford Rd, Edinburgh, EH4 3BL. Email: paul.austin@fieldsportspress.com

Northumberland husband and wife bag High Gun and Ladies High Gun in the 2023 Game Fair Challenge

Northumberland electrical contractor Frank Lawrison won overall High Gun at this year's Game Fair Challenge, held at Ragley Hall, Warwickshire from 28-30 July, while his wife Emma took the Ladies High Gun.

During the 50-bird English Sporting clay competition, organised and run by E.J. Churchill, Mr Lawrison hit 48/50 clays. He took home an Isuzu D-Max pick-up truck for six months.

His wife Emma won the Ladies High Gun with a score of 41/50. Emma was delighted to take home a Yildiz shotgun, courtesy of Berkshire-based firearm distributor Raytrade UK.

Pointer and Setter Champion Stake 2023

The most important setter and pointer field trial of the year took place during the last weekend of July on the 12,600-acre Bollihope Moor in County Durham. Owned by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, ruler of the Emirate of Dubai, Bollihope is considered to be one of the finest grouse moors in the country. This year there were 34 entrants consisting of 14 pointers, 13 Irish setters, five English setters and two Gordon setters.

Steve Robinson's Irish setter bitch – FTCh Coldcoats Ginny, came first, with his two other Irish setter bitches' in second and fourth, Only Terry Harris's pointer bitch Sparkfield Sidekick in third place denied Steve a clean sweep of the podium.

Gamekeeping profession faces oblivion in Scotland

With the 2023 grouse season now underway, Scottish gamekeepers warn that their profession has reached a crossroads.

Visitors from across the world take to the country's moors every year for the Glorious Twelfth, with the season netting up to £35m annually for the rural economy. A Scottish Government commissioned report found that grouse moor management supports higher per hectare employment than other moorland land uses, such as forestry and conservation.

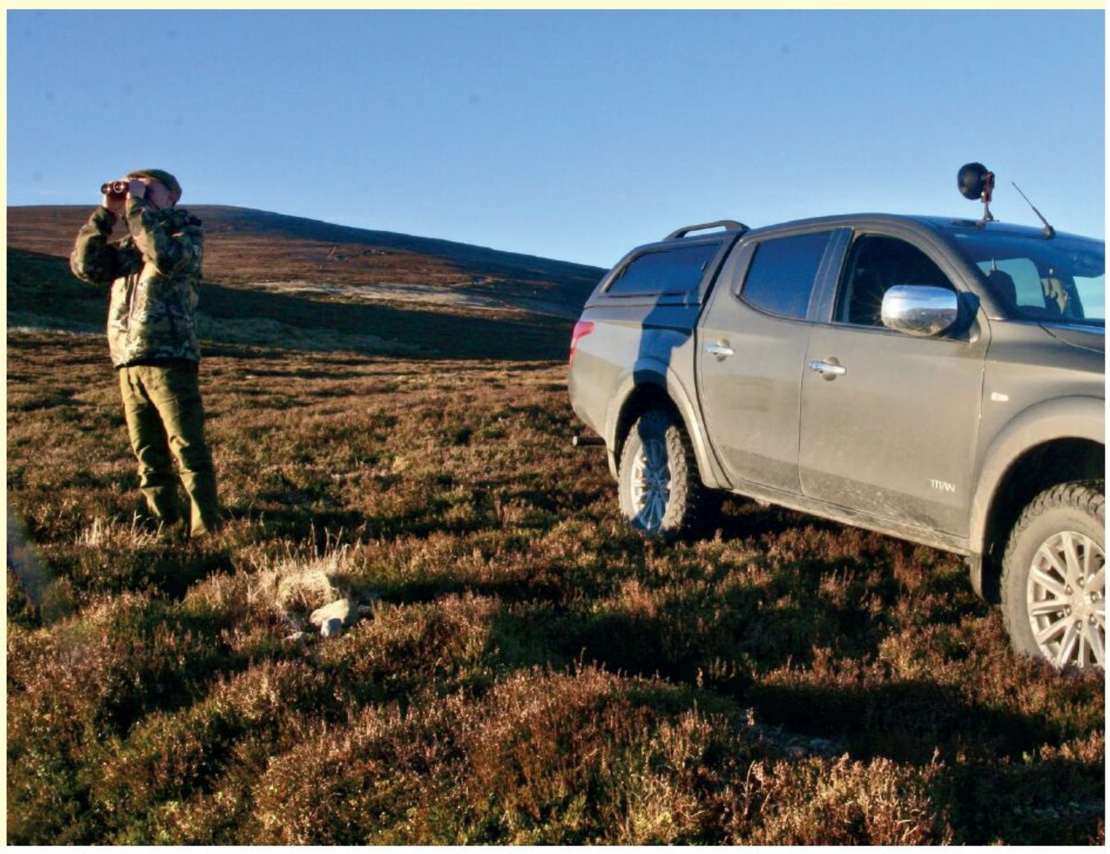
Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) Chairman Alex Hogg MBE stressed the ongoing decline in jobs and job security in this sector: "The trend is clear and that is very worrying. The government needs to understand the seriousness and work with us to protect these positions, not dismantle everything."

Additionally, gamekeepers' work in habitat and wildlife management helps to sustain declining upland bird species while protecting globally rare moorland habitats from further fragmentation.

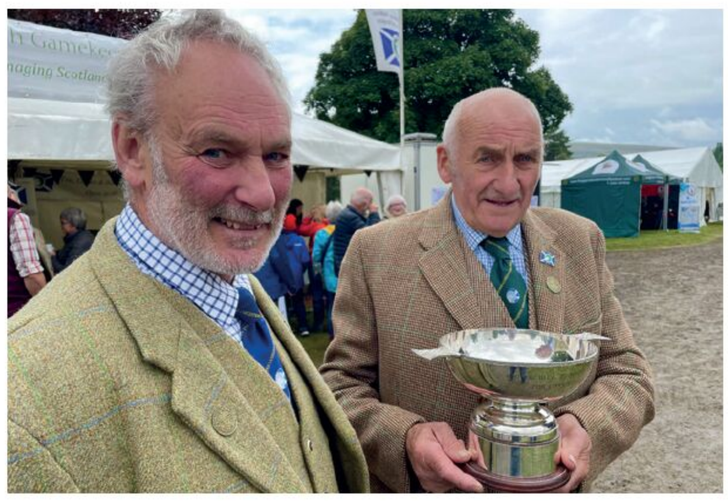
Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust research on Yorkshire moors found that curlews raised four times as many chicks on the region's grouse moors than on similar unmanaged moorland sites.

Incentivised carbon schemes have also threatened gamekeepers' jobs in Scotland. High-profile estates such as Kinrara and Glenprosen have been sold to drinks giant Brewdog and FLS respectively for centrally incentivised tree-planting schemes. Corporates buying up land for carbon credits to mitigate their carbon emissions rarely retain the incumbent keepers.

Borders gamekeeper Andy Buchan said: "For years, parliament has made our jobs harder. There's not a part of what we do that hasn't been picked apart. What we most need is support, if we are to continue."



Government deer changes could waste national venison asset



One of Scotland's foremost voices on deer believes the country is at grave risk of wasting a "national asset", with government changes threatening venison production.

Peter Fraser 76, a stalker for over 40 years and author of a paper on the economic impact of red deer, is now Vice Chairman of The Scottish Gamekeepers Association. Mr Fraser was speaking as he received a conservation award at Moy Country Fair near Inverness on Friday 4 August.

Mr Fraser believes that the recent Scottish Government decision to allow male deer to be killed all year round is a serious misjudgement that could damage the venison sector. He fears the move will push the poorest venison into a stuttering market.

In a narrative that is becoming familiar to the shooting fraternity, Mr Fraser lamented the lack of government consultation.

"The Scottish Government did not consult properly on these changes. If they had, they would have understood the consequences."

More than 100,000 wild deer are shot in Scotland every year. This produces 3,000 tonnes of venison that is worth £7 million, the same amount of money that Tesco Group turns over every hour.

Recent estimates suggest there could be up to 400,000 red deer in Scotland and that 150 million young trees are consequently vulnerable to damage.

'Nations favourite farmer' to run squirrel burger restaurant

Gareth Wyn Jones, star of BBC series *The Family Farm*, will host a pop-up restaurant serving squirrel burgers at the Welsh Game Fair at the Vaynol Estate, near Bangor, on 9 and 10 September.

Earlier this month Gareth, 56, launched an appeal to butchers to help him source and prepare grey squirrel meat for the pop-up.

Gareth, who farms near Llanfairfechan in the foothills of the Carneddau Range, said: "Grey squirrels are not native to this country. Squirrel meat is like any other wild food and eating them is like foraging for anything else."

SPORTING Gun

HERE TO HELP

EDITORIAL
Editor Paul Austin
Production editor Andrew Pickering
Design manager Mark Cowling
Art editor: Louise Walker
Sub-editor Victoria Rea

FIELDSPORTS PRESS

ADVERTISING
Fieldsports Press
Macnab House, 14 Belford Rd,
Edinburgh EH4 3BL
Tel: +44 (0)1371 851890

Advertising: Callum Madden
Tel: 0330 390 6514
callum.madden@futurenet.com

PUBLISHING
Managing director Dom Holtam
dom.holtam@fieldsportspress.com

EDITORIAL EMAIL
paul.austin@fieldsportspress.com
Editorial Offices:
Fieldsports Press.
Macnab House, 14 Belford Rd,
Edinburgh EH4 3BL

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Subscription queries: Tel: 01371 851890
Email: orders@fieldsportspress.com
Write: ESco, Trinity House, Sculpins Lane,
Wethersfield, Braintree, Essex, CM7 4AY
www.esco.co.uk, enquiries@esco.co.uk,
Tel: 01371 851800

DISTRIBUTION BY
Marketforce, 3rd Floor, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR; www.marketforce.co.uk

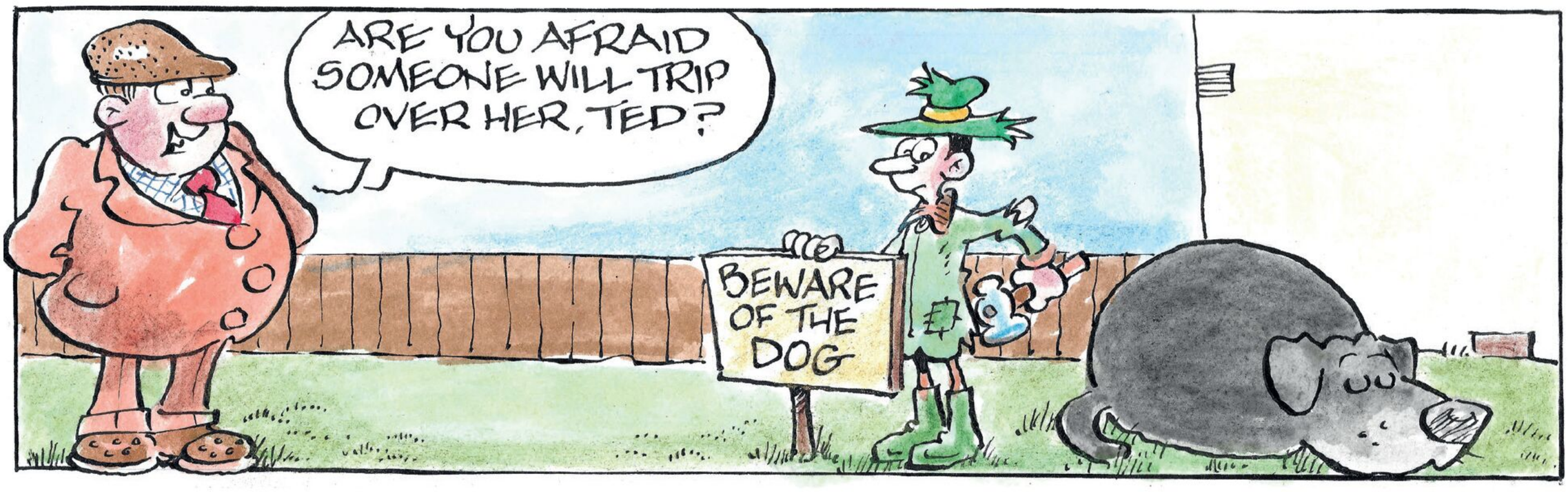
EDITORIAL SUBMISSIONS
We welcome contributions from readers and advertisers. Photos, stories and information should be sent by email to paul.austin@fieldsportspress.com
By submitting unsolicited material, you agree that Fieldsports Press Ltd may publish it without payment, in Rifle Shooter and elsewhere, in its original or edited form, with or without crediting the source.

PRINTERS
Printed by MRC Print Ltd

Copyright © 2023 Fieldsports Press

Ned & Ted

By Keith Reynolds



Burris

Dial in the Distance

Let VeracityPH Calculate the Rest

The Veracity PH from Burris is a ground breaking scope at an astonishing price. Easy to use and incredibly accurate. Simply enter the target distance and the Veracity will show you the point of aim. The clear heads up display will provide you with all the data you need.

RRP: £995.00

WATERPROOF SHOCKPROOF FOGPROOF NITROGEN FILLED BLUETOOTH

Magnification
4-20x50

Bluetooth™

Including the peace of mind

Burris
FOREVER WARRANTY
NO QUESTIONS ASKED

Burris
VERACITY PH™

- First Focal Plane Wind MOA reticle.
- Burris PEK (Programmable elevation knob) digital turret.
- Bluetooth connectivity to link with Burris Connect App.
- Calculate bullet drop & ballistics with the turn of a dial.
- Easy to use heads-up display.
- Lifetime warranty.

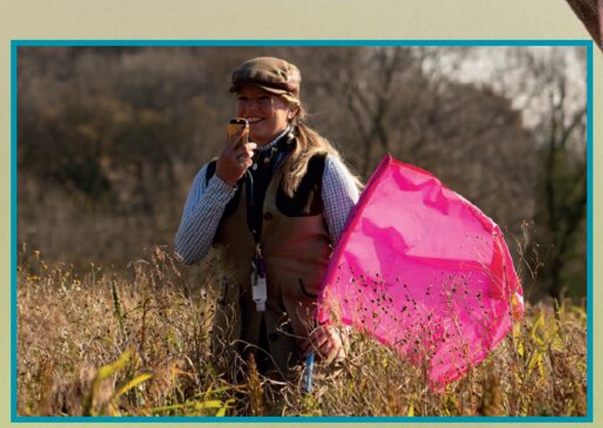
GMK For further product information and details please call GMK Ltd on 01489 587500 www.gmk.co.uk

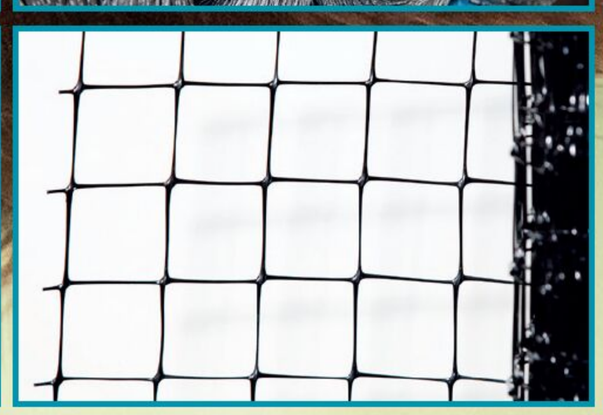
BUR0523_Veracity

Collins Nets

01308 485422
www.collinsnets.co.uk

Contact us for a FREE 2023 Game & Poultry Catalogue!

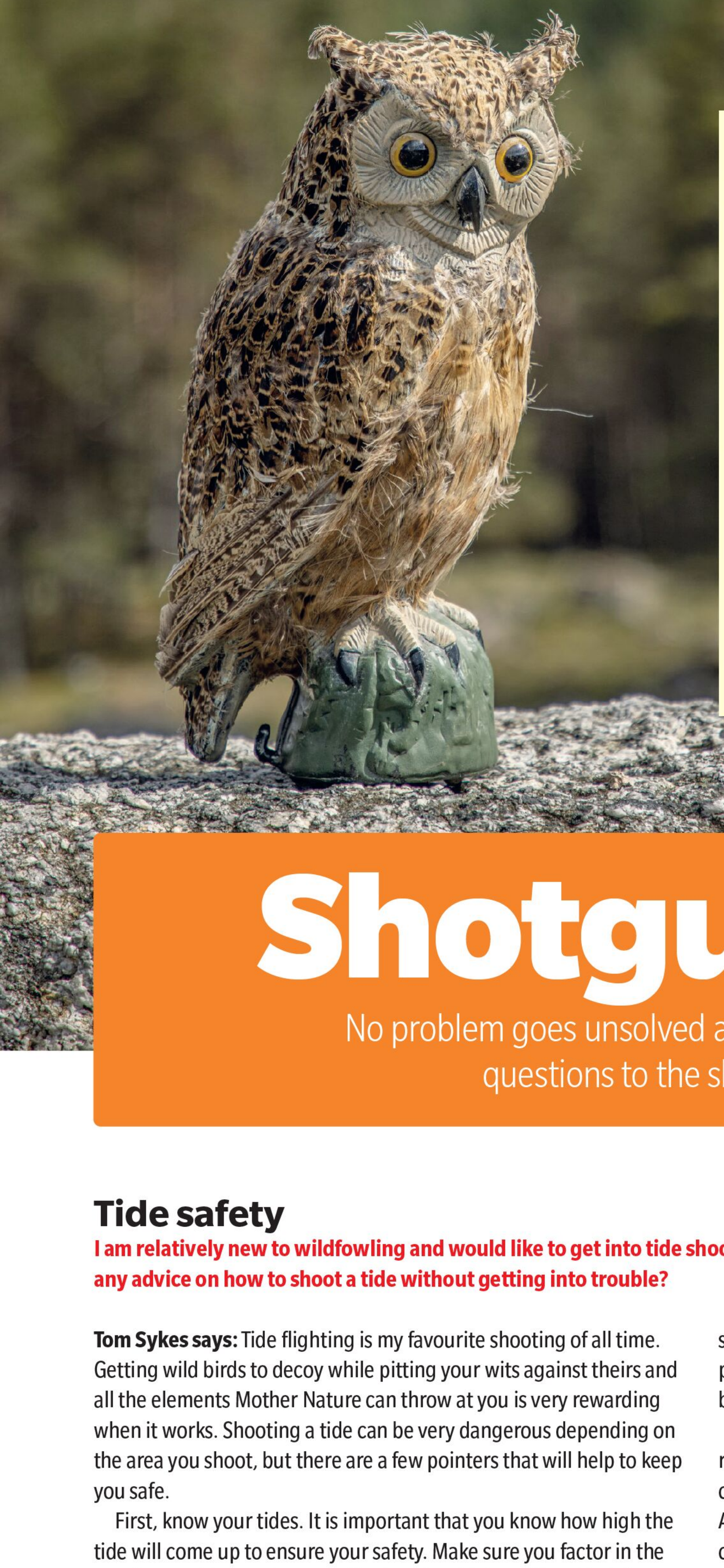




IN ASSOCIATION WITH
ELEY
THE PERFECT CHOICE

WIN! QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Send your questions to paul.austin@fieldsportspress.com for a chance to win an Eley cap



Feathered decoys

I love your owl decoy with the feathers. Where can I get one?

Tom Sykes says: Although owl decoys are readily available from many shops, I am yet to find one that has been feathered. The feathering on my decoy was painstakingly done by hand over the course of a few hours. I decided to try this technique after seeing feathered decoys in action in Sweden. I plucked a couple of hen pheasants and sorted the feathers into different bags depending on the type of feather, as this would allow me to easily create a natural looking plumage for my decoy. I then set about creating a design and hot glue gunning each feather into place. I used paint on the feet and face to keep the key features visible. I am sure that many types of feathers would work, and I have seen plenty of different plumage effects used, but I thought using hen pheasant feathers in the way I had looked most natural. The decoy does work wonders at pulling crows into range and I would highly recommend giving this arts and crafts project a go.

Shotgun Q&A

No problem goes unsolved as *Sporting Gun* puts your questions to the shotgun experts

Tide safety

I am relatively new to wildfowling and would like to get into tide shooting. My biggest worry is safety and I wanted to ask if you had any advice on how to shoot a tide without getting into trouble?

Tom Sykes says: Tide flighting is my favourite shooting of all time. Getting wild birds to decoy while pitting your wits against theirs and all the elements Mother Nature can throw at you is very rewarding when it works. Shooting a tide can be very dangerous depending on the area you shoot, but there are a few pointers that will help to keep you safe.

First, know your tides. It is important that you know how high the tide will come up to ensure your safety. Make sure you factor in the weather as this can dramatically alter the tide's predicted height. Second, be wary of the mud. A lot of areas I shoot have particularly sticky mud and it would be easy to get into a predicament while placing the decoys on the mud prior to the flight, only to be engulfed by the fast-incoming tide.

Third, have an escape route. You should ideally have a way to retreat to the safety of the banking should you need to. Finally, have common sense. Start shooting small tides and get a feel for things. Although big a tide with a wind behind it might produce the best conditions, don't take unnecessary risks, which includes considering your four-legged friend too! Have a great season and start to master this fantastic style of shooting.

Death from above

Tony Bracci reports on the raptors that are making a meal of his poults and his desperate attempts to protect them

The birds had hardly been in a few days before birds of prey found them. I can assess that we have two pairs of buzzards feeding chicks and a pair of red kites. It took less than a week for them to ignore the scarecrows, even with moving their position every evening. I even started changing their coats to make them look different but it didn't stop the raptors. Balloons around the pen worked at first but soon made no difference at all; even the moving eyes seemed to have no effect.

It's not only the birds of prey taking poults that creates the losses, but also those that fly out of the pen to escape and never make it back or don't want to return. What birds there are left in the pen get into the deepest cover they can find and spend their days

Photo: Mauribo/IStock

have just paid for the birds it is easy see how much is being lost when you have the dead birds in your hand. The most disappointing incident this year happened in a small pen we made near the duck pond to release a small number of birds we had reared from eggs we incubated ourselves. The birds had settled in and were enjoying being out of their rearing pen, but within a week the whole lot had been ‘taken from above’. This wasn’t a big financial loss, but the hollow feeling of all the effort that had been put into getting them to wood, just for them to be killed and left, felt like such a waste.

I’m sure the anti-shooting brigade would say this is just a natural predator taking advantage of an unnatural high volume of prey in a small area, but is there a chance we could have an unnaturally high population of birds of prey? They sit at the top of the food chain with no predators. What would they all feed on if there were no pheasants? There were two big shoots in previous years, not on our boundary but surrounding the same village that are not shooting anymore, this may have drawn a higher number of avian predators to our shoot rather than the same number but spread out over a greater area.

There is a second hatch a month away from coming to wood, so we set about trying to get a net over the top of the pen to stop the same thing happening to the next lot. Small trees were laid (half cut and laid down to keep the tree growing) to allow us to net over the top and also to provide more cover. The net was put over the pen and secured to the pen posts. It was then pulled tight with string tied to trees or the posts on the other side. This also created a web of string on the areas we couldn’t get the net over, hopefully not allowing the birds of prey hiding. Sometimes when I check round I see no pheasant poults at all, and seem to spend all my time picking up dead bodies. Sometimes you can see where birds have been killed and the carcasses taken away to be eaten elsewhere or fed to chicks, leaving a pile of feathers.

More often the pheasant poult’s body is found in the middle of the pile of feathers having been half eaten, but the most annoying ones are those that are killed and just left, whether that is because the attacker was disturbed or because there are easier targets to be had that they can’t resist.

There is a cost involved with this loss. As I

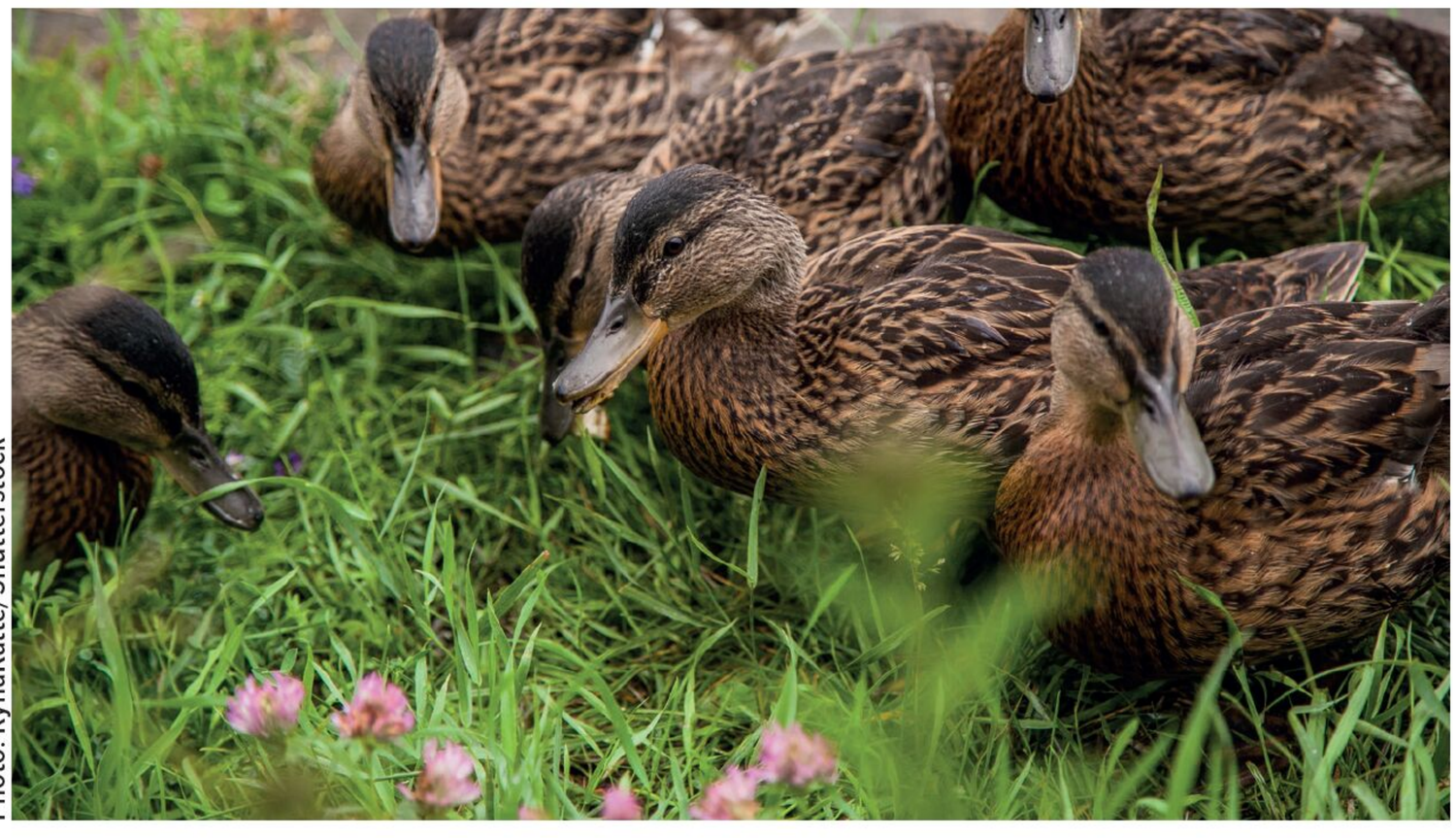


Photo: RynaKatte/Shutterstock

enough space with their large wing span. We hope this will provide enough protection and consideration has gone into positioning pens where they can be completely covered as I can't see this problem going away.

Every evening each pen is checked. This involves checking the perimeter for damage or anything trying to get in. The electric fence is tested to check it is working in various areas around the pen. The scarecrows are moved and new balloons put up. A radio is turned back on at each pen on a talk radio station, although recently I've been leaving it on all day to try and help keep the raptors at bay. I thought at first that visual deterrents were best but then thought it would be worth trying audio as well. Feeders and drinkers are checked, as well as the general well-being of the birds.

The ducks are also fed in the evening and are generally quite greedy. We have to be careful not to overfeed them, as if they get too fat they won't fly! The fish have also worked out the feeding schedule and are there ready to clear up any food the ducks spill into the water. As they are so keen on their food it is easy to move them slowly around the pond to make it easier on a shoot day to walk them up into the field for them to fly back and circle the pond.

Completely covering the pens appears to be the only way to keep the raptors under control and the poults safe for the season

The stalking has been quiet. The bucks are still recovering from the rut and not moving around anymore. We are seeing does and have managed to catch up with a couple of muntjac. At this time of year, with the birds in, I'd much rather shoot a fox than anything else but we are just not seeing them.

"The great tractor driver laid a couple of tarpaulins on the floor, tipped the load onto them and then covered it over"

The next job is to get all the hoppers up and running to feed the birds throughout the season. These are located around the shoot, creating pathways or corridors from the pens out into the cover crops and woods that make up the drives on a shoot day. Food in the hoppers is a mixture, mainly wheat but with a proportion of cut maize and added spice.

By each hopper I think it is important to provide water as well. The containers are made by cutting 25-litre plastic barrels in half. They collects rainwater and are cleaned and refilled when filling the hoppers with food.

Hopper feeding is really the only option with part-time keepering and assessments can be made on the birds' favourite places by the amount of food that has been taken. There are other signs that are looked out for; footprints and droppings around the hopper can also tell you who else is visiting to feed.

Another opportunity that came up was the offer of some 'tailings' for a very reasonable price. A trailer load of secondary grade grain and last bit left in the silo of stored food is delivered loose. This seemed like a gr eat chance to get some cheap food, but what got delivered made my eyes stand out on stalks. Ten tonnes of loose food on the floor is one big pile! The great tractor driver laid a couple of tarpaulins on the floor, tipped the load onto them and then covered it over, but the race was one to get it under cover before any rain came.

Calls were made and every feed bag on the shoot was collected up to be filled with food. Although the load was in one big pile it was mainly in two sections of wheat and barley. We bagged up the wheat to mix and use in the hoppers, but a greater proportion of the load was barley that would be used for feeding the ducks. We didn't have enough feed bags to get the barley under cover, so we ended up with eight builder's tonne bags full of barley that later on will be bagged up and moved to stores around the pond ready to feed the ducks throughout the winter.

Getting opportunities like this are a great help to small shoots like ours. We will have enough barley for the whole season and the start of next season too. We all like a great bargain, even if we all have to pitch in to get it under cover before it starts to rain. ■

eleyhawkltd.com

AN EXCEPTIONAL DAY'S SPORT REQUIRES A NOTABLE LOAD

LOW SMOKE · LOW RECOIL · 100% Signature PRIMER · 16mm BRASS easy ejection · PSB+ POWDER CONSISTENT BALLISTICS · HDPE RECYCLABLE CARTRIDGE CASE · PRO ECO WAD · FIBRE WAD Bio degrades

ELEY VIP GAME RANGE

Never one to stand still, Eley continually strives to develop superior ranges of consistent, ultra-proficient and highly effective loads. Eley – perfect ranges of shotgun cartridges that are trusted to deliver again and again and again.

THE PERFECT CHOICE

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu

Marsh recon

Tom Sykes explores how he goes about conducting marsh reconnaissance and the advantages of doing so

Reconnaissance basically means conducting a preliminary survey to gain information, which is implemented in the fieldsports world by gathering information regarding our chosen quarry. This is commonly broken down into the general location and habits of said quarry. This is simple enough on paper but can be a different thing all together when trying to implement in a real-world situation.

I suppose one of the first questions to ask is, "Why conduct reconnaissance?" Well, the short answer is to hopefully improve our odds in the field. Having the knowledge that birds will be in a certain area at a certain time provides the opportunity to plan the best ambush, significantly increasing the odds of a successful hunt. So how do I apply this to wildfowling? I am going to cover some of the methods I use to gather intelligence and some of my most used techniques to increase my productivity when out shooting.

Boots on the ground

The best way to see what is going on is to get out and have a look. This may seem obvious but there can be more to it. Over the years I have spent lots of time scouting and watching bird movements throughout the day. I find that a good pair of binoculars and/or a spotting scope are valuable assets to help gather detailed information. Having scraped by with budget optics in the past, I can vouch that it is worth investing in at least a half-decent pair of binoculars for this job as it certainly makes life easier when identifying distant birds.

My most common forms of reconnaissance are to have a drive round post-flight and see where the wildfowl have settled in for the day. It is typically easier to find geese than ducks, as they're primarily located in fields or on the marsh tops, making them easier to spot. However, there are often plenty of places to have a spy for a duck or two. I take advantage of a large hill near a stretch of river marshes, which gives me excellent elevated views across multiple sections of marsh, enabling me to survey over a large area efficiently.

Spotting birds can often be difficult, as the plumage aids the bird's concealment, enabling them to blend into their surroundings. Using the tide is a great option to aid with wildfowl recon, as the rising water level will eventually reveal the birds that have tucked themselves into cover or gutters, especially when the water breaches over the top of the marsh. It is considerably easier to spot birds on the water as the dark silhouette against the lighter backdrop is characteristically very prominent.

There will usually be more movement around the tide, as the birds take to the sky and once again reveal their position. The information gathered from a tide can reveal where to set up the following morning to wait for the birds to return to the location, give you an idea where to set up a tide flight, or highlight the bird's location so that they can be intercepted when they head back to the roost.

Know the ground

Reconnaissance isn't simply watching the birds, but also knowing the ground you shoot over. I spend a lot of time studying maps and especially satellite imagery to get a better understanding of the area I wish to shoot. Satellite imagery is especially useful for studying the topography and will often reveal areas that could be worth a flight. This comes with experience, but I will often study a map and think a particular gutter or point could be just the right place to try and that regularly pays off.

Knowing the best way to access areas through maps or knowledge of the ground is crucial to success. Spotting the birds in an area is all well and good, but you need to be able to reach that ground safely and the best way to know that is through a combination of studying satellite images and getting out on the ground. A dummy run of walking to the area in daylight with a receding tide is »

Photography: Sykes Media

“The information gathered from a tide can reveal where to set up the following morning”

also recommended to iron out any issue and potential dangers.

Walking the ground is another way to search for hidden gems like splashes and I find that it pays to look for those harder-to-reach areas as the more inaccessible the area, the greater chance that other people can't be bothered to shoot it, making it a little gold mine for undisturbed birds.

Another key to knowing the ground is to take the time to study the tides and weather to get an in-depth understanding of what different combinations do what. Tides and weather form a key part to bird movements and are certainly worth studying. Both factors are semi-predictable and a major part of my planning for a flight is comparing my tide table with the weather forecast to find the best way to exploit the predicted conditions. Another factor to add to this is the time of year, as the bird's behaviour will adapt as the days shorten and the conditions harshen as winter takes hold.

A decent pair of binos is a wise investment for any wildfowler

Learning on the job

Sometimes the best way to watch birds' movements is to go out for a flight and see what happens. This kind of learning on the job can be a great way to get to grips with the comings and goings of an area, while providing the chance to get a bird or two in the bag along the way with a bit of luck. You might find that the flightline develops in another area and you can either move to it or work out the best plan post flight to exploit it another day. Needless to say, a scouting trip feels a little bit more enjoyable if you are sat with a gun. It is also a better use of the limited time we may have to scout.

I know some shooters will sit and watch the entire flight from the car park before making a plan for another day. However, I would prefer to be out on an armed bird-watching expedition with a slim chance of a shot than in the carpark with zero chance, but that is just my opinion.

Even a basic scouting mission can produce the odd opportunity

An educated guess

Once you combine all the collected bits of information you can figure out how to implement it in the field. Most of the time this boils down to making an educated guess that you hope will produce the best outcome on your next outing. Years of experience with added knowledge of current movements and a good understanding of the ground are the cornerstone to making the best judgment when it comes to my wildfowling plans. I say "educated guess" as we can never be sure what will happen on the day, but recon will increase the odds of success.

Despite putting all the time and effort into watching an area and being sure you have it figured out, the birds will throw curve balls by not reading your script and ad libbing by going in completely the wrong direction and not doing a single thing you predicted or hoped for. That is wildfowling, and more broadly fieldsports, which is what keeps it interesting for me.

No matter how much I am sure certain things will happen during a flight, everything is wild and nothing can be fully predicted, which is part of the beauty of the sport. Sometimes I think it is going to be a great flight but nothing happens. However, there are the times when the stars align and the few birds you hoped would turn up are quadrupled and you have the flight of your life. But I would have a fraction of the success I do if I didn't continue to put the effort into my reconnaissance. Happy scouting! ■

SUCCESSFULLY INFLUENCING
OPINION SINCE 1908

FIGHTING FOR SUSTAINABLE
SHOOTING AND CONSERVATION

BASC
The British Association for Shooting & Conservation

BECOME A MEMBER AT BASC.ORG.UK

Beans and stubbles

Beans can provide some incredible pigeon shooting action at the end of the harvest. **Andy Crow** is on a mission as ever

Post harvest shooting means one thing for the pigeon enthusiast – stubbles! For Andy Crow it also means that he can get back to doing what he loves after a long, tough and, this year, unseasonably wet summer spent harvesting the fields. Beans are usually the last thing to be harvested, and Andy's are no exception.

"Now that they've learned how to undo the pods, you'll get small numbers of pigeons on the beans earlier and earlier each year," says Andy. "However, as the rest of the surrounding crops are cut and the beans begin to reach maturity, you will find that it really concentrates them into one area as food sources are limited elsewhere. Modern combines leave little on the ground for them to feed on, so it's a good time to really focus on your bean crop.

"The pigeons tend to feed from about lunchtime onwards on beans as they don't need to spend long feeding on them to get a nice full crop. Once they've been shot at a few times they can get even later – you might spend all day waiting and then they'll suddenly appear at about four o'clock. I've had a few great days shooting them right up until seven in the evening."

Andy is shooting on the wheat stubbles next to a large block of unharvested beans today and the pigeons are cycling between the two areas. Shooting on the stubbles makes retrieving shot birds easier, so it's an ideal spot if you want to shoot over standing crops but are concerned about getting your birds back out. He's got cousin Gary and little Regan along for the ride, and after months of miserable weather they've run into a problem they weren't expecting.

"It's so warm today and there's not a cloud in the sky!" explains Crowman. "We'd been planning to set up on that hedge running along the middle of the field, but we'll be directly in the sun all day with no shade if I stick to that plan.

"It's just not comfortable, plus I've my grandson Regan with me and I don't want him catching heatstroke from having the sun beat down on his head for hours. The other issue is that any shot birds are going to be in the sun, too, which risks the meat being ruined.

"Instead, Gary is going to one end of the hedge in the shade of a tree, and I'm going to set up at the other end where there's more overhang. That means we can both get some shade and make sure we keep the shot birds somewhere cool."

The positioning isn't perfect, but Andy is confident that clever placement of whirlies and flappers will draw the birds in close enough to have a good go at them.

The team have been driving around all morning, watching a dozen or so pigeons scattered around the fields. It's not looking overly hopeful to the untrained eye! It might be enough to put some shooters off, but Andy knows his ground well and has been watching the birds for days.

"Even if it looks as if the pigeons aren't feeding right now, I'm pretty sure they're going to fly in later – and hard! We've spent time watching them and the farmer also said he'd seen them coming in to feed a little later on these beans, which is standard behaviour as we discussed earlier."

As always, due diligence is essential, and local intel when you can get it will always help. Eyes on the ground will help ensure your success, and if you can't be there

Photo: SolStock/istock

The combination of freshly cut stubble and juicy beans next door proved to be just too tempting for our avian friends

On the gun and ready to go, but it's a slow start for Andy and the team

yourself often enough, try and enlist the help of the farmer, who can update you on when the pigeon are feeding, and on which areas.

Hides at the ready, Andy and Gary set out their decoys and add a rotary on the outskirts of the patterns in an attempt to draw the birds in. With everything set up, they tuck into their hides and the waiting game begins. Although the birds are definitely looking, it seems after a half an hour or so that the rotaries are putting them off. The pigeons are drawn in by the movement, but seem to flare off as they get closer, realising that something is not quite right.

Without delay, they are back out and swapping the whirlies for flappers, which produce a more realistic movement. Back into the hides they go, and it's not long before a steady (very steady!) stream of birds begins to decoy into the patterns in ones and twos, drawn in by the tempting flutter of wings that the flapper produces. There are lengthy gaps between them, but very few make an escape once in range of Andy and Gary's barrels and a small pile begins to build in Andy's hide.

The trickle continues for about an hour and a half and then, without warning, it becomes a deluge.

"It can be like this with beans," shouts Andy cheerfully. "I knew they'd get hungry around about now and we'd get some action. It's always worth waiting that bit longer."

Both the lads are getting some great shooting in now as barrels heat up and the action mounts. The birds are flitting between the stubble and the beans, as expected, proving once again how important it is to have good knowledge of your ground and of the birds' behaviour on different crops. Rosa the Lab is kept on her toes, watching from the base of the net and making mad dashes when instructed to bring the birds back in to Andy's waiting hand.

Ones and twos at first and then a deluge of pigeons arrived mid-afternoon

True to Andy's prediction, it soon switches off and the fast and furious action calms down as the pigeons move away, having taken what they can of the beans. They haven't been able to get much, with Andy and Gary to contend with!

The pile of pigeons keeping cool in each hide seems to have magically grown to a small mountain, and it's a cracking result for such a short time spent in the hide. With a decent pile of pigeons and always more work elsewhere to be getting on with, they call it a day and pack up at around six o'clock.

"We need to get these birds back to the chiller nice and quickly," explains Andy. "Plus, Regan needs to get home for his tea!"

Regan, as always, has demonstrated tremendous maturity for someone so young. He is quiet but watchful, pointing out birds before anyone else spots them, and his knowledge of British wildlife is staggering. If he is the future of our sport, we don't have much to worry about. ■

Photography: Emily Damment

SILLOSOCKS
JOIN THE MOVEMENT

grab your decoys

IT'S GOOSE SEASON

UKSHOOT WAREHOUSE.COM
SINCE 1998

Sillosocks Canada/Pink-Foot Goose Harvester 12-pack
£85

Sillosocks Canada/ Pink-Foot Goose Flocksox Decoys
£18 per decoy

Sillosocks Canada/Pink-Foot Goose Hypa-flap Decoys
£25 per decoy

Sillosocks Canada/Pink-Foot Goose Harvester 6-pack
£46

UKSHOOT
WAREHOUSE.COM
Quality in your field

GAIM

Virtual Reality Hunting and Sport Shooting Simulator.

SPECIAL OFFER!
All clay maps for free with code
SPORTINGGUN
(Value 80 EUR)

Correct ballistics.
Handmade wooden stock.
Rifle and shotgun.
Realistic trigger feel.

Available at www.gaim.com

Spotting an opportunity

Geoff Garrod reports on shooting over barley stubble and bird treatment for the table

It's a very busy time of year for me as a gamekeeper. It's late July, I have my partridge arriving, and they take up a great deal of my time and effort. Just keeping them fed and watered, let alone safe from predators, is a big job. Soon my pheasant poults will be here too and then the pressure really is on – so finding time out in a hide with the gun gets harder and harder at this time of year.

An opportunity arose recently, though, as I was taking delivery of a batch of partridge. A recently harvested barley field had some pigeons on it. They were flying in from a wood over the motorway; some dropped into this particular field and many passed straight over to feed on standing and laid wheat a field away. There was a constant line of pigeons returning from the wheat field, too. The stubble field was a staging post for the traffic in both directions and the situation looked promising.

It was mid-afternoon before I could get away and it looked like I might be able to get a few pigeons in the bag with the couple of hours I had free. It doesn't take much to encourage me into a hide! I suppose some of you may be wondering why I didn't set up on the field of standing wheat. After all, that's where most of the flock would be, and I was supposed to be protecting the crop.

The problem with shooting over the wheat is that picking up dead pigeons from the standing areas would be almost impossible, and the laid areas were not very large. If there was a large open area where you could have a reasonable chance of landing the shot birds, then that would be worth a go. It just wasn't the situation I was presented with and I hate leaving dead birds out in the field, plus walking through the crop causes damage.

I do everything I possibly can to pick up what I've shot to make sure nothing goes to waste. So the best option was to set up on the stubble field in between the wood and the wheat field, and try to get my decoy pattern under the flightline and hope that a few would decoy. Any that were either heading home or passing over this field to the wheat might swing over for a look at the decoys and present a passing shot.

I've shot this particular field for more years than I care to think about and the flight lines are pretty predictable and rarely change.

Photography: Richard Faulks

That’s useful when a last-minute opportunity presents itself and the only reconnaissance I’d done was watching the field as I sorted out the newly arrived partridge that morning.

On top of a small hill there is a hedgerow that I’ve used many times before to build a hide against, and on this occasion the wind and sun were perfect for me to use the same tried-and-tested location again. Wind and sun were squarely on my back and I was looking down the field towards an electricity pylon with the motorway and roosting wood behind them.

As I arrived and drove up the field, pigeons were feeding and spread evenly over the entire area. There was an abundance of barley heads on the ground and there were plenty of birds swirling around in the air. They seemed to be oblivious to my truck driving up the field and I could easily get to within 40m of them before they took to the air. My only worry was that this late in the day many of them would have full crops and be thinking of heading back to the wood for the night. But that was my only opportunity to get out that week, so I decided to give it a go. I set the hide up, placed my plastic full-bodied decoys out and settled in to see what would develop.

The disturbance of setting up the hide and decoys had pushed the pigeons feeding on the field to the bottom of the hill under the pylon. There was still plenty of activity in the air, the flightline from the wood was a constant trickle, and birds returning from the wheat field to my rear were flying straight overhead and keeping me on my toes with some fun snap shooting.

Each time I shot, the report put the flock into the air and they swirled around before returning in dribs and drabs. It was all looking promising and some of the pigeons were decoying nicely, which was very satisfying. With a few birds dead on the ground, I decided it was time to start putting some of them on sticks and bring in some of the plastic decoys. You simply can’t beat real birds in your pattern, and getting them slightly higher off the ground on the sticks makes them more visible and adds some movement as they blow in the wind.

Over the next hour, I managed to replace all the plastic decoys with dead birds, but the wind had shifted through 45° and was now »

Geoff's not the only one that's grateful to get out for a couple of hours

A box of Geoff's cartridge of choice opened and ready for action

Geoff sets up in the hide with the trusty Browning Maxus 2

coming from my left, plus the flightline to the wheat field had moved a few hundred metres with the wind change. I decided that action was needed. I moved the decoys to face into the wind and moved my truck under the new flightline in the hope that it would push the birds back in my direction.

With the changes made, I settled back into the hide to see if they would have the desired effect. Any birds that came up to the pattern decoyed perfectly, but the flightline stayed stubbornly in place and, more worryingly, most of the traffic coming to the field from over the motorway was starting to drop in near the pylon.

I stuck it out for another hour and a half and had enough shooting to make it worth my while. I guess I could have moved position or put flags out to try and stop the build-up of birds under the pylon, but at that stage in the day, with the number of birds moving around dwindling, it wasn't going to be productive. Besides, I was pretty happy with the shooting I had had for a speculative few hours in the hide. I had known I was taking a chance, but I'd helped protect the wheat and had had some good sport.

One thing you'll notice over the summer months is just how quickly flies appear when there are shot birds on the ground. It's something we should all think about and plan for if the pigeons are going to the game dealer or kept for your table. Some days, if there is a reasonable wind, I think it's best to leave the birds out in the open in the breeze, which helps keep the fly numbers down. If it's a still day and warm, it might be necessary to get them into the shade more quickly, but certainly don't leave them in a pile. They'll sweat and go green in no time at all and the meat will be ruined. Place them on their backs, spaced out a little to let the air get around them.

Some decoyers take cool boxes with them and wet hessian sacks are another option. I've even used fine mesh camo netting to protect them from flies on particularly bad days. You'll never keep all the flies off the

Swapping plastic pigeons for the real deal is a priority for Geoff

The stubble field provided the perfect landing spot for shot birds

An easy retrieve on the stubble, but it would have been a different story on standing wheat

shot birds, but do whatever you can to cool them off and protect them.

Flyblown birds (ones that have fly eggs on them) are not a serious problem as long as they're not left too long before chilling or processing. Fly eggs can hatch in as little as eight hours and up to 20 hours, but getting them chilled down will stall this process. Once they're with a game dealer they will have them cooled down low enough to stop the development altogether until they process them. If you're keeping them for eating at home, it's a good idea to breast the birds immediately. I know you won't really feel like doing this after a long day out in the field, but it really is the best way to keep the meet in good condition.

What a difference a year makes. Last year in the heatwave the harvest was all done and dusted in under a month, which made the decoying harder than in most years. There were just so many places the birds could feed. This year's harvest is going to be altogether different, with the abysmal weather in July. It's bad news for the farmers, but it should present more opportunities for me as a pigeon shooter. The stop-go nature of the harvest will mean that the feeding birds will be focused onto fewer fields and therefore easier to decoy. Let's hope I have time to get out after them! ■

Don't just pile up shot birds. Keep them as cool as possible if they're heading for the table

ThermTec

Cyclops D

Thermal Imaging Monocular.

- Dual Field Of View
- High Thermal Sensitivity
- Two Image Display Modes
- Joystick Operation
- AI Intelligent Rangefinder
- Continuous Zoom
- F1.0 Lens
- IP67 Waterproof, Dust-proof and Fog-proof
- GPS
- Long Battery Life

40 mm

20 mm

Cyclops 340 D

12µm VOx Detector, ≤25mk NETD, 384 x 288 Resolution, **Objective lens 20/40mm** F1.0 dual field of view, **Field of view 13.1° x 9.9° / 6.6° x 4.9°, 1.9x / 3.8x magnification**, 7 reticle options with adjustable coordinates, 1024 OLED display.

RRP: £1,999.00

Cyclops 350 D

12µm VOx Detector, ≤25mk NETD, 384 x 288 Resolution, **Objective lens 25/50mm** F1.0 dual field of view, **Field of view 10.5° x 7.9° / 5.3° x 4.0°, 2.4x / 4.8x magnification**, 7 reticle options with adjustable coordinates, 1024 OLED display.

RRP: £2,299.00

Cyclops 640 D

12µm VOx Detector, ≤25mk NETD, 640 x 512 Resolution, **Objective lens 20/40mm** F1.0 dual field of view, **Field of view 21.7° x 17.5° / 11.0° x 8.8°, 1.1x / 2.2x magnification,** 7 reticle options with adjustable coordinates, 1024 OLED display.

RRP: £2,799.00

Cyclops 650 D

12µm VOx Detector, ≤25mk NETD, 640 x 512 Resolution, **Objective lens 25/50mm** F1.0 dual field of view, **Field of view 17.5° x 14.0° / 8.8° x 7.0°, 1.4x / 2.8x magnification**, 7 reticle options with adjustable coordinates, 1024 OLED display.

RRP: £2,999.00

EDGARBROTHERS.COM

75 years EDGAR BROTHERS

Pitching for business

Engaging with farmers and the art of acquiring new ground. **Peter Theobald's** guide on keeping an eye open for opportunities

Occasionally when I am out and about scouting for pigeons I will spot a situation on a farm where I don't have permission to shoot. Usually I don't follow it up with the farmer unless it looks as if it will be really worthwhile. One such situation occurred a couple of weeks ago that caught my attention. I had passed this particular field many times during the last few weeks, but one day I noticed that a few patches of the crop had gone over, and one or two pigeons could be seen sitting in a dead oak on one of the boundaries.

It wasn't until half of the 15 acre field went flat, and birds could be seen fluttering here and there, that I decided to take a closer look. As I stepped into the field from a convenient lay-by, 200 pigeons burst from the crop right next to the main road, only to lazily drop back in further up the field. Another 200-300 left the surrounding trees as I walked into the field, also joining their mates on the floor. Even as I watched, more birds were arriving from two main flightlines, diving into the ever-growing throng. It was time to do some detective work.

Calling into a farm whose owner I knew, I asked if he knew the owner of the field in question. He did, and gave me the gentleman's name and where I might find him. I find it always helps if you have a name to ask for and knowing that pigeons are doing damage as we speak. The lady that answered the door said her husband was not in, but kindly gave me his mobile »

Photograph: Obradovic/iStock

number. Encouragingly, after I had explained my mission, she felt sure he would give me permission to shoot.

I prefer to meet farmers face to face when seeking permission to shoot pigeons, giving them a chance to weigh you up, and you to convince them that you are not some kind of cowboy. Also, I never knock on a farmer's door unless the pigeons are there in numbers, doing serious damage. Never suggest you are doing him a favour by protecting his crop, and only ask for one day to reduce the numbers.

This being a Sunday, and not wanting to disturb him later that evening, I decided to call him on the phone. Having announced who I was and where I lived, I asked him if he was aware of the large number of pigeons stripping his wheat. He certainly was aware, so when I suggested I could do something about it, he readily agreed. Pulling back into the layby on my way home, pigeons were still piling in, even though it was past 17:00. This was going to be a big shoot!

Arriving at 10:00 the next day with Robbie (one of my Orkney goose-shooting pals) we were surprised to disturb 50 or so pigeons that were already feeding and both the flightlines active. The obvious place to set up was a line of trees on one edge of the field, which involved a 300yd tramp with all our gear and the stiff breeze full in our faces. However, I have learned over the years that the best place is where you will shoot most pigeons, regardless of the difficulties involved in getting there.

Photograph: MikeLane45/iStock

It was a case of not being able to see the trees for the wood pigeons

Picking a particularly large patch of laid crop to set the 25 Enforcer decoys on, we were confident that we could drop any shot birds where they could be retrieved. An hour after arriving at the field we sat down in the shared hide and were ready to go.

The wait was a short one, as single birds started to appear, decoying in text-book fashion despite having to swerve round to make use of the wind. At this time of year I reckon that whatever number you have in the bag at 13:00, you will double come the end of the day. With the clicker at 124 it was a bold prediction to think we might make over 200, but with the pigeons showing no sign of letting up, it was entirely possible.

The 200 benchmark was passed just before 4 o'clock, and if anything the birds were coming even faster. In fact there appeared to be every chance of firing the two bags, each containing 200 cartridges. The last shell was ejected at 18:00, and though we had more in the truck we decided to start the daunting task of transporting the eventual bag of 318 back to the motor. It was utterly exhausting work, but by taking the bags containing 30 birds in short relays, so as to get a rest between each one, we eventually pulled off the field at 19:15.

I sent a text and a picture to the farmer, thanking him for the day. He replying immediately to thank us for the job we had done, and invited me to come again any time I spotted pigeons on his land. Most farmers are truly amazed that you can shoot that many pigeons in a single day, having got used to the casual fellow who turns up randomly, sits in a convenient hedge for a couple of hours, fires his box of cartridges and goes home. Farmers will always appreciate it when you kill large numbers, and I'm always happy to oblige! ■

Photograph: Rionegro/iStock

400 cartridges fired and 318 birds in the bag. It's been a big day by anyone's standards

HULL CARTRIDGE

CONFIDENCE IN THE FIELD

PERFECT FOR PARTRIDGE

IMPERIAL GAME - Particularly suited to fine English or lightweight game guns. Drop dead performance with surprisingly low recoil. Fibre wad, 65mm, 1450fps, 26, 28 and 30gm.

THE PARTRIDGE CARTRIDGE - The perfect combination of measured power and pattern for high bird days. Superior long range ballistics with excellent pattern retention. Fibre wad, 70mm, 1410fps, 32gm and ***NEW*** 28gm 6.5 1450fps.

If you're making the move to non-lead shot, **BISMUTH** is the effortless choice for owners of fine guns with fixed choke. Fibre wad, 1425fps, 65mm -28 and 30gm, 70mm - 30, 32 and 34gm. Also available in 16, 20 and 28 Gauge.

hullcartridge.co.uk/game

Trial and tribulations

The Bright Seeds team entertain the great and the good at their trial site, but conversation soon turns to more than simply the mixes on offer

Bright Seeds recently held its Open Day at its headquarters' trial site at Dean Lane Farm, Fovant, Wiltshire. The agenda of those visiting the site was a little different this year. All the standard topics featured, such as holding birds and the ability of game maize to stand through the winter, but we have reached a time when the shooting world has many other things to consider.

Although the steer of countryside policy towards 'good works' is set in motion, it is constantly being tweaked, as we saw with the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) rollout. Like all government programmes of this sort, it is a process, not an event. A lot of people will be looking for reassurance and guidance on how to successfully grow the crops required from both a regulatory and practical point of view.

A notable aspect of the trial site is the high number of dual-purpose mixtures, particularly AB9 wild-bird mixtures. This is unsurprising because most of these double up as game cover (achieving the right balance between cover and stewardship will be a significant factor for commercial shoots). But that's only part of the story. Due to fewer permissible seed dressing and agrochemical treatments, only by trialling a larger number of wild-bird mixtures can we establish what is feasible to be grown agronomically.

One might think the increase in AB9 stewardship crops would see a decline in the varieties of game maize on trial. The reverse is the case. The trial site is hosting a record number of game maize varieties, sales of which have hit at an all-time high this year. This may appear contradictory, but while stewardship cropping has increased, so has the need to balance it – and often protect it – with high-quality game cover. In this respect maize has no equal. The position can be seen as vindication of government policy – the

It appears that the new GWCT Wildlife Mix is going to be a huge success

“The aim was to develop a longer-term, multipurpose mixture that has a flexible sowing window”

increase in game maize is a knock-on effect of the increase in stewardship.

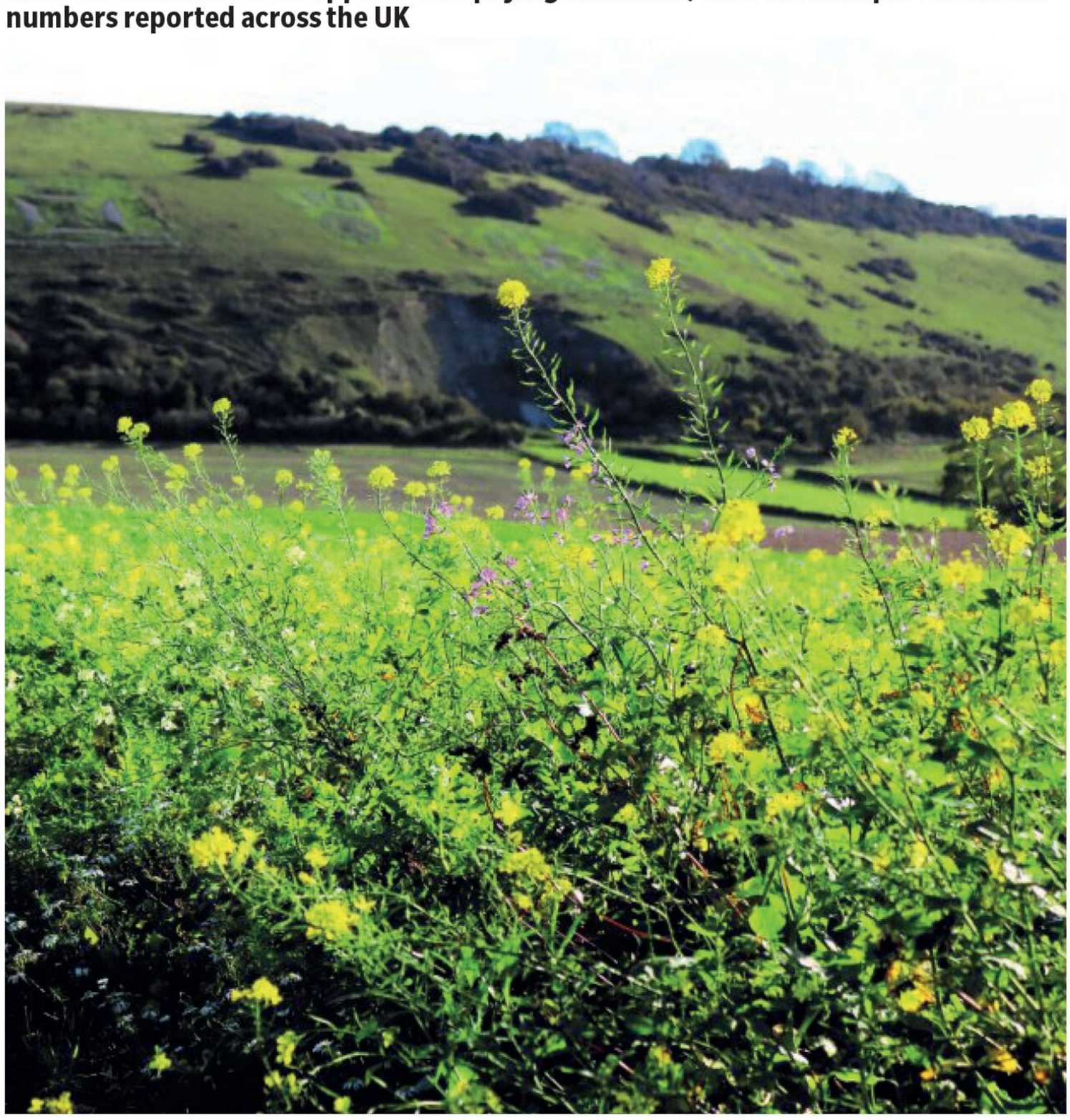
A wild bird mixture that catches the eye of visitors to the trial site is one that has been developed with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) and has been named accordingly as the GWCT Wildlife Mix. It exemplifies the whole thrust of the current environmental agenda and the strong emphasis on these mixtures at the trial site.

The GWCT Wildlife Mix is comprised of almost 50 species, over three quarters of which are native. Indeed, many of the wildflowers are harvested by Bright Seeds from English wildflower meadows. It provides a rich nectar and pollen source for pollinators and other insects from early spring to late autumn. With many of the species flowering low to the ground, it greatly benefits grey partridges during the breeding season. Farmland birds also profit from inclusions of millet, sunflower, teasel and chicory; all of which give high seed yields during the winter months.

The aim was to develop a longer-term, multipurpose mixture that has a flexible sowing window. Given that components of the mixture can last up to 10 years, for example perennial wildflowers, and that it qualifies for stewardship and can be sown in early summer and the autumn, the objective has been achieved. Sales of the GWCT Wildlife Mixture are brisk and to incentivise a purchase, for every hectare’s worth of seed sold, Bright Seeds is donating £20 to the GWCT Grey Partridge Recovery Scheme.

It is important that people do not feel overwhelmed by the new schemes. In many ways the new arrangements are less daunting than before. For example, SFI is more flexible than Countryside Stewardship (CS) because it operates for a three-year

These new initiatives do appear to be paying dividends, with much improved insect numbers reported across the UK



Multipurpose mixtures with flexible sowing windows are ideal cover crop for many

term rather than being locked into a five-year commitment. You can also upgrade your SFI agreement to add more actions and land before the end of the first year, and again in the second. Nevertheless some have decided to sign-up to CS in any event, believing the picture will be clearer in five years' time.

Of the subscribers to SFI, there is a split between the fully committed and those dipping their toes into the water. Whichever camp you are in, the only firm advice Bright Seeds has is to be aware of the opinions. If the trial site helps in this regard and paints a clearer picture of countryside management in this new era, it has succeeded in its primary mission.

Of course, the everyday challenges of running a shoot remain. Rescue crops have played a bigger role than usual. An early cold snap and a dry drawn-out spring, followed by a heat wave meant that many crops lacked moisture in the establishment period. And, as if to rub it in, as the doors opened to the combine shed, so did the heavens. This untimely weather sequence certainly increased the uptake of summer sown crops

"On the positive side, bird numbers are at the desired level for the first time in years"

yet, for all the climatological challenges, game maize fared better than forage maize, helped by its less ridged sowing window. Moisture retention and being ready to exploit favourable weather conditions are the lessons of this growing season so far.

But as the gamekeepers, land managers and others with vested interest gather around the trial plots, it's not the weather that is foremost in their minds. It is the political landscape just as much as the physical landscape that lies before them to which the talk turns. The licensing issue in Wales; restrictions on releasing birds near Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); input costs continuing to strain margins; and speculation of what is to come if Labour win the next general election. These are all legitimate topics for the trial site.

On the positive side, bird numbers are at the desired level for the first time in years – helped by good supply chains of breeding stock and greater attention to detail in looking after wild bird populations in the spring.

One discovers quickly that there is more to a trial site open day than what grows out of the ground. Listening to the array of conversations that take place allows you to catch the mood – which overall is positive and often passionate. Observing it all is reassuring; it is good to know the countryside is in safe hands.

In a follow-up article during the shooting season, I will look at how well game cover is standing up to the rigours of winter, the heightened importance of catch crops and the difference between game cover crops and over-winter cover cropping. ■

Conversations at the event were as much about government policy and the potential changes to come as the crops themselves

ON SALE NOW!

The Complete Guide to Clay Shooting 2023

ONLY £7.99

BUY YOUR COPY HERE

Everything you need to take your sport to the next level!

High Lodge aims high

Jasper Fellows discovers the lakes and breaks at High Lodge

John Bidwell is a legend of the Sporting world. Throughout his incredible career the 14-time FITASC Sporting World, European and British Champion has helped develop sporting guns, designed his own series of clay traps, authored a champion's guide to sporting clays and served as one of the country's finest shooting coaches.

Following this hugely successful career, John is now semi-retired, though his influence can still be felt here at his family's ground on the edge of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB.

"John still serves as a director," says his daughter, Jane Coppen, who runs the business as its managing director today. "But he passed on his management duties to the family in 2022."

As you'd probably imagine from a ground founded by Sporting royalty, High Lodge's Sporting course is a highlight of the ground's offerings. Upwards of 30 stands wind their way through woodland trails and open meadows of the lodge's estate.

"We like to provide a good variety of target presentations," says Jane. "We use our local landscape and sightlines to create targets that cater to all ability levels. Plus, we regularly update and adjust the course to keep our targets fresh for returning regulars."

While some clays may prove challenging, it couldn't be easier for the experienced shot to get stuck in. "All our machines and stands are connected to our 'Pay & Clay' system. This carding arrangement allows licence holders the opportunity to explore the course at their leisure," continues Jane. "The machines also offer a delayed launch system, so visitors can shoot solo if they wish."

This adoption of useful technology can

also be seen across High Lodge's other clay-breaking facilities. "Alongside the Sporting course we have four permanent Skeet layouts," says Jane. "Two are used for Skeet, one for DTL and one for ABT. All our Skeet layouts can also be operated using a delayed launch system."

As if that wasn't enough, High Lodge also has six fully automated Compak/Sportrap layouts. "They are all fully covered and are also set up for solo practice," says Jane. "We try to make it as easy as possible to practise, to make the most of our facilities whatever the weather."

As well as solo practice, extensive instruction is offered across all disciplines. "My husband, Andrew, heads up our team of experienced instructors," Jane explains.

"They are all well versed in all disciplines and game shooting, so can shooters of all stripes can boost their scores. We're always happy to help newcomers discover our sport, too. We have packages for complete beginners where we offer opportunities to try all the disciplines over a course of lessons, while also giving advice on gear and equipment."

This desire to introduce visitors to new shooting sports extends beyond clay breaking. "We are also proud to offer six air-rifle stands and archery under instruction," says Jane. "The air-rifle stands are positioned in our woods and offer a variety of targets. The long-range stand is particularly popular and allows up to four sharpshooters to practise their sport undercover. Air rifle and archery are great fun and a brilliant way to enjoy a bit of competition with friends."

If you are competitively minded, then High Lodge's pack calendar of events is well worth looking into. "We host various events throughout the year," explains Jane. "We specialise in Compak, Sportrap, Sporting and Super Sporting events, as well as FITASC.

"We host everything from CPSA majors through to family fun shoots and a few very special events. Everyone from international competitors to the casual shot can find a level of competition they are comfortable with at High Lodge."

Clearly there is a lot on offer here, more than even the keenest shot could enjoy in one day. So if you truly want to make the most of all the facilities, why not stay in one of the on-site lodges? "We have 19 luxury lodges. Each is fully furnished and 12 of them even include a private hot tubs, plus many are dog friendly," says Jane. "The lodges sit next to our two fishing lakes, where 20lb carp, tench, roach, rudd and perch can be caught."

Whether you are staying the night, or simply visiting for the afternoon, you can be sure you will be well fed and watered thanks to High Lodge's in-house café. It serves all the classic shooting ground fare, and the catering team are well versed in handling large parties. Perfect for those making use of the conference suit to entertain clients, or to host private shooting parties.

"The lakes and lodgings are part of what makes High Lodge so special," concludes Jane. "We are proud to offer some of the best clay shooting facilities and competitions in the UK. But beyond that we also offer everything a country sports loving family could need for a perfect, peaceful, yet activity packed, Great British holiday." ■

WHO'S WHO?

High Lodge was founded by John Bidwell, who still retains his role as director. Today John's daughters, Jane Coppen and Helen Gooch, also serve as directors, with Jane as managing director and Helen overseeing the lodges, shop and café. Jane's husband Andrew rounds out the directorial team and manages the shooting and grounds.

High Lodge has large team of staff, with the reception and administration team headed by Sarah Caplin, catering by Lucy Bartlett and events headed by Caroline Dunsworth. Andrew Coppen pulls double duty as a coach, with Oliver Wilde and Jake Moore completing the line-up of instructors.

WHAT'S ON OFFER?

Sporting, Sportrap, Compak, Skeet, ABT, DTL, High Towers and FITASC by appointment

WHEN IS IT OPEN?

Monday-Saturday, 9am-5pm.
Late night shooting is offered on Wednesdays during the summer months.
Sunday morning shooting is possible between September and March.

WHERE IS IT?

High Lodge Leisure Limited
Haw Wood
Hinton
Near Darsham
Suffolk
IP17 3QT

TUITION

Individual hourly instruction is available from £70, excluding clays and cartridges.

MEMBERSHIP

Annual membership is available from £70, with a £60 yearly renewal. Members benefit from reduced rate clays and lessons, and there are numerous discounts in the shop and clubhouse café.

Great subscription deals at sportinggunsubs.co.uk

Benelli semi-automatic

Rob Speed, a dyed-in-the-wool over-and-under man, takes a look at a lightweight semi-auto and loves it!

Generally speaking, if anyone in the shooting community mentions a semi-automatic it is always a Benelli. They have stood the test of time in terms of reliability and robustness, and I have many gamekeeper friends who have used these guns for years as a true working tool. They've put their gun through its paces daily and have never encountered any problems.

First impressions

My experience of shooting semi-automatic shotguns is very limited because I've always been an over-and-under kind of guy. As some of you might already know, I'm an avid crow and pigeon shooter, so this Benelli Montefeltro may well open my eyes as to what I've been missing.

The gun is presented in a fairly generic plastic case, with a selection of flush chokes and some plastic shims that are very important if you want to shoot the gun to its full potential.

I am a left-handed shooter and this particular model I'm going to be using is a right-handed gun. This isn't a problem because aforementioned plastic shims alter the cast and drop. They sit between the receiver and stock to alter the fitting dimensions. I did the grown-up thing and read the manual to find out which shim I needed and fitted it to see the barrel picture I deemed correct. Good gun fit is very important if you want to shoot consistently well and the shim kit will help me achieve this. That being said, I believe Benelli do offer true left-handed model with the extraction port on the opposite side to this one, which would have been the ideal gun for me.

My initial thoughts were: it is going to handle incredibly quick compared with what I am used to. The gun weighs 6lb 11oz, which is nearly 2lb lighter than I am used to, which concerned me. But as soon as I did the classic 'mount and swing' that we all immediately do when picking up any new gun, I knew I could shoot it. That normally means good news for me, bad news for crows and pigeons!

The composite stock and forend feel really nice, with a slim pistol grip and a forend that sits nicely on the hand. It is solid and not rattly like some composite models on the market, which gives reassurance that the gun is going to live a long life.

So with that all said, the gun fit set and my preferred choice of a ½ choke tightened into the barrel, it's time to have a play!

First time out

Before going out for a full day in the field I like to test a gun just to make sure I've got the setup correct and simply get a feel for it. I would hate to be out for a day in the field and have a bad experience because I've set the gun up wrong. It would be a very painful journey home knowing I should have just checked the gun first.

So a quick session on the clays was needed just to know the gun is shooting exactly where I want it to. With the Montefeltro loaded I shot at a couple of hanging crow targets and they turned to balls of soot. That was a great confidence booster because it was clear that the gun was shooting exactly right. I repeated this multiple times and I had the same outcome. The beauty of this Benelli is that if the gun hadn't been shooting exactly where I wanted it to, a quick browse of the manual and a change of the shim would have corrected the issue.

I was shooting a 28g load and the gun was smooth on recoil. That essential for me as I have an old back and shoulder injury that »

I have to be careful with. Another thing to mention is that the gun is steel proofed.

On to a crosser to see how the gun handles. It was a fast and flat right to left crosser, which I missed then hit. The gun handled very quickly in my hands, which I had predicted but didn't account for. I loaded the gun again – which is so cool when you haven't loaded an auto for a while. The next pair I hit and finished the box of cartridges with only a couple of misses. I was happy to take the gun into the field. It is such a smooth-shooting and fast-moving gun, it should be perfect for hide shooting. I just needed to adapt my way of shooting, which I'm confident I will be able to do in the field.

In the field

So I was in the hide, three cartridges loaded into the Montefeltro, optimistic that three crows would enter the pattern and wouldn't leave. However, I wasn't that lucky.

As soon as we got ourselves comfy in the hide, a small group of jackdaws decoyed well into the pattern and I took a left and a right. A good start, but I wasn't completely happy with my gun control. It was very fast in the hands compared with what I am used to and I missed the next four birds. But once I got used to the fast-handling qualities of the Montefeltro, the birds started dropping again and we were on our way.

I was using a six shot 30g fibre load and I found the Montefeltro to be incredibly soft on recoil. I was always led to believe that the inertia powered semi-automatics had quite a bit of recoil. This was absolutely not the case! The ½ choke I used gave a dense pattern to dispatch the birds perfectly out to 50yd.

Tech specs

Make:	Benelli
Model:	Montefeltro
Calibre:	12 gauge
Mechanism:	Semi-automatic
Orientation:	Right handed (can be altered to left handed)
Barrel Length:	30"
Stock Length:	14 ½"
Weight:	6lb 11oz
Chamber:	3"
Chokes:	Multi
Steel proofed:	Yes
Importer:	GMK, 01489 579999
Price:	From £1195

With 83 birds in the bag on its first outing, the Benelli certainly delivered

As for the mechanical performance of the Montefeltro, it performed faultlessly as to be expected. The cartridges ejected a good 2m from the hide, which was reassuring, and I didn't have a single malfunction. The trigger pulls were crisp and not too light, which is just how I prefer a shotgun trigger to perform. My only personal dislike is the pistol grip, which is built to suit someone with larger hands. I did struggle to reach the trigger with my stumpy fingers!

We ended our afternoon session with a mixed bag of 83 corvids and pigeons. I really enjoyed shooting the Montefeltro and it did make me question why I don't have a semi-auto for hide shooting.

Due to the horrible rainy weather we encountered on the day, I felt the need to give the gun a clean right away. That task was accomplished very easily compared with some autos I have had to clean in the past.

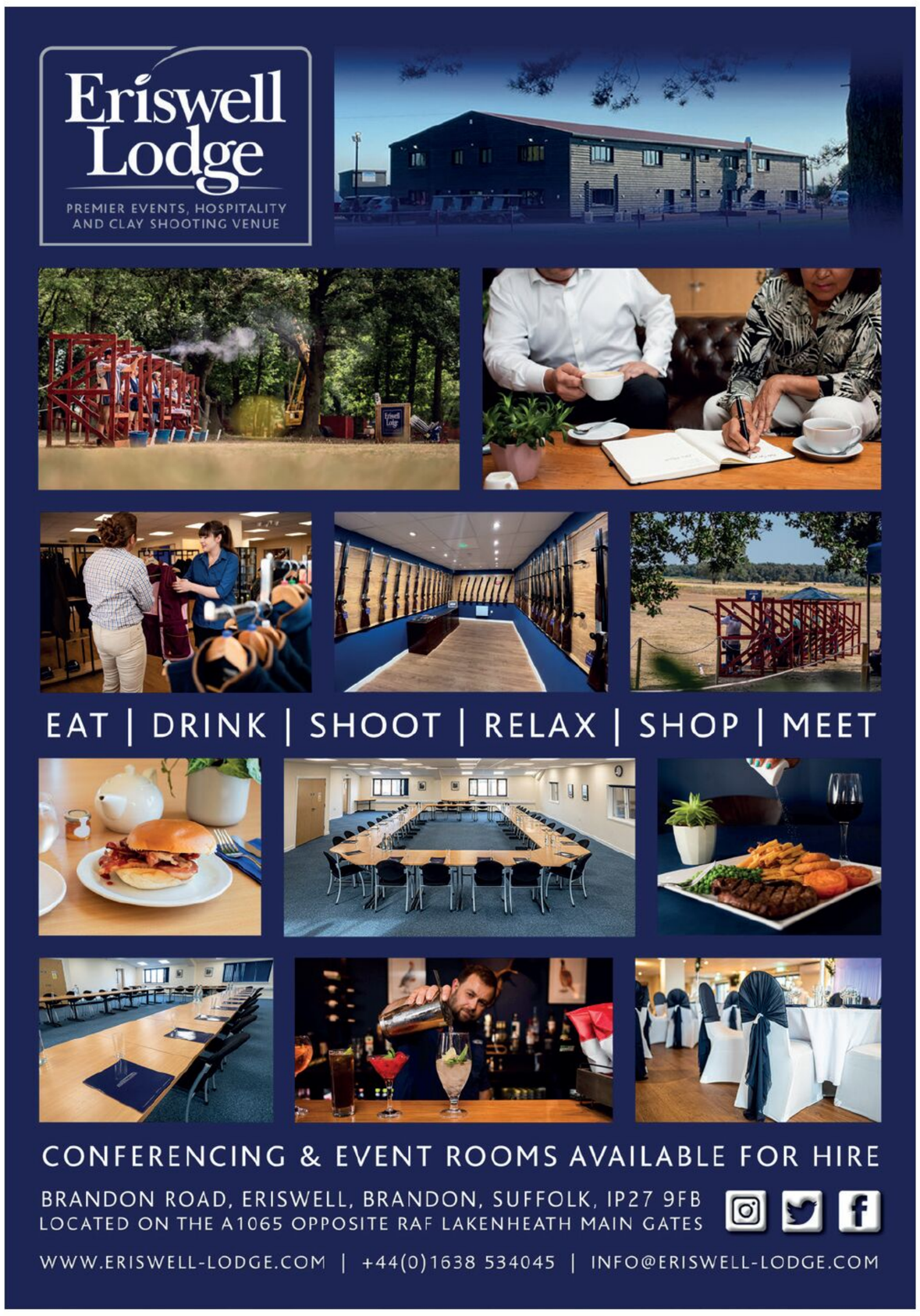
Conclusion

The Benelli Montefeltro is a very fast-handling gun due to its light weight, but surprisingly the recoil is not exaggerated by this and is incredibly smooth. It lived up to its reputation of being very reliable as I didn't have a single mechanical issue. The casting shims are a massive bonus as the gun can be altered to achieve the exact gun fit for the shooter. Assembly and disassembly was very simple and cleaning was just as easy. The pistol grip would better suit shooters with larger hands.

So if you are a shooter who requires a reliable, steel-proofed, lightweight and smooth-recoiling semi-automatic, I would highly recommend the Benelli Montefeltro.

If you want to see this gun in action on our day in the hide shooting corvids and pigeons, be sure to watch out for the video that will be uploaded soon on my *Fieldsports with Speed* YouTube channel. ■

Lightweight and ultra-reliable, the Montefeltro was certainly a hit with Steve!



evolution
SUNGLASSES & EYEWEAR

Evolution Magnex Shooting Eyewear

John Heagren wearing Evolution Magnex

Magnetic Lens System – Change a lens in 5 seconds!

- Interchangeable multi lens set
- 6 lens colours: Brown, Orange, Purple, Rose, Yellow & Light Yellow
- Lenses attach with non-visible magnets – effortless and instant lens changing (5 seconds)
- Class 1 optical grade, UV400 rated lenses
- Fully adjustable nose piece (height & width)
- 'Bhive' polycarbonate lens material provides enhanced clarity
- High velocity impact protection exceeds the requirements of EN166F & ANZI Z87.1
- Advanced, multi-feature lens coatings
- Supplied with soft pouch, cloth & hard case
- Optional prescription optical insert available

Multi lens sets from £125

Renowned clay & game shot & Shooting Manager at Bisley Shooting Ground said:

"Evolution Magnex is now my preferred shooting eyewear – exceptional value for money and highly recommended"

www.evolutionsunglasses.com

Tel. 01256 533955

E: info@evolutionsunglasses.com

Geared for success

Jasper Fellows rounds up some of the latest and best releases aimed at the dedicated clay buster!

RRP FROM
£4,350

Beretta 687 Silver Pigeon V Sport

Based on Beretta's 680 platform, the 687 Silver Pigeon V offers the same high level of reliability for which the series is famed, but fully upgrades the package with deep relief laser engravings and grade-three wood.

This Sport version of the Silver Pigeon V is equipped with a ventilated midrib, a rubber recoil pad and Steelium Optimabore HP barrels, while weighing in slightly heavier than its game counterpart at 7.83lb for the 30" version and 7.94lb for the 32".

Key points

- Grade-three walnut stock and forend
- Deep cut laser engraving
- Ventilated midrib
- Available with 30" or 32" barrels
- Low profile action for fast handling
- Steelium Optimabore HP barrels
- Game version also available

Where to Buy: gmk.co.uk

Härkila Rannoch HSP Shooting Waistcoat

As summer turns to autumn, it's time to start reconsidering the shooting wardrobe. New this year, the Rannoch HSP Shooting Waistcoat from Härkila is an ideal cross season piece. The waistcoat's windproof polyester lining will help keep the worst of the northerly breezes at bay, while the cut of the coat, with its side slits, ensures ease of movement on the stands.

The waistcoat features durable micro-suede reinforcement panels on the shoulders and breast to lessen recoil wear over time. Plus, two large cartridge pockets with drainage holes will help keep the keen shooter fully supplied for a day in the field or on the clay ground.

The Rannoch HSP Shooting Waistcoat is available in a wide range of sizes from 38-50" chest, and two colourways – Dark Navy and Willow Green.

Features

- Two-way zip closure
- Large, reinforced bellows cartridge pockets with drain holes
- Extra front pockets on top of large front pockets
- Reinforced front with micro-suede
- Windproof lining
- Slits at sides

Where to Buy: harkila.com

Browning BDM Bluetooth Hearing Protectors

When just a single shotgun blast can permanently damage your hearing, it's well worth investing in a good set of ear defenders. The Browning BDM Bluetooth set, available from Uttings, offers solid protection and all the mod cons one would more likely expect from a top tech brand.

According to Browning, the headset offered a mean attenuation level of 23dB, enough to bring a 12-bore down to a safer level less likely to cause immediate hearing damage. Thanks to a set of microphones buried within the earpieces, the BDM Bluetooth set can provide active noise cancellation with the ability to amplify ambient noise. That means you should be able to hear the goading of your mates, yet your shotgun blast will still be baffled.

The headset also features Bluetooth connectivity and comes with a 15mm jack socket, so you can hardwire your device or radio if needed. For comfort and fit security, the set also features gel padding and an optional tightening system.

Features

- Active ear defenders NRR 23dB
- Adjustable headband
- Omni-directional mic
- Bluetooth connectivity
- Jack socket included for connecting to non-Bluetooth devices
- Gel padded ear cups for added comfort

Where to Buy: Uttings.com

Nordic Clay Launcher Trap Master

The TrapMaster from Nordic Clays Launcher is one of the most innovative trap systems seen in years. According to the firm, this pistol-like device can launch proprietary fully bio-degradable 'clays' up to 100m at a speed of 37mph, anywhere, anytime. The launch system is electronically driven and can be operated with little training. This could be a major game changer as it allows for impromptu clay shooting, without the elbow grease required to operate a traditional clay thrower.

Features

- Launch clays in any direction and angle
- Able to launch singles and doubles
- Nine firing speeds
- Built-in battery with up to 300 launches per charge (up to 600 clays)
- The battery charges up to 70% in two hours.
- Launches targets up to 100m at speeds more than 37mph

Box of 196 clays: £44.40
Where to Buy: nordicclays.com

RRP FROM
£380

Le Chameau Mouflon 2.0 Boots

Released at the 2023 Game Fair, the Mouflon 2.0 boots from Le Chameau reimagine the brands popular outdoor boot. According to the manufacturer, the boots are made from luxury European hide, hardwearing leather and nubuck uppers and feature a breathable Sympatex 4-layer lining.

The boots use a new lightweight Vibram Curcuma sole, which acts as a toe bumper for foot protection and offers a large contact area, with lugs of opposing heights, for better traction.

The Mouflon 2.0 boots are available with 10" or 12" heels and in a wide range of sizes.

- Available as a cut length or full-length boot
- 'Self-cleaning' grooves
- Mixed material construction with European hides and a breathable lining
- Curcuma Vibram soles for superior grip
- Undercut heels for downhill stability
- Arneplant insoles provide stability, comfort, and moisture absorption

Where to Buy: lechameau.com

A GLORIOUS TWELFTH
12% DISCOUNT & FREE
SHOOTING INSURANCE

To mark the start of the season, *Sporting Gun* is offering a 12% subscription discount and free Sporting Shooter Association membership, which includes £2million of public liability insurance covering the use of airguns, shotguns and rifles. Offer ends 12/10/2023.

USE ONLINE PROMO CODE

SGAUG12

£44.99 annual print & digital subscription

ACT FAST TO ENSURE YOUR COVER IS IN PLACE FOR THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON

SPORTING-GUN.COM

*See website for terms and conditions

Challenges on the Glorious Twelfth

Phil Moorsom and the rest of the Rough Rovers have to put up with some tricky conditions on the opening day of the grouse season

Finally the new season is underway and the Rough Rovers, in our tenth year, marked it with a small driven grouse day on the Glorious Twelfth. Seventeen of us gathered for dinner on the Friday night and I confess that my 'the more the merrier' approach had not bargained on a number quite so high. There were a few sharing pegs, one brought his son, a few their partners who were making a trip of it keen to explore the area.

I knew bringing a small army of guns along was not going to be received that well with David, the moor owner, and it took me a few days to pluck up the courage the broach the subject. As expected, the response was not positive but there was plenty of time for him to mull over the idea. I left it a week and predictably he mellowed, and we made an arrangement over the transport costs as the only way to get the full team around such a steep moor was in a convoy of Argocats.

So after a sensibly early night we assembled for breakfast at a local café along with a beating team at least 30 strong. It was fantastic as everyone there was bursting with excitement and you would struggle to tell who was shooting and who was beating. The guns were given an in-depth safety briefing, clear instructions of how to mark their birds, a reminder that patience would be key while waiting for the birds, and a warning that in the ever increasing wind they could go absolutely anywhere. "Get stuck in!" was the clear message.

Guns loaded into the Argocats, we set off for the first drive, with the butts stretching a good quarter of a mile below a long curling ridge and a fierce southerly coming across the line. Predictably one of the rented Argocats was a heap of junk and had to be abandoned, with me and two of the guns

A few more guns than either Phil or indeed the shoot expected

High winds, rain and the broken down Argo didn't exactly help

in it. The two guns started to simmer with frustration, especially after an early shot rang out while we were a long way from butt No. 7. I got them in place, advised them to reset and put the unexpected yomp behind them, and focus on the job in hand.

It was a wonderful to see the team lined out below the bank of purple heather, framed by the ominous fast-moving skies above. The beaters were tiny specks in the distance and a keen eye could see birds lifting and pitching back in, getting under the wind. However, several coveys of 50-plus birds turned on the wind going back over the beater's heads oblivious to their enthusiastic flagging. Thankfully a good number of birds dropped in just short of the ridge above, which ramped up the anticipation.

There then followed about 10 minutes of blissful mayhem along the line. I was in a butt with Andrew, who was shooting driven grouse for the first time. He managed a left and right out of the first covey and the look on his face will stay with me for a good while.

The beating line approached the top of the ridge, the horn sounded and all the guns raised their barrels high in the air to acknowledge the signal to only shoot behind. The grouse were coming through in ones and twos now and finally the top three pegs got some shooting with varying levels of success.

Drive over, there was a real buzz among the guns and a few envious expressions from those who hadn't had a lot of shooting. I saw Sean, the keeper, heading in my direction with a face like thunder dragging a red lab behind him. "Who's *!*?*@* dog is this, Phil?" he enquired calmly. I recognised the dog immediately shocked by his presence as the team had had specific instructions not to bring dogs at the owner's request. The uninvited dog had abandoned his owner first thing, choosing to run amok in the beating line and had managed to get tied to one of Sean's bitches.

I was as livid as the keeper as I knew four of our guns had reluctantly left their dogs at home. Needless to say the arrogant owner was scolded by me and his membership is now in doubt as it could have jeopardised future invitations for us to shoot here. The poor dog spent the rest of day tied up, so it wasn't much of an outing for him.

One Argo down, we moved our entourage to the very top of the moor. The beaters would be attempting to drive the birds towards us directly into the wind and rain. We would then move up three pegs and shoot a return drive, with the wind finally behind the birds. Snug in our butts, we waited as the dedicated beaters scaled (literally) the north face of Scadam Peak with wind and driving rain in their faces.

The few birds that did come through were either catapulted backwards by the wind or snuck underneath it two feet off the ground and on occasion almost stationary. The top and bottom of the line did have shooting, but a heavy toll was taken on some of the new beaters, who fought hard to keep in line but failed valiantly.

Things now turned a bit chaotic as the shoot owner was keen to get the return drive done, with the pressure of an unsuccessful one taking its toll. Unsurprisingly, many of the beaters felt they deserved a medal or a break at least. A few guns also got a bit confused as to their next position and went to the wrong end of the line and were told curtly that they were in the wrong place and had to walk all the way back.

Tempers had worn a little thin, with elevenses vanishing due to the logistical issues created by the faulty Argo. I encountered minor eruption in butt No. 3 as one of its gun-sharing occupants had just had a blank drive, been on the broken Argo, had just walked back from the wrong butt, and was missing his elevenses. Thankfully he is a good friend, so I was eventually able to talk him down and emphasized the importance of not ruining the remains of the day for him and his butt mate.

A quick break and a chance for the guns to gather their thoughts before the next drive

Finally everyone was in position, so before the action started I went into the bothy to lay out the drinks and food we had, as lunch was planned after this drive. I walked into the darkness and was given the fright of my life by a beater hiding in corner hoping to evade detection. He told me about the varied illnesses preventing him from further duties – while eagerly chugging away on his vape. Perhaps it was for medicinal purposes.

An early shot up on the right signalled the arrival of some super southerly-charged grouse, which demanded commitment and skill to shoot early out in front. For many, by the time the gun was in their shoulder the bird had gone through and they were already chasing them with a shot from behind. It was amazing just how quickly they were coming through, with the storm-force wind behind them humbling several very experienced shots. Some memorable birds were shot all along the line and it was at last time to have drink and tuck into our packed lunches.

The first three drives were always going to be tricky, but the back of the day had been broken in good time, so we planned to squeeze in two more that afternoon to make up for the birds lost to the wind. The pressure was off and as we were up at the top, the rest of the day was downhill.

All smiles in the end after a rather trying day for all involved

After a good 40-minute break, the guns embarked on a long drive back to the bottom of the moor. As I was not shooting and we were reduced to three Argos I opted to join the beating line, which added an unexpected dimension to my day. We walked two miles over low heather and relatively firm ground pushing small coveys forward.

I knew the valley the guns were in well but rather worryingly hadn't heard a single shot and we were only 300yd from the top of the ridge. Once over the top, the horn sounded, a few more birds got up and were clinically shot behind. I was greeted by a line of grinning faces as the drive had been epic, with birds coming across, down and over the top of the valley offering some incredible, challenging shooting – and I had missed it. There was a good deal of back slapping and detailed descriptions of every bird shot as the pickers up methodically worked their way through the heather.

David, keen to get the final drive in, didn't let the team rest on their laurels for too long and moved the guns into traditional stone butts that prompted many to secure that classic 'Me in a grouse butt' photo. Some of the less-enthusiastic beaters were released as the final drive was small, pushing up two valleys either side of a tall ridge. I retired to the top of the next valley to watch the action unfold from above and it was quite a spectacle. There were eight or nine coveys that went through the line, the wind and rain had disappeared, and the sun had made a timely appearance.

It was the perfect way to finish and everyone enjoyed the day. Some were luckier than others, some shot better than others, and some will regret the few they missed, but hopefully everyone will remember the ones they hit and the day as a whole will stay long in their memories. It was an epic way to kick off the season. ■

All eyes ahead as the line approaches, hopefully preceded by a decent covey of grouse!

SCAN ME
roughrovers.co.uk

CÆSAR GUERINI

10
YEAR
WARRANTY

STEEL SHOT PROOF TESTED

01564 742477 - info@angloitalianarms.co.uk - caesargueriniuk.com

Communications **manifesto**

Strategic communications consultant **Sven Hughes** delivers an inspiring and insightful vision of what we all need to bedoingto secure the future of field sports

It was interesting to see how the government's recent firearms licensing consultation managed to galvanise such a diverse range of stakeholders with an interest in shooting. For eight weeks shooting's main social media channels, lobbying organisations and specialist publications all spoke with one voice, appealing to everyone with a firearm to get involved, complete the online survey and be heard. This was perhaps most succinctly expressed by Bill Harriman, BASC's Director of Firearms, on YouTube's Fieldsports Channel: "If you can't spend five minutes to save shooting, then frankly you shouldn't be shooting."

Alongside writing occasional articles for shooting magazines, my day job is as a strategic communications consultant. I help politicians, corporations and even militaries maximise the impact of their messaging, whether to win an election, sell more product, or convince enemy soldiers to choose peace rather than a continuation of conflict. And it is through this professional lens that I have been watching, and so impressed by, UK shooting's response to the government consultation. The degree of messaging consistency has been a shining example of what can be achieved when our entire sector works together, as one.

What worries me, however, is that this hard-earned momentum will now be lost as the various stakeholders return to their individual niches within the wider UK shooting community. It is this fragmentation, with its consequent dilution of messaging alignment, that will enable the anti-shooting interests to resume their attempts to undermine our sector, by using this division to their advantage. This is exactly what is happening to the shooting and hunting community in the US, as those who are driven by a desire to ban all forms of hunting set about thin-slicing the various field sports, and calling for increased legislation/restrictions pursuant to each discipline.

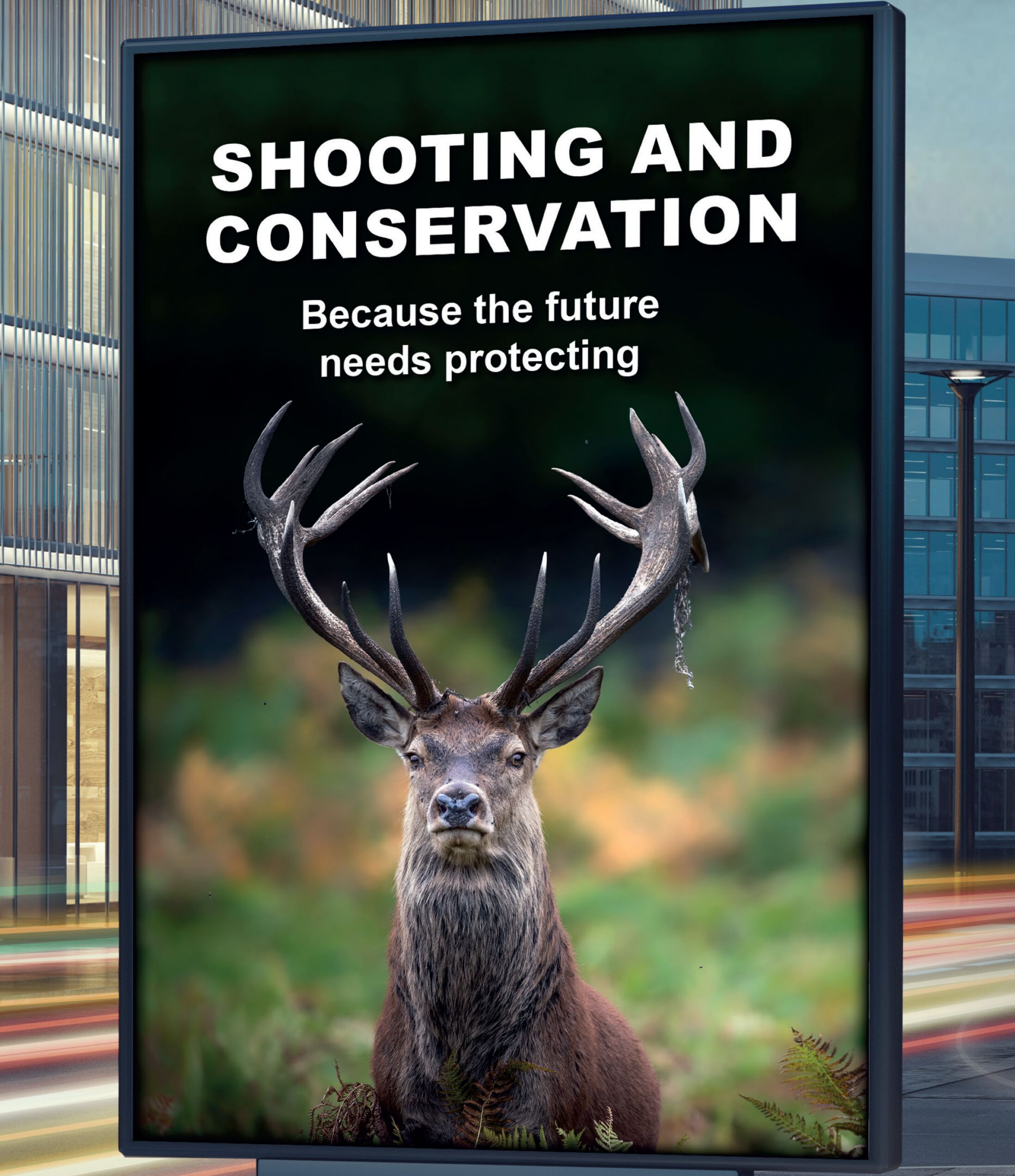
This strategic approach by anti-shooting/hunting campaigners is not by accident, and it is very effective. It ensures that each proposed restriction is seemingly so small and innocuous that it doesn't pose a meaningful threat to the interests of the overall shooting community. Each tweak of the legislation falls just short of the threshold of awareness and outrage that would cause a unified response.

However, these tactical small steps are of course part of a carefully planned strategic roadmap, with the eradication of shooting and hunting as the ultimate objective. It is instructive to listen to recent editions of the MeatEater podcast with Steven Rinella for an up-to-date examination of how this 'death by a thousand cuts' strategy is bearing fruit and successfully undermining the US shooting/hunting community's rights and freedoms.

The same methods are likely to be used to undermine shooting and field sports here in the UK in due course, if not already, and it would be wise to recognise the threat for what it is and to prepare a united response ahead of time. There is no such thing as 'tactical' messaging in this context, everything is 'strategic'. To successfully protect shooting and our wider fields sports (the strategic intent), we must rethink and redesign our individual tactical messaging and marketing so that it delivers against our sector's strategic aims.

This means that everyone in the UK shooting community (and associated »

Photographs: City – Milindri/iStock, Stag – mcdonaldkar/Getty Images


SHOOTING AND CONSERVATION
Because the future needs protecting

Photograph: Karl Nesh/Shutterstock

field sports) – whether a manufacturer, professional or public participant – should consider playing more of an active part in reframing and rephrasing their sector-related content with this 'war of words' in mind. We need to collectively understand and accept that every touchpoint we have with the public must now become a talking point. Every retailer must become more of a reteller and every manufacturer must think of themselves as a story factory, not just a product factory. And all with one intent: to build the overarching strategic narrative for the future of shooting and field sports.

We all have a part to play, exactly because the tactical has become the strategic. Our marketing campaigns, our articles and even our Facebook and Instagram posts – each of our tactical engagements with the public should be considered and created in terms of its strategic value to the shooting/field sports community.

With this in mind, the rest of this article aims to provide some go-to messaging guidance for our sector (both shooting and field sports) to consider. If we are to adopt a more unified communications strategy, then we need to be sure of who are we trying to reach, with what messaging, and with what intent. That is true effects-based communications.

To be clear, though, this isn't just about designing effective counter messaging in response to the anti-shooting narratives. That would simply dance to the tune of their words and actions. Instead this is about developing and implementing our own collective communications plan, with our own strategic intent – ensuring the long-term maintenance and growth of shooting and field sports in the UK.

Defining the target audience

Most marketing strategies try to establish self-aware groups among the public. The audience is invited to prefer one type of cola or another, or identify with one political party or another, and this choice is reinforced with branded associations and benefits. Ultimately the individual's brand choice becomes a proxy for their personality – you are this type of person if you drive this type of car – and they can then be grouped for the purposes of future targeting, messaging and mobilisation.

For many years this has been true of the shooting and wider field sports communities. You are either for something or against something – and there are many curated echo chambers available to you that will confirm your choice and status either way. We have a name for those who don't agree with us – we call them 'antis' – and they have many names for us, I'm quite sure.

However, for shooting/field sports, this group identity strategy is in fact rather unhelpful at the current time. The toxicity of the debate risks dissuading new audiences – let's call them the 'unaffiliated swing', with no strong feelings about shooting/field sports either way – from engaging with our communities or issues for fear of getting embroiled in highly emotive public spats between the two entrenched sides. But without the support of the broader public, our shooting and field sports will continue to be unduly affected by the shrillness of the opposition voices as they fill the social media and MSN void with ill-informed content.

So if we know that the unaffiliated swing may not want to engage publicly, the only sensible long-term strategy must be to prompt and enable more private conversations to take place. Put simply, we need to spend less time preaching to the choir at country shows and instead focus on activating discreet at-home and at-work conversations where a calmer and better informed discussion of the facts can take place without fear of being shouted down.

Sounds impossible? Well, 'peer-to-peer' and 'moment marketing' are in fact well-known marketing techniques, used by many

Photograph: JohnnyGreig/iStock

Photograph: OfirPeretz/iStock

commercial brands, to reach their audiences in more effective ways than traditional posters, TV or print campaigns. For example, Sensodyne toothpaste has just launched a new packaging initiative that includes a QR code on some of its packaging, to turn the twice-daily teeth-brushing ritual into an at-home brand-associated well-being moment.

Similarly, aspects of Dove's very successful 'real beauty' campaign were specifically designed to prompt at-home conversations between mothers and their daughters on the topic of unhealthy modern body-image expectations. These messaging techniques are more discreet, more targeted, more cost-effective… and arguably more suitable for the modern messaging needs of our shooting/field sports communities.

It can be done, and to reach the unaffiliated swing audience I suggest that it must be done. However, it will require a complete rethink of our collective outreach methods and aims. Competitor brands in our sector will need to come together and create at-home/work touchpoints to extend the reach of their current marketing. Magazine editors and social media content creators will need to work together to agree, and then introduce, shooting-related content that is specifically designed as 'news to use' within a familial or work context. And we, as participants in both shooting and wider field sports, will need to play our part by amplifying these messages into friendship and professional networks that normally exist beyond the reach of the current sector broadcasters.

I'm certainly not saying that it will be easy, but the response to the government's firearms restrictions consultation provided a timely reminder of the need for united action and consistent messaging in defence of our industry/sport/pastime, as well as our collective ability to achieve it. The professionalism of our messaging today will be fundamental to the successful maintenance and growth of our sector over the long term. But we need to get real, and quickly, if we want to seize this opportunity. We desperately need the support of the unaffiliated swing – and if they won't come to us, we must go to them, on their terms.

Designing the right sector positioning

Shooting and stalking/hunting have already changed their language, very positively and effectively, over recent years to better reflect the realities. The modern sector is now, more appropriately, framed in terms of sustainability and land management, and the protection of biodiversity is regularly cited and explained by sector spokespeople. Without doubt these are worthy words and they do indeed represent the lived experiences of the majority within the sector.

However, my concern is that by simply restating sustainability and all its associated benefits over and over, the sector will become complacent by virtue of its efforts, and not its actual effect on the key audience. We may be saying all the right words, but not actually creating any measurable behavioural or perceptual change in line with our strategic intent – to increase our relevance and resonance among the unaffiliated swing. While we congratulate ourselves on our own worthiness, the anti-shooting community continues to achieve its incremental tactical wins.

I have always enjoyed the expression "Don't tell me you're funny, make me laugh," and wonder if it could be applied to the sector's current messaging strategy. How do we make the audience laugh while simultaneously seeing off the tactical threats? My recommendation would be

»

Great subscription deals at sportinggunsubs.co.uk

to reframe the shooting-as-conservation argument entirely in the future tense. This may seem like a very small change, but the effects could be considerable. So much of the current shooting messaging and commentary speaks to the past, in terms of what the sector used to be like, or the present in defensive terms in response to the anti-shooting community's attacks. From a stratcoms perspective, it feels as if we have forgotten our power to inspire, and the ability of a described destination to galvanize an audience towards a common goal. After all, how can we lead on these issues if we don't know where we are going?

Doing our utmost to focus all our messaging on the future benefits of our current actions could change the game. It would create a positive purpose for every action and convert the tactical into the strategic. It would ensure that the unaffiliated swing get to feel that they have a described benefit that they can understand: a 'what's in it for me' to prompt at-home and at-work peer-to-peer conversations. And it would introduce 'loss language' into the mix: establishing something positive that will be lost if the undermining efforts of the anti-shooting community are left unchecked.

Think of how Elon Musk/Tesla marketed the their first electric cars. They knew that the infrastructure wasn't yet in place for recharging in our cities, they knew that the batteries still had some problems, and they knew that the price was too high for many consumers – but they successfully described a desirable future and explained today's actions (and issues) in those terms. They established what the audience wanted to buy and used that to explain what they had to sell.

Photograph: Kullapong Parcherat/Shutterstock

By framing and phrasing everything that we, as a sector, say and do today in terms of tomorrow's benefit, we would be able to (re)introduce some much needed nuance back into the conversation, embrace new topics that are currently beyond the reach and remit of today's shooting/fields sports communities, and step beyond the well-rehearsed anti-shooting community's current messaging. It is simply a matter of describing the positive changes that will result from our current actions.

Yes, we are about conservation – because of what it will deliver to our society and future generations. Yes, we harvest animals – because it ensures future biodiversity. Yes, we are moving to entirely lead-free shooting – because we are already living up to tomorrow's standards. Everything becomes a positive. Everything becomes a solution, not a problem. And everything becomes a description of the benefits that would be jeopardised if the anti-shooting community's current efforts to undermine our sector are allowed to go unchecked.

Using the right language

Assuming I'm correct in this strategic assessment and the new positioning opportunity for shooting/field sports, then what next? How do we turn the strategy into a toolkit for everyday use by all the various stakeholders in our sector? Well, there's a tried-and-tested way to build strong verbal brands, as demonstrated by the likes of Coca Cola and Volvo, as well as Obama and Trump.

The chances are that the first word that comes to your mind when you consider a Volvo car is 'safety'. That's because for decades the brand has been seeding and reinforcing that specific brand stimulus-response in your brain. From the shape of the Volvo logo (like a seatbelt because Nils Bohlin first developed the three-point seatbelt for Volvo), to the repeated use of crash-test dummies in their adverts, right through to the content on their current website: Volvo owns safety.

Photograph: M. Unal Ozmen/Shutterstock

Photograph: skynesher/iStock

Similarly, Coke owns ‘taste’, despite Pepsi’s best efforts to undermine this positioning with their blind-taste-test adverts. During their election campaigns, Obama owned ‘change’ and Trump owned ‘great’. These single-word associations were created to establish an immediate empathic bond between the brands and their audiences.

If we want to achieve a similarly strong cognitive association among the unaffiliated swing audience, then every stakeholder in the entire category needs to start speaking with one voice, and using the same single word to create a consistent verbal footprint.

The word we need to own is ‘future’. We need to start using and repeating that word in all our marketing material, articles and speeches . And don’t think that the audience will get bored of hearing the same word – they won’t hear it as often as we write/speak it. Just go back and listen to an Obama election speech to hear how often he used ‘change’ without it becoming too much.

To make this verbal strategy even more effective, I suggest also using the word ‘because’ in combination with ‘future’. So, for example, “Because we recognise the harm that lead shot can cause on the habitat, we are ensuring that the future of shooting will be entirely lead-free”, and, “Because we are taking the necessary steps to control deer numbers today, the future of our biodiversity is secure on this estate.” This because-future combination achieves what we set out to do at the start of this article – create a communications platform so that we can convert every tactical conversation into a strategic opportunity. ‘Because’ deals with the tactical issues we face without resorting to defensive language, and ‘future’ pivots the conversation to a positive place to draw in new audiences, using new topics and touchpoints.

That can’t be all there is to it, surely? A future-facing strategy and the use of the words ‘because’ and ‘future’? There must be more. A lot more? Well, I invite you to consider the implications of what I’m saying. These recommendations may sound small, but they would require our entire sector to find new ways of uniting and working together for the long term, rather than just in response to occasional government consultations. They would require us to speak with one voice, across disciplines, brands, channels and touchpoints. We’d have to accept that we may have been right in theory (sustainability at the heart of shooting/field sports), but not in effect (winning the unaffiliated swing). We’d have to stop doing certain things that we’d previously believed were working, and conjure entirely new solutions. In short, adopting these recommendations across the sector would mean a reappraisal of current effort, a reallocation of current spending and a reassessment of future measurements of effect. That’s no small undertaking.

Clearly these recommendations are just that: proposals for further consideration and discussion. I have no authority in our sector to insist on anything, and no specialist sector knowledge beyond enjoying shooting and field sports in my spare time. However, as a stratcoms professional I do invite you to consider the suggestions and discuss them with your friends and colleagues in the sector. Whether you agree or disagree with what I’ve said, what I’m sure we can all agree on is that the recent firearms licensing consultation has been instructive and could be the beginning of something positive, not just the end of an administrative process.

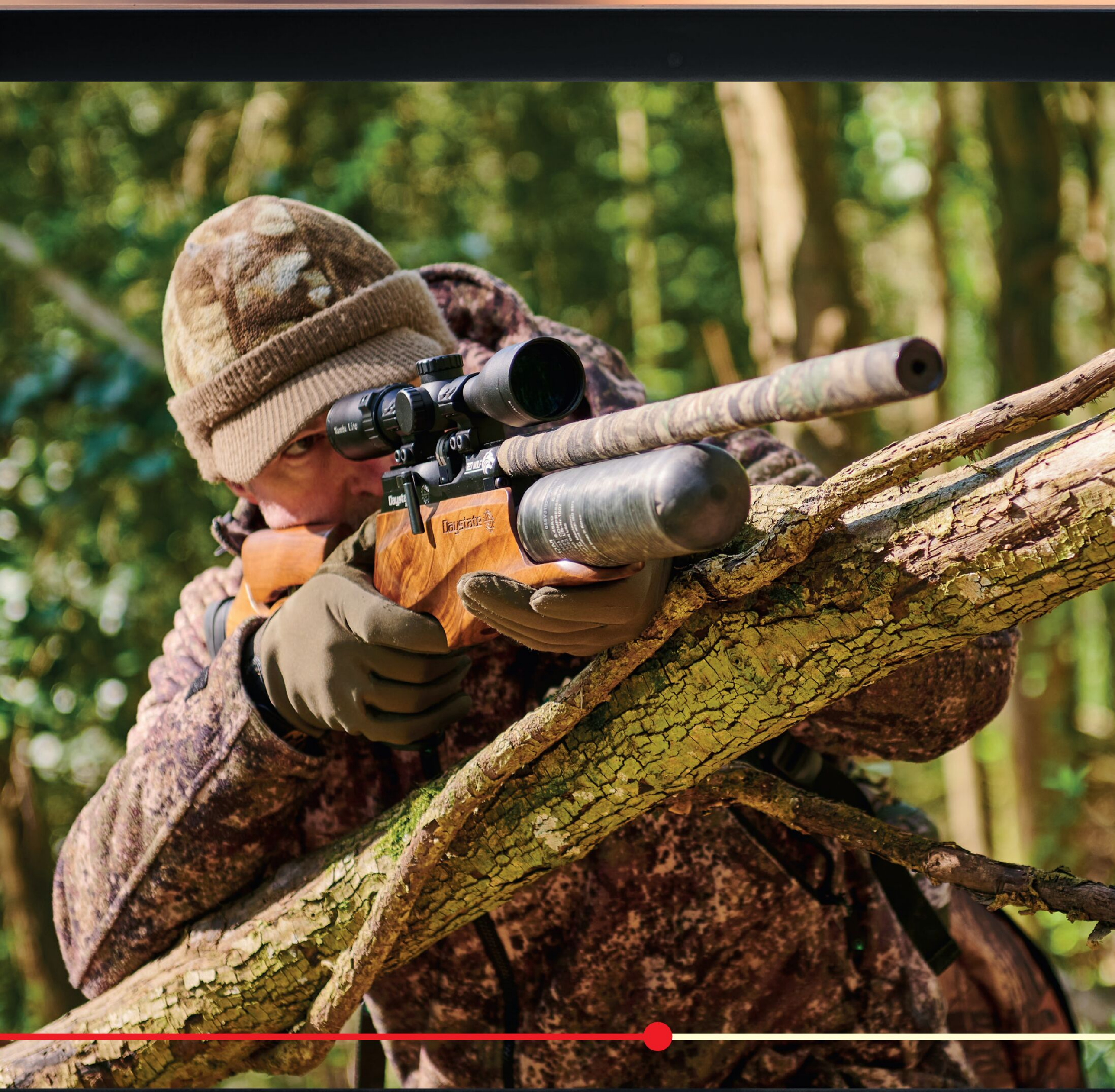
There’s a big difference between simple communications and strategic communications, as the anti-shooting community seem to have already understood. For the sake of the long-term future of our sector, I only hope that we take this opportunity to come together and work together on our collective strategy and messaging.

Because what we do today could safeguard the future of shooting and field sports in the UK. ■

PRIMARY POINTS

- Without a strategic objective, our much loved sector risks being cannibalised by the thin-slicing techniques of the anti-shooting lobby, as currently being evidenced in the US and indeed Europe, and especially the UK.
- We require a sector-wide solution in which all stakeholders unite around the same strategy, so that their everyday tactical messaging has a renewed strategic purpose and is focused on building the same strategic endpoint.
- The sector should treat the unaffiliated swing as the must-win audience, because unless we break free from the current binary pro/anti rhetoric, we risk alienating this crucial cohort.
- Our sector’s marketing and messaging should focus on prompting positive at-home/work conversations, instead of relying on the usual broadcast methods.
- The unaffiliated swing audience needs to hear a better place being described to them, set in the future, with clear ‘what’s in it for me’ benefits.
- We all need to start framing and phrasing our tactical messaging in terms of the because-future interrelationship: instilling everything we do and say with positive purpose

Great subscription deals at sportinggunsubs.co.uk


Hawke Vantage
Daystate

S&C TV

SHOOTING & COUNTRY

KEEPING YOU
ENTERTAINED
WHEN YOU'RE
NOT IN THE FIELD

FIND US ON

YouTube

SCAN THE ABOVE OR SEARCH

@SHOOTINGCOUNTRYTV

BROWNING®

TRIUMPH

ULTRA XS PRO

THE MOST RELIABLE AND BEST PERFORMING LINE FOR GUARANTEED RESULT

Crowned *Fitasc* world Sporting Clays champion
(Sam Green 2019)

Adjustable cheek-piece that lets you alter the drop and cast

Steel proofed Back-bored barrels with 5 INV+ Titanium chokes

3 Inflex II recoil pads (12, 20, 25 mm), 2 inserts

WWW.BROWNING.EU

Firearms and ammunition can only be sold to permit holders and of legal age

The excitement of the first migrants

Alan Jarrett bags some early arrivals but has serious concerns about yet another area of our sport that's becoming increasingly pressured by legislation

The arrival of the first migrant duck and geese depends to a considerable extent on where you live in the country. Unsurprisingly northern parts of these islands get migrants earlier than we do here in the southeast, but even so there is no hard-and-fast rule.

Here in Kent we often get an early influx of teal – indeed sometimes they are so early as to be gone by the time 1 September arrives! If they are still here then some additional sport can be enjoyed until they move off, and it will be many weeks before the next lot of birds start to arrive.

Nothing is less certain than that the timing of bird migrations. Doubly so now, for there can be no doubting that birds are arriving later in the season and invariably in lesser numbers. This causes considerable acrimony between wildfowlers and those who seek to regulate our sport. The way in which European legislation is now being used – with the dreaded 'precautionary principle' being used as a battering ram rather than the crutch for which it was intended – is causing massive concern.

This is increasingly seeing the regulators in essence trying to implement a North American-style adaptive harvest management regime by stealth, for which there is no legal basis apart from the precautionary principle. The saying "There are lies, damn lies, and statistics" has never been truer than in this case.

Some of the bag limits being imposed in wildfowling consents are frankly ridiculous, being disproportionate and just plain unfair. One pink-footed goose for a whole wildfowling club for the entire season? Reduced numbers of birds are arriving in the UK due to 'short-stopping' (birds not completing their migratory journey because hard weather is not forcing them to do so) is now noticeable. Hence the opportunity for the regulators to restrict our sport.

The key difference between North America and Western Europe is that the North Americans have comprehensive flyway data on which to base their findings. Bag limits are respected and obeyed because there is a solid scientific base upon which the system is built. Not so here. 'Let's not do it just in case' is a system being imposed that will not earn the respect and trust of wildfowlers. »

Notwithstanding the problems associated with short-stopping and its impact on bird migration, we are still entering an exciting time for those of us looking to the coastal marshes and saltmarshes for our sport. Soon our estuaries will be filling with teeming flocks of duck and geese, and this is what we have been waiting for.

Wildfowling in its simplest form is flighting – ambushing birds as they pass from one place to another – but one of the delights of this sport is the opportunity to make so much more of it. It would take a lifetime and more to truly learn the ways of the birds and how to best get on terms with them. That for me is understanding the estuary and how birds behave in that particular environment. Begin to understand that and you are already partway to consistent success.

To some extent good fortune plays its part, for although being in the right place at the right time is essential you do still need that slice of luck. That can take many forms, but when the opportunity comes it is important to take advantage of it.

Over the years my wildfowling habits have changed a good deal, partly due to finding new places and new challenges, but also because the pressures on our estuaries have changed, with more people than ever out and about. I go to the estuaries for peace and solitude – not to rub shoulders with dog walkers and the like.

One of my habitual places was always likely to yield a shot or two and was at its best from mid-September onwards. My first visits were always at hop-picking time here in Kent, which is late September. Then mallard would often come down from the inland marshes as the light faded and it was often possible to return home with a plump bird or two. The place was a wide mudflat with extensive areas of mussel beds. Once the tide had left the flats this created a mosaic of shallow pools, into which a few decoys could be placed. It was then a matter of waiting for the light to fade and hoping for the best.

Adult cock wigeon – an early arrival and a fabulous bit of early season eating

One late September afternoon the tide was ebbing fast and the first sign of the mussel beds began to appear as black lumps amid the swirling waters. But there were duck there, and through the binoculars it was obvious that there had been a recent arrival of wigeon.

Of course they departed when the dog and I walked out, but it was enough to fill me with hope that at least some of them would return. There was good reason why they might do so, for here the zostera grass was green and lush after a summer of growth.

This is a muddy, smelly place. Where you walk your feet sink into the mud around the mussels, and break through into the anaerobic layer below, which releases the gases. My routine of digging a shallow pit exacerbates matters, but over the years has proved almost essential.

“Where you walk your feet sink into the mud around the mussels, and break through into the anaerobic layer below”

Eventually we were hunkered down to await events. It was a peaceful, idyllic setting, with the mudflats alive with the calls of the waders as they dashed for a meal after the tide. The flats seemed full of tiny sounds, whether the gentle tinkling of departing water or the scuttle of crabs. The night began to close in and anticipation grew with every passing moment.

A single wigeon edged past the decoys and fell with a splash into a nearby pool. Soon others came – some moving through high up against the increasingly black sky; some came lower and full of naivety so that it was possible to fire again and again.

Plump bodies fell to the mud and the dog dashed hither and thither at her work. Not unusually at this early stage of the season, the majority were cock wigeon, for the differential migration among this species often sees the adult males arrive first.

They were all gathered in, with the decoys stowed in the bottom of the big rucksack. We sauntered happily back with nine fine wigeon, content that we had met the first of the migrants and done ourselves proud by shooting well and picking them all. ■

R&B SPORTING

Side by Side

with the shooting
community since 2006

customer reviews:

"Professional and friendly - a real shooters shop."

"First class service & advice - as far as I am concerned R&B is the No.1 go to provider."

"R&B will go the extra mile to keep customers satisfied - cracking store!"

Shotguns • Rifles • Clothing • Optics • Repairs

01989 763859 rbsporting.co.uk

Units 5 & 6, Cropper Row, Haigh Industrial Estate, Ross-on-Wye. HR9 5LA

Shooting essentials

Martin Puddifer pulls together some of the latest must-have accessories

Schöffel Country Ptarmigan Evo Coat

A classically fitting and 100% waterproof, windproof and breathable coat, with large bellow pockets, a rear zipped game pocket and a detachable/adjustable hood. This machine washable coat also has an adjustable waist and micro-fleece lined hand warmer pockets.

Price: £549.95
• schoffelcountry.com

The Original Muck Boot Company Unisex Calder Boot

Waterproof and highly breathable, this all-purpose neoprene boot offers fantastic support and comfort. It features a durable rubber outsole, a reinforced heel and toe and a mesh sandwich-fabric lining, and is available in sizes 4-13.

Price: £135
• muckbootcompany.co.uk

Bisley Embroidered Pheasant Stockings

A smart and comfortable addition to any man's shooting wardrobe, these classically designed, one-size shooting stockings, available in both rich green and burgundy, feature a striking pheasant motif and garter. Available in sizes 8-11.

Price: £20 • bisley-uk.com

Dubarry Men's Ballinturbet Waterproof Shooting Jacket

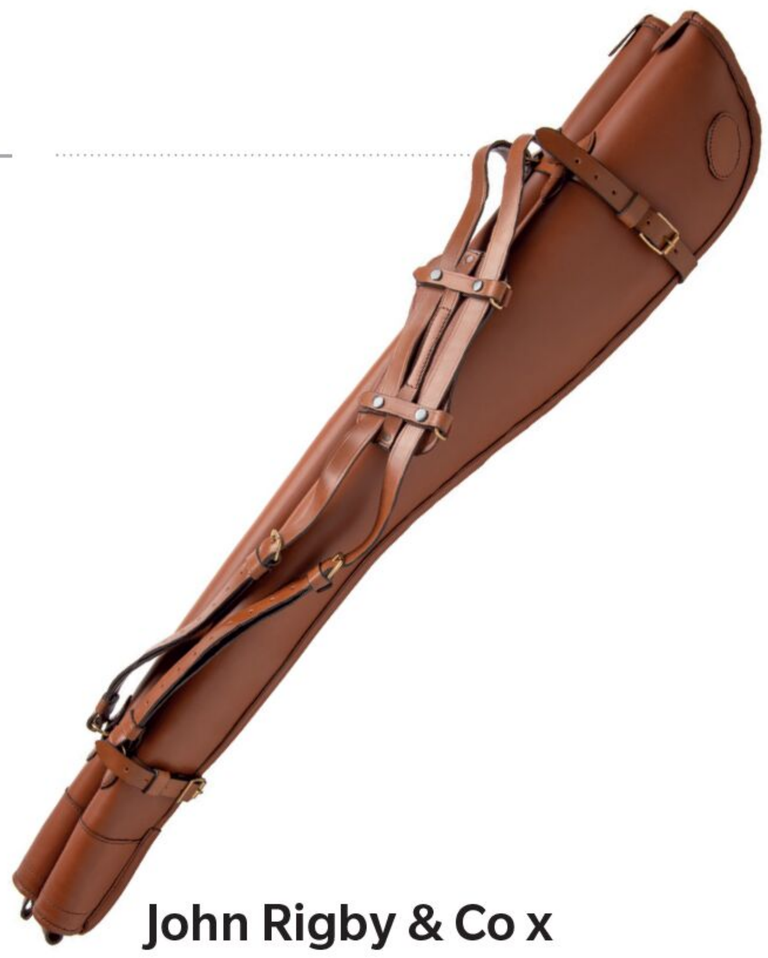
A waterproof and breathable three-quarter length shooting coat crafted from Teflon coated 100% pure new wool and a Gore-Tex lining. The machine washable coat also features cartridge pockets with tabs, a two-way YKK zip and ergonomic sleeves for extra lift.

Price: £749 • dubarry.com

Le Chameau Mouflon 2.0 Extreme 10" boots

Launched at The Game Fair, these hardwearing 10" boots feature a microporous midsole, waterproof and breathable leather and nubuck uppers, a lightweight Curcuma Vibram sole for dependable grip and an Arneplant insole for stability and comfort. Also in a 12" version at £400. (This product was listed incorrectly in our September issue.)

Price: £380 • lechameau.com



John Rigby & Co x Traditional English Guncases Double Shotgun Slip

A double shotgun slip to last a lifetime, the stylish rich tan leather outer is complemented by the fleece lining and reinforced leather toe, ensuring lasting protection for a pair of shotguns in the field.

Price: £2,160
• johnrigbyandco.com

Härkila Clim8 Jacket

The temperature of this jacket's large heat pad is adjusted by the wearer via the Clim8 app. Crafted using down insulation and wind-resistant lining, it has an elasticated hem and sleeves, with a stow pocket for its power bank (sold separately).

Price: £419.99 • harkila.com

Alan Paine Didsmere Gilet

Stuffed with soft-hollow-fill wadding and featuring a digitally printed breathable coated polyester outer, this machine-washable gilet has a two-way zipper, hand warmer pockets and is available in sizes S to 5XL.

Price: £144.95 • alanpaine.co.uk

Champion Arundel Bodywarmer

Ideal for colder months, this jacket features a 100% polyester microfibre outer, a fleece lining and a studded back vent. There is ample storage for belongings in the side and inside pockets. Available in sizes S to 3XL.

Price: £25 • bisley-uk.com

Gamebore 12 Bore Black Gold Game UER

Released on September 1st, in time for the partridge season, this cartridge features Diamond Shot Xtra, Gamebore's new full-cup Bio-Wad and double base RS Propellants to ensure high performance and comfort during busy drives.

Price From: £584 (per 1,000) • gamebore.com

Dedito Haakan Boot

A full-leather, lace-up boot that is well-suited to challenging weather conditions and terrain. Comfortable and durable thanks to a 400g 3M Thinsulate lining and the breathable Windtex waterproof membrane, the boot also features a Vibram outsole.

Price: £295 • deditoboots.com

Seeland Key-point Elements Jacket

Crafted using the Seetex membrane, this windproof, waterproof and breathable jacket features two large pockets for cartridges at the front and a game pocket at the back. Adjustable/detachable hood included. Available in chest sizes 36-54".

Price: £199.99 • seeland.com

At a glance

1 Seeland Dog Dummy Waistcoat

Price: £99.99 • seeland.com

2 Härkila Orton Overtrousers

Price: £169.99 • harkila.com

3 John Rigby & Co Leather Gloves

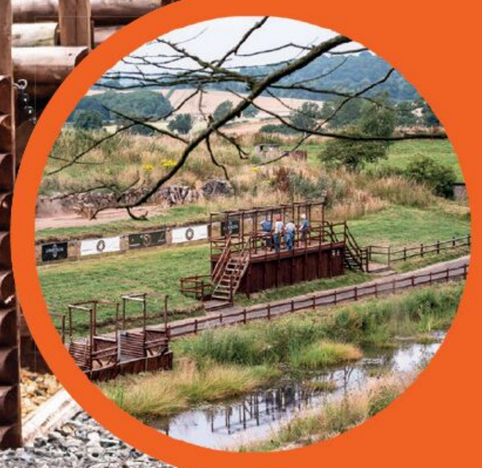
Price: £120 • johnrigbyandco.com

Set your sights higher with Thimbleby Shooting Ground

Outstanding clay shooting experiences in the unrivalled surroundings of the Thimbleby Estate, on the edge of the North York Moors. From one-to-one or group instruction to our legendary Simulated Game Days and corporate events, there's something for everyone at Thimbleby Shooting Ground.

Pushing the boundaries of Simulated Game shooting

Expert tuition to inspire and challenge



Corporate events to reward and motivate

Exceptional facilities including clubhouse, shop, café and gun room

Stunning surroundings

www.thimblebyshoot.com ○ info@thimblebyshoot.com ○ 01609 883401

Gaim VR shooting simulator

Paul Austin immerses himself in virtual reality with a simulator that accurately mimics the ballistics of multiple real-world shooting scenarios

Mark Zuckerberg's dream of the metaverse – a virtual utopia (or dystopia, depending on your point of view) – is still a long way off. His vision of legions of legless avatars transforming the internet into one giant, Meta-owned, VR space seems increasingly unlikely. However, the billions of dollars he's invested have produced at least one major benefit.

Gaim, a spin-off company from Aimpoint, one of the giants of the shooting industry, has been around for a while. Aimpoint initially developed their VR simulators as a training tool for the police and military, but their virtual efforts have now spawned a standalone business targeting the consumer market directly.

I'll be honest. I've seen the software in action at several shows, but watching someone in VR on a flat screen can never convey what's happening in the virtual space. Interesting, perhaps, but hardly a serious shooting aid, surely? The name didn't help, either. 'Gaim' doesn't inspire confidence. What I want is a serious simulator, not a first-person shooter.

I'm sure the PR/marketing department at Aimpoint love their clever play on words, combining 'aim' into the new brand, but I don't think it's done them any favours in terms of attracting serious shooters to what on the face of it looks like an expensive toy.

Required kit

First, you need a Meta Quest 2 VR headset and controllers, roughly priced at £299 in the UK. Second, you need the Gaim rifle and the associated software, at roughly €440 plus import tax. So it's not a cheap setup.

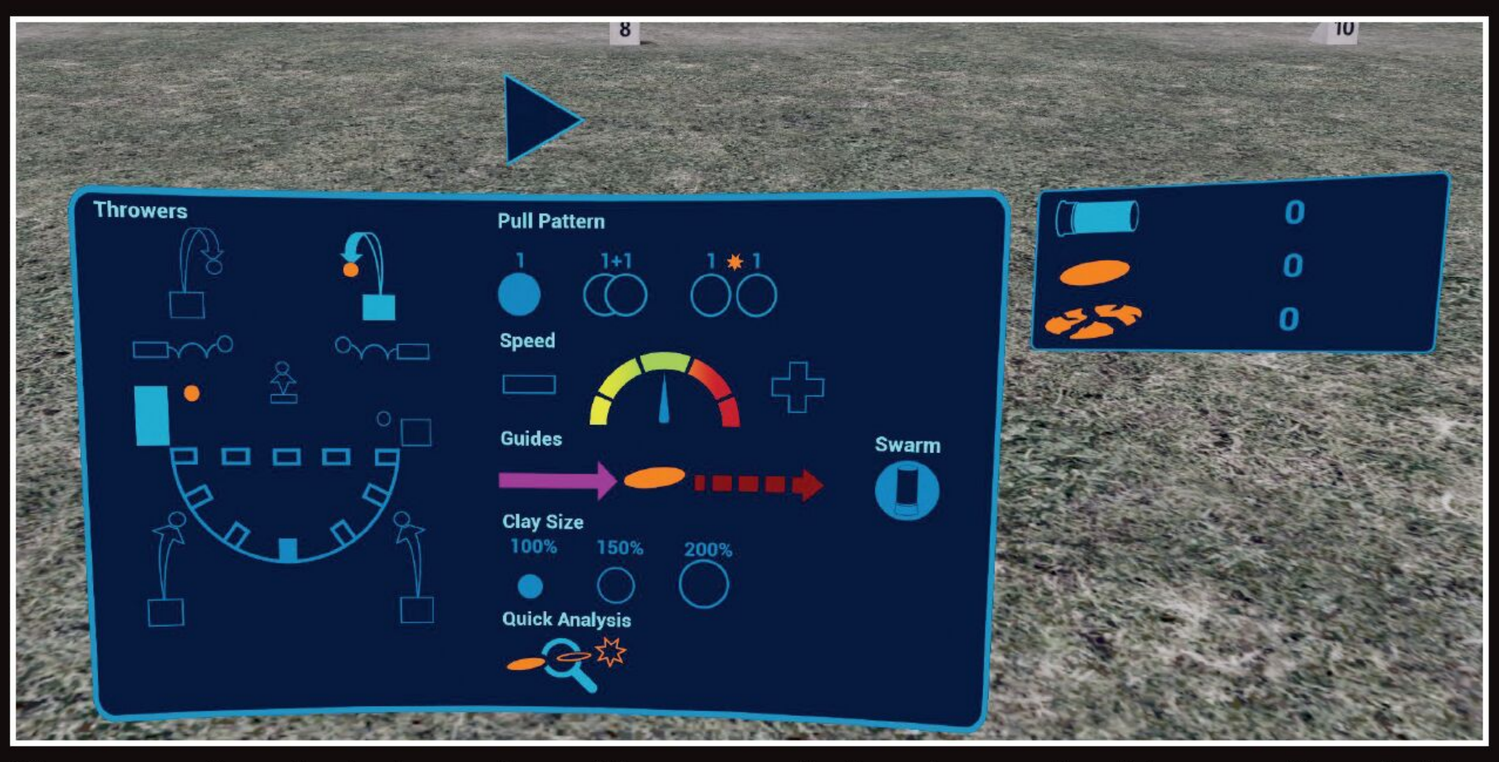
Gaim sent over a headset loaded with the software along with the rifle itself. »

The training environment can be completely configured by the user with prey, speeds, numbers and direction at your control

Surprisingly, this consists of a very decent piece of laser-engraved timber in a full-size stock, including a recoil pad, although there is no actual recoil involved. At 1,645g it has sufficient weight and subsequent inertia, making it feel very believable.

The stock doesn't have a barrel, but it's weighted at the forend to provide quite a realistic balance to the rifle. The trigger was also a pleasant surprise, feeling very much like the real thing with a definite break and real-world weight. This is nothing like clicking a mouse button or a controller. It has the feel of a real trigger; a little heavy at 750g, but very functional.

With one of the controllers nestled into a holder at the end of the stock, you're ready to go. Just slip on the headset and you're in the virtual world. There are no wires to restrict your movement and you're completely enveloped and free to move as you will. It's only when you don the headset that you



Clay ground controls. Launch positions, speed, clay sizes and guides are all available

"You can select from bolt-action, semi-auto centrefire, shotgun, and the newly released handgun"

appreciate the difference between a flat-screen preview and the total immersion of the VR experience.

Graphically it's more on a par with the Wii games console than the latest Xbox, PlayStation or gaming PC, but once you're in the simulation any qualms about image quality/realism dissipate. It's a very immersive experience. So much so, that I've regularly found myself reaching for a rail on a virtual stand during a simulation.

It's also worth stressing that the Meta Quest 2 is a true games console, with hundreds of titles on offer, which I'm sure your kids will appreciate. Gaming, fitness apps plus an entire virtual world awaits. The Quest 2 can do a lot more than just shooting simulations – a point you might want to stress when attempting to justify the investment. It's also worth mentioning that the simulations do not always require an internet connection, so you can use the system anywhere. It's very portable.

Into the sim

Once you slip on the headset and emerge into your virtual living room, you simply select the Gaim Simulation app and you're transported into the first selection screen. Click on the rifle and you're off. The first task is to sort out your gun fit and zero your rifle. As gun fit is unique you do need a dedicated rifle/gun set up for each user. To do that, select a player, click the gear icon and you'll appear in the zeroing environment.

You can select from bolt-action, semi-auto centrefire, shotgun, and the newly released handgun (controller sold separately). It's worth taking the time to set up each in turn; you only need to do this once. There are targets downrange at 25m and 50m, with close-ups on your left so that you can track

your hits. A control panel on the right allows you to adjust the gun fit by clicking arrows to adjust the cant, scope/red dot/bead height, windage, elevation, etc. It's very straightforward to create a custom fit for any new shooter, large or small.

Back on the main menu, there are plenty of options. There are six rifle simulations plus one timed driven hunt, all of which feature pretty much anything you can point a gun at in Europe and North America. Deer of various species, bears, boars, foxes – you name it. And depending on the sim you choose, they can be mixed to form a very realistic (and often chaotic) driven hunt.

There are five shotgun sims, including duck flighting and pheasant shooting, plus skeet, trap challenges and a five-stand comp, all of which can be run as multiplayer competitions. There are also three IPSC-style (practical shooting) timed simulations, akin to what you might see in two- and three-gun steel-target shooting competitions. The focus is predominantly on the AR15 in your arsenal, along with the optional handgun. However, if you harbour fantasies of going full-on John Wick, there are a number of time challenges on offer.

The final section features the Sim Pro options. Although it is perhaps the least visually complex, I've spent more time in this section than anywhere else. The environment is basic but the post-shot analysis is excellent. It is here that you'll conduct the majority of your serious shooting practice, with both the rifles and the shotgun. You can even prepare for shooting licences across a variety of European countries ahead of a hunting trip abroad.

Rifle shooting sims are great fun but are much more suited to European driven hunts

Believable ballistics

The graphics might seem a bit old-school compared with PC games and consoles, and the animation may appear rudimentary on occasion, but it's the ballistics and post-shot analysis that truly matters. In that context, the Gaim system is phenomenal.

The fundamental principle across all the simulations is consistent. On taking a shot, the system captures that moment and integrates the data into the live action. The simulation continues, but each near miss superimposes a ghost image of the animal, bird or clay, along with the location of your shot. This could be a clean miss, or perhaps a hit that failed to connect with the vitals.

If your shot connects correctly, the target drops; otherwise it just keeps moving or flying. It's the ghost image that shows precisely where your shot ended up. These images linger on-screen for several seconds, making it easy to identify your mistakes in

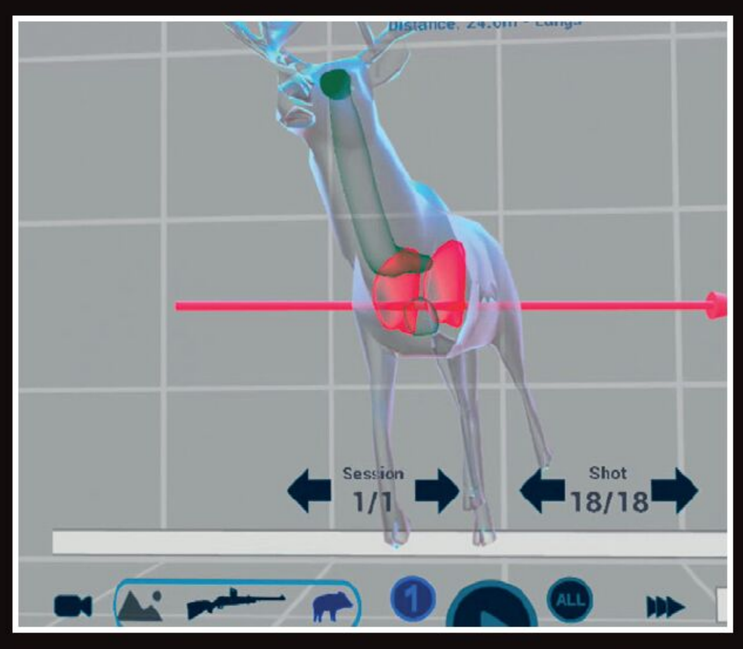
The graphics may be a little basic but once you're 'in the sim' you're completely immersed in the environment

terms of aim or lead, even amid a driven hunt or a hectic clay-busting session.

The Pro Sim scenarios, along with the live-action challenges, take this to an extreme level. The post-shot analysis enables you to examine all your shots individually, dissecting them with real-time playback of your lead (aimpoint) and the trajectory of the shot itself. This trajectory is tracked three-dimensionally through the animal, allowing you to even rotate the quarry for a 360° view of the shot from any perspective.

Within the Pro Sim simulations you have nearly complete control over the environments and targets. You can specify animal numbers, their speeds, the variety of species and their distances. In the Pro Sim Skeet layout you can determine almost every parameter, from the size of clays, their speed, doubles, singles, on report, and which of the eight towers/throwers are active. You can even add guides to the clays to help you identify the correct line.

When you combine all these features with



Complete post-shot analysis is available in all the simulations

the option to shoot from 10 locations on the layout, you can generate any type of clay or angle of shot you desire. It's particularly when using the shotgun that you start to appreciate the accuracy of the ballistics.

The bottom line

So should you rush out and purchase the Gaim VR shooting simulator? If you're a typical UK rifleman, probably not. While the simulator is tremendous fun, on the rifle side it's all about driven hunting. If you journey to Europe to hunt, then it's definitely worth serious consideration. It offers a superb and accurate freehand shooting experience that will certainly enhance your skills when it comes to driven game.

For the UK audience, it's the shotgun simulations that really make sense. Go clay busting with a few friends, and if you ask them why you missed you're likely to get a different answer from each person. With the Gaim system you can see exactly where you went wrong.

You can invest hours practising those tricky fast crossers that you can never quite master in the real world. Yes, it's an expensive system, but if you shoot a lot, the savings on clays and ammo alone would soon add up. The intensive training it provides translates really well into real-world scenarios and can dramatically improve your shooting. Highly recommended! . ■

META QUEST 3

Meta has officially unveiled the Meta Quest 3. This new VR headset is set to launch this autumn, while the existing Meta Quest 2 has seen a US$100 price cut since 4 June.

The forthcoming Meta Quest 3 will start at US$499 and will be fully backwards compatible with your existing library of Meta Quest 2 games, including the Gaim Simulator. The new hardware offers twice the processing power, better resolution, a 40% thinner profile, improved controllers and full-colour mixed-reality passthrough.

This latter feature allows you to view your play area through the headset's cameras and depth sensors. This means that virtual objects and scenes can effectively be superimposed onto the real world around you. This is done in a similar, albeit perhaps less elegant way, than in Apple's Vision Pro, set to launch next year. Currently there's no suggestion that the Gaim simulator will be available on the Apple platform.

At present the Meta Quest 2 is rated as the best VR headset you can buy. It's not the most technically advanced headset, but it is certainly highly user friendly. You don't need a gaming PC to plug it into (although you can) and there are no cables to trip over.

When will the Meta Quest 3 be released? Speaking at the Meta Quest Gaming Showcase, CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that it would launch in the autumn, with further details to be revealed at the company's Connect conference on 27 September. Pre-orders for the Meta Quest 3 are expected to open on the same day.

Price and specs

The Meta Quest 3 will start at £499 for the 128GB version, which is £100 more than the current Meta Quest 2. Details regarding the exact specifications of the Meta Quest 3 were absent from the announcement, but here's what we know so far about the headset's capabilities:

Storage: The base option will have 128GB, with higher storage likely to include 256GB and 512GB models.

Processor: A "next-generation Qualcomm chipset" promises double the graphics performance.

Resolution and refresh rate: Zuckerberg promised the "highest resolution display yet", so expect an improvement over the Meta Quest 2's 1920x1832 display and at least a 120Hz refresh rate, potentially reaching as high as 144Hz in certain applications.

It's anticipated that the Quest 3 will offer a display resolution of either 4,128xx2,208 pixels or 2,064x2,208 pixels per eye. This will take advantage of the greater GPU power of the Quest 3.

Key features

Mixed Reality: Full-colour passthrough with 10 times more pixels, powered by dual 4MP RGB cameras.

Controllers: Improved Touch Plus controllers with haptic feedback – essentially interactive vibration. It seems very unlikely that this feature will be incorporated into the Gaim system, based on the current controller/rifle design.

Hand tracking: Like the Meta Quest 2, this is also included, allowing you to use your hands to interact with virtual objects.

Should You Wait for the Quest 3?

The simple answer is, most definitely! A £100 increase is a small price to pay for what is essentially a doubling in performance in most areas. The extra resolution alone will definitely enhance the environments, and especially the clay simulations.

Price

Quest 2 VR Headset £299 – Gaim software and rifle €440 plus import tax (total approximately €550).

HÄRKILA

COUNTRY LIFE HAS NEVER LOOKED BETTER

THE ESTATE COLLECTION

Embodying the essence of traditional British design and heritage, The Estate Collection blends classic elements with contemporary design. Featuring impeccably tailored styles with practical features, this line is designed to be worn on shoot days, on a walk with the dog or drinking a pint with your best mates. These styles bridge the gap between formal and casual, ensuring you make a refined statement everywhere you go.

FIND THE CLOSEST DEALER AT HARKILA.COM

Venison Sloppy Joe

Inspired by a trip across the pond, **Cai ap Bryn** delivers a mouthwatering take on the humble burger – but this time with a venison twist

Now I know what most of you are thinking: What on earth is a Sloppy Joe? It doesn't sound like a culinary treat at all, but it is in fact a delicious sandwich that's believed to have originated in the US in the 1930s. It comprises a minced meat filling with a barbecue or tomato sauce addition.

Serving Sloppy Joes makes it extremely simple and super easy to feed a lot of people quickly. The filling is just ladled inside a burger bun and often served with coleslaw. It's a cheap meal that's extremely popular at gatherings and sports games all over the US.

I tried my first Sloppy Joe in Texas, from a street vendor at a college football game (American football, not soccer). We went to watch Baylor University play Texas Christian University, with 45,000 in attendance – for a college game! In addition to the experience of the game there was a vast array of street food on hand. I was immediately intrigued by the Sloppy Joe, so I bought one without hesitation. It's exactly as it sounds, but not just sloppy; it's juicy and incredibly delicious.

It is only recently that I thought this would be excellent, recreated using minced venison. I have plenty of prime quality fallow venison left from last season, frozen in 1kg bags, and it needs to be used. Not only is this sandwich a great summertime BBQ addition but it would also be excellent for a shoot snack. Hot venison mince on a winter morning sounds like a terrific pick me up and a great alternative to bacon baps.

"I thought this would be excellent using minced venison"

I'm gradually working through my venison stock, so it is ideal that the fallow buck season has started again and we can start our deer management and restock the freezer. Here in Sussex we have very large numbers of fallow deer that need to be managed correctly. Post-Covid we have seen numbers rise significantly due to the drop in venison prices and demand from consumers. Last season we started to concentrate on managing the increasing numbers, and I know this year that once all the crops are cut and we have full access to the land, we will certainly be kept busy. ■

METHOD

1. In a pan, sauté the onions, garlic and peppers until soft. Then add the venison mince with a stock cube and brown.
2. Add the vinegar and stir. Once done, add the remaining ingredients. Stir, cover and simmer on a low heat for around one hour. If the sauce becomes too thick add a little water to loosen.
3. To serve, toast some buns. I like brioche as they are buttery, delicious and go perfectly well. Some people like their buns dry, but I like to coat them with either butter or a thin layer of mayonnaise.
4. Spoon over your Sloppy Joe and serve with a slice of cheese and coleslaw. The creamy texture of the coleslaw combined with the rich Sloppy Joe filling will leave you wanting more.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 6 - 8
Cooking time 1 hour
Prep time 10 minutes

- Venison mince 500g
- 1tsp vegetable oil
- 1 beef stock cube
- 1 white onion, thinly diced
- ½ bell pepper, thinly diced
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1tsp soy sauce
- 1.5 tbsp of tomato puree
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper
- ½ tsp crushed chilli flakes
- 2 tsp red wine vinegar
- 400ml of passata
- 2 tbsp of barbecue sauce

To serve
- 150g of coleslaw
- Sliced or grated cheese (I like to use Gouda but Monterey Jack is also very good)

Buying a quad bike

In this two-part series, **Alex Hatton** delves in to the world of quad bikes, covering buying tips, what to look for, as well as upgrading to make the perfect stalking addition!

I entered the world of quad bikes in a bit of a hurry a few years ago. I had picked up some red deer stalking, consisting of steep terrain and carcasses coming in at over 100kg. Unlike many grounds, where the truck is parked at the bottom of a hill and the deer are at the top, my deer were in the valleys and troughs and the car at the top, so gravity was no help at all. Did I need a quad? Yes, I sure did!

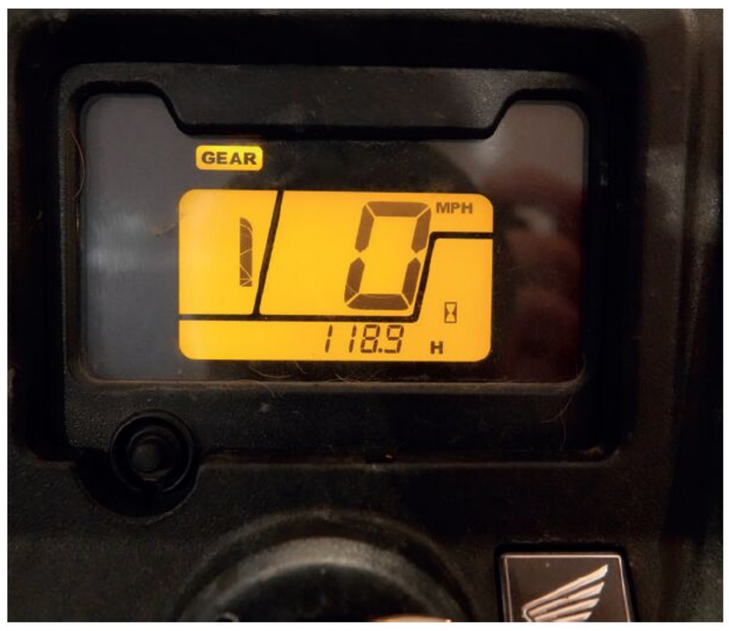
The best place to start this journey is by defining what the purpose of your quad bike will be. Is it for stalking from or just carcass extraction? How you will use it may help you decide whether you need one at all. A lot of my fallow deer can be accessed with my pickup or dragged near to where I can get a pickup, but as the winter progresses this is not possible.

With security in mind, your stalking habits will need to change when you have cash tied up in a quad. They are easily and often stolen, especially since the advent of battery-powered angle grinders. You really need to think about how you will use it and if you can alter your parking habits. Leaving it for hours on the side of a road is just not sensible. Equally, towing a trailer with a quad in it around small windy lanes is not a lot of fun when you meet something coming the other way. If you plan on stalking from it, its just trailer security you need to think about.

There are many good brands out there and everyone has their favourite, whether that's Honda, Yamaha or Suzuki to name a few. Do some research, look at what your landowner/farmer is driving and ask him what he recommends. My own view is that a small quad bike like the Honda TRX420 will do for any UK species and terrain, and more power only means more expense and weight if you get stuck. Even with a model such as this, there a considerable price difference between the most basic FM1, which is a manual shift, and the FE (electronic switch) and FA (automatic). Add on power steering and it all gets much more expensive.

Do not be in a rush to buy – go and try a few quads with the different extras on. Quad bikes seem more readily available these days, so a first stop should definitely be your local dealership, where they often get a lot of second-hand quads coming in. Have a budget in mind and know the difference between an auto and a manual, independent rear suspension or a single swingarm. You can choose accordingly. Some quad bikes

An awkward extraction of three fallow



Check the quad display is working and that hours mirror kilometres

The air filter should be clean

The chassis should be free from rust and do check for the number

such as the Yamaha Grizzly come with a winch – we will go in to this in part two – but most others have a space where one can be retro-fitted. You can change the colour of a quad or replace individual plastic panels, so do not let this be what turns you off a particular bike if it ticks other boxes.

Buying

Facebook is awash with adverts, with many seemingly great deals. If you go down this route you need to make sure that it hasn't been stolen. Things that make me nervous when looking at a Facebook add are pictures not taken at the seller's address, sellers who will not meet at a home address, and those that only take cash. There are some companies selling quads with free delivery and a warranty, but you cannot go and see it first, which does not feel right.

Find out where the chassis number is stamped for the make of quad before you go. Hondas have the year of manufacture at the end of the chassis number, so it's easy to match up with the information the seller is giving you. If it has been used on a farm you may have to scrape back layers of manure from the location, but it will be there. And just make sure it does not look like it has been tampered with and rescribed. As with a car, ask for proof of purchase, a manual that matches the model and year, and at least one of the keys should be original and marked with the maker's name. A quad bike that is road registered and has a logbook should be easy to verify.

For the non-mechanically minded, like me, try and look beyond the shininess (or lack of). As a rule of thumb, the hours should mirror the kilometres, so if it has done 1,000 hours that should equate to 10,000 kilometres. More kilometres than hours can mean it has been driven very fast and hard.

Equally, lots of hours and few kilometres can mean it has spent much of its life idling. You also want to see a fair amount of use for the age of the bike – leaving a quad bike standing around can also cause issues. I would steer clear of a bike whose electronic display does not work as it gives you no idea of how much work it has done.

Search online for what goes wrong with your chosen make and model and how to spot the common issues. When you turn a Honda on, for example, if there are any faults one of the lights flashes in a sequence, like Morse code, that relates to a specific fault.

If you did not know that you would not spot this subtle message. There are also service messages on a Honda display showing when the next is due – all handy things to know before you go to see it.

Check the oil as you would with a car – there will be a small dipstick with an upper line on it. If the oil is clean this could be a warning sign that it's been topped up before you arrived. If its too low, it could have already caused damage to the engine. Check other fluid levels to make sure they are correctly topped up. Look for leaks or seepage. The air filter can usually be found

"If the oil is clean this could be a warning sign that it's been topped up before you arrived"

Extracting a red stag over very lumpy terrain

“Ask if it has a service history or check to see if the manual has been stamped”

A heavy extraction of a red hind

under the seat, which lifts off. It is the easiest part on a quad bike to change, so if it is filthy you have to wonder when the quad was last given any care and attention. Many quad bike owners do their own servicing, but ask if it has a service history or check to see if the manual has been stamped.

Although tyres are easily replaced if they are worn, bear in mind a set of medium-priced fronts cost £100 each and rears £120 each, plus fitting. If you plan on using the quad on wet ground you will want a good amount of tread to assist you.

Drive it and check all the gears work. There should not be any ‘quirks’ to get it into a specific gear, other than reverse, which alters according to the make. It is very important to check the four-wheel drive works. Often something on the display will come on to show you have engaged the four-wheel drive but you should be able to feel the difference when it is engaged.

When you drive it, listen to the sounds it makes. Quads are noisy and you get that exhaust ‘thump’, but the brakes should be quiet and the engine should not sound rough. Standing on the quad, rock it backward and forward and give the steering a good shake and lift. There should be no rattling or movement in the joints. Look underneath and see how rusty the chassis is – there is little that is more corrosive than cow manure, especially if it has never been washed off until this sale.

Trailers

Another expense you need to consider at this early stage is a trailer. Quad bikes are a lot larger than you imagine, so make sure that you know the dimensions of your year/make/model before you go to collect your bike and make sure it will fit. On steep terrain a trailer capable of housing a quad bike may be too heavy for the actual quad to pull safely, so in the next instalment we look at transporting a deer.

A multipurpose trailer to get the quad around

Security

Think about where you will store the quad when it is not in use. Leaving it on a trailer, all ready and waiting for a thief to take is not a good idea. Out of sight is much better, with a ground anchor and some chain and consider a tracker of some description.

Road registration

It is notoriously difficult register a quad bike with the DVLA if you have bought it second hand. Speaking from experience, Honda are very supportive and if you send them your chassis number they will provide you with a letter confirming its import details, which will help to register it. After that you can register it for an agricultural exemption so that it does not need to have an MOT. This process can take some time and require taking the quad to your nearest office for inspection. If this is important to you, then it may be best to start with a quad that is already registered.

In part two we will look at getting the most out of your quad bike to make it the ultimate stalking machine! ■

MORE THAN JUST A DRIVE

Complete your drive all-year-round with a tyre that delivers superior grip and performance on and off-road. With durability and longer life technology, be ahead in the field with the Grabber AT3.

ANYWHERE IS POSSIBLE

GENERAL TIRE

0870 112 9401 | www.generaltire.co.uk

Musso to my ears

Ed Coles takes a look at a South Korean import that's trying to carve out its place on the UK shooting scene

Ssangyong launched the Musso to the pickup market in 2018. It has recently undergone another facelift and has added a long-wheelbase version to the range. The Musso is available in four specs – the entry-level Ex, the Rebel, the higher spec Saracen and the new long-wheelbase Rhino. We're taking a look at the Rhino, so without further ado let's see what the latest offering from South Korea has to offer the country sportsman.

From the front the all-new Musso certainly looks like a real beast with its massive bumper, black grille and bonnet. The ruggedness is paired with sleek modern lights and 17" alloy wheels. From the side, the long-wheelbase Rhino looks a bit low slung at the back and the sidesteps add to the theme. It almost looks like an estate car with the roof cut off. I would prefer it with a canopy, I think. Despite the low profile it still has a reasonable ground clearance of 220mm, which is lower than some competitors, but should be adequate for off-piste adventures.

Looking underneath we can see a few glimpses of the independent front suspension, ladder chassis and new quad framed body – plus a few bits of trim that could potentially get knocked off. At the back the Rhino comes with good old fashioned leaf springs and the running gear looks suitably rugged.

Under the large bonnet is a 2.2 litre four-cylinder diesel engine and, like the exterior, it's been given a bit of a makeover. Ssangyong have found an extra 20hp and an extra bit of torque. The South Korean power plant now gallops out 202 horses and produces 441Nm of torque. The Musso still boasts a towing weight of 3.5 tonnes, while being able to carry a tonne at the same time, so on paper it's a proper workhorse.

The Rhino has a six-speed automatic gearbox connecting the engine to the 4x4 running gear, which has three settings. Drivers can select from the usual two-high, four-high and low settings, plus a further three drive settings – Power, Eco and Winter. The Rhino has a top speed of 113mph.

Opening the tailgate, the workhorse end looks pretty impressive and there's room for more than 30 bags of wheat with space to spare. From a keeper's perspective, it's certainly enough room for a full pallet and tool boxes. It's quite refreshing being able to climb up into the back and not need a step ladder, which makes loading the Musso a simple pleasure for my little legs, although the sides are industry-standard height.

The Rhino is plush and comfortable inside. An understated dash features high-tech instruments and the fancy infotainment system. All the usual gadgetry is present and correct – navigation, DAB, Apple and Android play, reverse cameras... you know the routine. Most importantly, the child seat is relatively faff-free to fit and the big doors make life very easy. The Musso has

Uttings .co.uk

for the *Great* Outdoors

24 MONTHS FINANCE APR 17.9%
Now available on all orders over £500
INSTANT DECISION | NO PAPERWORK
Finance example based on **24mths**, 15.9% APR: Cash Price £1699, 10% Deposit £169.90, Monthly Payment £75.28, Total Amount Payable £1976.60

36 MONTHS FINANCE APR 21.9%
Now available on all orders over £500
INSTANT DECISION | NO PAPERWORK
Finance example based on **36mths**, 19.5% APR: Cash Price £1699, 10% Deposit £169.90, Monthly Payment £56.76, Total Amount Payable £2213.42

DEKO — We are pleased to offer **24 & 36 Months Finance** on all orders over £500. Apply and sign online to get an instant decision in just a few minutes with no paperwork whatsoever. See website for details.

NEXT DAY DELIVERY

Order before 2pm Monday to Friday & get your order **NEXT DAY** (Saturday & Sunday extra).

PRICE MATCH

Find it cheaper at our competitors & we will endeavour to **PRICE MATCH**

NEW | THERMAL TECHNOLOGY | PULSAR IMAGE.QUALITY

XG35

AXION 2 XG35

Better quality, better price

- Pocked-sized and lightweight monocular
- Enhanced image processing algorithms
- High-quality rendering of both target objects and background
- Designed for constant and often hardcore use
- Reinforced magnesium alloy housing
- Up to 7 hours of continuous operation

XG35LRF

Wifi-compatible STREAM VISION 2

8 COLOUR PALETTES

The new Axion 2 XG35 and its LRF counterpart, the Axion 2 LRF XG35 have a lot more to offer than their XQ35 predecessors, including a bigger sensor, wider field of view, larger viewfinder, and greater detection range.

Axion 2 XG35 - 640x480.....**£2339.95**
Axion 2 XG35 LRF - 640x480.....**£2629.95**

NEW | PULSAR IMAGE.QUALITY

Telos XP50

TELOS XP50 / TELOS XP50 LRF

Thermal Imaging Monocular

- **Upgradable device**
- Highly sensitive thermal sensor
- Advanced Pulsar Image boost technology
- Objective ring zoom control
- Precise laser ranging up to 1000m (LRF Model)
- Built for toughest conditions
- Replaceable battery pack
- Ergonomic, nonslip rubber-coated housing
- Customizable user interface

Telos XP50 LRF

THERMAL TECHNOLOGY

Wifi-compatible STREAM VISION 2

The first upgradeable device from Pulsar that has been designed for timeless use.

Users will be free to change to more powerful optics, add a higher resolution sensor or display and more efficient and functional electronic parts. They will even be able to equip the device with a laser rangefinder and additional optical channels, so their product will always be relevant whilst remaining cost effective.

Telos XP50 - 640x480.....**£3099.95**
Telos XP50 LRF - 640x480.....**£3399.95**

NEW | THERMAL TECHNOLOGY | PULSAR IMAGE.QUALITY

MERGER LRF XP50

Thermal Imaging Laser Rangfinding Binocular

- Built-in precision laser rangefinder
- 1800m detection range
- 1000m ± 1m range
- 8 colour palettes
- Waterproof IPX7
- 2.5-20x Mag. (x8 zoom)
- 16GB internal storage
- Stream Vision 2 compatible
- Classic daytime binocular aesthetics
- Wide operating temperatures of -25 to +50°C
- Built-in video & still image recorder

Wifi-compatible STREAM VISION 2

The new Merger LRF XP50 thermal imaging binoculars feature a 640x480, 17 µm NETD <25 mK thermal sensor, fast aperture F50/1.0 germanium lens, HD AMOLED display, advanced image processing algorithms, built-in still image and video recorder, stream vision 2 compatibility, and much more... All in a classic daytime binocular design.

Merger LRF XP50.....**£4649.95**

NEW | 20.0x | PULSAR IMAGE.QUALITY

MERGER LRF XL50

Thermal Imaging Laser Rangfinding Binocular

- New HD 1024x768 @ 12µm thermal sensor
- Extra-long detection range
- Wide 14 degrees FOV
- High image detail across the whole magnification range 2.5-20x
- Combined dual battery system
- Classic binocular design
- Comfortable viewing experience with both eyes
- Precise laser rangefinder with 1000m measuring distance

THERMAL TECHNOLOGY

Wifi-compatible STREAM VISION 2

The new Merger LRF XL50 thermal imaging binoculars offer a next level thermal imaging experience. The image generated by new 1024x768 thermal sensor features high definition and rich detail. It is ideal for uncompromised trophy identification - silhouettes, anatomical features, and behavioural peculiarities of observed animals are incredibly distinguishable.

Merger LRF XL50 (1024x768).....**£5899.95**

HIKMICRO LYNX THERMAL IMAGERS

See the World in a New Way

Intelligent awareness - Any moment, any condition

WE ARE PROUD TO BE A HIKMICRO AUTHORIZED DEALER

HIK Micro Lynx 6mm	HIK Micro Lynx PRO 10mm	HIK Micro Lynx PRO 15mm	HIK Micro Lynx PRO 19mm	HIK Micro Lynx PRO 25mm
(160x120) Thermal Imager	(256x192) Thermal Imager	(384x288) Thermal Imager	(384x288) 35mK Thermal Imager	(256x192) Thermal Imager
£369	**£579**	**£949**	**£1099**	**£1299**

HIKMICRO FALCON

See the World in a New Way

WE ARE PROUD TO BE A HIKMICRO AUTHORIZED DEALER

Thermal Monoculars

As used by the BBC

Advanced thermal monocular series - Boasting an industry leading SUB 20 NETD sensor with a high quality F1.0 lens that delivers the highest performance thermal sensor available on the commercial market. Exceptionally high quality image even in the harshest of weather conditions.

- Extremely high thermal sensitivity NETD<20mk
- SIGHT app connection • Up to 2600m detection range
- HD thermal sensor - up to 640x512 @12µm • Super large aperture
- Image Pro, enhanced image optimization

	RRP	NOW
Falcon 35mm - 384x288	£1699	**£1599**
Falcon 50mm - 640x512	£2599	**£2449**

HIKMICRO GRYPHON

See the World in a New Way

Thermal & Visible Fusion Imager Monoculars

The Worlds First Thermal & Optical Bi-Spectrum, FUSION Monocular! FUSION Technology uses a thermal sensor alongside a conventional optical camera to deliver a super-detailed thermal image!. Can also be used as a regular thermal monocular with the choice of 4 colour palettes or a highly detailed daylight & night vision optical camera.

NEW LOWER PRICES!

GRYPHON

		RRP	NOW
25mm	384x288	£1899.99	**£1299**
35mm	384x288	£1999.99	**£1499**
35mm PRO	640x512	£2399.99	**£2149**

GRYPHON LRF

- Up to 600m LRF range

		RRP	NOW
25mm	384x288	£1999.99	**£1499**
35mm	384x288	£2199.99	**£1725**
35mm PRO	640x512	£2599.99	**£2299**
50mm PRO	640x512	£2799.99	**£2599**

WE ARE PROUD TO BE A HIKMICRO AUTHORIZED DEALER

HIKMICRO RAPTOR 50mm

See the World in a New Way

WE ARE PROUD TO BE A HIKMICRO AUTHORIZED DEALER

LRF Thermal Imaging Binoculars

The All-In-One Solution

In combination with thermal camera, digital day & night camera, and laser rangefinder, the ultimate innovative RAPTOR series binocular provides unprecedented observation capability in thermal or true living color, up close or from a distance, during day or night in adverse weather to break through your visual limitation.

Raptor 50mm 384x299 LRF..... **£3099.99**
Raptor PRO 50mm 640x512 LRF.....**£3999.99**

LEUPOLD BX-T HD

TACTICAL BINOCULARS

The BX®-T HD Tactical binocular is purpose-built to give you the tactical advantage needed to succeed in any situation. Its ultra low-light performance combined with its extreme climate tested body and MIL-L reticle make it ideal for field applications.

10x42 - **ONLY £649**

Mil-L Reticle

- High-definition clarity
- Lightweightand comfortable
- Easy to clean
- Waterproof and fogproof
- Tactical reticle - built-in Mil-L reticle

Bushnell

RANGEFINDING BINOCULARS

FUSION X RF

Superb ranging accuracy and advanced optics combine to make the best of both worlds in Bushnell's Fusion X 10X42mm Ranging Binocular. Bushnells HDOS - High-Definition Optical System - provides optimum viewing clarity, while the one-of-a-kind ActivSync™ Display means you'll never again have trouble reading the ranging readout. Together, they make the Fusion X the one tool every hunter needs.

10x42...RRP £809.99 **NOW ONLY £699**

HAWKE FRONTIER LRF

RANGEFINDER BINOCULARS

The Hawke Frontier LRF binoculars use high light transmission optics and a red coloured OLED display to make the view to your target clearer than ever before. Frontier LRF Binoculars are designed to deliver highly accurate distance measurements with the press of a button. They are ergonomically constructed to fit comfortably in your hand with easy access to both of the control buttons.

- MOLLE system adjustable
- Binocular Harness Pack
- Padded Neck Strap
- Stay-on lens covers • CR2 battery

	RRP	NOW
Frontier LRF 8x42	£999	**£949**
Frontier LRF 10x42	£1099	**£1049**

GPO RANGEGUIDE 2800

GERMAN · PRECISION · OPTICS

Representing the pinnacle of design, function and performance the Rangeguide 2800 offers superior light transmission, edge-to-edge sharpness, close focus and brilliant color reproduction. GPO have integrated a Laser Rangefinder Engine with a range of 2800 meters, angle reading as well as temperature measurement.

- Slope Correction
- Temperature Sensor
- Hyperscan Mode with 4 Measurements per second
- Dual TargetSeeker Technology
- Distance Measurement upto 2,800m

RANGEGUIDE 2800 32mm		RANGEGUIDE 2800 50mm	
8x32 LRF	**£979**	8x50 LRF	**£1399**
10x32 LRF	**£999**	10x50 LRF	**£1419**

VORTEX FURY® HD 5000 / FURY® HD 5000 AB

High quality optics and long-distance ranging capability come together in Vortes's all-new Fury HD 10x42 Laser Rangefinding Binoculars. Convenience, speed, efficiency, and valuable dual-purpose functionality - all the advantages of a high-definition binocular perfectly paired with an angle compensated rangefinder.

FURY® HD 5000

- Laser rangefinding binoculars
- Laser rangefinder maximum range 5000yds
- Horizontal Component Distance (HCD)
- Line of Sight (LOS) mode displays actual line of sight distance to the target.

10x42 HD 5000 RRP £1470 **£1349**

FURY® HD 5000 AB

- Laser rangefinding binoculars
- Laser rangefinder maximum range 5000m
- Horizontal Component Distance (HCD)
- Scan This feature
- Ballistic Mode

10x42 HD 5000 AB RRP £1829 **£1699**

VIP WARRANTY

IN-DISPLAY WIND /DROP SOLUTIONS

SWAROVSKI OPTIK EL RANGE TA

(Tracking Assistant Rangefinding Binoculars)

FREE Swarovski cleaning set worth £51 with every bundle

COMBINING STATE-OF-THE-ART OPTICS WITH PRECISE MEASURING FUNCTIONS

The EL Range is the latest demonstration of the Innovativeness that lies at the heart of Swarovski Optik. It combines Swarovision technology with precise range measurement, and an integrated Tracking Assistant to make it much easier to track your prey by guiding you to where you fired your last shot

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£3130	**£2975**
10x42	£3210	**£3050**

Order Online www.uttings.com

Customer Services: 01603 619811
Mon-Fri: 9.30am-12.30pm • 2pm-4pm

Postal Address:
PO Box 672, Norwich, NR3 2ZR

PARD NIGHT VISION NV007A

NV REAR ADD ON SCOPE

High-definition digital night vision. Let the night become day.
Digital imaging, clear colourful picture, long distance, night fill light mode, rabbit can be visible within 200m.

£332.99 - 12mm 1x or 16mm 4x
NV007A Adaptor **£19.99**

- High Definition OLED 1024X768 Screen
- Wifi Connectivity / Smart Phone Control
- E-Compass / 3D Giroscope
- Hd Video Recording Function
- High Resolution Photos
- Upto 128Gb External Storage

PARD NIGHT VISION NV007SP

NEW

NV REAR ADD ON..£499.99
Back mounted digital night vision clip-on with high sensitivity 2560x1440 CMOS sensor and advanced technology. Converts a standard Day Scope into a high-performance night vision system.

NV007SP LRF

NV REAR ADD ON WITH LRF.. £599.99
As the NV007SP with the addition of a built-in laser range finder that will instantly show reading through the device, negating the need for a separate unit.

- Direction adjustable IR light
- 1200yds Laser Rangefinder (LRF model)
- Sensor resolution(px): 2560x1440
- 2K CMOS sensor
- Frame rate: 30fps
- Lens: 22.5mm
- IR distance: 350m
- Operating time: 8h
- IP Rating: IP67

SIGHTMARK WRAITH 4K MAX

3-24x50 DIGITAL DAY / NIGHT SCOPE

STAR BUY!

LESS THAN 1/2 PRICE SAVE £620!

A harmony of technology, power & precision. In low-light conditions, the Wraith 4K Max utilizes an enhanced ultra-high definition 4000x3000 digital CMOS sensor to detect objects up to 300 yards away, and in daylight, this detection range is even further. The Wraith 4K's sharp 1280x720 display resolution delivers crystal-clear imaging while 3-24x digital magnification gives users the versatility to adjust as needed.

3-24x50.....RRP £1049
NOW ONLY £429

- 10 reticle option
- Night vision mode
- Daytime color mode
- 300yd detection range
- Built-in video recording
- Crystal-clear 4K digital imaging
- Enhanced ultra-high definition 4000x3000 sensor

PARD NIGHT VISION DS35 GEN 2

DIGITAL NIGHT VISION SCOPE

NEW

Traditional day scope exterior with an ultra-clear 2k display for a truly immersive viewing experience in all weather conditions with contrasted images. Operates during daytime like a traditional glass optical scope and at night with night vision capability for 24-hour operation. Fits on standard 30mm ring mounts

DS35 Digital Night Vision Scope 50mm or 70mm Lens 850nm IR.....£749.99
DS35 LRF Digital Night Vision Scope 50mm or 70mm Lens 850nm IR with LRF..£849.99

- Pixel Size: 2.9um
- Sensitivity: 0.001 lux
- 30 Frames per second
- 1000m LRF (DS35 LRF)
- Resolution: 2560x1440
- Continuous digital zoom: 4-8x/5.6x-11.2x
- Objective Lens: 50mm F2.4/ 70mm F2.4
- Optical Magnification: 4x/5.6x
- 2x Digital zoom

HIKMICRO CHEETAH

Nightvision Riflescopes

High-performance dedicated digital day & night riflescope. Delivers a high-resolution full-colour image in the day and gives you a detailed black and white image at night. Offers 400m of detection distance with the built-in IR illuminator. The 1000m laser range finder, on the LRF model, allows you to accurately judge distances while shooting in the day or at night.

CHEETAH
- Detection Distance: 400m
- Sensor resolution: 2560x1440px
- Full colour in the day • Black & white at night

RRP £729.99 **NOW £619.99**

CHEETAH LRF
- Full colour in the day • Black & white at night
- Detection Distance: 400m • Sensor: 2560x1440px
- 1000m laser range finder

RRP £999.99 **NOW £719.99**

HIKMICRO ALPEX

Day & Night Riflescope

Alpex uses the same 30mm tube chassis as the Stellar thermal scope but with HIK's advanced night vision technology.

- Built-in Wi-Fi module • Built-in video recorder
- Recoil-activated video recording
- Picture in picture • Charging via USB
- Switching surveillance modes
- Dustproof & waterproof
- Impact protection • Colour nightvision

RRP £859.99 **£799**

PULSAR DIGITAL COLOUR NIGHTVISION

DIGEX C50 DIGITAL COLOUR VIGHVISION SCOPES

Digex C50
550m night viewing range
3.5-14x - (4x Digital Zoom).....£1099.95

Digex C50 with Digex X-850s Illuminator
550m night viewing range
3.5-14x - (4x Digital Zoom).....£1239.95

Full-colour imaging from sunset till dusk in the Colour Twilight mode
In deep twilight, when the human eye is already unable to discern details of observed objects, the Digex C50 displays a bright image with correct colour rendering, prolonging hunting time into the night.

ATN X-SIGHT 5 SMART ULTRA HD / X-SIGHT 5 SMART ULTRA HD LRF

DAY & NIGHT RIFLESCOPES

NEW

Upgraded high-performance sensor for ultra-high definition with 4 million more pixels for accurate tones, vivid colors and true-to-life visual sensation. The advanced Ballistic calculator helps you hit your target each time. Experience better day / nighttime visual quality and capability along with ambient temperature compensation.

- Ultra 4k sensor
- One shot zero
- Dual stream video
- Smooth zoom
- Day/night mode
- Ballistic calculator
- E-compass • Wifi
- 3d gyroscope
- Record video in real 4k
- Custom reticles

5 GEN • 4K+ SENSOR

X-Sight-5
Ultra HD 4K+ resolution with a ATN Quad Core
X-Sight 5 3-15x.....£859
X-Sight 5 2-25x.....£949

X-Sight-5 LRF
Ultra HD 4K+ resolution with a ATN Quad Core
X-Sight 5 3-15x LRF....£1149
X-Sight 5 2-25x LRF....£1249

Multiple Patterns & Color Options, User Custom reticles

STRIKE EAGLE®

A true 1x on the low end adapts to a wide range of scenarios, letting shooters engage targets from point-blank to extended ranges. In any application, the Strike Eagle® ensures accurate, reliable, and repeatable performance - every time you squeeze the trigger.

UNLIMITED LIFETIME WARRANTY

1-6x24	AR-BDC	£399
1-8x24	AR-BDC	£499
3-18x44	FFP EBC-7 MOA	£789
3-18x44	FFP EBC-7 MRAD	£789
5-25x56	EBR-7C MOA	£849
5-25x56	EBR-7C MRAD	£849

VENOM®

Take the first step into long-range shooting with an optic that helps you go the distance with a ton of shooter-friendly features. Featuring a 5x mag range built into a 34mm tube for a massive amount of turret travel, the Venom® also includes Vortex's RevStop™ Zero System for a fast, easy, reliable return to zero.

UNLIMITED LIFETIME WARRANTY

5-25-56 FFP 34mm EBC-7C (MRAD)	£579
5-25-56 FFP 34mm EBC-7C (MOA)	£579

EBC-7C (MRAD) EBC-7C (MOA)

LEUPOLD VX-FREEDOM

LEGENDARY LEUPOLD DEPENDABILITY

A new generation of shooters deserves a new riflescope. With the VX®-Freedom™ you get best-in-class optics and unbeatable accuracy. It's also everything you expect from a Leupold: designed, machined, and assembled in our Oregon factory, tested to the same ruggedness standards as our top-tier riflescopes, and guaranteed for a lifetime of performance.

VX-FREEDOM
1.5-4x20.....£399
2-7x33.....£399
3-9x33.....£529
3-9x40.....£399
3-9x50.....from £469
4-12x40 SF.....£649
6-18x40 SF.....£649

Aggressively Knurled, 1/4-MOA Finger Click Adjustments

LEUPOLD VX®-3HD

LEGENDARY PERFORMANCE. HD CLARITY.

The VX®-3HD delivers legendary performance and HD clarity in an incredibly tough yet lightweight package. And with its one-revolution CDS® ZeroLock® dial, you have a customizable ballistics solution at your fingertips. Simply range your target, turn the dial to that number, and aim dead on.

VX-3HD - 30mm
1.5-5x20 IR 30mm - CDS-ZL....£899
3.5-10x40 IR 30mm - CDS-ZL....£899
4.5-14x40 30mm - CDS-Z.....£949
3.5-10x50 IR 30mm - CDS-ZL....£999
4.5-14x50 IR 30mm - CDS-ZL....£1149

VX-3HD - 1 Inch
2.5-8x36 1 Inch - CDS-ZL.....£649

KAHLES HELIA RIFLESCOPES

The HELIA series impresses with uncompromising focus on the real essentials: functionality, reliability, handling and aesthetics. The perfect tool for hunting.

Powerful optics system • with exceptional edge sharpness • Day/night illuminated reticle with • intelligent automatic switch-off

1-5x24i	Reticle 4DH	£1410
1.6-8x42i	Reticle 4-Dot	£1450
2-10x50i	Reticle 4-Dot	£1490
2.4-12x56i	Reticle 4-Dot	£1580
2.4-12x56i	Reticle G4B	£1580
3.5-18x50i	Reticle 4-Dot	£1700
3.5-18x50i	Reticle G4B	£1700

LEICA AMPLUS 6

Performance to rely on...

The well-balanced, high-quality optics feature an extremely crisp illuminated dot, 6x zoom, a large exit pupil and a wide field of view. The rugged design makes the Leica Amplus 6 ideal for uncompromising use in any terrain - even in the most adverse weather conditions.

	RRP	NOW
Amplus 6 1-6x24i	£1260	£1129
Amplus 6 3-18x44i BDC	£1450	£1299
Amplus 6 2.5-15x50i	£1440	£1289
Amplus 6 2.5-15x50i BDC	£1530	£1369
Amplus 6 2.5-15x56i	£1530	£1369
Amplus 6 2.5-15x56i BDC	£1630	£1459

ELEMENT OPTICS THEOS

Created through a three year process of meticulous planning, careful crafting and brutal testing with a completely re-engineered turret system, digital illumination control and a magnification range of 6-36x. New features on this model include a revolution flag that provides a visual indication when you pass a full turn, a new zero-stop mechanism that requires no tools, a digital illumination that clears up space around the parallax knob, and an aperture ring that manipulates the depth of field when needed.

- Capped Windage with Thread Protection Ring • Tool-free Resettable Turrets
- 34mm Main Body Tube • Exposed Elevation (12 MRAD per Revolution)
- Side Parallax: 10m-Infinity • Removable Magnification Throw Lever
- Illuminated, First Focal Plane Reticle • Aircraft Grade Aluminium
- Advanced Fully Multi-Coated Lenses with Anti-Fouling Layer
- Hard Mechanical Zero-Stop & Revolution Indicator Flag
- Waterproof, Fogproof, Shockproof & Nitrogen Purged
- Sunshade, Aperture Ring & Neoprene Cover included

6-36x56 FFP - APR-2D MRAD..... **£2470.99**

APR-2D MRAD

SWAROVSKI OPTIK Z8i

ULTIMATE PERFORMANCE. PERFECTLY DESIGNED.

The Z8i marks a milestone by SWAROVSKI OPTIK. This rifle scope's 8x zoom and outstanding optics ensure that you couldn't be better equipped for every type of hunting. The slim 30-mm (1.2 in) central tube also blends seamlessly with any hunting firearm. In addition, the ballistic turret flex and FLEXCHANGE, the first switchable reticle, provide you with maximum versatility in every hunting situation.

	RRP	NOW
Z8i 0.75-6x20 IR	£2320	£2205
Z8i 0.75-6x20 IR Flexchange	£2560	£2435
Z8i 1-8x24 IR	£2320	£2205
Z8i 1-8x24 IR Flexchange	£2560	£2435
Z8i 1.7-13x42 IR	£2710	£2575
Z8i 1.7-13x42 IR Flexchange	£2970	£2820
Z8i 2-16x50 IR	£2830	£2689
Z8i 2.3-18x56 IR	£3050	£2897
Z8i 3.5-28x50 IR	£3160	£3000
Ballistic Turret for Z8i	£259	£229

E+OE Prices subject to change. Goods subject to availability

OVER 15 MILLION PAGE VIEWS OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS

OVER 12,000 PRODUCTS ONLINE

WE NOW TAKE PAYPAL PayPal

STAR BUY!

HÄRKILA
SANDHEM FT WAISTCOAT

- Micro suede and corduroy details and pipings
- 2-way zip center front
- Zipped side pockets
- Inner pocket
- Leather zip puller with logo rivet
- Windresistant lining

	RRP	NOW ONLY
Dark Navy	£129.99	**£99**
Willow Green	£129.99	**£99**

NEW

HÄRKILA
SANDHEM PRO WAISTCOAT

A new take on one of the most classic waistcoats within shooting and field sports. The waistcoat is made from wool which gives you outstanding temperature regulating abilities while still preserving the classic look of the Sandhem product family. The wind resistant lining has a classic check pattern.

Sandhem Pro Waistcoat Men's
Dark Navy.....**£179.99**
Forest Green.....**£179.99**

Sandhem Pro Waistcoat Ladies
Dark Copper.....**£179.99**
Forest Green.....**£179.99**

NEW

HÄRKILA
SANDHEM 200 PULLOVER

The Sandhem 200 Fleece Pullover is a soft fleece pullover with a high collar, which is perfect as a warm midlayer or an outer layer in brisk weather.

- Insulating, breathable & moisture wicking
- Classic leather zip puller with logo rivet
- Soft comfortable fleece
- High neck with 1/2 zip
- Subtle logo's
- Full stretch

Dark Navy.....**£149.99**
Willow Green.....**£149.99**

NEW

HÄRKILA
SANDHEM PRO HSP PULLOVER

The Sandhem Pro HSP Pullover is a new take on the classic pullover. The fleece fabric is exchanged for wool and we have added a windproof membrane making it even more versatile.

- Micro suede and corduroy details
- 1/2 zip center front
- Leather zip puller with logo rivit
- Full stretch
- Classic fit

Forest Green.....**£199.99**

HÄRKILA
STEINN FLEECE JACKET

- Brushed fleece
- Zipped chest pocket
- Zipped side pockets
- Easy open string pullers
- 2-way/½ zip center front
- Drawstring in waist/at hem

	RRP	NOW
Light Willow Green	£109.99	**£79.99**
Shadow Brown	£109.99	**£79.99**

NEW

HÄRKILA
AILSA QUILT JACKET

The Ailsa quilt jacket is a classic shooting jacket made specifically with women shooters in mind. A stylish appearance as well as functional features that make sure that you are well equipped for your upcoming shoot. Reinforcements on the shoulders secure solid contact with the buttstock of your shotgun and the integrated stretch panels help you to swing through the target without restricting your movement.

Willow Green.....**£239.99**

NEW

HÄRKILA
ORTON TECH HWS JACKET

Classic fit hunting jacket made from a soft and stretchy fabric ehich is fitted with a HWS® waterproof membrane. It has a practical packable hood. Features are handwarmer pockets, large front pockets with quick-load straps, Napoleon pocket and an inside pocket. Adjustable with drawstrings at the waist and lower hem.

Willow Green - **£299.99**

NEW

HÄRKILA
ORTON OVERTROUSERS

- Welt opening to enter pockets in trousers underneath
- Adjustment system at bottom hem
- Packable into external pocket bag, possible to carry on belt
- Packable into external pocket bag, possible to carry on belt

Willow Green - **£169.99**

HÄRKILA
RETRIEVE

The Retrieve range is a comprehensive series of traditional hunting garments with a modern twist for the quality minded dog keeper or bird shooter.

Jacket - Warm Olive	**£469.99**
Trousers - Warm Olive	**£299.99**
Light Trousers - Dark Warm Olive	**£189.99**
HSP Pullover - Dark Warm Olive	**£169.99**
Shirt - Dark Olive Green Check	**£69.99**
Shirt - Burgundy Check	**£69.99**
Tie - Olive	**£32.99**
Tie - Burgundy	**£32.99**
Flat Cap - Warm Olive	**£64.99**
HWS Gloves - Dark Warm Olive	**£74.99**

HÄRKILA
PRO HUNTER MOVE

The Pro Hunter Move 2.0 GTX jacket is made from a strong AirTechTM material, a windproof and exceptionally durable canvas fabric.

The trousers have easy-access top pockets and thigh pockets with a cartridge holder on the right side. The zips, including the ventilation zips behind the thigh pockets, are waterproof.

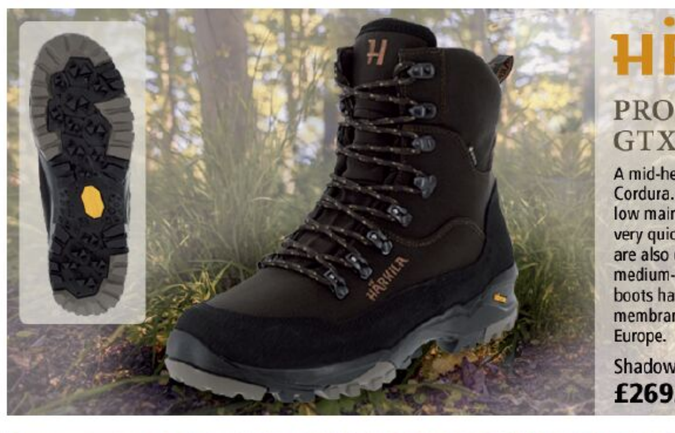
Pro Hunter Move 2.0 GTX Jacket..**£549.99**
Pro Hunter Move Trousers.....**£399.99**
Pro Hunter GTX Gloves.....**£139.99**

HÄRKILA
PRO HUNTER ENDURE

Created for traditional hunts where functionality and a classic image are important.

- GORE-TEX 2-layer lining
- Available in Willow Green

Jacket.....**£599.99**
Trousers.....**£399.99**
Breeks.....**£279.99**



NEW

HÄRKILA
PRO HUNTER LIGHT MID GTX WALKING BOOTS

A mid-height boot in extremely hardwearing Cordura. This has the advantage over leather of low maintenance, as well as being lightweight, very quick drying and highly breathable. The boots are also outstandingly comfortable and have a medium-stiff sole that provides good support. The boots have a field-tested, waterproof GORE-TEX membrane and are designed and manufactured in Europe.

Shadow Brown
£269.99

NEW

HÄRKILA
PRO HUNTER LIGHT HI GTX WALKING BOOTS

Featuring a Vibram aftersky outsole, this boot was engineered to provide high levels of stability and comfort on unpredictable terrain. The cordura fabric makes them durable and resistant to any wear and tear. Combined with the breathable and waterproof gore-tex membrane, these boots are built to keep your feet dry and protected on even the wettest and muddiest terrains.

Shadow Brown
£329.99

HÄRKILA
SAXNÄS GTX WALKING BOOTS

Made from superb high-quality leather making them ideal for trekking and hunting in the mountains and on other rough terrain. Despite their leather construction, they are surprisingly light, and exceptionally comfortable, with a stiff sole to provide the support you need when the ground conditions are uneven. The boots have a field-tested, waterproof GORE-TEX membrane.

Available in Willow Green or Mid Brown

Saxnäs GTX.....**£279.99**
Saxnäs Lady GTX.....**£279.99**

HÄRKILA
FOREST HUNTER GTX WALKING BOOTS

Light weight boots despite their leather construction. In designing these boots, Harkila created extra space around the toes. Not only does this provide excellent comfort, but it is also useful in cold weather, because it gives you more room to move your toes, even when wearing thick, insulating socks.

Available in Willow Green or Dark Brown

Forest Hunter Mid GTX.....**£279.99**
Forest Hunter Hi GTX.....**£319.99**

HÄRKILA
ATAMMIK WALKING BOOTS

Attack any environment with confidence wearing the Harkila Atammik GTX . These waterproof boots are designed to take on the harshest of environments and they deliver this by having some great features. Wear on the shoot or out for a hike - they won't let you down.
Constructed from durable Cordura, these boots have an advantage over leather boots in a way that they're very quick-drying and breathable.

Dark Brown
£279.99

HÄRKILA
REIDMAR MID 2.0 GTX WALKING BOOTS (UTURN SYSTEM)

These boots weigh only around 640 g per boot, despite their leather construction. They have a medium-length, 8"/20 cm shaft and a standard-width last. The boots feature UTURN wire closures, and are secured with a couple of turns on the button, and loosened by turning the button in the opposite direction.

Dark Brown or Willow Green
£299.99

BERETTA NEW

STRETCH TECH HALF ZIP FLEECE

Thanks to its elasticity, the fleece improves physical performance by optimizing the dissipation of body heat generated during activity. The fleece can be used as a thermal layer in combination with an outer shell.

- Central YKK half-zip & front pocket with YKK zip
- Elasticated bottom
- Beretta logo printed on the back
- Regular fit

Green Moss.....**£94.95**
Black.....**£94.95**

BERETTA NEW

ABISKO HALF ZIP FLEECE

Abisko Half Zip men's thermal fleece with knitted external and internal fleece can be used as a thermal layer in combination with an outer shell.

- Central YKK half-zip
- Front pocket with YKK zip
- Elasticated bottom
- Beretta logo printed on the back
- Regular fit

Brown Bark.....**£109.95**
Green Moss.....**£109.95**
Ebony.....**£109.95**

BERETTA NEW

CERAMIC FACE FLEECE

Men's hunting thermal Ceramic Face fleece made of lightweight grid fleece with ceramic print on the outside of the fabric.The lightweight grid fleece ensures optimal thermoregulation, breathability and quick drying. While the ceramic print improves the durability of the fleece. Can be used as a thermal layer in combination with an outer shell.

Ebony.....**£114.95**
Green Moss.....**£114.95**
Brwon Bark.....**£114.95**
Black.....**£114.95**

BERETTA NEW

ALPSTEN FLEECE

Alpsten men's thermal fleece made of lightweight micro-grid construction fleece. The lightweight micro-grid fleece ensures optimal thermoregulation, breathability and quick drying. The fleece can be used as a thermal layer in combination with an outer shell.

Green Moss.....**£134.95**
Brown Bark.....**£134.95**
Black.....**£134.95**
Ebony.....**£134.95**

BERETTA NEW

SMARTECH EVO FLEECE JACKET

Polartec® Smartech EVO men's thermal fleece made of Polartec® Power Stretch® fabric. Polartec® Power Stretch® ensures optimal thermoregulation, breathability and quick drying. Side panels with ceramic print improve the durability of the fleece. Smartech EVO fleece can be used as a thermal layer in combination with an outer layer.

Green Moss.....**£149.95**
Brown Bark.....**£149.95**
Ebony.....**£149.95**

BERETTA

ROE JACKET

Men's hunting thermal Jacket made of Polartec® Thermal Pro® fabric with thermal padding and laser perforation for improved breathability. Front padding increases the thermal capacity of the jacket. The laser perforation improves guarantees excellent thermoregulation. Can be used as a thermal layer in combination with an outer layer.

Green Moss.....**£189.95**
Brown Bark.....**£189.95**
Ebony.....**£189.95**

BERETTA

CHAMOIS 3L JACKET

Men's lightweight Chamois 3L hunting jacket suitable for outdoor activities. Waterproof, breathable and can be folded into the pocket for easy transport. Made with BWB - Beretta's Waterproof Breathable membrane with 3L construction. The face material is treated with DWR - Durable Water Repellent finishing. The sleeve construction offers freedom of movement.

Moss Green.....**£134.95**
Ebony.....**£134.95**

BERETTA

TRI-ACTIVE EVO

Men's hunting Tri-Active EVO jacket and trousers are designed for stalking or hide hunting in outdoor environments where you need to be completely silent and stay dry. Waterproof and breathable, they are made with stretch panels for maximum freedom of movement.

(Mens and Womens versions available)

Jacket - Moss Green.....**£274.95**
Trousers - Moss & Brown Bark.....**£209.95**

BERETTA

UNIFORM PRO EVO

Uniform Pro EVO is the line of extremely light and stretch bags and gun cases, specifically designed for the shooting range. Made of 100% polyester, they resist water, tears and scratches. In addition, the special Beretta lining absorbs moisture and oil excess from the shotgun barrels.

		RRP	NOW
Soft Gun Case - 138cm	Blue or Black	£64.95	£59.99
Double Soft Gun Case	Blue or Black	£89.95	£79.99
Take Down Slip - 90cm	Blue or Black	£64.95	£59.99
Field Bag	Blue or Black	£64.95	£59.99
Small Bag	Blue or Black	£28.95	£26.99
Pouch with Mesh	Blue or Black	£28.95	£25.99
Pouch	Blue or Black	£28.95	£25.99
Daily Backpack	Blue or Black	£74.95	£64.99
Case Backpack	Blue or Black	£79.95	£69.99
Vertical Shoulder Bag	Blue or Black	£28.95	£24.99
Duffle Bag	Blue or Black	£104.95	£89.99
Trolley Bag	Blue or Black	£139.95	£129.99

BERETTA NEW

GAMEKEEPER EVO

The Gamekeeper EVO Accessories line offers a wide range of products aimed at satisfying hunters' array of needs.

		RRP	NOW
Foldable Gun Case - 140cm	Moss & Brown Bark	£54.95	£49.99
Gun Case - 128cm or 140cm	Moss & Brown Bark	£64.95	£59.99
Rifle Case - 120cm or 132cm	Moss & Brown Bark	£64.95	£59.99
Double Gun Case - 140cm	Moss & Brown Bark	£84.95	£79.99
Double Rifle Case - 132cm	Moss & Brown Bark	£89.95	£79.99
Game Bag	Moss & Brown Bark	£48.95	£44.99
Backpack	Moss & Brown Bark	£69.95	£59.99
Cartridge Bags - 100	Moss & Brown Bark	£28.95	£24.99
Cartridge Bag - 150	Moss & Brown Bark	£54.95	£49.99
Cartridge Bag - 250	Moss & Brown Bark	£64.95	£59.99
Cartridge Belts - 12g or 20g	Moss & Brown Bark	£28.95	£24.99
Cartridge Wallet	Moss & Brown Bark	£24.95	£21.99
Hull Pouch	Moss & Brown Bark	£24.95	£21.99

BERETTA NEW

IBEX BACKPACKS

Ibex backpacks combine capacity with lightweight and tough materials designed for the different needs of the hunter. Designed for the functional organization and transport of all you may need, with optimal wearability for a long day on the go. Every detail is designed to offer maximum functionality combined with carefully selected resistant and durable materials.

Small.....**£84.95**
Medium.....**£189.95**
Large.....**£329.95**

E+OE Prices subject to change. Goods subject to availability

OVER 15 MILLION PAGE VIEWS OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS
OVER 12,000 PRODUCTS ONLINE
WE NOW TAKE PAYPAL PayPal

United we stand!

With threats to shooting escalating nationwide, there is an urgent need for tens of thousands more people to join the fight, urges **Conor O'Gorman**

First, many thanks if you gave five minutes back to shooting this summer and completed the Home Office firearms licensing survey, which ended on 23 August.

There are some 600,000 people holding a shotgun and/or firearm certificate in Great Britain. The firearms licensing consultation impacts every certificate holder and I expect around 50,000 responses to be submitted. If that's the case it's certainly an improvement on the 12,758 responses to the 2020 Home Office firearms safety consultation, but still less than 10% of certificate holders having their say on government policy.

If you didn't complete the survey, may I ask why not? Did you not hear about it? Did you intend to but never got around to it in time? Could BASC have done better on the communications front? Perhaps you felt it pointless to respond to consultations, and anyway isn't that what the shooting organisations should be doing on our behalf?

While there is no right or wrong reason – we all have busy lives and other interests outside shooting – there is a need for more shooting ambassadors to respond to surveys and consultations, lobby MPs, get involved in campaigns and indeed motivate others.

Numbers can make a difference

Firearms licensing delays are rife and lack of resources is part of the issue. BASC called on people to write to their Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC), urging them to sort out their police forces' FAC services.

Last year 46 people wrote to West Mercia PCC to complain about the long firearms licensing processing times for their certificates, and as a result the PCC allocated £200,000 to the licensing team to address the backlog and waiting times. It only took those 46 people to make a difference.

In July Louise Beardmore, the new chief executive of United Utilities, announced to shareholders at the company AGM that none of its shooting leases would be renewed on its massive landholdings across England.

BASC encouraged people to email the her to complain about the politically motivated move. Thousands rallied to the cause and that opened the door to negotiations between United Utilities, BASC and the 23 affected shoots.

When Natural Resources Wales launched a consultation in March on proposals to ban gamebird releasing in Wales, they expected a meek response from the shooting community and a big response from the antis. However, the tables were turned with tens of thousands of people in the UK and overseas saying no to the proposals on the back of BASC's Act Now campaign.

Last year's consultation on the Health and Safety Executive's lead ammunition ban proposals had 2,759 responses, enough to delay the review process by six months.

Imagine if many thousands – or even tens of thousands – more of us had got involved. What if all those people you have seen moaning on social media for years about the voluntary move away from lead shot for live quarry shooting had taken the time to have their say in the face of proposals for a very real total lead ban?

Maybe that six-month delay could have become years. Maybe the proposals could have been dropped in the face of such evidence and opposition? Who knows? Well we will never know.

There is still another chance to have your say as the next round of consultation on lead ammunition ban proposals will have opened by the time you read this. This consultation is only for 60 days, so please visit the BASC website as soon as you read this and let's stand united in numbers on this and further threats to shooting.■

Possibly the most important podcast to debut this year

The *Shooting Times* Podcast is released every Wednesday, when the latest issue of the magazine hits the newsstand, and is available to listen to for free on all your favourite podcast platforms. Each episode covers the news and biggest topics in our pages – it is a shakedown of the most pressing issues for those who love all things shooting. The podcast is a modern extension of the world's oldest shooting magazine and is hosted by Patrick Galbraith, the 18th editor. We first hit the shelves 141 years ago and we've gone to press every week ever since.

Follow us on

A time and a place

Robert Morgan explains that condition isn't always everything. It's often provenance that makes the big money

In the world of collecting antique firearms, one factor is key: condition. The majority of times, a common piece in outstanding condition will invariably trump the rarest in poor. There is only one occasion when condition becomes less important and that is when an item has exciting provenance. Take the item pictured here, for example.

This is a London made Colt 1851 Navy percussion revolver. Now Colts in general are probably some of the best known and widely collected antique guns out there, but quite plentiful and readily available. Certainly there are some extremely rare variations and models, and some might argue that the London 1851 Navy is a harder gun to obtain, having a production of just 42,000 pieces made over a four year period before Colt's London factory mysteriously burnt down. But apart from the address details and the use of iron as opposed to brass in the trigger guard construction, it is basically the same product as made in the American factory, which had a production in excess of 215,000 units.

It doesn't take an expert to tell you that this revolver is a long way from a good example of its type. Sadly neglected for many years, it had lain slowly corroding in a damp basement. The rust is so extensive that not only does it cover almost every metal surface but it has also seized the action. The highly desirable original case and accessories have also suffered badly, with the case coming apart along its joints and seams and having extensive mildew, and the accessories corroding almost as badly as the revolver.

Yet this example recently sold at auction for over double what a similar revolver in good condition would have fetched – nearly £4,000 including premium. And this is where provenance is key, for this revolver belonged to Lieutenant William Acton of the 77th Foot.

Rust is everywhere and the action has seized solid

By all accounts Lieutenant (later Colonel) William Molesworth Cole Acton (1828-1904) was quite a colourful character, and part of his uniform is preserved in the National Army Museum, Chelsea. He made his name during the Crimean war and according to the archives of the same museum, the feat performed by Acton (by now Captain) at the famous Battle of Inkerman was one of the most remarkable of that battle and was given due prominence by the historian Alexander Kinglake, who wrote:

"When he reached the companies in front, both the officers thus called upon to act refused in plain terms to do so"

"Sent by General Pennefather with an augmented company of the 77th to reinforce the 'Barrier' across the Sevastopol post-road, when the battle was nearing its close, Acton was then ordered to clear a Russian battery from Shell Hill. Acton took his own company and was told he could use two others that were to be found up ahead. Unfortunately, when he reached the companies in front, both the officers thus called upon to act refused in plain terms to do so, saying that they (the three companies) were not strong enough.

"Then Acton said, 'If you won't join me,

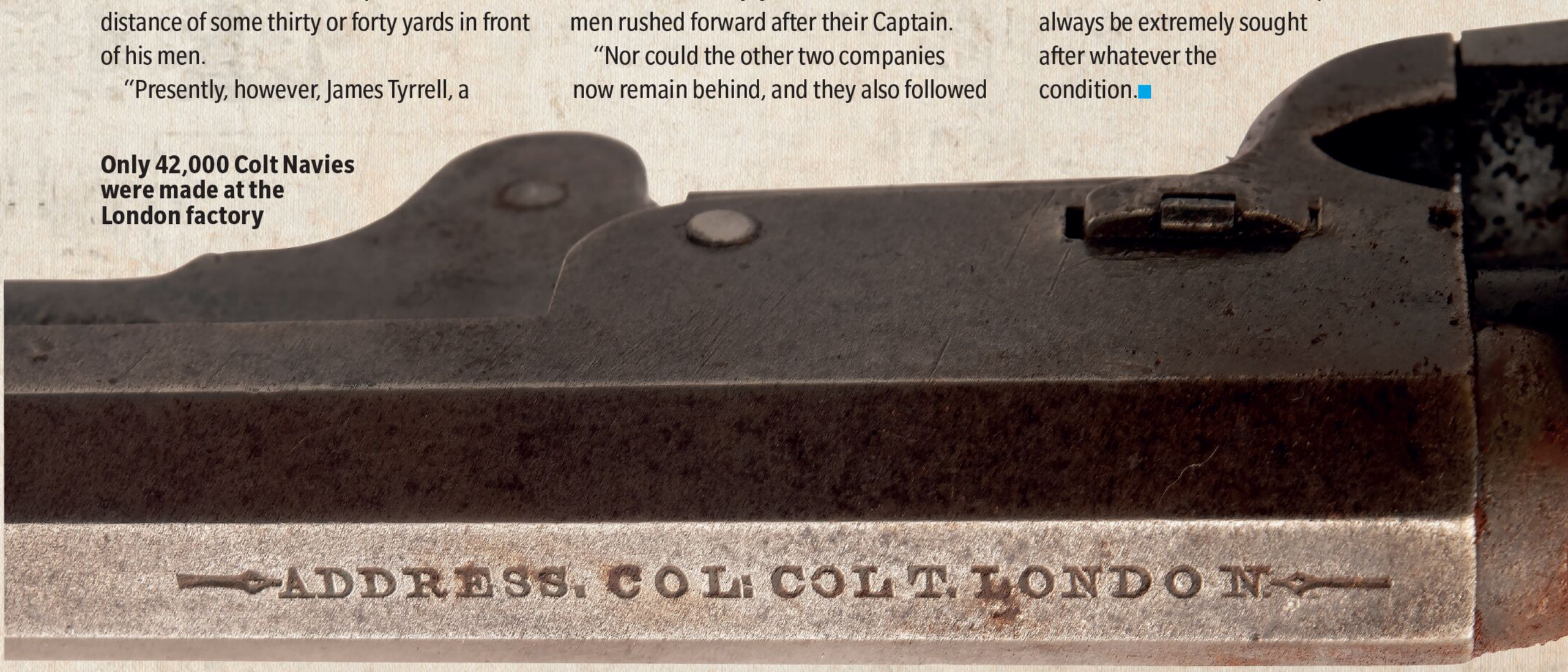
The accessories and original case have also suffered badly

I'll obey my orders and attack with the 77th'; and so saying, he ordered his men to advance; but not a man of them moved, for they were checked, as was not unnatural, by finding that their Captain was seeking to act in defiance of the opinion given by the two other officers. Acton said, 'Then I'll go by myself,' and moved forward accordingly; but he soon found himself quite alone, at a distance of some thirty or forty yards in front of his men.

"Presently, however, James Tyrrell, a Private of the 77th, ran out of the ranks and placed himself by the side of his Captain, saying, 'Sir, I'll stand by you.' Then a soldier sprang out from the company which was on the right of the 77th men. The officer and the two soldiers moved forward towards the battery, and they compassed a few yards without being followed; but then suddenly, to Acton's infinite joy, the whole of his 77th men rushed forward after their Captain.

"Nor could the other two companies now remain behind, and they also followed Acton in an attack which proved completely successful".

Apparently, very few casualties were sustained by the three companies. The Russians however were not so lucky. Acton was almost certainly carrying this revolver during the attack, and this just serves to underline the fact that when an item can be tied down to a time and a place, it will always be extremely sought after whatever the condition.■



Only 42,000 Colt Navies were made at the London factory

The countryman

In his new column **Mike Powell** starts a monthly record of all things relating to field sports and our ever changing countryside

Somewhat unexpectedly, as harvest time started in earnest in August, the weather that had been very dry for so long broke and the rains came. As is always the case in the countryside, weather conditions seldom suit everyone, especially the farmers, growers and gardeners among us. As a gardener I was desperate for rain, as we've had a hosepipe ban here for months. In some parts of the west country it's been in force since last year. But as a fox controller I was looking forward to harvest time as it's when my fox control work really takes off. Fortunately the weather relented long enough for some of the winter barley to be combined, which meant I was able to get out on the stubbles in a couple of the fields in the parish.

The first night out saw me arriving a couple of hours before dark, but even that was a fraction too late as there were already a couple of foxes working the strips between the high rows of straw left behind by the combine. Driving to the top of the field and parking the Hilux up in the same spot I've used for years, I was treated to the sight of the two foxes departing into the uncut field next door. As darkness fell a well-grown cub suddenly appeared and for some considerable time was spotted intermittently working the cleared strips. Eventually a shot was offered and at around 100yd the first harvest fox was dealt with. Hopefully it will be the first of several as this year has seen a definite upsurge in numbers locally.

The methods I use these days are very different from those I employed all those years ago when I started out on my fox-shooting career, mainly down to the changes

70 years behind the rifle and still going strong, Mr Powell is indeed a legend!

of much human behaviour, especially in the countryside. I've lived in this village for almost 60 years and for 20-odd years before that just across the river. Back then the locals treated the countryside with respect. There were a few local 'feuds', but nothing too serious, everyone got on pretty well and land was respected. How different it is today.

Only recently a family of five with three dogs was spotted walking in one of the local farmers' fields. Nothing too wrong with that perhaps, except that it was a field of rape in full flower and the family were walking right through the centre of the crop. The farmer got there just as they were leaving and when he pointed out the damage they had caused was subjected to a load of abuse, the gist of which was, "The countryside is here for all of us, not just you."

The result locally has been for locks to be put on the gates, which is not only a pain for the farmer and his workers but more importantly for me! Having to lock and unlock gates when on fox patrol is not only a real nuisance, but also alerts any fox in the vicinity that someone's about.

On a far more positive note, this year has seen a definite increase in the number of insects. As a boy I was a keen butterfly and moth collector and had a very big collection, which had all been dispatched in a 'killing bottle'. This was a large screw topped jar with a layer of plaster of Paris in the bottom, covering a small layer of crystals. Popping the insect in would cause almost instantaneous death – hardly surprising as the crystals were potassium cyanide! I seem to remember the whole thing costing about a shilling. I had to sign the poisons register, though. It all seems rather surprising considering I was about eleven.

I am sure that much of this upsurge in insect numbers, not only butterflies and moths but bees as well – the latter so vital to all aspects of nature and life itself – is down to the increase locally of the so called 'cover crops' farmers are giving incentives to grow. These are non-harvestable crops of mixed wild plants that not only improve the quality of the soil but have clearly benefitted insect life in general, which this year I have certainly seen.

Several species of butterflies, in particular those I really haven't seen for years, have suddenly appeared. Such icons of the insect world as brimstones, marbled whites, orange tips and various fritillaries, along with the more common painted ladies, small tortoiseshells and red admirals, while not being in abundance have been around on a daily basis, something not seen for years. All good news.

Not such good news is the very clear increase in the members of the corvid tribe. They are truly becoming a real menace as much as anything through their sheer numbers. There was one aspect of this local corvid increase that afforded me a quiet smile, though. On the cliff land purchased a few years ago by the RSPB, which is only a few hundred yards from my home, is a crop of barley that has been grown specifically for the benefit of the relatively rare cirl bunting population. When the land was sold, the new owners stopped me shooting on it, something I'd done for 40-odd years.

There are as I write this many hundreds of crows, rooks and jackdaws laying waste to the crop, which will guarantee the cirl buntings will see precious little of it, something that in years past certainly wouldn't have happened! ■

Mike was a little late when it came to cornering Charlie on the new stubble

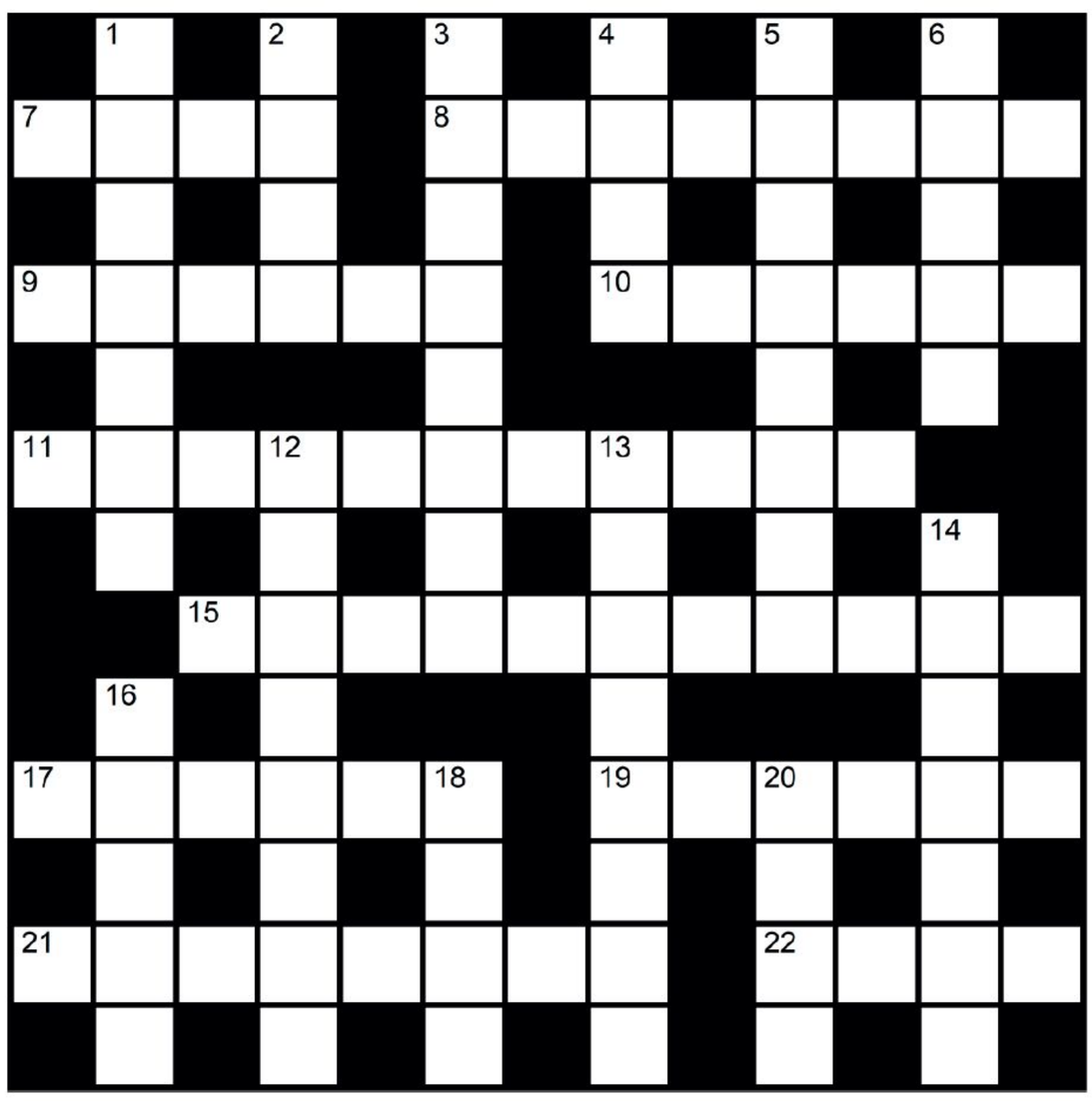
"When the land was sold, the new owners stopped me shooting on it, something I'd done for 40-odd years"

in fox behaviour. Perhaps the biggest sign of this is foxes' reactions to humans and their way of life, especially vehicles. No longer do foxes disappear at the first sign of man or his transport as they used to. Very often when I'm out on my nightly fox forays I have a fox walking past the truck only a few yards away. This really isn't particularly surprising when you remember that a great many foxes see and smell humans and vehicles every day of their lives.

It isn't only wildlife behaviour that's changed over my lifetime. The same is true

Win terrific prizes!

October crossword



CLUES ACROSS

7 A possibly hooded bird (4)
8 Requested a review of a firearms licensing decision (8)
9 Wildfowling licence (6)
10 Three-legged gun stand (6)
11 Cooing grey crop raiders (11)
15 Retailers of venison and the like (4,7)
17 They grant shooters sporting privileges (6)
19 _ duck, black and white diving duck (6)
21 Thrusting device for dummies involved in gundog training (8)
22 _ season, when game can be hunted (4)

CLUES DOWN

1 One of the high points in the woods (7)
2 Navigate water - Labradors love to do it! (4)
3 Possible employment basis for shoot staff - not full-on (4-4)
4 A marking on the coat of fallow deer (4)
5 _ Rifle Association, Bisley-based charity and governing body (8)
6 A lure used by bird shooters (5)
12 The sporting pursuit of scent with hounds (4,4)
13 Gun mechanisms for kicking cartridges out (8)
14 A really cool solution to shot game storage! (7)
16 These deer are posing a threat to our native reds (5)
18 German city famed for gunmaking (4)
20 _ followers, hunt participants (4)

WIN!

Skeet vest

RRP £69.99

Available in patriot blue and a selection of other colours. Sizes small to 5XL. This durable, lightweight, cotton shooting vest has large front and rear pockets, reinforced shoulders and a mesh back.

Seeland

Name

Address

Postcode Vest size

Email address

By submitting your information, you agree to our Privacy Policy, available at: fieldsports-journal.com/policies

SEPTEMBER ANSWERS

ACROSS 6. Hawthorn 8. Semi 9. Draw 10. Labrador 12. Muddy 13. Leveret 15. Engrave 17. Chair 20. Criminal 21. Cone 22. Auto 23. Numbered
DOWN 1. Stewed 2. Poult 3. Knobber 4. Estate 5. Birr 7. Airgunner 11. Obedience 14. Evening 16. Ramrod 18. Hocked 19. Plump 20. Clay

Cut out the crossword coupon and send to: *Sporting Gun* Crossword, Fieldsports Press, Macnab House, 14 Belford Rd, Edinburgh, EH4 3BL by 24th September 2023. The first correct entry drawn will win.

☐ Tick this box if you consent to your information being used by Fieldsports Press for marketing purposes.

The unbelievable truth

Here are five statements about the Winchester Model 1894 reviewed on page 112. See if you can identify the one that is NOT TRUE by putting a cross in the box next to the false statement

1. It was designed by John Moses Browning ☐
2. It was issued to the British Home Guard ☐
3. Stripping the action is extremely easy ☐
4. The design has remained essentially the same ☐
5. A shotgun version is available ☐

ELEY
THE PERFECT CHOICE

WIN!

ELEY VIP SPORTING

PRICE FROM £106/250

When in need of a cartridge that breaks clays convincingly over a multitude of targets, the Eley VIP Sporting is the perfect choice. With extra-fast speeds, high brass heads and premium PSB+ powders, there are few cartridges that can compete. **Visit: eleyhawkltd.com/clay-load/vip-sporting**

Name

Address

Postcode

Email address

CUT out the quiz coupon and send to: *Sporting Gun* Unbelievable Truth, Fieldsports Press, Macnab House, 14 Belford Rd, Edinburgh, EH4 3BL by 24th September 2023. The first correct entry drawn will win.

By submitting your information, you agree to our Privacy Policy, available at: fieldsports-journal.com/policies .
☐ Tick this box if you consent to your information being used by Fieldsports Press for marketing purposes.

Spot the target

Kevin Richards/Shutterstock

On this picture, what the person is shooting at has been removed. Put an 'X' where you think the target is.

WIN!

Bisley Active electronic muffs

The ultimate in hearing protection that also amplifies non-harmful sounds, so you can still hear clearly in the heat of the action!

WORTH £89.99!

CUT out the quiz coupon and send to: *Sporting Gun* Spot the Target, Fieldsports Press, Macnab House, 14 Belford Rd, Edinburgh, EH4 3BL by 24 September 2023. The first correct entry drawn will win.

Name

Address

Postcode

Email address

By submitting your information, you agree to our Privacy Policy available at fieldsports-journal.com/policies. ☐ Tick this box if you consent to your information being used by Fieldsports Press for marketing purposes.

This month's wordsearch

WIN!

The **classic-fit Aylsham fleece jacket** worth £114.95* (£109.95, ladies'). Available in a variety of colours and sizes, with adjustable waist, zipped pockets and elasticated cuffs.

EST 1907 Alan Paine ENGLAND Country Collection

WORTH £114.95!*

To get this fleece, you need to find 12 words in the grid.

EJECTION
CALIBRE
VIZSLA
MUZZLE
FOLLOWER
PRIMER
MUNTJAC
MODIFIED
RETRIEVE
CHAMER
COCKER
CROWN

K	A	F	C	F	O	L	L	O	W	E	R	E	E
Z	M	O	A	K	M	E	P	R	I	M	E	R	M
R	E	E	L	D	L	C	U	I	L	E	F	T	I
K	N	E	I	V	I	Z	S	L	A	J	V	I	R
R	M	R	B	C	R	O	W	N	E	O	M	E	D
E	U	R	R	R	P	P	F	O	E	R	H	R	R
T	N	M	E	U	I	E	E	A	W	D	U	I	L
R	T	M	O	D	I	F	I	E	D	D	U	C	I
I	J	C	L	J	E	N	O	P	E	C	M	P	T
E	A	W	E	M	U	Z	Z	L	E	A	O	Z	E
V	C	M	C	H	A	M	B	E	R	M	I	Z	J
E	O	O	M	R	J	J	I	S	E	C	E	A	N
E	N	U	N	O	I	T	C	E	J	E	W	M	C
O	M	I	C	E	A	D	N	C	O	C	K	E	R

Name

Address

Postcode Fleece size

Email address

CUT out the quiz coupon and send to: *Sporting Gun* Wordsearch, Fieldsports Press, Macnab House, 14 Belford Rd, Edinburgh, EH4 3BL by 24th September 2023 The first correct entry drawn will win.

By submitting your information, you agree to our Privacy Policy, available at: fieldsports-journal.com/policies.
☐ Tick this box if you consent to your information being used by Fieldsports Press for marketing purposes.

COMTETITION PRIZE-WINNERS:

SEE THE NOVEMBER ISSUE FOR COMTETITION PRIZE-WINNERS:

	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
Crossword	John Marono	Christopher Chambers	Nicholas Grogan	Adrian Pile
Spot the Target	John Davis	R Goodacre	R. Tudor Thomas	Steven Cook
The Unbelievable Truth	Peter Knight	John Davis	David Wall	Roger Reed
Wordsearch	Peter Sumner	David Wall	Elizabeth Jeffery	David Reed

An in-between month

October can be a lean month, but **Rupert Butler** recounts a trip with his father that turned this traditional shooting pattern on its head

In search of snipe. An unexpected bounty awaits in the young spruce plantation

For many game shooters over here in Ireland, October is sometimes considered a bit of an in-between month. Early season Mallard, which were harassed for a few weeks, have now become clever and only leave the comfort of local sanctuaries at the dead of night to feed in some quiet, undisturbed location before returning as the first rays of light crease the eastern sky.

In addition our pheasant and woodcock shooting doesn't open until the start of November, so as you can see there can sometimes be a bit of a lull at this time. Migratory fowl will start to push down from the north in good numbers but they confine themselves to our coasts and larger estuaries until harsher conditions force them further inland. But I may have found a solution.

Some years back while walking my doggies high above on a nearby mountain, one of my Labradors gave chase after a large hare that had been relaxing in some long grass. I have never had the most obedient of dogs, nor do I wish to. If they perform their tasks in a reasonable manner I am obliged to overlook the odd discretion. That said, it takes more than a couple of blows on my trusty whistle, together with a few harsher words, to get him to regain his composure.

By this time we have meandered into a young spruce plantation that is but a year or so old. On his return journey, with tongue lolling, he happens to stumble across a wisp of snipe that screech off noisily into the cool morning air. Now while it is not unusual to find snipe high above at this time of year, my interest is piqued when they circle a few time before landing again, a sure sign that they are very familiar with the surroundings.

I decide to walk over and flush them again but in doing so I manage to lift not one but three more wisps. Now I'm really interested. The plantation in question is 50 acres or so in size and seems to be alive with these little pocket rockets. If Fibi hadn't gone off after that hare I wouldn't have been aware of their existence. Every cloud has a silver lining.

The following weekend I put my theory to the test. If there are an abundance of snipe in one such plantation then surely others will hold them also. Returning on this occasion with gun in hand I let the dogs loose among the young spruce trees. Sure enough, in almost the exact location I flushed the first wisp the previous week, up get seven birds. I am ready and waiting, and account for two birds. My shots serve to rise several other birds from the surrounding grasses, one of which makes its way into the bag after I throw a quick cartridge into the breach.

As I collect my prizes a jack snipe boldly lands only a few yards from where I stand.

Once upon a time we used to shoot these smaller specimens but to be honest they aren't a fraction as sporting as their larger cousins, and they travel a mere 100yd or so before alighting again.

After a couple of woeful misses I manage another pair before reaching the taller plantation in front. A short drive later I spy another young plantation and decide to chance my luck. My new destination holds more birds than the first, in fact so many that my dogs are distracted as birds depart in all directions. My shooting ranges from almost miraculous to downright awful moments later. I manage to add four more to the bag, all but one being second-barrel birds.

Thereafter I tried three more similar plantations, none of which held a sniff of a bird. There was little difference between all the blocks I visited, so why did some hold good numbers and others none at all? To this day I cannot answer, but what I do now know is which areas are favoured by these little bundles of energy, for whatever reason.

Many a good snipe shot will tell you to fire either immediately, before they start to zig-zag, or wait until they finish and fly straight once again. I just tend to throw up the gun and hope for the best, although I do seem to shoot more at longer distances than closer to hand, which is down to a better spread of pellets, no doubt.

Many years ago October used to be a great month hereabouts for the first wave of migratory duck – teal in particular. From the middle of the month onwards, squadrons of these delightful birds would descend on every waterway in the land, providing great sport. Alas nowadays our milder winters mean that its early December before large numbers start to appear.

"I have many great memories of October teal flights, especially those that coincided with the first falls of frost"

I have many great memories of October teal flights, especially those that coincided with the first falls of frost. For those that have slipped away with time I merely refer »

to dad's wonderful set of diaries, which he meticulously kept, and everything comes flooding back.

One such entry is from October 1986. A hard frost had settled in, giving that wonderful crunching noise underfoot as one went about the morning after. I was hoping that it would carry on until the following weekend so that I could accompany dad to a wee valley nearby that has a large meandering stream running through it. Apart from some early season mallard, providing water levels were sufficiently high, coupled with some snipe along its fringes, it held little to write home about.

That was until the frosts came and turned it into a shooters' paradise. On the evening in question we tramped our way to our favourite spot long before flight-time in case some early birds were on offer. Our chosen ambush point was where the stream in question divided momentarily, leaving some marshy ground in the middle.

It was here among some taller rushes that we buried ourselves along with Teal, our golden Labrador at that time. A couple of bunches of teal had departed on our arrival, some of which had offered the briefest of opportunities. As is always the case at flight-time we refrain from firing, for more often that not most of these birds will return in smaller bands come dusk.

Twenty minutes go by without sight of a bird and the usual doubts start to creep in. Should we have taken a couple of birds earlier? Did we flush those birds too late for them to return? But suddenly the sky is alive with teal as they pour in from all directions, at first in ones and twos and then in a hurry. I give up sending Teal to collect shot birds because at this stage he is on autopilot. As is usual with flights such as this you will shoot a couple of pairs, give yourself a smug pat on the back, and then proceed to miss a couple of absolute sitters. Shooting is not dissimilar to most sports in this respect, just when you think you have it mastered it, it will bite you on the back.

A single bird dives past and I am just about to pull the trigger when something in the back of my mind tells me that the shape is not quite right. Fortunately I refrain from adding a woodcock to the bag; he won't be in season for another couple of weeks. Over the years it's quite amazing how many times I have seen woodcock come to dine in the middle of a duck flight, especially during frosty spells when the soft margins are much to their liking.

"Over the years it's quite amazing how many times I have seen woodcock come to dine in the middle of a duck flight"

Suddenly, not unlike turning off a tap, the teal just stop coming, giving us a chance to stand up and stretch. It also gives the canine Teal a chance to pursue some birds in the field alongside. Although he can be prone to the odd lapse in concentration, it's at times like this that he shows his true worth, collecting birds rapidly as the light fades.

We are just about to call it a day when we hear some mallard quacking way up the valley and quickly stumble back to our vantage points. Just as teal had done earlier in the flight, mallard start to pour in for 15 minutes or so. It gets to the stage where we have to stop as the light is not good enough and would have resulted in some pricked birds flying off into the darkness. One of the shot birds is a young drake pintail, an unusual visitor hereabouts but welcome nonetheless. It was a long walk back up the hill with our bounty in tow. Flights like this are few and far between, so should be enjoyed to the fullest.

So there you have it, sometimes October isn't such a bad month. Hopefully our weather patterns return to those of former years so that we can once again experience flights such as this. But I have my doubts. ■

Rupert gets ready for the teal. What looked like a lost opportunity turned out to be a bonanza

Gundog Q&A

No problem goes unsolved as *Sporting Gun* puts your questions to the gundog experts

Dummy training

I understand dog training is an on-going daily task – sit and wait for food, etc. But how often should I go out with my dog and have a dummy throwing session?

Nick Ridley says: Those who shoot over their dogs regularly are, in effect, training them every time they go out, so the dog won't need dummy work as much once it is trained. Those who do Working Tests in the summer need to be on top of dummy training all year round. Those who only work their dogs in winter can get away with just general obedience once the dog is trained, with, perhaps, a refresher course just before the season starts.

With the pups and young dogs I'm training I use dummies every day because they have it all to learn. But once a dog has been shot over, any training is specific to the shooting field, so I don't do anything outside that except for general management and recalls.

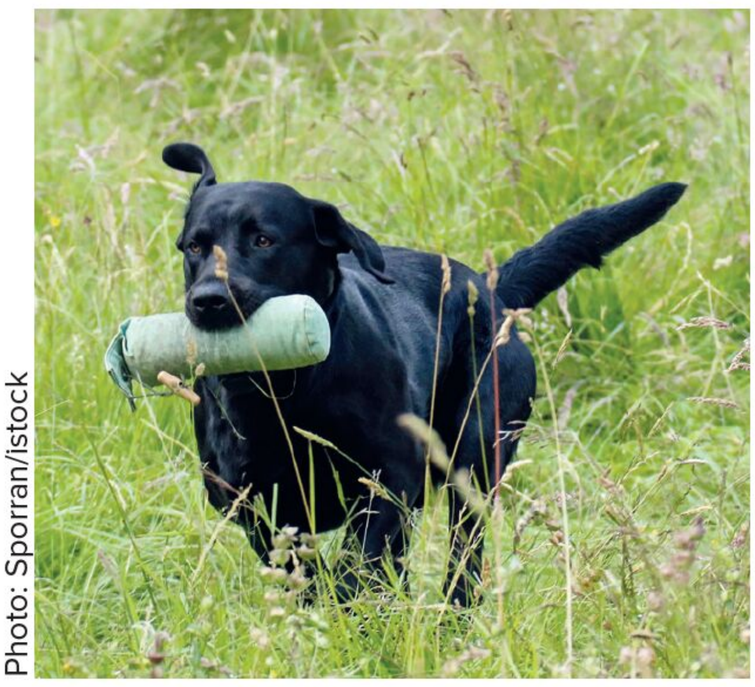


Photo: SporranSporran/istock

Photo: Lois_McCleary/istock

Dog jitters

This last season, on the first drive of every shoot, my three year-old Labrador shivered with excitement and proved somewhat erratic in her obedience. She improved as the day went on, calmed down and started to listen. Before next season, is there anything I can do to keep her calm right from the beginning?

Nick Ridley says: This reaction isn't at all unusual – let's face it, we all get excited with the first drive of the day and this excitement is quickly picked up by our dogs. To help avoid it I suggest you give her a good run before the start of the day to burn off a bit of excess energy and then try and keep her as calm as possible by not letting her mingle with the other dogs. If you have any doubts that her obedience is not what it should be, then it's a good idea to keep her on the lead just in case she decides to run in. Once a dog has discovered the delights of unrestrained joy they will do it again and again if left unchecked. By reasserting steadiness, you can concentrate on your shooting and not worry about the dog.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

Dr. John

Delivering quality and value for 150 years

www.gilpa.co.uk

GILBERTSON & PAGE LTD.
Established in 1873.

The problem:

What are the dangers of water?

Our in-house vet explains some of the problems you may encounter when your dog is around water, and what you should do about it

Vet's advice: Neil McIntosh SG's gundog health expert

Q: Last season I felt that some members of the beating team were a bit careless around water. Can you remind them of its dangers?
A: A valid point. Failing to properly risk assess can get you into deep water!

Hypothermia

Generally caused by being cold and wet (with a large dollop of thoughtlessness on the part of the owner), your dog's response to hypothermia is similar to our own. The animal's blood vessels constrict, adrenaline is released and shivering occurs. The latter is a very effective way of generating needed heat but is also wasteful of vital resources and gives a massive clue as to what is going wrong, so take action. If hypothermia continues, renal output is reduced, the blood thickens and slows, electrolyte imbalances occur, which lead to painful muscle damage, and the heart is affected. Even mild hypothermia will reduce working ability and owners will see athletic prowess dipping dramatically.

I reiterate: if your dog is shivering, it is affected. Prevention is much better than cure and involves adequate nutrition, regular drying of dogs, the use of appropriate coats and heat as required.

Ice

It is obvious that if ice won't take a dog's weight, it certainly won't take yours. My heart is in my mouth every time I see a dog skating after a wounded bird on ice, not least because of the possibility of going under and not being able to get out, but also because joints are at risk and painful damage to the adductor muscles of the hind legs can occur when dogs do 'the splits'. A bit of risk assessment is required pre-shooting and a decision made as to whether birds that land on ice will be picked. Guns should be advised accordingly and 'out of control' dogs kept well away.

Drowning

Fresh water drowning differs from sea water drowning, but the end result is the same. In the former, the sticky lining of the lungs, which allows them to expand and open, is diluted and consequently the lungs collapse. When sea water hits the lungs, however, the high osmolarity of salt causes fluid to rush into the alveoli where oxygen exchange should take place.

Drowning begins with panic, compounded by air hunger, which is caused by breath holding. Next, a reflex inspiratory effort causes the dog to swallow water into the stomach and inhale small amounts into the lungs. The larynx goes into spasm, leading to asphyxia. As the muscles relax, water floods the lungs. The red blood cells are starved of oxygen, the circulation collapses, the heart muscle dies and the brain is starved of oxygen. Death is imminent. Commonly, even where dogs survive near-drowning, they succumb to organ failure within the next day or two and some are left permanently disabled.

River and sea depth, speed and currents are all factors that should be assessed before working starts. Exhausted, water logged dogs are most at risk and remember that individual dogs have varying swimming ability and few, if any, seem to possess

It's your job as owner to keep a very close eye on your dog and the conditions

Hypothermia can be a major problem and shivering is the obvious sign. Keep some towels handy and know when enough is enough

'consequential thought'. Being able to get into water does not necessarily mean you can get out!

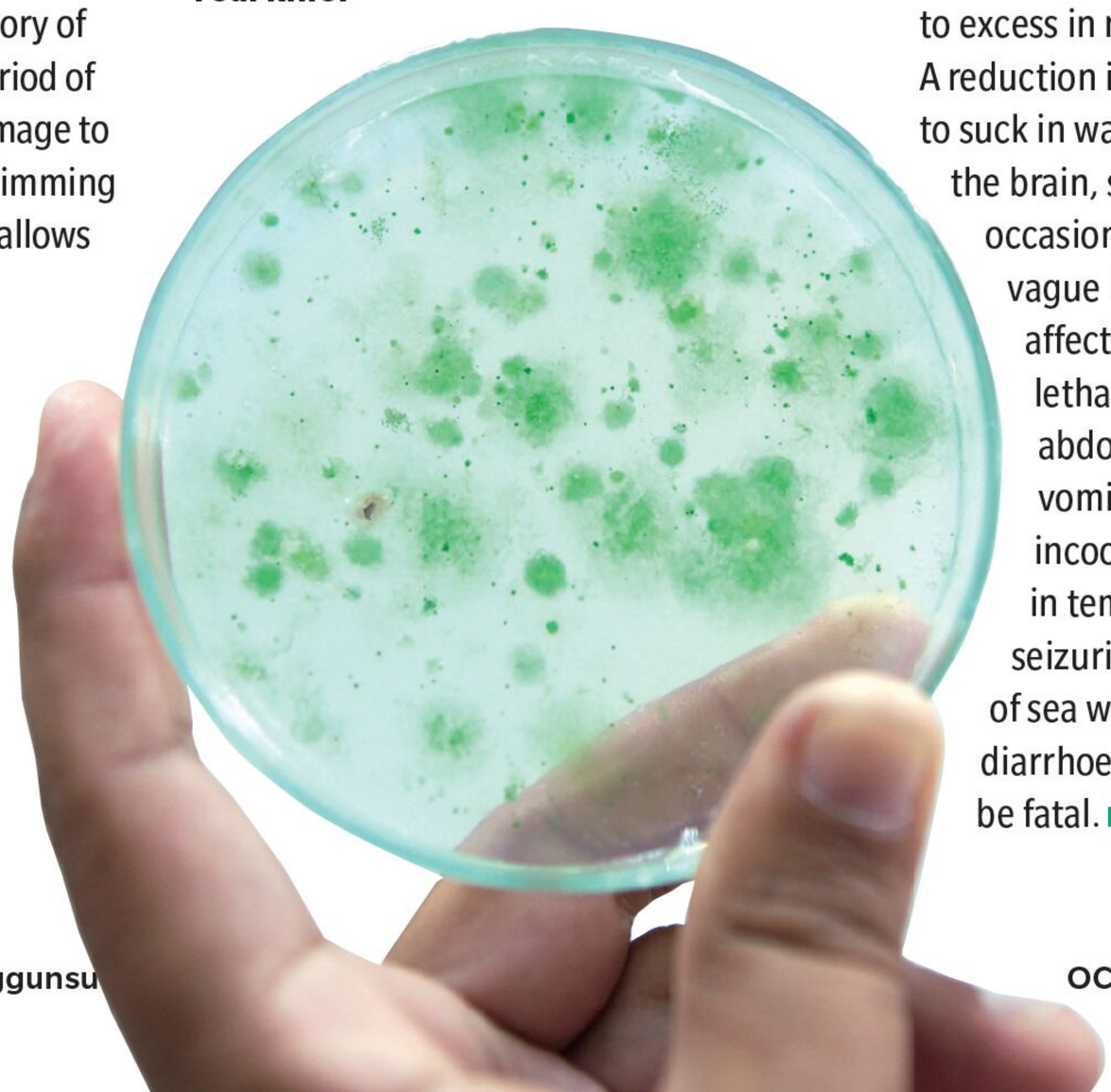
Swimmer's tail

Variously known as swimmer's tail, limber tail, limp tail and broken wag, affected dogs suffer from a painful, flaccid tail that hangs down from the tail base. This affliction is typically seen in relatively unfit dogs who have been swimming in cold water, and in pointers where there is a history of prolonged cage transport after a period of intense work, the cause is acute damage to the coccygeal muscles. Avoiding swimming and the use of painkillers generally allows the issue to resolve over a few days. Lasting damage is rare.

Blue-green algae

We covered this topic last month, but it is well worth repeating, as dogs die every year. Heavy growths of algae bloom in stagnant water in warm, wet conditions, sometimes helped by nitrogen rich run off from fertilised fields. As the algae degenerate, they release intracellular toxins into the environment and these cyanobacteria can be ingested by dogs when they swim, drink or groom. Gastrointestinal symptoms precede neurotoxicosis (muscle tremors, weakness, seizures and collapse). Death occurs due to toxicosis of the kidneys and liver. Rinsing with fresh water and preventing coat licking after swimming is helpful.

The infamous blue-green algae can be a real killer



Leptospirosis

Classically spread by water contaminated by rat urine, leptospirosis, despite social media gossip, is difficult to diagnose and treat and around 30% of affected dogs will die. Get your dog vaccinated. It's better than doing nothing.

Water Intoxication

This can occur when dogs swallow too much water when swimming, or drink to excess in response to hyperthermia. A reduction in sodium levels causes cells to suck in water and when this involves the brain, symptoms are severe and occasionally fatal. In mild cases a vague lethargy is seen. Seriously affected individuals exhibit lethargy, listlessness, a distended abdomen, nausea, drooling and vomiting. Signs can progress to incoordination, weakness, reduction in temperature and heart rate, seizuring, coma and death. Ingestion of sea water can cause vomiting, diarrhoea and dehydration and can be fatal. ■

Turning at heel

Howard Kirby explains the importance of basic obedience and the huge impact it will have on more advanced training further down the line

In last month's article we looked at teaching a young gundog to understand two different positions. Quite simply they require that the youngster will sit directly in front of you and then quietly move to an at-heel position alongside you.

We will need to develop these behaviours as we move to advanced training. Last time we concluded on the fact that we will need the 'finish' or at-heel position as an essential part of retrieving. The line-up and alignment of the dog as we set them up to take a line out to a retrieve is absolutely crucial. We will use this alignment to give the dog direction as to the line we want it to take.

September's article looked at how we can use food rewards to build come, sit, watch me and then move into the finish position. We now need to teach the dog to turn a full 360° while remaining close and at heel. This is necessary because it's your skill in efficiently weaving the dog around your legs that facilitates the setup, in preparation to make a retrieve. The best way to see the importance of this is to watch an experienced handler bring a dog forward and set it up. Now watch someone that is yet to learn this skill. The latter will look clumsy and require multiple commands.

Let's establish where the need for this is applied in the field. First, smoothly guiding the dog into its setup position is pretty much an essential so that we can send the dog out to make a quick and efficient retrieve. When picking up or walking in line with guns, especially in competition, if we have dogs that automatically about turn with the handler, then the chances of marking down shot birds is massively enhanced.

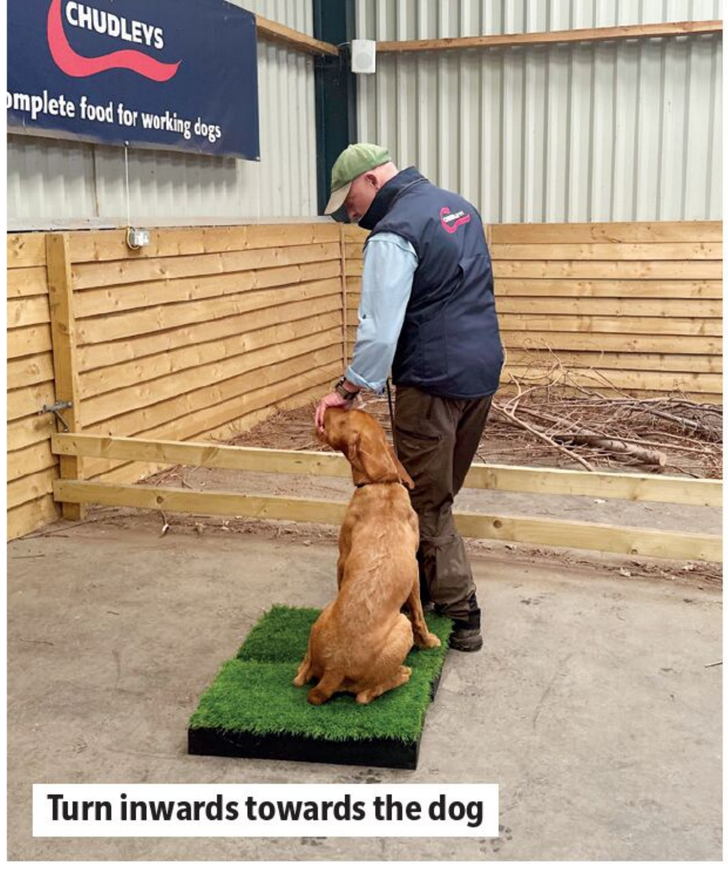
With spaniels and HPRs most retrieves are taken following a sit to flush or a loose bird that's been shot. However, you will be called up as a picker-up or trialler to make blind retrieves. Giving your dogs the additional skills of a highly trained retriever will put so many more tools in your box.

The about turn

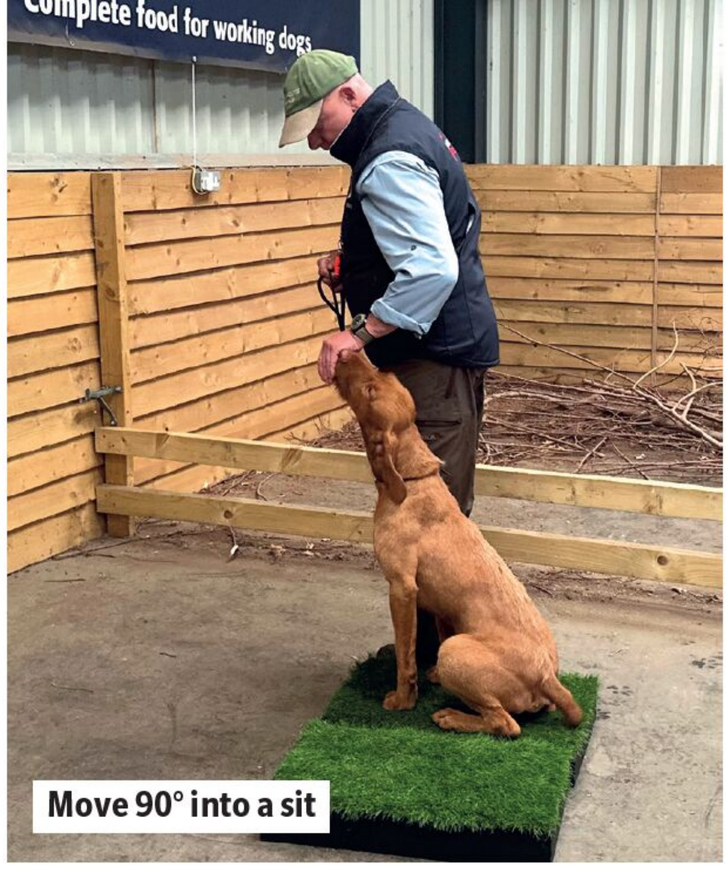
Following on from where we left off last month, the about turn can easily be taught »

All these exercises are building towards perfect alignment

Start with the dog at heel



Turn inwards towards the dog



Move 90° into a sit

using a place board. Of course everything we do using a target can be done without, but using a place board helps teach the dog to be neat and tidy as it turns. Later in the training schedule we can remove the board and the dog will continue its learned behaviour.

With the dog sat alongside you (depending on the dimensions of your place boards you might need to push two together to give the dog enough room to turn around without the need to step off), using a food reward turn in towards the dog, carefully lure him as you turn, and bring him into a sit as you complete 90° of turn. Ensure you are using plenty of food to keep the dog engaged. Novice handlers are too quick to reduce the amount of food that is offered.

It's really important to keep in mind that the dog has no idea of what it is you want him to do. The exercise you are doing offers little or no reward other than the food you give him. You are engineering movement by coaxing and luring. Careful and clear positioning of your food hand will move the dog into the positions you are looking for.

Initially keep turning inwards towards the dog, using your body to bend and guide him. Practise turning 90° before you stop and reward. Then repeat and reward again. If you do this four times you will both have rotated through 360°. Slowly build this exercise up until you can rotate a full turn without the need to stop, fall over or get dizzy. Once this is fully mastered we will be introducing the throwing of a dummy and a retrieve that will encourage the dog to mark rather than focus on your hand.

Everything we've talked about can be done using a dummy instead of food. This will of course require you to have a dog that is very dummy focused.

Our aim is to practise this exercise until you can turn in either direction, smoothly and accurately, while the dog moves with you. This exercise should be done carefully, ensuring you don't rush the dog and confuse it. This exercise can be taught indoors as it requires very little space to practise.

While we are on the subject of being able to practise indoors, it's probably a good opportunity to remind you of the importance of a distraction-free environment. We all know just how easily young dogs get distracted. Short, sweet, indoor training with high-value feed rewards should make the building of these essential early behaviours enjoyable and easy to construct for both parties. I cannot overemphasise the importance of precision with these early come, sit, watch, finish and about turn behaviours. The better you and your dog are at performing these, the easier everything that follows will be.

Heelwork

Although these articles are focusing on alignment and the build up for retrieving, all the behaviours we have been building also link directly into teaching a youngster to walk at heel. Heel work is one of the areas most dog owners find the most difficult to grasp. Anything we can do to assist with this will be time well spent.

If you take any real interest in your dog and its needs, you will continually notice information on the importance of giving your dog plenty of exercise and mental stimulation. First-time owners often translate this into taking dogs for high-activity walks. If you choose to encourage a young, highly inquisitive and nose-driven gundog to race around parks and the countryside without constant engagement and direction from you, there will be one very predictable outcome. You will produce a dog that quickly learns to entertain itself and other dogs, people, game and wildlife will quickly become its chosen targets. While you will be giving the little devil plenty of exercise, without structure and guidance there's a very good chance you will teach the dog to become an out-of-control lunatic. But of course your dog needs exercise and some time just to bimble around and be a dog.

Already, and we're only just getting started, there are plenty of exercises and mind-testing behaviours that we can challenge a dog with. I strongly encourage you to build a training and exercise plan that hangs its hat on teaching the dog self-control and to engage with you. Both of these will bring it rewards, food, affection and the opportunity to retrieve – which leads us into the next stage of this training journey. A well-planned and delivered gundog training strategy will fit the bill nicely.

So now the fun really begins. It's time to get stuck into the exciting stuff – retrieving! After all that's what we got his dog for, right? But before we race off to start throwing things all over the place, we should just reflect and assess our position.

As we move forward into what most would consider to be the best aspects of owning and training a gundog – retrieving and hunting – I encourage you to take pride in teaching your dog all these early behaviours. Often referred to as 'basic obedience', it is these early lessons that will be an essential part of a successful future. Unless you develop a dog that wants to be with you, sits, watches you, finishes and has a thorough understanding of how to control itself while the world rushes by, it's highly unlikely that you will produce a highly trained gundog.

Become a scholar of teaching basic obedience. There are training classes and a whole sport built around the finer points of obedience training. Maybe arrange to go and watch a local obedience training class. These guys are fascinating to watch and masters of their craft. There is so much to learn and enjoy, but its so satisfying when you can use your skill to teach your dog.

Next month we'll take this up another level with the alignment and releasing of the dog to make a retrieve. As always, have fun and enjoy your dogs – and keep training. ■

Tel: 01888 563288
www.tuffies.co.uk

Ridiculously happy.....

TUFFIES
DOG BEDS

Waterproof, sturdy nest with detachable and washable cover.

HARRIS DRYBOOT

70 years in production

Only £81.99 per pair

* HIGH QUALITY, HARDWEARING, WASHABLE & QUICK DRYING
* PADDED COTTON LINING FOR ALL DAY COMFORT
* REINFORCED SOLE FOR ROUGH TERRAIN OR HEAVY DIGGING
*DEEP, WATERPROOF GUSSET FOR EASY ACCESS AND REMOVAL

THE IDEAL ALTERNATIVE TO A KNEE LENGTH WELLY!

www.thedrybootcompany.com
07974 977112

barclaycard VISA
SME news UK ENTERPRISE AWARD
Secure Payments By: PayPal

GUNDOG GEAR

FOR ALL YOUR COUNTRY PURSUITS

GUNDOG TRAINING & SHOOTING EQUIPMENT,
OUTDOOR CLOTHING, FOOTWEAR AND ACCESSORIES

100% Natural, Healthy & Nutritious

FREE UK DELIVERY ON ORDERS OVER £75 Free gift with every order at the check out

DISCOVER THE FULL PRODUCT RANGE ON OUR ONLINE STORE:
WWW.GUNDOGGEAR.CO.UK

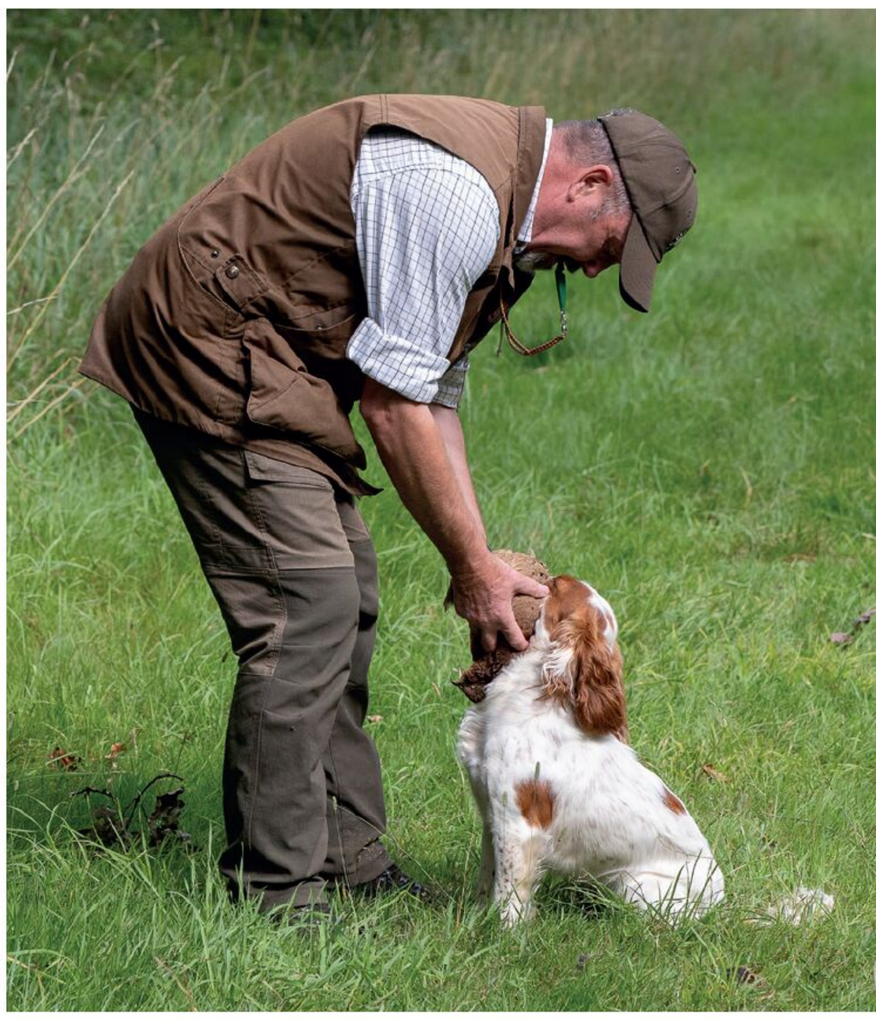
OR COME VISIT US AT OUR SHOP:
83 RIMROSE ROAD, BOOTLE, LIVERPOOL, L20 4HN

SALES@GUNDOGGEAR.CO.UK | 0151 933 3008 |

Adventures of Nick & Ted

● **Age** 89 months

Nick Ridley starts to intensify the training to get his dogs back up to speed for the coming season



After a rocky start, Twig's cold game retrieving has come on in leaps and bounds

During the training of my cockers there are always light-bulb moments when the pups suddenly get the idea of what you are asking of them, and you realise it is time to begin to push them and test them. Little Twig has just turned 15 months old and all the pieces of her training jigsaw are very slowly beginning to click into place, but just last week I had the chance to really take her out of her comfort zone. I expect all my dogs to be versatile as I need to be able to go beating with them, pick up with them and of course my absolute passion, shoot over them, so I do try and mix up their training programme.

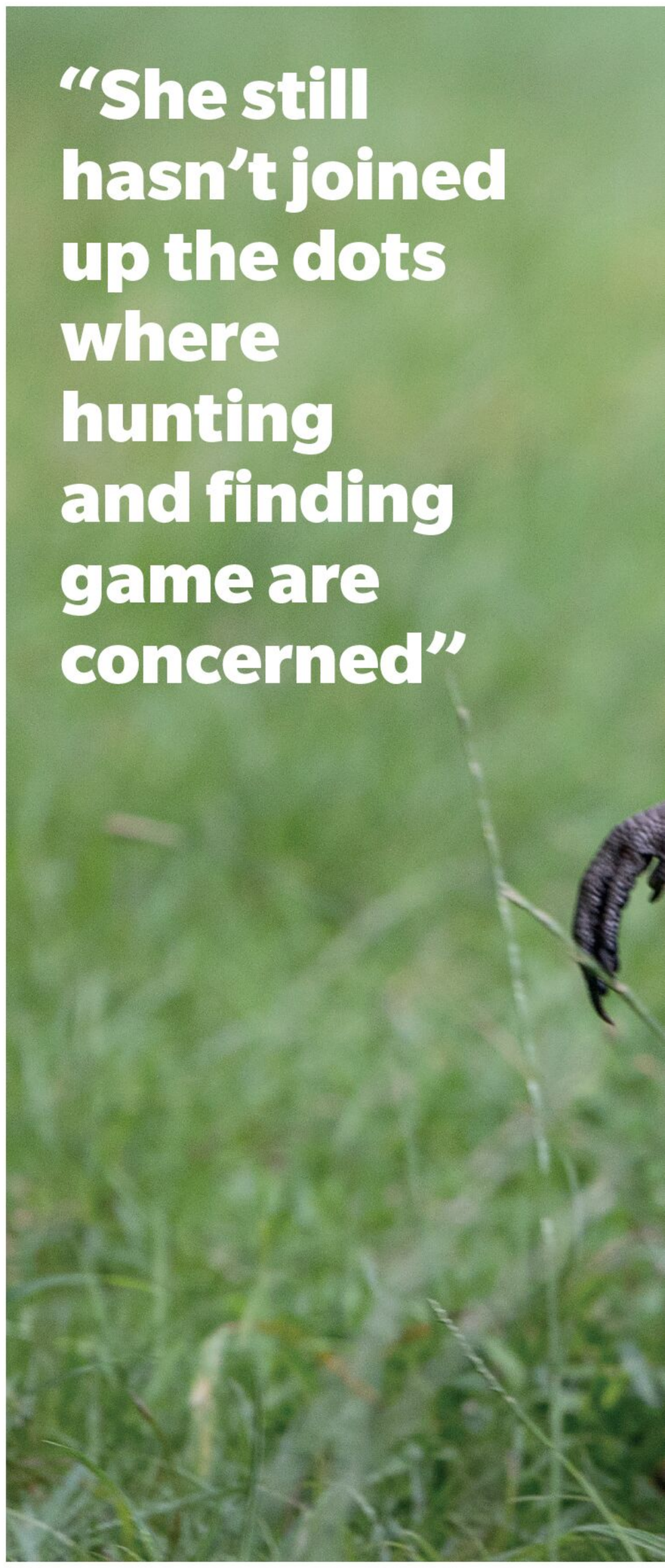
Twig had previously heard shot and I have used the dummy launcher with her, and she was rock steady to the sound and launch. Howard Rudkin of Fullpip Gundogs runs simulated picking up days at the Six Mile Bottom shoot near Newmarket and I asked if I could join one of his sessions just to give Twig the opportunity to watch other dogs working and experience the atmosphere.

It was a miserable, wet day – more like November than late August. I decided to stand well back from the other handlers and when the simulated clay drive began I was able to just reassure Twig without interfering with the more experienced dogs and handlers. To be quite truthful all the shooting and the firing of the dummies from the remote launchers and other dogs going for retrieves didn't bother the little dog at all. She sat quietly next to me watching what was going on, never got worked up or made any attempt to run in. I was over the moon; it was a big lesson and a big step forward.

The following day the rain stopped for a while and I got back up to the wood for another training session. I have no plans to work Twig in the shooting field this season, although if I get the chance and if I think she is ready for a quiet walk about in January I may take the opportunity to give her that bit of experience. I had done a little cold game work with the pup and found that she was holding on to the retrieve. Fortunately she wasn't damaging the birds, but she was reluctant to let them go, so I backed off and went back to fur and feathered dummies again. A bit of maturity and a bit more training and it was time to try again – and this time she was nigh on perfect.

Her enthusiasm for retrieving is really good, which is a positive thing as over the past few weeks she has been finding her hunting gears and showing that she is going

With the wet summer, Nick has been able to get plenty of hunting sessions in to get Percy fit and ready for the season



to take after her dad, Percy, and be a bit of a machine in any kind of cover. She still hasn't joined up the dots where hunting and finding game are concerned and I am okay with that, as I think that when she does it will be time to hold on to my hat. I am hoping that in the coming weeks I will be able to get a bit of dogging in on my local shoot and that will give her the chance to experience hot scent. I will let you know how I get on.

Although a fair bit of my time has been taken up training Twig, Ted and Percy certainly haven't been left alone. With only a few weeks before we begin beating and picking up, the boys are back on a fitness regime. I like to begin with long memory retrieves and plenty of road walking to tone up their muscles, and when the weather is right a good hunting session in the wood. I also brush up on their handling skills and stop whistle, which all tend to get sloppy over the summer months. Too many people think their gundogs are like their guns, but you can't expect to put them away at the end of the season and get them out in October and hope they will work just fine. Even well-trained dogs need refresher training.

Ted is due later this week for his regular blood tests to check his calcium. The past two tests have put his levels smack in the middle of where they should be, but this will be the longest gap (two months) so I am a little apprehensive. If all is well, I think we will be able to go to six months and then annually. We have just had our insurance renewal and the premium has nearly doubled. Some increase was expected, but I didn't think it would go up quite so much. That said, Ted is worth every penny. I have managed to secure a few days' walked up shooting this coming season and I am really looking forward to it. I think it will be extra special bearing in mind there was a good chance I might not even have had Ted by my side. ■

It's back to boot camp for Ted as he gets ready for the upcoming shooting season

Experience is one thing but the ability to convey that knowledge to the client is the key

Gundog trainers

Ryan Kay on the difference between knowledge, experience and the ability to teach

What is the definition of a gundog trainer? This is a question I recently asked on the Farlavale Facebook group. Why did I ask it? Well, it's become apparent to me that the perception of a gundog trainer may have changed somewhat in recent years. And the answers I got showed I was right.

There has certainly been a noticeable increase in the number of general dog trainers of late, with some appearing seemingly out of nowhere. Many are armed with an array of qualifications and a vocabulary full of the latest terms and

phrases to help make things more complicated for the average dog owner.

There are of course many variables that come under the umbrella of the term ‘gundog trainer’. One is the variety of breeds within the four subgroups. It’s a rarity that someone can honestly say they offer the right training for retrievers, spaniels, HPRs and pointers/setters. I can only think of two people in the whole country with enough experience in all these groups to train any gundog breed to a good level, or at least a level that reflects the capabilities of the breed.

So what quantifies you as a gundog trainer? I think it comes down to two main things – knowledge and the ability to teach that knowledge. There are without doubt some extremely knowledgeable gundog enthusiasts out there, with years of experience, who constantly produce outstanding working gundogs for the field, but simply can’t effectively convey or breakdown their accumulated information into a learnable format for the handler. Conversely there are some excellent and engaging teachers who deliver with patience and understanding, yet the content is somewhat limited.

Qualifications.

There are no recognised qualifications that make you a gundog trainer. There are numerous qualifications that have been developed to ‘state’ you are a gundog trainer to their particular standard, but has their content been independently approved or rigorously scrutinised by anyone other than those who have written it or have a vested interest in it? The content may have been accredited by City and Guilds, Ofqual or equivalent regulatory bodies, but these organisations are not gundog experts. I know of several trainers with apparently relevant qualifications spewing out of their ears, but to me that doesn’t make them gundog trainers.

I am only one of a handful of Kennel Club Accredited Instructors for Working Dogs. Does that qualification officially make me a gundog trainer? No - it simply declares that I have accumulated significant knowledge and that I teach in a particular way and to a particular code of practice. It has less to do with the actual content that I teach, which I draw from many years of experience. It’s how I deliver that content that sits behind the KCAI qualification

So aside the two main attributes I’ve listed above, my description of a gundog trainer, comes down to this: ‘A person who can teach another person to train their dog to perform within the shooting field.’

I’ve mention the shooting field because I believe that to be deemed a gundog trainer a person must have extensive experience of handling dogs within the environment in which they were designed to perform. That means broad knowledge of working with game and all the training that entails. Without the experience of training dogs on game, you are simply a dog trainer. For example, without experience on game, how can you teach hunting to a client. And as three of the four subgroups are hunting groups, this leaves you purely as a retriever trainer – on dummies! So even here that lack of expertise on how to manage and handle a dog on game, and the knowledge of how game behaves and where it resides, will limit your retrieving know-how.

There are two further aspects worth mentioning here. Providing you can teach, it then comes down to knowledge and experience. Experience should enhance your own ability as a handler, but without anyone judging you or even offering an opinion on the standard of you or your own dogs, you’re left to decide yourself if you or your dogs are actually any good.

This highlights the first of the two aspects – a proven track record. If you’ve had success in competitions like field trials, then you and your dogs have been judged independently by your peers and experts within the same arena. Without this, you have a long reputation to build up and only by consistently turning out trained dogs in the shooting field for others to see are you going to build that reputation. This is, however, a common route that many have been successful at over the years.

The second aspect I feel worth mentioning is one that I don’t think can be taught. It’s the reason why some racehorse trainers are better than others, why one jockey can get more out of a horse than another, and why one canine behaviourist picks up on something they’ve never been taught.

It’s your natural affinity and kinship with animals – dogmanship, for want of a better word. Over the years I’ve seen some of the most unnatural handlers come for lessons, needing weeks and weeks of training on the same area before the objective has been achieved. You could almost see the dog going “Thank goodness you got that in the end. I’ve been waiting for ages.” On the other hand, I’ve had someone walk into the training paddocks and their natural affinity with a dog has just shone through from the word go. Adding this secret formula to a seasoned, experienced trainer with a proven track record, makes them a great teacher too. Then you have the recipe for a real gundog trainer. ■

Without experience on game, how can you teach hunting?

Rattus norvegicus

Patrick Hook and shooting buddy Paul take on a challenge. Patrick chases Charlie while Paul racks up an impressive total on the farmyard rats

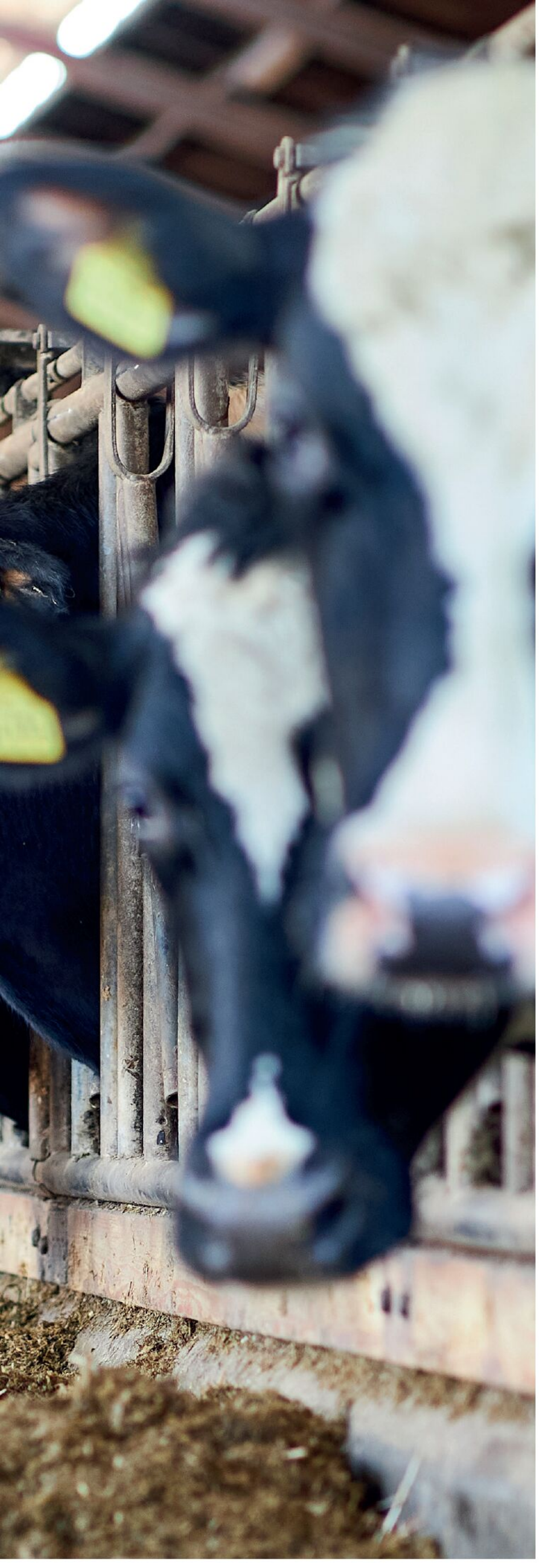
Photo: Roman Melnyk/Shutterstock

Back in the late 1970s the punk rock band The Stranglers released an album called *Rattus Norvegicus* – the scientific name for the Brown rat. One of the tracks was *Down in the sewer*. But while rats do, of course, inhabit such places they're also really at home in the farmyard. The ready supply of food and shelter allows them to breed like mad, and once they get a foothold in an area it's almost impossible to shift them.

From the farmer's perspective, rats present two distinct problems. First, they carry all manner of extremely nasty diseases, and second, if manage to gain access to feedstuffs they can both consume and contaminate it. As a result their numbers need to be controlled. There are many good pest-control companies, but they mainly rely on traps and poison. Rats are clever creatures and many learn to avoid even the most sophisticated of capture mechanisms, along with the most tempting of chemical concoctions.

One of the alternatives is to use packs of specialist ratting dogs as they can be very effective; however, they can't be used when there is livestock around. This is where a competent shooter can provide a real service to farmers. My shooting partner, Paul, is one such person. Although he goes all over the world fishing and shooting, he simply loves ratting. While he knows that his work really helps the local farmers, he adores the simplicity of just picking up an air rifle and heading off. His weapon of choice is a .177 Air Arms S510. It is pinpoint accurate, totally reliable, has a good shot count (about 100 per fill) and, coupled with an add-on NV unit, deadly efficient.

While I also do some ratting, I still prefer to go foxing with my trusty .204 Kimber. This juxtaposition can work well, though, as it means Paul can stay in the yard and hammer the rodents while I head off into the fields.



One night recently we did just this on his neighbour's farm. The plan was for me to follow him around for a while so that I could take some photographs, and then head off and see if there were any foxes about. It only took a minute or so to get there, so while he got his equipment ready I went ahead to see what was about.

The yard in question is always a busy place as the farmer keeps cattle in the sheds – their feed attracts rats in their hundreds and that is exactly what I saw. The creatures were everywhere – sometimes just in ones and twos, sometimes in very much larger groups. Up on the tractors, down in the gutters – in the trees, under the bales, and running about between the cows' hooves. The presence of the livestock worked in our favour though – as long as we took care to stay out of sight, we could make as much noise as we liked.

Paul likes to use the same basic techniques as when we're foxing – a hand-held thermal spotter shows him where the rats are, and a set of tripod sticks provides him with the necessary steady aim. This works really well alongside the NV, which is coupled with an infrared illuminator to get really good visuals. The Air Arms S510 not only hits hard and consistently, but it's quiet too. Reloading is fast and smooth, meaning that he can sweep across a line of rats and knock them down as though he was in a shooting gallery. During this session he fired 80 shots, which equated to about 75 rats allowing for misses and follow-ups.

Rats learn quickly, though, and he finds it important to get on target and fire rapidly or they spot the red light from the IR and run off. Fast target acquisition is necessary anyway, as rats rarely keep still for long. One thing we noticed on this occasion was that the vast majority were relatively young – testament to the speed at which they can breed and yet another reason why they can't be ignored for long.

From our point of view a night's ratting makes a good break from the foxes, and being in and around sheds allows us to carry on even when it's raining. And it also helps the farmer a tremendous amount, which is always a good way of racking up those vital Brownie points! ■

TIPS

- Rats only become really active after dark, so you'll need some way of seeing them. This means a lamp, night vision or a thermal scope.
- If you're using a pre-charged air rifle, make sure that the bottle is fully charged before setting off.
- Make sure that you take plenty of ammunition – running out when the rats are teeming is incredibly frustrating.
- Rats are strange creatures. Some nights you may see hundreds while on others, seemingly for no reason, there may be few about. When this happens, give it a few nights and try again.
- Always carry spare batteries for anything electronic you're using, such as the thermal spotter, NV and illuminator.
- I always carry at least one spare torch, usually two. Farmyards can be dangerous places and this is especially true in the dark

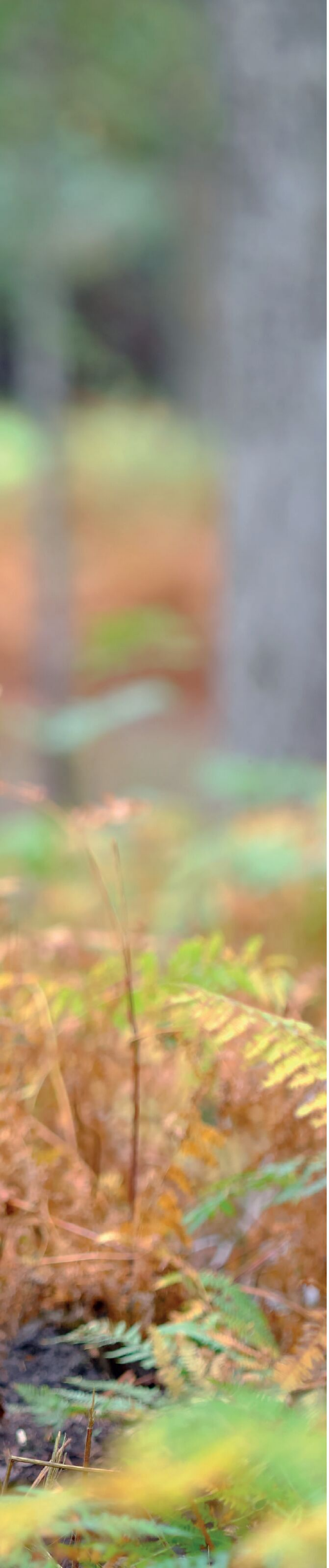
A typical view of the farmyard – a number of rats clustering around a stall full of cows. They rarely keep still though, so quick reactions are required to aim and fire successfully.

The first thing Paul does is work out where the rats are before deciding if a safe shot is on. Here he's having a look with the thermal spotter. This equipment is a game-changer.

This pile shows less than half of those shot in the one session. Shooting them not only saves the farmer money, but it's also environmentally friendly, as it makes using toxic baits unnecessary.

Range time

Before you even consider going out to shoot a deer with your new rifle there is a bit of range work that needs to be done first, as **Charles Smith-Jones** explains



Marc Chesnau/Getty Images

It always helps to have an experienced mentor if you are new to shooting. They will be able to help with your setup and advise on technique if necessary. Ideally a formal rifle range with an instructor will be available, but many of us may have to make do with a field with a suitable earth backstop behind the target. If so, do make sure that it is safe and meets the conditions on your FAC.

The target need not be complicated; an A4 sheet of paper with a clearly defined dot, circle or diamond pattern is fine. All you need is a picture that you can sight onto precisely for every shot. At the most basic level, a large cardboard box with an aiming mark and weighted down with a lump of turf (not a rock because of the ricochet hazard) works well enough.

Before you start, do check that the eye relief of the scope suits you. Too great a distance between the eye and the rear lens and you will not get a proper sight picture; too short and recoil may cause a painful blow to the eyebrow. In most cases about three inches or so is right, but make sure that you experiment with mounting the gun in several shooting positions to make sure it works for all of them.

Make sure that you have plenty of time before you start as there is nothing more detrimental to good shooting practice than rushing. You should also consider a few simple marksmanship principles, without which accuracy can never be at its best. Apply them every time you shoot, and they become second nature in no time:

- The shooting position and hold must be firm enough to support the rifle.
- The rifle or weapon must point naturally at the target without any undue physical effort.
- Sight alignment and sight picture must be correct.
- The shot must be released and followed through without undue disturbance to the position.

First you need to ensure that your rifle is bore sighted to ensure that barrel and scope are pointing towards roughly the same point. A collimator or similar device helps but don't worry if you don't have one. Simply fix the rifle in a stable position and, with the bolt out, look down the barrel and ensure that it is pointing at the target or a similar fixed object. Then, without disturbing the rifle, adjust the scope so that the cross hairs sit over the same point. It's really that simple.

Now you can move on to actually firing some shots to confirm that the scope is properly adjusted. The rifle barrel must be clean and dry, as any trace of oil might cause the first shot to fly wild. At about 25m from the target, get into a comfortable position (prone using a bipod is probably best) and remember the marksmanship principles. Pull the rifle stock firmly into the shoulder with the trigger hand while supporting the forend with the other. If using a bipod, form the non-shooting hand into a fist that supports the toe of the stock. Make sure that the rifle is pointing naturally at the target and there is no tension trying to force the rifle into position. You can check by closing your eyes and taking a couple of breaths. When you open them again the crosshairs should be where you left them.

Breathe out, then squeeze the trigger gently – it should almost be a surprise when the rifle fires. Keep the trigger held back while staying in the aim for another second or so – this is the 'follow through'. If at any stage in the process you do not feel comfortable, don't shoot. Simply take your finger off the trigger and relax for a moment rather than rush things.

"One shot is never enough. From now on you need groups of shot holes to confirm that there is no human error involved"

One shot is never enough. From now on you need groups of shot holes to confirm that there is no human error involved. Groups of three shots tend to suit most people. There should be as many holes close to the target as shots fired, hopefully clustered closely together, but they probably won't be exactly where you aimed them. Make appropriate vertical and horizontal adjustments to the scope dials to move the central point of the group. Scopes may vary, but on average it will take around four clicks to move the sights ¼" at 25m, and just one click to do the same at 100m.

Most of us these days shoot using a sound moderator, so between strings of shots »

always check that it has not worked itself loose as they sometimes can. It's a good habit to get into as a loose moderator will almost inevitably affect the rifle's zero. When fitting the moderator, by the way, it only needs to be hand tight – there is no need for excessive force when screwing it into position.

Now that the rifle is shooting roughly to the centre of the target you can move back to 100m and repeat the exercise, making adjustments so that the centre of your shot group is once again around the point you were aiming at. Some people prefer it to be an inch above, which extends the range at which you can shoot directly at a target and expect the shots to fall within it (the 'point blank'). There is no need to chase absolute perfection here. As long as the group centre is within ½" or so of the desired point on the target it will be more than adequate for shooting deer at sensible ranges.

A group like this indicates there's a problem with either your shooting, the scope, or the rifle itself

Left: Practise with an air rifle or rimfire. Commercial centrefire ammunition isn't cheap

If you are having difficulty getting your shots into a tight group, don't despair. Most rifle ranges have experienced coaches and a session with one will quickly pick up any faults in your technique or the rifle's setup. Alternately get a shooting friend to watch you firing as they may be able to pick up errors that you are not aware of, such as snatching the trigger, closing your eye or flinching when firing, or poor rifle hold.

In any case, once the rifle is zeroed and ready to go, don't rest on your laurels. Fullbore ammunition is expensive, especially if you are buying commercial loads, so if you can, practice with an air rifle or .22 rimfire as an excellent and much cheaper way of developing shooting skills. We may not all be able to cloverleaf our groups, but if you cannot place your shots consistently in the middle of a deer target kill zone it's a sign that you need more practice.

Take the opportunity to learn the correct point of aim, as unfortunately real deer don't come with convenient aiming marks. Paper deer targets are readily available, and you may even have access to shooting grounds with iron deer silhouettes, which produce a satisfying clang when hit in the right place. Practise shooting from different positions as well. In the field a prone shot off a stable bipod may not always be possible, and sometimes standing while shooting off sticks can be the only option.

The DSC1 test standard is a good basis to work from, where the standard is shooting from prone or a simulated high seat at 100m, then at 70m sitting, kneeling or standing. Try them all and find what works best for you. The final stage of the DSC1 test is also an area that many people neglect – a close dispatching shot from between 10 and 20m into a target representing the head of a fallen deer. The point of aim for this is higher because of the closeness of the target and it is important to know it in case of a real-life situation. At closer ranges do wear eye protection – and of course ear defenders for all shooting.

Range work is not just about making sure that your rifle is zeroed or getting shooting practice. It also enables you to identify your own capabilities in case of you are tempted to attempt unsteady or excessively long-range shots at living deer. ■

Be prepared. Confidence is a key factor and plenty of range time can provide that

Introducing Gemini

Handheld thermal binoculars from InfiRay

Gemini

Designed for the professional hunter, who demands excellent performance and dependable tech, InfiRay launch the Gemini Series of thermal binoculars.

Featuring InfiRay's OEM 12µm 640×512 (50Hz) NETD≤25mK infrared detector and 50mm F1.0 large infrared objective lens, coupled with it's 4µm 1920×1080 (50Hz) digital night vision detector and 50mm F1.1 digital night vision objective lens and built-in laser rangefinder, the Gemini captures superb images with great contrast via it's intelligent, full-colour fusion image algorithm, even in extreme dark and poor weather. These binos also offer all the software features you'd expect from InfiRay - multiple scene modes, infrared highlight, infrared edging, hotspot tracking, digital zoom and real-time video playback.

This, with the Gemini's lightweight and ergonomic construction make it the only pair of binos you'll need in the field, day or night.

Thermal detector: 640×512 / 12µm
CMOS detector: 1920×1080 / 4µm / 50Hz | Fusion Mode | 50mm F1.1 digital night vision objective lens
Built-in 1200m Laser Rangefinder
1024x768 OLED display | Wi-Fi
64Gb storage Built in microphone

IRAYGEH50R £3,899.99

Available in all good gun shops - ask your local Dealer

HIGHLAND OUTDOORS
TRADE ENQUIRIES | 0345 099 0252
sales@highlandoutdoors.co.uk | www.highlandoutdoors.co.uk

Outdoor InfiRay
www.infirayoutdoors.com

HIGHLAND OUTDOORS IRELAND
TRADE ENQUIRIES | 053 925 6675 | 085 861 9722
sales@highlandoutdoors.ie | www.highlandoutdoors.ie

Charlie on the cheap

Mike Powell explains how the old ways still work – especially with some modern assistance

Photo: JMrocek/GettyImages

Fox control – or 'foxing' as it's now referred to – is something I've been involved in since I was a lad in the far-off post-war years. To say the equipment was rudimentary back then would probably be an understatement, but we did manage to get quite a few foxes, and as our prehistoric equipment improved so did the number we accounted for.

Today, of course, it's all totally different. The changes have mainly been brought about by the arrival of night vision in its various guises, with thermal being the biggest game changer of it all. The thing that strikes me most is the vast sums of money that are spent on shooting, something that's totally worthless in financial terms. All those years ago we did it completely the other way round, spending as little as possible, not difficult as times were hard, to make as much from the foxes we got as we could. Sadly those days are gone and will never return.

Moving on to the present day, I can't help but think that there must be many people who would like to go out after the odd fox or two but are prevented from doing so by the sheer sums of money involved. I count myself extremely fortunate in being in the privileged position of being able to test quite a few of the various items of night vision gear that seem to appear almost on a monthly basis. I have to say that many of these are absolutely amazing, and providing you have

Some of the earlier lamps were a bit on the large side!

Modern lamps and torches are totally different from when I started

Foxes will usually stand still when the lamp first goes on

enough money to throw at them you really won't go very far wrong, as long as you have some knowledge of your quarry.

So the intention of this article is certainly not to knock any of the excellent equipment out there, but perhaps to point out to those who find the eye-watering expense just too much to handle in these extremely difficult times that there are ways of doing some fox control that won't endanger your mortgage repayments too much.

I started out like others of my generation with a lamp of one sort or another and a shotgun. Today, of course, the vast number of foxes accounted for are shot with a rifle combined with digital or thermal night vision. I will ignore choice of calibre, etc, as this has been covered over and over again. Put simply, virtually any rifle from the .17 calibres upwards is more than capable of killing a fox in the right hands and, within its capabilities, range-wise.

So you have a rifle and you want to go out after a few foxes. What other equipment will allow you to do that on a reasonable budget and give you a good chance of some success? Clearly as the year moves on, nights are far and away the best time to be out after foxes. Perhaps the start of the foxing season proper starts as the last of the harvest is brought in and the old foxes and this year's offspring will be out and about in the stubbles looking for morsels the combine's lethal cutter bar has left behind.

Bearing in mind that this article is aimed at being able to get a fox or two as economically as possible, and as foxes will be patrolling the stubbles and cleared fields while daylight still exists, perhaps a return to the old ways is the possible answer. You will have your rifle and scope, so in daylight there's no problem, and as failing light renders the scope ineffective a torch is the easiest and most economical option.

There are many excellent torches on the market, but I've found the Night Master range, such as the Trident, which offers a choice of three colours, or the Speras T1 to be excellent. Many years ago when I started shooting foxes for their skins, a lamp was all the extra equipment we used – and did so to good effect! Today perhaps the biggest and most useful piece of equipment any night shooter can own is a thermal spotter.

Without a doubt, thermal has been the biggest game changer in modern shooting history, for the first time enabling quarry (and almost anything else) to be seen and identified even on the darkest night. Again there are some very good and not too expensive models on the market. Pulsar are a well-known and very popular make, obtainable from many outlets such as Scott Country. A new one on the scene that I've recently tested is the Pixfra range from Night Master. The one I tried out was the Mile, which for Just over £1,000 did everything needed to get results. There are several models in the range but this one certainly did the job. I'm aware that it's still a lot of money, but compared with much of the equipment on the market today it is relatively inexpensive.

Armed with the Pixfra Mile I set off for a stint on the stubbles. The huge advantage the thermal clearly gives you is that you can spot your quarry, in this instance a fox, without it having any idea you're there. Over the years there has been a lot of talk about 'lamp shy' foxes, and certainly many years ago when a light was rarely seen out in the field's, foxes were certainly inclined to be wary of them.

Now things have changed. The countryside in general is no longer a light-free zone, in fact lights are everywhere – farmers working at night, off-roaders, walkers, joggers, security lights on almost every building... the list goes on. So why should a fox be worried about yet another? »

My Anschütz Hornet with the Speras torch and Pixfra Mile thermal

Photo: www.dgwildlife.com

This is where the combination of a thermal spotter and a good torch really come into their own. My own experience is that a fox, like most animals that operate at night, needs confirmation of where the danger lies so that they know where to run when it is identified, and rely on their three senses of hearing, sight and smell. So to give a typical example, should the lamper enter a field at night and make a noise opening or climbing the gate, the fox will be aware that there is a potential danger and will be on the alert. Even then, as I've seen so many times, it will appear to carry on as normal, but as soon as a light comes on it will be off.

However, if our lamper has been careful and quiet, when he spots the fox though his thermal he can either wait for it or stalk it, and hopefully the fox will eventually be in range and he can then put the lamp on it. The fox, being unaware of the danger, will almost without exception stand for long enough for a shot to be taken. Just recently I've been trying out the combination of thermal spotter and lamp and each time it's worked like a charm. One fox did run for 20yd before stopping to check where the danger lay, because foxes don't necessarily assume there's a human behind the light.

Another tip if you are walking the fields with a thermal is to be quite open about it. Years ago this wouldn't have worked, but today there are so many people about at all hours that foxes have become tolerant of us. If you are on the move and spot a fox, keep moving but not on a collision course. Angle away from the fox, keeping it in sight all the time. When you are happy with the range, slow down and ready yourself for the shot. There is every chance the fox will wait to see what is going to happen next. You will need to be quicker in this type of situation as the fox is well aware of you. However, in most cases it will offer a shot – more often than not moving off a few yards before stopping.

Lamping foxes is a testing and exciting way of controlling their numbers and is so much easier today, when almost exclusively everyone uses a rifle, as opposed to times gone by when we had to be within 30yd or so of our quarry with a shotgun.

There is some amazingly good gear out there that's a joy to use but comes with a hefty price tag. Practically it's quite easy to set yourself up, providing you have a suitably scoped rifle, for under £1,500. The outfit I was using recently cost under £1,200 and accounted for five foxes in two weeks.

There is far more to this type of foxing than can be covered in this article, but the object of this piece was to confirm that you don't need to spend a fortune to shoot foxes at night! ■

"The fox, being unaware of the danger, will almost without exception stand for long enough for a shot to be taken"

OBJECTS OF DESIRE

687EELL

The 687EELL is one of the most desired and iconic game guns available. The beautiful side plates are adorned with exquisite game scenes or intricate scroll engravings. The premium grade walnut has precise, deep cut checkering protected by a deep oil finish. The strong, low profile receiver and cold hammer forged barrels are designed to cope with modern loads and high volume days. These guns are beautifully balanced whatever your choice of barrel length or gauge.

Price from £7,650. Left-hand models and pairs also available.

GMK

For further product information and details please call GMK on 01489 587500 or visit www.gmk.co.uk

BERETTA

BER_0722_687EEL

The cowboy classic!

After almost 130 years in production this American icon is still going strong. **Charles Smith-Jones** explores the timeless 1894 Winchester

The ultimate cowboy gun is still going strong

A true classic design by John Moses Browning, the Winchester Model 1894 ranks among the most famous guns of all time and is credited with making the Winchester synonymous with underlever rifles. In almost continuous production since the year of its name, it remains a firm favourite, most particularly among hunters who want a reliable, hard-hitting and compact gun for the closer-ranges typically shot at in the denser forests of the USA.

Winchester introduced its lever-action rifle in November 1894, saying: "We believe that no repeating rifle system ever made will appeal to the eye and understanding of the rifleman as this will and that use will continue to warrant first impressions." It appears they were right, and the new rifle quickly became a favourite among both professional and recreational users.

Over 7.5 million Model 1894s have been produced since then. In addition to a hunting pedigree, it has a long military history, seeing service in conflicts on the American Frontier, in the Spanish-American War of 1898 and until as recently as WW2. It has been used not only by US forces but also by our own Royal Navy and was even issued to the British Home Guard. Originally intended for black powder cartridges, it became the first repeating rifle to chamber the smokeless .30 Winchester Center Fire, which eventually became known as the .30-30 we are more familiar with today and is the calibre most closely associated with it.

A somewhat complex but highly reliable mechanism permits longer cartridges than those used in its predecessor, the Model 1892, to be cycled, as when the lever is pulled down it takes with it the bottom of the receiver. This opens up more space, allowing the cartridge to feed without any need for a longer receiver. The complexity of the action does mean that stripping it is a meticulous task that must be carried out in a careful sequence in the rare event that it should ever be necessary.

“It has been used not only by US forces but also by our own Royal Navy”

The old iron sights have now been superseded on the latest models with a side-ejection system, allowing the 1894 to finally accept a scope. However, collectors may well still prefer the classic design

Not a long-range precision rifle by any means but still a very capable closer range all-purpose shootin’ iron

Great subscription deals at sportinggunsubs.co.uk

It's a old design, and as tough as they come, but stripping an 1894 is not for the faint-hearted. You need to keep a very close eye on what goes where!

There are three basic versions of the Model 1894. The standard version had a 26" barrel and a tubular magazine extending along its length holding nine rounds; the 20" Carbine holds seven. A Saddle Ring model was also manufactured, similar in dimensions to the Carbine but featuring a saddle ring on the left of the receiver for mounted use.

There are many variations on these themes and the stock options available. Finishes can range from plain to the surprisingly elegant, although the essential design has changed little over the years. More recent models accept a wide variety of cartridge types including, since 1983, the Model 1894 Big Bore for .307 Win, .356 Win, .375 Win and, slightly later, .444 Marlin. In 2003 it was even introduced chambered as a .410 shotgun known as the Model 9410.

The original sighting system was straightforward, with a notched rear sight and a post front. Early models of the 1894 ejected the fired case through the top of the receiver and over the firer's shoulder rather than off to one side. This was not considered to be an issue as a more popular early upgrade was to mount a peep sight. The increasing popularity of telescopic sights demanded side ejection, however, so in 1982 the action was redesigned to permit this and allowed the use of top mounted scopes.

If you fancy owning a piece of pure Americana, the Model 1894 might be just what you are looking for. With most of the cartridges it is chambered for, such as the venerable but still highly effective .30-30, it has a comfortable recoil and is light, handy and a pleasure to shoot. A number of aficionados have also discovered that this lever action makes a pleasant change from more run-of-the-mill bolt action rifles. Although it is certainly not a gun for the long-range shooter, it is capable of surprising accuracy at sensible ranges, especially if fitted with a telescopic sight. ■

Tech specs

Winchester Model 1894

Country of origin	USA
In production	1894–2006 and 2011-present (latter produced in Japan by Miroku)
Action	Lever
Stock options	Wood, commonly beech or walnut. Synthetic aftermarket options also available.
Barrel length	20", 24" or 26"
Magazine	Internal tube, capacity 7-9 cartridges depending on barrel length
Left hand version	No
Weight (bare)	Standard 7lb 6oz, Carbine 6lb 8oz
Available in calibres	.30-30 Win, .32-40 Win, .38-55 Win, .25-35 Win, .32 Win Special, 7-30 Waters, .307 Win, .356 Win, .375 Win, .357 Magnum, .44 Remington Magnum, .444 Marlin, .45 Colt, .450 Marlin, .410 bore
Cost new	£1,145.99 (M94 Short Rifle, .30-30)
Cost used	Upwards of around £500 in good, usable condition, though often much more for top-quality or rarer examples

THE SMART CHOICE FOR PRESCRIPTION SHOOTING GLASSES

PERFORMANCE SPORTS EYEWEAR

- High definition vision
- Distance, bifocal, varifocal & high index lenses
- Lenses hand-crafted to your own prescription
- FREE try-before-you-buy service
- In-house optical laboratory & fast turnaround
- Renowned customer service

Optilabs

optilabs.com/shooting
020 8686 5708

QUALITY BRANDS FOR OUTDOOR PEOPLE

WILD & MOOR
QUALITY COUNTRY LIVING

CALL 01535 610066
WWW.WILDANDMOOR.CO.UK
BORN IN THE YORKSHIRE DALES

Rifle Q&A

No problem goes unsolved as *Sporting Gun* puts your questions to the rifle experts

A question of calibre

I'm stepping up from my rimfires and I'm now in the market for a centrefire for foxing. What calibres would you recommend?

Paul Austin replies: The in-vogue foxing round at the moment is .204. It's a fantastic flat-shooting foxing calibre with very low recoil. However, it's really only suitable as a dedicated foxer/varmint round. It's not the right (or legal) calibre for smaller species deer.

Another great choice is .22-250. It's very fast and very flat, but admittedly delivers more recoil. It can be used for smaller species of deer, but it's still pretty much a dedicated foxing calibre like .204.

The most popular foxing calibre in the UK is .223. It's usable on smaller species deer but it has the added benefit of being very cheap to run, with a box of 20 rounds coming in around £20 at the low end.

Another great choice is .243 – formerly the ultimate all-rounder prior to considerations about a lead ban. In the past a .243 could be used for anything from foxing to red deer, but the light lead-free ammo can't quite cut it on the reds. However, all other UK deer species are well within its reach. With a 90/100gr bullet, fallow aren't an issue and you could drop down to a 55gr varmint round for foxing.

Lastly, we come to the all-conquering 6.5 Creedmoor. It's hugely popular and is rapidly replacing .243 as the ultimate all-rounder. However, even at the low end (95gr bullets) think it's a bit much for foxing. You want a varmint calibre that basically explodes on impact, dumping all its energy into the animal. With Creedmoor there's more chance of pencilling (shooting straight through without sufficient expansion), which of course could also result in more ricochets.

For me, the ideal choice would be between .204, .223 (if money is tight) or .243, if you wanted an all-rounder that could pull double duty on the deer – well, most of them.

Photograph: MartinaVaculikova/Getty Images

34mm mounts for long-range shooting

I'm thinking of buying a 34mm tubed scope for long range and maybe getting involved in PRL shooting. I'm looking to stretch out as far as possible on my existing rail. Any suggestions?

Paul Austin replies: First, 34mm is the perfect choice for long-range shooting, as there's much more room for the erector tube to move within the scope itself, so you definitely gain a lot more 'dial' with a 34mm tube. If you don't want to add a 20 MOA rail, adjustable mounts are the answer.

Burris do their XTR Signature rings, but Sportsmatch have recently launched their ATP94 model. I'm a huge fan of Sportsmatch rings and their adjustable offerings have got me out of many a sticky situations mounting and various IR scopes over the years.

These new rings are height adjustable, adding another 50 MOA. Combine that with a 34mm scope and you should be able to reach out to a ridiculous distance with any self-respecting centrefire.

I have been using Sportsmatch rings for a number of years. High-quality, no-nonsense kit that's engineered to a very high standard and still retails at a sensible price. What's more, they are a British brand to boot, so there's no reason not to fly the flag! The ATP94s come as a Picatinny mount, so they should slot straight onto your existing rail.

The silencer is currently supplied with a 12 gauge choke tube to fit one of the following choke systems:

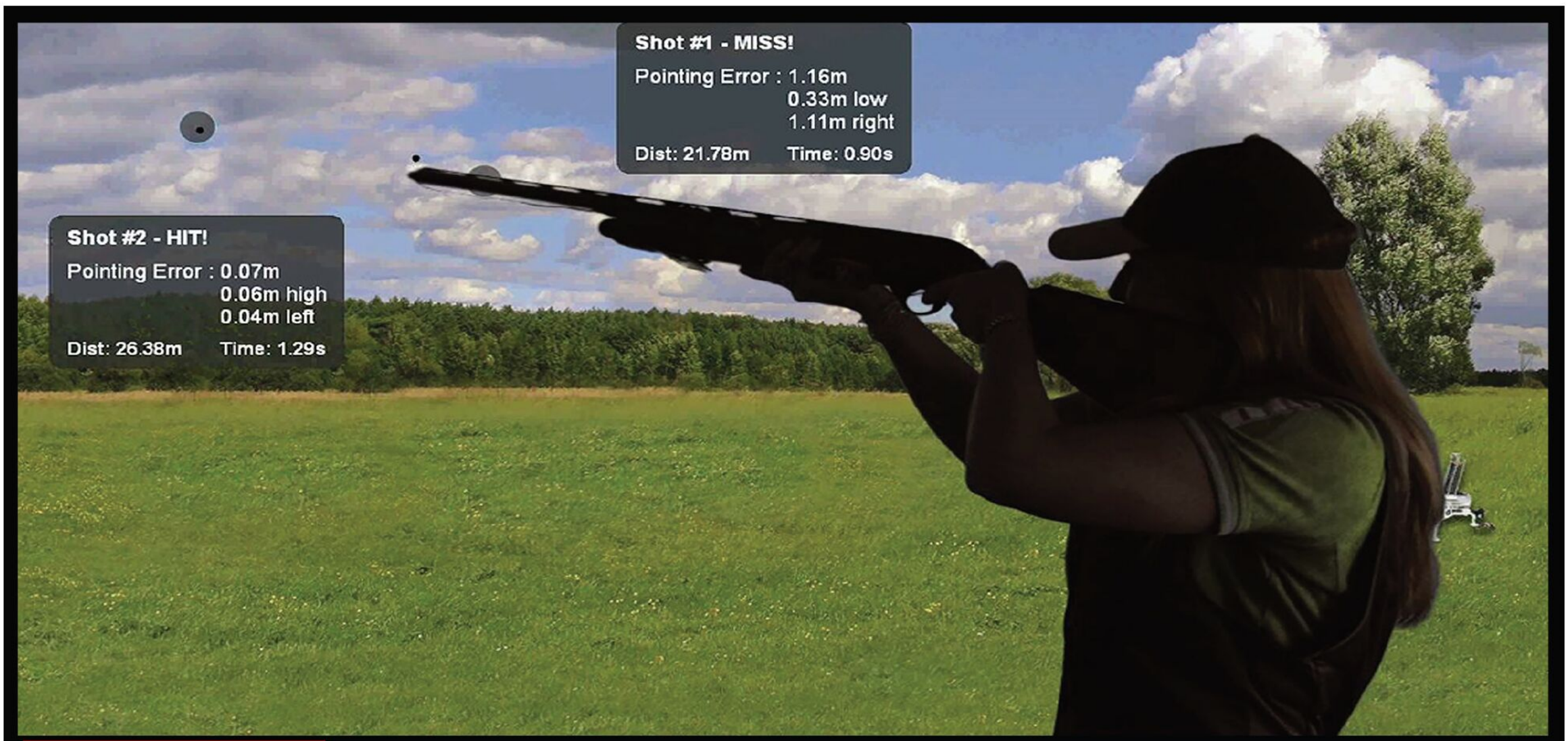
- Mobilchoke (Beretta, Benelli, Franchi, etc.)
- Crio Plus (Benelli M2)
- Invector (Mossberg, older Winchesters, Weatherby)
- Invector Plus (Winchester, Browning)
- Optima HP (Beretta)
- Remington (870, 1100)

Distributed by

Jackson Rifles

Trade enquiries:
Tel: +44 (0) 1644 470223
Glenswinton, Parton, Castle Douglas DG7 3NL

www.jacksonrifles.com



DryFire
TARGET SIMULATORS

Clay Pigeon Shooters
Practise your shooting

www.dryfire.com

Practise indoors 24/7 with your own gun!

Muntjac – a prolific little breeder!

Jon Snowdon provides an intriguing look at the lifestyle and breeding patterns of one of the most prolific deer species in the UK

Super Prin/Shutterstock

In the last edition of *Sporting Gun* I wrote about the various breeding strategy that roe deer have developed over millennia to successfully enable the survival of the species. In that piece I mentioned the K species and roe deer being within that classification.

Roe deer are of course a native species. They have been around for thousands of years and were on the British Isles when the land bridge flooded, around the Dogger area of the North Sea and the Channel. Once that area became flooded due to rising sea levels and the melting of the last ice age, any animal that lived on the British isles became a native species simply because they could not travel across to Europe.

Let's take a look at muntjac deer, which are at the other end of the spectrum. Muntjac are a non-native species that were introduced into the UK in the late nineteenth century when introduced to parks, where they did very well. Roe deer, on the other hand, do not thrive in captivity. Muntjac are the smallest deer in the UK and have proved in a relatively short period to be agile, adaptable and resilient. Inevitably there were escapes and it is likely that either accidental or even deliberate releases occurred too.

The species was not fully understood and it was originally thought that Muntjac would be unlikely to survive in the wild in the UK. That belief has been proved wrong and muntjac are now spreading rapidly throughout England. There are only a handful of counties that don't have muntjac records.

Due to their R selected tendencies they present unique challenges and are capable of overpopulating areas rapidly and can cause significant damage to the ecosystem. Their management requires a proactive approach and it is crucial that there is constant monitoring of numbers. It is also important to respect their resilience and adaptability. They are after all a testament to the dynamism of nature and managing them is a task that requires a deep understanding of these dynamics.

Why so successful?

Being an R selected species their strategy is to produce young frequently with as little mentoring as possible. The muntjac is unique in its breeding cycle. For instance the bucks are fertile throughout their antler cycle and can breed virtually throughout the year. Although the doe will only produce one kid, they make up for that as an R selected species by breeding regularly. After a doe produces her first kid she will then go on to have a kid every seven months.

Usually smaller deer have a shorter lifespan. Roe deer are around 10 years and CWD around six. Muntjac, however, are capable of living for 16 years and with their breeding strategy it is clear to understand how this feisty species is taking over some parts of the UK.

Does are able to breed at seven months old, and with a gestation period of around seven months it its generally accepted that they go on to have young every seven months until death. This rapid reproduction rate and relatively short gestation give muntjac the potential to expand very quickly in favourable conditions. Once the population is allowed to expand to higher levels it rises out of control and is very difficult to bring back to a sustainable level.

"Their management requires a proactive approach and it is crucial that there is constant monitoring of numbers"

Yet another of the numerous R tendency species strategies, which again is unique among UK deer, is that does come into oestrus and breed within days of giving birth. No other deer does that; generally there is at least a couple of months before breeding takes place. Roe, for example, have their young in May and will be ready to breed from late July into August, and red deer have young in June/July with the peak of their rut in mid-October.

The muntjac's R selected tendencies, in addition to all of the above, also mean they do not invest a huge amount of time in mentoring their young. Kids can become »

Great subscription deals at sportinggunsubs.co.uk

self-sufficient relatively quickly compared with other species and are weaned after around two months. The R strategy leaves them no choice but to grow up quickly, because within seven months the doe produces yet another kid.

We are the ones that are managing our deer population and it is important that it is carried out effectively. We have to understand each species' strategies to enable us to mitigate their impact on the ecosystem. An approach is necessary that takes in the unique dynamics of each species. That understanding and the collection of data is a key to the efficient and effective management of these magnificent animals.

It is in our hands to ensure the sustainability of our deer for centuries to come. We can learn from the iconic roe deer and the unexpected rise of the muntjac. Let's be prepared to be adaptable and resilient, step away from many of the entrenched ideas we my hold, be flexible in our approach and embrace multiple strategies. ■

That's your Lotte

For one diminutive dog, Lotte on occasion does create chaos. In fact I am thinking we should have called her Chaos. As a breed teckels are determined little beggars and Lotte is no exception.

We have had people working in the house and it has been bedlam. Lotte is a very friendly girl and true to form she was determined to get under their feet and ours. Everything was just too interesting and her need to investigate knows no boundaries. Lotte follows people in the house wherever they go. And yes, I mean everywhere!

Lotte is not happy having the builders in and has taken to her bed. Well, not exactly her bed!

She has spent the last four weeks furtively hiding behind closed doors ready to ambush whoever opens the door next. She does a very thorough investigation of tool boxes, any jacket that hangs on a chair has the pockets rooted through and we know why that is. I have three pairs of trousers with pockets chewed out because that's where I keep the odd treat. I really should have known.

Being so short legged, in the weather we have had she comes back absolutely drenched and sits on my chair. I not only have no pockets but also a permanently wet backside!

ANDREA'S RECIPE

Venison skewers

Ingredients

- 1 lb minced venison
- 1tsp ground cumin
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
- 1tbsp chopped mint
- Oil
- 1 pack of multicoloured peppers deseeded and chopped into squares

Method

1. Mix the venison, spices, garlic and mint together until well blended.
2. Divide into 8 balls, rolling between your palms to make an oval shape.
3. Thread on to 4 skewers putting on a piece of pepper then a meatball and finishing with a pepper.
3. Heat a griddle pan until hot and cook the skewers for about 4 minutes on each side brushing with oil to stop them sticking.
4. Serve with a salad and yogurt.

Tasks in hand

I don't think I need to remind you that it has been wet. The whole country seems to have had a soaking for weeks, which does hold us up. We have towers to move and erect, and much of the past storm damage has not been cleared due to the soft ground not allowing machinery in to do so. Hopefully it might be all right if we get a prolonged dry spell. Fingers crossed.

Generally this month is a quiet one for us, the roe rut has burned out and the bucks tend to keep out of the way to recover from their exertions. They might appear in mid-October but our cull is all but complete and the one per two we didn't manage to get may be taken if they appear.

We have fallow appearing on two of our estates and that is proving a little frustrating. Being herd animals they tend to move around a lot. They will be on your ground for what can be a short period and then they simply disappear over the boundaries. I'm sure they have read the manuals and clearly know the seasons! The open season for fallow males is 1 August for England and Wales and the doe season is 1 November first to 31 March. Typically we have some bucks and does with young on our ground before August. I am confident they will appear this year in season.

FIERCE
FIREARMS

CT RIVAL PACKAGE

- Fierce 2-Lug action in Titanium
- Precision Machined Action | Wire EDM cut raceways
- 70 degree bolt throw | Spiral fluted bolt
- BIX'N ANDY custom adjustable trigger
- Lightweight Carbon Fibre Stock | Integral Bi-pod email
- LR negative comb design | Ergo pistol grip – Palm Swell
- Fierce C3 Carbon Barrel
- Match grade barrel liner | Cryo-treated | Hand Lapped
- GPO Spectra Fixed 7.5x50i with G4i reticle & 30mm Tube
- Talley Lightweight Scope Mounts

The calibres that are available are the following:

- 243 Win with 24" barrel and 1/8 twist
- 6.5 Creedmoor with 22" barrel and 1/8 twist
- 28 Nosler with 26" barrel with 1/8.5 twist

½ MOA Guaranteed | Titanium Action | C3 Carbon Barrel
Carbon Fibre Stock | Bix'N Andy Trigger Adj.

RRP. **£3440.00** ONLY

RAYTRADE UK LTD.

Email: sales@raytradeuk.co.uk **Tel:** 01635 253344

Fierce competition from across the pond

Bruce Potts takes a look at the latest from Fierce Firearms – a factory rifle that guarantees the performance of a custom

Fierce Firearms, based in Quebec, Canada, started producing high-precision items for the firearms industry and now produce precision rifles of their own. To this end, Fierce have manufactured an extraordinary range of rifles with guaranteed accuracy of ½ MOA at 100yd with recommended ammunition.

You can opt for the Rival model, which has a Remington 700-type footprint and a two-lug bolt, or the Edge model, here on test, with a Sako 85 footprint. But in both cases the build quality is more custom than factory.

The Edge rifles show their precision and custom credentials with a lightweight yet super-strong carbon-fibre constructed stock and the barrel is match-grade hand-lapped stainless steel with Fierce's proprietary C3 carbon-fibre wrapped barrel technology. Add to this a superb trigger system and stainless steel detachable magazine, and you have yourself a really nice stalking rifle in your hands. Best of all, this rifle came chambered for the new 6.5 PRC round, so it will be really interesting to test.

Specification

The Edge has a choice of stainless steel or titanium (on test) actions, this CT Titanium model, although pricey at £5,720, really makes the already light Edge into a nimble stalking rifle. You also have a tough black Cerakote finish, making it impervious to the weather. Carbon-fibre barrelled models weigh 6.6lb and the titanium actioned CT model weighs a scant 6.1lb.

The three-lug bolt action and low 70° bolt lift combines fast operation with a positive lock-up, as well as reliable controlled round feed of the cartridge. The bolt is spiral fluted to reduce weight and also prevent binding in operation. Extraction is via a large Sako-style claw, with ejection performed by an inset spur in the floor of the action. Although the bolt handle is stubby I had no problems cycling the action as its large hollow serrated handle possesses a good grip.

Up top, scope fitment is via a drilled and

tapped receiver. Here we had Talley mounts and the large ejection port also allows you to feed single cartridges through the action. The mag itself is a stainless steel detachable unit that fits four rounds of fat 6.5 PRC ammunition and is easily removed with the forward release lever in the floor plate.

The safety locks the bolt closed when operated but, as in a Sako, a small secondary lever also allows the bolt to be opened to remove a cartridge. Trigger-wise the Edge uses a match-grade single-stage unit, adjustable from 2-4lb with no creep and this rifle broke at 2lb 5oz, which was both safe and precise to use.

Carbon-wrapped rifles are all the rage these days. Fierce use a 416R stainless steel C3 buttoned-rifled, match-grade, hand-lapped and cryogenically treated barrel that is machined down in diameter and wrapped with carbon fibre to give both strength and stiffness. This culminates in a lightweight barrel that delivers varmint barrel accuracy and consistency along with reduced heat build up and thus less heat mirage. Add to this that ½ MOA guarantee and you have yourself a pretty special hunting rifle.

The barrel itself is 24" (26-28" is best to get the most out of a 6.5PRC though) with a 1 in 8" rifling twist, a straight taper, 0.9" diameter muzzle and ⅝" UNEF thread.

It's a light gun, primarily due to the carbon-fibre composition of the stock, which achieves a mere 0.745kg in weight (plus trigger guard). The weave construction of the carbon fibre gives the strength and an appealing pattern overlaid with a sprayed on camouflage. There is no chequering to the stock and it doesn't really need it due to the textured and slightly rippled surface. The 13.75" length of pull is a tad short for me. There is a very soft recoil-absorbing Limbsaver butt pad, not that the 6.5 PRC kicks much.

"There is a very soft recoil-absorbing Limbsaver butt pad, not that the 6.5 PRC kicks much"

To aid consistent accuracy, Fierce have fitted aluminium pillars and a forward-mounted metal recoil lug/tang for stability, with the barrel free-floated for it entire barrel length. All in all a very finely put together rifle indeed.

Field test

I fitted the new GPO Spectra 4-6x50i scope, whose optical quality and magnification range was perfect for the fast and flat-shooting 6.5 PRC round. Hornady introduced the new 6.5PRC in 2018 and it can be seen as a magnum version of the 6.5 Creedmoor, offering 200-250fps more velocity.

Factory ammunition was a bit sedate to be honest, with the Hornady Match 147gr ELD ammunition shooting 2785fps for 2533ft-lb of energy and all shooting just under 1". The only other factory load I had was Hornady again, with the 143gr ELDX bullet travelling at 2780fps and 2455ft-lb, with all shots touching – ½ MOA as claimed.

So both were below the 2900fps written on the boxes. For reloads, I use the QuickLoad ballistic program to ascertain the initial loads on new rifles as it saves a lot of time and money spent on the wrong components. Starting off with the light Sierra 85gr HP loads, I used 61.0gr of Norma N204 powder for a stonking 3368fps and 2142fps, with two shots touching and one off. For those who might fancy some longer-range varminting, the 108gr Lapua Scenars with 56.0gr of Vit N150 powder, trotted along at

The Fierce Edge CT is a high-end factory rifle with the build and performance of a custom, and uses the very latest in carbon-fibre technology in both barrel and stock

Titanium action shaves the weight off the rifle, as does the fluted bolt, with the whole action having a remarkably smooth operation

Very Sako-esque safety system and note the carbon fibre weave to the stock and camo pattern

You can see the match-grade stainless steel barrel join and carbon fibre wrap, which gives the profile of a varmint barrel but the weight of a sporter

3201fps velocity and 2458ft-lb energy with 0.80" groups.

As a lead-free option I tried 120gr GMX with 57.0gr of Ramshot Hunter for 3086fps and 2539ft-lb with 1.25" groups. That's good for lead-free. Switching to a lead-cored bullet like the Nosler 120gr Ballistic Tip with the same load achieved a performance of 3089fps for 2543ft-lb and 0.65".

My favourite lead-free option is the Barnes LRX 127gr bullet, and when combined with 58.0gr of RL19 powder I got 3063fps and 2646ft-lb. Here the bolt was a tad sticky, so regard this as a maximum load and start lower. Good all-rounders were the Nosler AccuBond 130gr over 57.0gr of Ramshot Hunter powder for 2949fps and 2511ft-lb, with very consistent 0.75" groups at 100yd.

Upping the bullet weight to 140gr with the Hornady SST projectile achieved 2855fps with 2535ft-lb and 1" groups with 55.0gr of RL19 powder. An alternative load would be 61.0gr of H1000 for 3011fps/2819ft-lb.

I have been playing around with Hornady 143gr ELD X bullets, which are designed to expand more than the ELD Match bullet and offer great ballistic coefficient values. With 55.0gr of Vit N555 powder I managed 2876fps and 2627ft-lb and sub-1" groups. 57.0gr elevates the velocity to 2954fps and 2771ft-lb. They expand very well up to red deer sized game and are equally good for roe and CWD.

Running the 6.5 PRC round through QuickLoad shows that it does shoot flatter than a 6.5 Creedmoor with the same bullet weight. Compared with a 6.5 Creedmoor with a 140gr bullet at 2700fps/2267ft-lb, the results are 54.7" drop at 500yd with 18.3" wind drift, while the PRC with the 143gr ELD X bullets at 2954fps/2771ft-lb give a 41.8" drop and 13.6" drift. Quite a lot better.

Conclusion

Carbon-fibre wrapped barrels and carbon-fibre composite stocks are here to stay and Fierce have used them to all their advantages, both in light weight for better handling and for strength with a consistent bedding from that stiff stock design.

The whole action is faultless and smooth and with the familiarity of the Sako 85-style action I had instant muscle memory operation of the mag release, safety and general operation. You can feel the precision built into these rifles, and as a stalker I also appreciated the reliable nature of the feeding and ejection coupled with great handling out in the field.

Accuracy was very good, even with the limited factory ammunition situation. The price reflects all these features but when compared with a custom rifle seems very reasonable. ■

Tech specs

Fierce Carbon CT Edge 6.5 PRC rifle

Manufacturer	Fierce Firearms, Canada
Model	Carbon Edge CT
Type	Bolt-action carbon-fibre sporter
Calibre	6.5 PRC
Magazine	4-shot detachable
Action	Titanium
Finish	Carbon fibre and Cerakote
Barrel	Carbon-fibre wrapped, 24"
Overall Length	44.5"
Weight	6.1lb
Sights	Drilled and tapped for scope mounts
Stock	Carbon-fibre sporter
Trigger	Single-stage adjustable
Price	£5,720

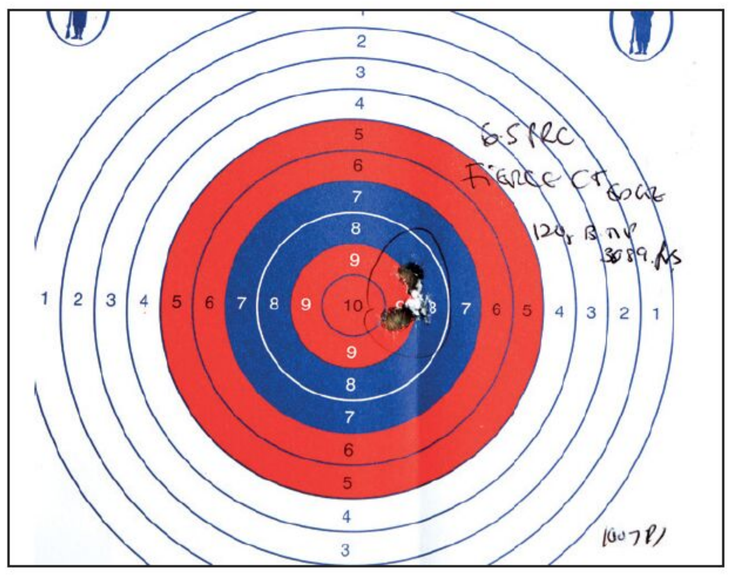
Contacts

Fierce, GPO: Raytrade Ltd – 01635 253344

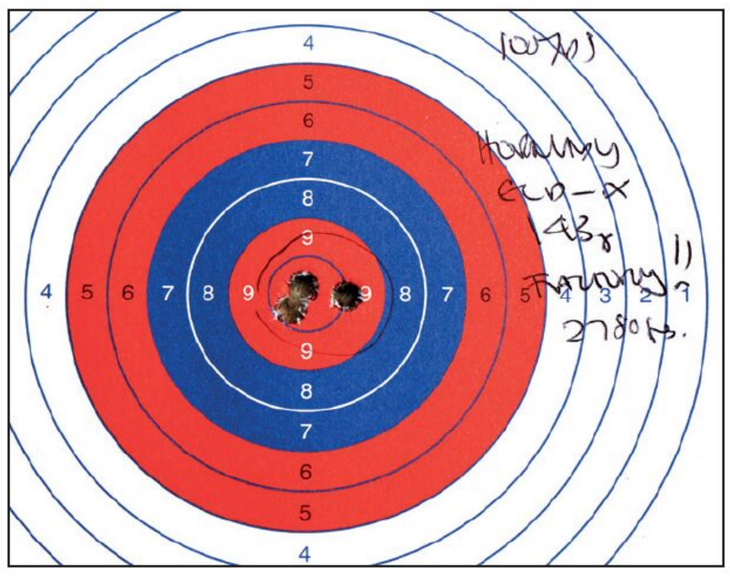
QuickLoad Ballistics: JMS Arms – 07771 962121

Norman Clark Gunsmiths Reloading Supplies – 01788 579651

Alliant powder, Hornady: Edgar Brothers – 01625 613177



½ MOA clams were justified with this 120gr Nosler B Tip load at 100yd



Factory ammo was good in the accuracy department but low on velocity

COUNTRY SPORT SCOTLAND

Discover your memorable sporting experience now

The premium directory for country sports opportunties in Scotland

SHOOTING | STALKING | FISHING

Follow us on socials

countrysportscotland.com

SCAN ME

NGO

Rifles

The next generation

Tim Weston offers up some interesting proposals to revitalise our sport and get more youngsters out game shooting

I often hear from shooters that we are struggling to get the young involved in our sport. To a certain extent I agree with that, but not entirely. Rural sports are so diverse that it is hard to quantify what people mean, but on the whole they are talking about game shooting. But which part of game shooting is struggling to attract young people and why?

I think that the driven side of shooting is certainly a place where you don't see many young people standing on a peg, which is probably down to cost and availability, but could we get more young kids out beating and picking up? I think the answer to that is a simple "Yes." Do we want more young people out shooting game, the answer to that is also a definite "Yes" in my opinion.

The NGO runs free simulated game days for young shots, with a live quarry drive, and they are an excellent way to get more young people involved as well as their families. But is this enough?

I want shooting to be an all inclusive pastime that can be enjoyed by siblings and parents as well as the traditional participants. But what do we need to do to get kids away from their small screens and out into the sometimes horrific British winter weather? We need to make it fun, exciting and rewarding, which I personally think shooting is already. But I can understand why some looking in from the outside, who have no traditional background in fieldsports, might think that it is a staid and stuffy sport for old white men.

In 2019 the English and Welsh Cricket Board were having a similar internal discussion and came up with a 24-point plan to save cricket, which was slowly declining.

"I would love to see game shooting emulate the ECB's The Hundred success"

Even village cricket was seeing fewer and fewer young participants. Among these ideas was The Hundred, which was hoped would retain current lovers of the game while attracting a new audience of youngsters and families, and ultimately improve participation.

The ECB carried out some proper market research and its findings regarding the existing demographic of cricket fans and attendees offered few surprises. On average, 82% of ticket purchasers are male, 94% are white British and 65% identify as upper-middle, middle or lower-middle class.

Naturally the research found that engagement in cricket is less among children and teenagers when compared with other sports and I would say shooting is similar. With three-quarters of current cricket fans hooked before 16, the ECB want to offer a shorter game. Is this starting to sound familiar?

You might not think that this is directly relevant to shooting, but we can draw some comparisons. We need to make beating, for example, more exciting rather than just putting the kids on stop for hours on end out of the way. We need to get them involved, seeing the action, and where possible getting hands on.

I know what you are thinking – that you can't compare apples and pears – but all I am suggesting is that as gamekeepers and shoots we can do something to encourage more boys and girls to get involved in our sport and make it more exciting for them. Get them involved with the picking up team, use a radio on the drive or be around pegs (obviously with safety at the top of our minds) to see the action.

I would love to see game shooting emulate the ECB's The Hundred success. Wouldn't it be amazing if we could have young people on every shoot right across the UK this winter – and their families too? I am sure some of you will be engaging in some excellent initiatives and I would love to hear what they are. Let's come up with our own 24-point plan to get more participation in game shooting. ■

CLASSIFIED 0131 573 0358

MADE IN BRITAIN

BRITBORE MOP®

BORE CLEANING MADE EASY

Simple . Quick . Effective

Please go to our website
www.britboremop.co.uk
to view demo videos and read the reviews from our customers

TELEPHONE 01763 838010

CLAYLINE

Wholesale suppliers of PROMATIC *clays*

All ranges and colours • Mixed pallets available • Delivery countrywide

Please contact Phill Smith
Tel: 07976 302420 Email: clayline@outlook.com

TELEPHONE:
0800 772 3961

COOL GAME (UK) limited

www.coolgameuk.com

GERMAN QUALITY

2 YEAR WARRANTY

MAKE YOUR GUN FIT YOU WITH AN ADJUSTABLE COMB

by Jim Spalding

KICK-EEZ PADS SUPPLIED & FITTED
NEW STOCKS BUILT FOR ENGLISH GUNS

112 East Road, West Mersea, Essex CO5 8SA | Tel/Fax - 01206 382477

ORION GUN CLUB

SKEET • DTL • SPORTING

Every Sunday 10am to 1pm

Chequers Road, Noak Hill, Romford, Essex CM14 5RG

Just around the corner from Old MacDonalds Farm

For further details call Stuart on:
Telephone: 07954 297849 | Peter: 07802 273050
Website: www.gunclub.info

Ogdens Shooting Supplies

Call **0161 620 2190** Email **pogsew@btconnect.com**

Visit **ogdensshootingsupplies.co.uk**

PARK STREET GUNS
Registered Firearm Dealer
1-2 Park Street Lane, Park Street,
St. Albans AL2 2NE
Tel: 01727 872646/872669
Fax: 01727 875449
parkstreetguns@talk21.com
www.gunshot.co.uk

COUNTRY WAY GWGS 410 GUNSHOP

140 Norman Road West Malling Kent ME19 6RW
Tel: 01732 841311/870023
Cash and Carry Cartridges
Over 1 Million cartridges in stock all the time

Bradford Stalker
Shooting & Country Sports Specialists. Established 1985

Large selection of new & used shotguns, rifles and airguns, clothing, footwear, night vision, scopes, reloading, lamps and accessories. Call for bulk clay pigeon and cartridge prices.

All Major Brands Available and Stocked

Tel: 0191 4100565
www.bradfordstalker.co.uk

Ouston bank farm, Ouston, Chester Le Street Co Durham, DH2 1BB
Email: contact@bradfordstalker.co.uk

NORFOLK SPORTING GUNS

With over 40 years of experience in the business, we stock and supply all leading makes of sporting accessories, sporting guns, rifles and clothing at highly competitive prices. You can also come to us for gun repair and maintenance services. For a free estimate, speak to our team today.
01953 605 517
christanner1957@tiscali.co.uk
www.norfolk-sporting-guns.co.uk
18a Market Street, Wymondham NR18 0BB

INDEPENDENT SHOOTING SUPPLIES
200+ Shotguns and Rifles in stock

*** Shotgun and Rifle Ammunition**
*** Shooting Accessories and Equipment**
*** Optics* Clothing * Decoying Equipment**
*** Knives * Gun Safes**

RUN BY SHOOTERS... FOR SHOOTERS

ISS are located 50 yards from the corner of Thoby Lane & Roman Road.

Open from 9am to 5.30pm Mon to Sat
The Yard, Thoby Lane, Mountnessing, Essex, CM15 0TD
Tel: 01277 356181

Melbourne Gun Ltd

MELBOURNE TACKLE & GUN

64 Church Street,
Melbourne, Derbyshire
Tel: 01332 862091

Large selection of new and second hand Sporting Rifles, Shotguns and Air Rifles. Outdoor, Waterproof Clothing & Footwear. Barbour, Aigle & Seeland stockist.

Visit our website
www.melbournegun.com

3 legs or 4?

Mark Ripley explains the relative merits of tripods and quad sticks, which you should use, and why

Whether you are deerstalking, foxing or rabbiting, you will no doubt at some point have used a set of shooting sticks – or at the very least considered them. The advantage of the extra height and stability offered by such a shooting aid when shooting in the field is unrivalled, sometimes enabling a shot that would otherwise be impractical shooting freehand.

Of course you can use a bipod or shoot from a kneeling position, but this might often not be possible in long grass or over crops. Also, the additional movement involved in changing positions might well give away your presence to your intended quarry.

The major inconvenience of shooting with shooting sticks or tripods is simply that they are an additional cumbersome piece of equipment to carry around the fields. However, when foxing I find them invaluable – just not in every situation. When shooting over the hilly ground that makes up some of my permissions I often prefer to use a bipod. This is because the hillsides are heavily grazed and shots are invariably further due to the open nature of the ground. However, anytime the grass is too long for prone shooting I will always opt to use a set of sticks or a tripod.

There's quite a debate as to which is the better option, and both have advantages and disadvantages. As a rule, and having used both extensively, I would say that sticks (namely quad sticks) are a better option for stalking, and a tripod has the edge for foxing. But before we go into why and how I've come to this conclusion, let's take a look at what's on the market.

First up, there's the poor man's option – homemade quad sticks. They can be made with four garden canes, a few nuts and bolts and some string, and in all fairness do a pretty god job of offering a basic steady shooting platform. They are also lightweight, easy to carry and cheaply replaced.

From here there are many manufacturers offering various forms of quad sticks, but there is one that stands out from the rest and to my mind offers the best and probably most stable shooting aid out there – the Viper-Flex Styx Journey.

They are one of the more expensive options but well worth the money. They are lightweight, adjustable and well made, with some clever design features such as their one-handed deployment handle and a wide rest beam on the front to allow some horizontal movement without needing to adjust your position, which is a brilliant feature over many other options.

The Primos Trigger Stick is a popular tripod option. They are a really clever design when it comes to quick height and angle adjustment, but stability is limited and the legs also have a tendency to fail to deploy properly after a while.

From here there are several carbon fibre shooting tripods available, but for me the best all-round option I've found and regularly use is the Rekon CT-1 tripod with pig saddle from Scott Country. This offers a stable platform that's quickly adjustable and is reasonably lightweight to carry in the field.

In a nutshell, I would say that if you want the best of either system you would be looking at the Rekon tripod and the Viper-Flex Styx.

So, what are the advantages of one over the other? Well, the advantages of the Viper-Flex over the Rekon tripod are that it supports the rear of the rifle as well as the forend, offering unrivalled stability. The Vipers also have an option to add further support with the fitting of a fifth leg, which then gives benchrest-like stability, all in a more compact and lightweight package.

The downside to the Vipers is that they lack manoeuvrability in the field or on rough ground. To move them about on a target requires you to step the leg around, which can be difficult in bramble, nettles, etc. Also, »

“There’s quite a debate as to which is the better option, and both have advantages and disadvantages”

if you choose to use these with the fifth leg it can be a bit of a faff to adjust for a quick shot.

The Vipers also require you to keep hold of the rifle with at least one hand, whereas the Rekon style tripod allows you to leave it locked in the clamp and have both hands free to use binos, thermal or for calling. Another disadvantage of the Vipers is that they are not easily adapted to shooting on steep or very uneven ground. The Rekon, however, can be quickly adjusted and levelled and can also be used kneeling, sitting and even prone thanks to the versatile design.

The price of the Viper-Flex varies considerably online depending on supplier and model – anything from £200 to over £500 – while the Rekon is currently available for £440 from www.scottcountry.co.uk.

If you have a Picatinny rail on the underside of your rifle you can opt for the cheaper version of the Rekon, which uses this rail to clamp directly to the tripod and removes the need for the saddle clamp.

Put simply, the Viper-Flex offers a light, easy to carry and supremely stable shooting platform that is perfect for deer stalking where you will more likely have a little longer to set up for a shot on a grazing deer.

The Vipers offer extra stability by supporting the rifle front and rear, and with the stock tucked into the shoulder pocket and the lead hand clamping the forend against the front beam of the sticks, the only movement is rocking back and forth. The fitting of the fifth leg negates this, but it can also be minimised by bracing one of the rear legs against your thigh.

The Rekon offers a more versatile platform, hands-free capability and allows you to quickly and easily manoeuvre onto your target. That's a massive advantage when calling foxes or when they simply won't stand still (which is 90% of the time). With a little practice and correct technique you can also be surprisingly accurate with them. I've made shots on a steel fox target over 600yd from a standing position and regularly shoot foxes out to 200yd or more using them.

"One of the main faults people have when shooting off both sticks and tripods is having them set too high"

One of the main faults people have when shooting off sticks and tripods is having them too high. From a standing position, the top of the butt of the rifle should be the height of your solar plexus or thereabouts. This causes you to lean forward into the rifle and absorb recoil, rather than being pushed backwards off balance, often resulting in a high shot.

When out foxing, Mr Ripley is rarely seen without his trusty tripod

Shooting from a tripod does take more practice to achieve accurate shots, yet the benefit of their versatility makes it worth the effort, which is probably why you see military snipers and police marksmen shooting from tripods rather than quad sticks.

Although you can achieve a relatively stable position using them by adopting a 45° stance, as you would when using sticks, a better method is to stand square on to them with one of the tripod's legs pointing straight back towards your centreline. Then use your non-shooting hand to grip the rear leg of the tripod with your thumb pointing down and your arm locked. This causes you to use bone support, not muscle, for greater stability. By leaning around 30% of your weight into this leg you are create a second tripod with your two feet and the rear foot of the tripod, making a much more rigid position.

The Rekon tripod makes an excellent option when sitting down, especially when you can rest your back against a tree or sit on a sloping hill. By using your knees to support your rear elbow, this makes a really comfortable position to shoot from and great for long waits with the rifle supported and locked in position in the saddle clamp.

Furthermore, the Rekon comes supplied with two central spindles, the shorter of the two giving you the option of using the tripod from the prone position, making it an excellent all-round shooting-support system.

Whichever option you choose, there's no doubt that for general foxing or deer stalking, the advantages of using a tripod or shooting sticks far outweigh the inconvenience of carrying them! ■

Use your non-shooting hand to grip the rear leg of the tripod, with your thumb pointing down and your arm locked

FRANCHI

FEELS RIGHT

AFFINITY 3 & AFFINITY ELITE

MANUFACTURED IN ITALY, THE FRANCHI AFFINITY AND ELITE SHOTGUNS OFFER UNQUESTIONED RELIABILITY AS WELL AS EXCELLENT VALUE FOR MONEY.

Franchi's Affinity shotguns are well known for their easy handling and rugged reliability what-ever the weather.

Affinity 3 features a TSA recoil pad which reduces felt recoil up to 50%. The inertia driven action ensures very reliable cycling and the oversized bolt controls make loading easier, even when you're wearing gloves. These are truly versatile guns, whether you're out in the field or at the clay range.

Affinity 3 is available in 3" and 3.5" chamber in a variety of configurations. A true left hand version is available in 3" black synthetic.

RRP From: £900

7 YEAR WARRANTY

WOOD

MAX 5

Affinity Elite features a Cerakote finish to both the barrels and the action of this incredibly tough gun. Cerakote is an ultra-thin, polymer, ceramic coating which fortifies the metal with an extremely resistant finish. Available in both 3" and 3.5" in either Bronze or Cobalt OPTIFADE™

RRP: £1,150

7 YEAR WARRANTY

BRONZE

COBALT

See the website for full details of all specifications available.

GMK

For further product information and details of your local stockist please call GMK on 01489 587500 E: sales@gmk.co.uk **www.gmk.co.uk**

FRAN0123_AFFElite+1

BROWNING®

2023 WORLD ENGLISH SPORTING CHAMPION
SAM GREEN – SHOOTING HIS ULTRA XS PRO THE CROWN

THE BEST THERE IS

WWW.BROWNING.EU

Firearms and ammunition can only be sold to permit holders and of legal age