

NEWS: CLOSE SEASON ABOLISHED FOR SCOTTISH STAGS

SHOOTING TIMES

11 OCTOBER 2023

& COUNTRY MAGAZINE

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Early season redlegs

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SKINNER'S

BORN TO BE OUTDOORS

DOG OF THE WEEK



Ken

Two-year-old Ken performed fantastically during his first season and is already showing great promise as the new season starts - hopefully there will be many more to come.

Owned by Millie Ramskill • Photographed by Natasha Hill Photography

11.10.23
Issue 6,470

SHOOTING TIMES On the fence



As a skein of pinkfeet flew overhead last week, a friend asked me if I had ever shot a bird by mistake. What he was really asking was if I had ever misidentified a bird and sent it tumbling. I told him that I hadn't and added the caveat that, even if I did misidentify a bird, the safest place for it to be was at the end of my barrels. I explained that most shoots implement fines and most Guns – certainly the ones I know – don't even salute unless they are positive of the species. My friend, a keen twitcher, was intrigued how Guns can identify a bird at a second's notice; it stands as testament to their knowledge and expertise.

He then added that, several years ago, he had to report a gamekeeper for suspected raptor persecution. Sadly, but understandably, this impacted the way in which he views fieldsports. It's almost clichéd at this point but the actions of the minority do impact the majority. Our chat was only brief, but I think it went some way to repairing his faith in fieldsports. We must try to lay the facts bare when we can; the folks on the fence are not always against us.

Ollie Harvey, Managing Editor



Contact Ollie at ollie.harvey@fieldsportspress.com

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featured STORY



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Rural Reaction was launched on 1 October this year and hopes to highlight issues that are important to rural communities



New political party launched ahead of general election

Rural Reaction aims to take on the Conservative Party in their rural heartlands, focusing on those who live and work in the countryside

A new political party, Rural Reaction, was launched on 1 October 2023 by PR and political lobbying veteran Ian Gregory. The party aims to take on the Tories in their rural heartlands and highlights recent lobbying successes on foxhunting, dog e-collars and overseas trophy hunting as examples of where politicians have changed their minds away from dogma delivered by the conservation industry.

Mr Gregory suggests that a lot of soft opinion coming from urban areas does so because people

haven't looked at the science. He also says he is looking at a broader overall picture than just the upcoming general election, stating: "The key thing here is not about winning seats, it's about shifting the

"It's about shifting the debate to consider rural voters"

debate so that the big parties now have to consider rural voters. To force the Conservative Party and the Labour Party to think about what the views of the countryside are, instead of just playing for

urban animal rights activists. Rural Reaction can shift who has key jobs [in Government] and can even shift Government in a very tight election."

Christopher Graffius, executive director of

he explained. "As in previous general election campaigns we will be seeking the views of all candidates, including those from Rural Reaction, on shooting and conservation, and communicating them to our members and the wider community so that they can cast informed votes."

ST contributor Graham Downing added: "In my experience, protest parties have rarely achieved what they set out to. My advice to those with rural issues in need of political attention would be to make an extra effort to engage with MPs from one of the major parties." **FP**

Optimism for the new season

Shooting contributes £2bn to the UK economy and supports 74,000 full-time jobs. After a few tough years for the shooting community following Covid and the bird flu pandemic, there is optimism that 2023 will mark a return to form for game shoots across the country.

A return to more seasonal conditions in October has meant early-season pheasant shoots are showing encouraging signs and days are selling well.

Liam Bell, headkeeper at Millichope Estate and ST contributor, said: "Build-up to the season has gone well for the most part. The terrible weather in June and July has meant that the poults have stayed tight to the woods and the game crops. Days are selling well; people are just keeping a weather eye on the



Early-season pheasant shoots are showing encouraging signs

potential for bird flu to rear its head again"

Sir Johnny Scott, author and president of the Gamekeepers Welfare Trust, added: "From an industry point of view, despite the muddled bureaucracy, the preparation hasn't been too bad. More broadly, shooting really has to pull itself together and focus on quality rather than quantity.

"We need to lower the stocking rate of pheasants, be more conscious of their welfare and increase the quality of the product that makes its way to our tables. Many agents are advertising 'mini days', which is the right thing to be doing. Paying to kill a certain number of birds is increasingly unpalatable; we should be paying for the pleasure of the day."

Warnings over greenwashing



There are concerns that much of the UK's land could be bought up by companies for tree planting

Agricultural land in the UK is at risk of being forested over by conglomerates under the pretext of combating climate change, the UK's farming minister has warned.

Farming minister Mark Spencer said that the UK has to take care not to let too much farmland be turned over to tree planting and other carbon-offsetting schemes for the sake of

corporate "greenwashing". He explained: "We need to be wary of what we're using land for and we can't allow that sort of greenwashing. If we're not careful, Shell and British Airways will buy all the land in England and just plant trees on it to offset their carbon."

Richard Negus, a professional hedge-layer, conservationist and ST contributor, said: "Corporate

greenwashing is rife. It's all about numbers for them. The trees and seeds are unsustainably sourced, the wrong trees are planted in the wrong places and they are not managed in a way that will see the forests last.

"Scientists and companies need to remove their carbon blinkers and engage forest practitioners at an earlier stage in planning."



Weekend X poll

If you could only have one breed of dog, what would it be?

48% Labrador

25% Springer

27% Cocker

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To do this week



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The World Gunmakers'

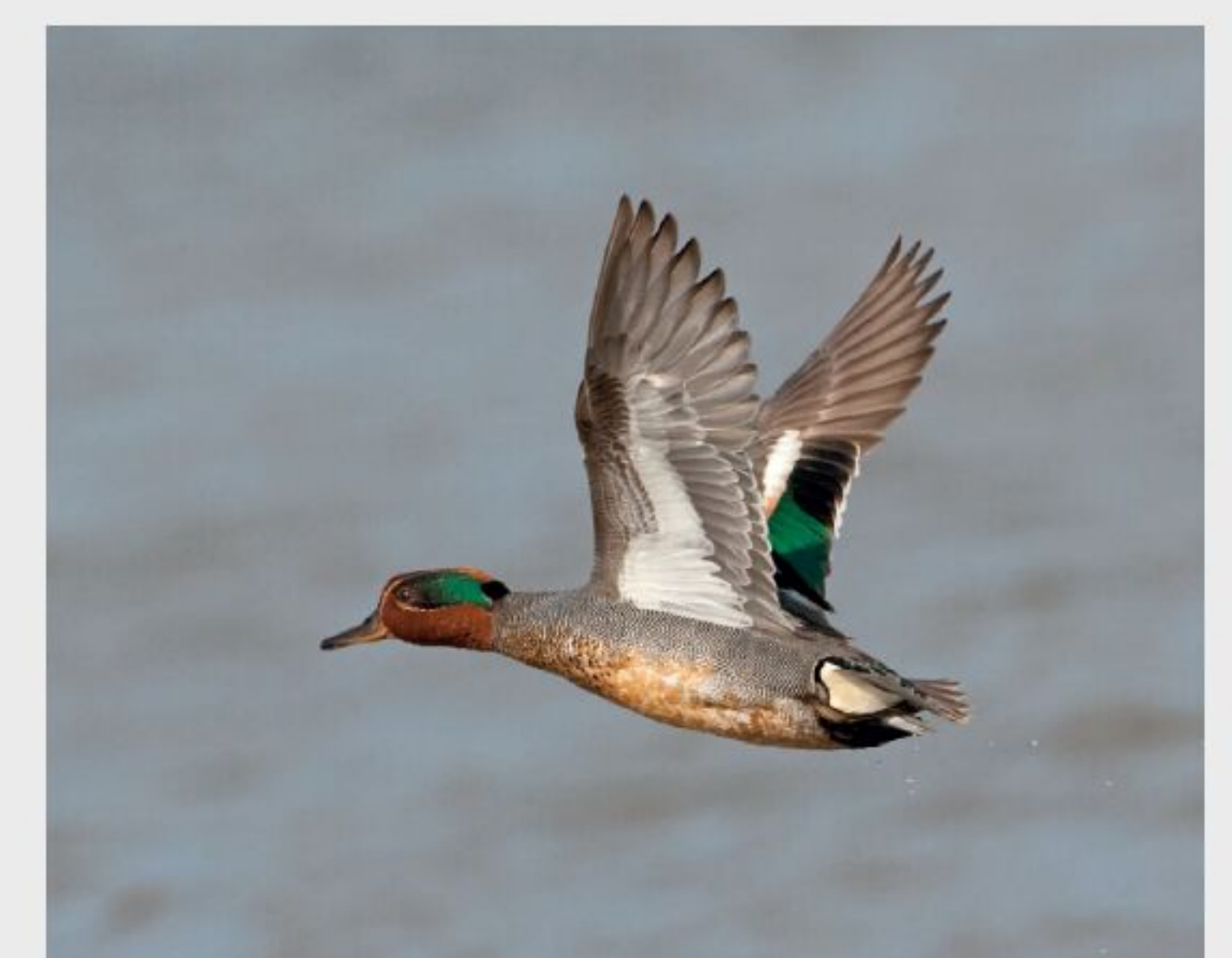
Evening returns on Wednesday, 8 November at the Armoury House in the heart of the City of London. Exhibitors include English heavyweights William Evans, Purdey and Holland & Holland, Italian gunmaker Zoli, Spanish gunmaker Kemen, German behemoth Blaser and Austrian gunmaker Karl Hauptmann. Plus, new for this year is Gunwerks and Christensen Arms, two American brands that specialise in long-range hunting rifles. Tickets cost £125 and can be purchased from worldgunmakers.com



SHOOT

With the 'half ducks'

streaming in across the North Sea, a few changes to how you feed your flightponds and splashes could see more variety in your bag. Barley will pull in the mallard but casting a bit of rape and millet in the margins will attract their speedy and delicious cousins.



There are concerns over the welfare implications of the new legislation on Scotland's deer population



Scotland abolishes close season for male deer

From 21 October, there will be no close season for male deer of any species in Scotland, despite concerns from the British Deer Society

Last week, the Scottish parliament voted on government proposals to abolish the close season for male deer in Scotland. Despite having been rejected by the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, parliament voted to accept the government proposal. This means that from 21 October 2023, there will be no close season for male deer of any species in Scotland.

The British Deer Society (BDS) did not support the abolition of male deer close seasons as communicated in its government consultation, yet the Scottish government decided to press ahead regardless. The BDS expressed its fear at the possibility of “our most enigmatic mega-fauna being treated as pests”.

This measure is also not an effective one for deer population control, argued James Scott, head of policy and external affairs in Scotland for the BDS. “Effective management

of the female deer population is the only thing that will produce meaningful population reduction,” he said.

In much of Scotland, this change is effectively unnecessary as those needing to control male deer out of season have already been able to do so under a general

Green Party that seems hell-bent on rushing through a raft of ill-thought-out legislation.

“The decision to declare an open season on male deer, particularly on the open hill, has serious welfare implications – not only for the stags but also for the breeding hinds, which have difficulties enough on open ranges

“We are increasingly treating our deer species as vermin, which is abhorrent”

authorisation. Image intensifying and thermal sights have also now been legalised for controlling deer numbers at night.

UK professional stalker of the year and ST contributor Chris Dalton said: “Yet again the voice of reason, backed up by well-documented scientific fact and input from experienced deer managers, has been ignored by a Scottish government propped up by a

in winter simply trying to survive the often extreme conditions.

“Allowing thermal sights to be used for stalking during daylight hours was inevitable and brings Scotland in line with the rest of the UK, but the use of such scopes in darkness is already abused – we are regrettably increasingly treating our deer species as vermin, which I find abhorrent.” **FP**

**THEY
SAID
WHAT**

“It should be more about shooting a ... surplus of wild birds rather than captive rearing, letting out a load of not-very-wild birds and then shooting them a few weeks later”

Who said it:
Mark Avery

Why: Wild Justice's Mark Avery discusses the future of shoot days on the *Shooting Times* Podcast. Needless to say, it isn't generally “a few weeks later” but Mark is a scientist and writer, not a gamekeeper.

Predator eradication to cost a further £8 million

A project to eradicate stoats from Orkney could take another five years and cost a further £8m. The Orkney Native Wildlife Project began trapping stoats in 2019 and has so far removed more than 5,000. The animals pose a major threat to bird eggs and young as well as the native Orkney vole. Stoats were first reported on Orkney in 2010.

With 7,000 traps laid across Orkney, this is one of the largest-ever invasive predator eradications on inhabited islands.

The project has already cost about £8m, but those behind it claim the same amount will be required to finish the job, with three years of eradication and two years of further monitoring.

Dr Elizabeth Bell, managing director of Wildlife Management International, told ST: "Invasive species eradications on islands present their own unique challenges. It takes a tremendous amount of planning to make each eradication as safe,

effective and humane as possible. Invasive species are one of the top five threats to wildlife globally and invasive mammals have driven birds, reptiles and invertebrates to extinction."

Meanwhile, in Dumfries, a man has been fined £9,700 for killing one the UK's native mustelids, the pine martin. David Excell pleaded guilty to deliberately trapping and killing the creature and has subsequently had his firearms licence revoked.

The project to eradicate stoats on Orkney has already cost around £8m



Activists flock to Dartmoor

The Prince of Wales became the largest private landholder in Dartmoor National Park when he inherited the Duchy of Cornwall from his father King Charles. Prince William now owns approximately a third of the national park, almost 70,000 acres.

Campaigners are now urging Prince William to rewind significant portions of his holdings, which are currently mainly used for grazing and more intensive farming. Around 200 protesters chanted, "Make it wild or make it ours," as they marched to South Hessary Tor on the moor on 30 September, before laying down a symbolic wicker gauntlet outside

the offices of the Duchy in Princetown, Devon.

Author and land campaigner Guy Shrubsole, who has previously described the Duchy as a "medieval anachronism", said that the remnants of temperate rainforest on Dartmoor should be nurtured back to greater prevalence.

Amanda Anderson, director of the Moorland Association, told ST: "The Duchy of Cornwall appears to have ambitious plans in place to enhance biodiversity and mitigate climate change, in addition to the good work that they have already been doing for many years. Rewilding may cause the

loss of rare and threatened moorland habitats and species adapted to open landscapes. Campaigners should ensure their demands are truly about enhancing ecosystem services for society, nature and the climate."

Tom Orde-Powlett, vice chairman of the Moorland Association, followed up: "The Duchy of Cornwall has invested significant time and effort in curlew conservation, including habitat management and predator control. There seems to be a very clear vision for social, environmental and economic sustainability."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Rare golden pheasant spotted

A nearly extinct golden pheasant was recently spotted at Billingford Lakes in Norfolk. Golden pheasants are native to forests in southern and western China and were introduced to the UK in the 19th century. Norfolk is the only place in the country these birds can be found. A spokesman for the Norfolk Ornithologists Association said: "They disappeared around three years ago, and they were known to be at the Wolferton Triangle in west Norfolk." Another bird was spotted by Julie Murray in a back garden in Sedgeford earlier this month.



GWCT researches salmon decline

Around 13,000 fish in the River Frome, Dorset, have been captured, tagged and weighed as part of an annual study by the GWCT. The charity's head of fisheries, Dylan Roberts, commented: "If you went back to the 1970 and '80s, about 15 to 20% of the salmon that went to sea would return as adults – now that figure is about four to 5%." The study suggests that "intensive farming" and "problems with sewage in rivers" are among the reasons for the drop-off in both salmon and trout numbers.



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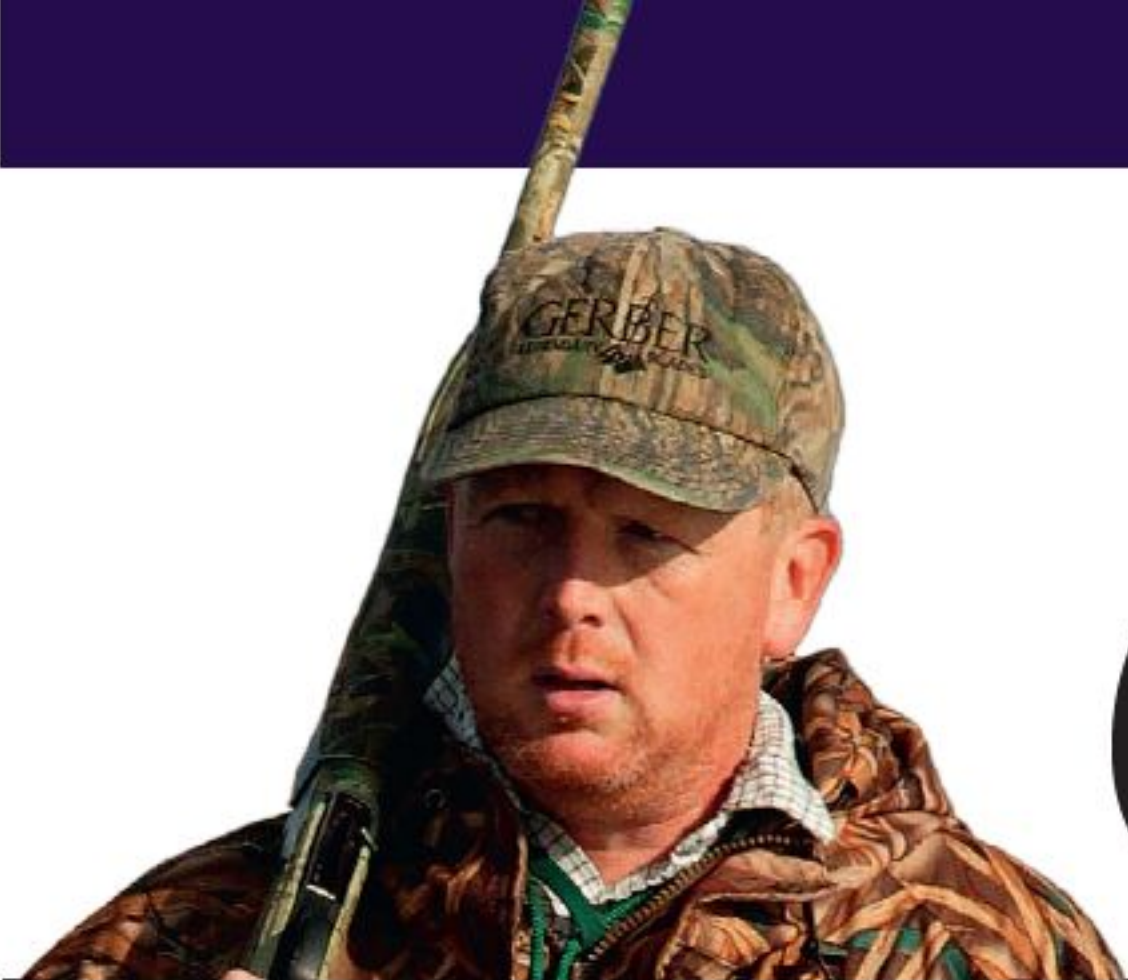
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On the Campaign Trail

Tim Bonner

The pheasant can be an extraordinarily sporting bird in its wild state and deserves far more respect from Guns, writes Tim Bonner

When I have rid myself of turbulent children and employers, I will retire to a quiet room and contemplate, among other things, the pheasant – and in particular when it became commonplace. In the second half of the 20th century the pheasant went from being a rare and venerated quarry to a workaday commodity. I am certainly not suggesting this was entirely negative, in fact it opened up game shooting to a huge number of people for whom it would otherwise have remained out of reach, but it did fundamentally change our relationship with what can still be a most fabulous gamebird. Put simply, the pheasant became so common that to shoot one, or many, became unexceptional, and there is nothing romantic or epic about the unexceptional.

There is no great literature of pheasant shooting, as there is of wildfowling or foxhunting, largely because it is entirely predictable. We all know what is going to happen when we go to stand on a peg, the only outstanding questions are how many come over and how straight we shoot. In fact, the great literature that involves pheasants tends not really to be about shooting at all. Think of Isabel Colegate's *The Shooting Party* or Roald Dahl's *Danny, the Champion of the World*. The fact that the one famous book about actually shooting pheasants most of us could think of would be Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey's *High Pheasants in Theory and Practice* shows quite how dry pheasant shooting can become.

A strange contradiction

The start of the pheasant shooting season is an opportunity to mull over the strange contradiction that, for many of us, the quarry that is the easiest to bag is ultimately the least satisfying to 'hunt', even if that activity has all the environmental, economic and social benefits that we know driven game shooting has. Nor is it easy to explain that strange phenomenon of loving the thing that we seek to kill. I find it difficult enough to justify to myself my obsession with hunting woodcock, wildfowl and wild brown trout, which I adore compared to my



While pheasants have become the norm for driven shoot days, wild birds still offer cracking sport

indifference towards reared pheasants or farmed rainbow trout.

You will not be surprised that the memory of shooting pheasants that stands out for me did not involve a straightforward driven day. It was in the North in the autumn on a wonderful estate that is primarily one of the finest driven grouse moors in the country. There are any number of species, some on the quarry list some not, that benefit from the careful management of habitat and predators.

“It was higher and travelling even faster than I had anticipated”

When shooting the moorland fringe after the main grouse season anything can appear, and most things did on that day, including a magnificent blackcock, red grouse, grey partridges and pheasants, for which the rule was strictly cocks only. I was on the right of a loose line of five or six Guns, there was a long horizon and the beaters were bringing in a huge area of in-bye, hedges, rushes and scrub. When I

saw the first high dot in the blue sky, I told myself not to rush and stick to my 'track, mount, kill' technique. As it closed I saw it was a cock and, belatedly, realised that it was higher and travelling even faster on the stiff breeze than I had anticipated.

The gun went up and I remember pushing the barrels through at the last moment as it disappeared above the perpendicular and squeezing off a shot that killed it stone dead. Two more cocks followed and both fell to a single, less hurried shot, and then a last bird took a line along the hedge to my right at the very edge of my range and, amazingly, it too died.

My old dog picked that first bird well over 100 yards behind me and the rest without me having to move a muscle. I have a photo of him with those four dead birds, the Cogswell and four empty blue cartridge cases. All the pheasants ever bred are not worth those four wild beauties. 🐦

∞ Tim is the chief executive of the Countryside Alliance. He has hunted a pack of beagles, pursues wild trout and is a passionate wildfowler and rough shooter. To join the Countryside Alliance, visit: bit.ly/43pGZus



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SHOOTING TIMES
18 October

Stalking on the Isle
of Lewis, rabbiting
with an air rifle and
testing the best loads
for goose shooting

... **AND MUCH MORE!**

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Bidding a fond farewell to the Editor

I have just read Patrick Galbraith's comment on the *ST* online newsletter about leaving the magazine. I must admit I was a little peeved, especially as I have been impressed with the new *ST* podcasts; the interview with Mark Avery proved that perhaps it is

possible to work positively with some surprisingly diverse folks. But, as you say, sometimes you need a new challenge and I respect your decision to move on.

Anyway, I just wanted to thank you for what you have achieved for both *ST* and UK

country pursuits in the past seven years. I look forward to reading the new book when it comes to press and, hopefully, many more articles for 'The Shooter'!

Best regards and good luck for the future.

Mark Lorne, by email

WHAT DO WE MEAN
BY INVASIVE?

I read recently that there was discussion as to whether sika deer were going to be classified as an invasive species in Europe, meaning that there would be no close seasons and that they would be treated as vermin (News, 4 October). This would mean the same for the Republic of Ireland.

But what do we mean by invasive or native? Muntjac deer escaped from Woburn Park in Bedfordshire in 1838 and Chinese water deer have a similar story in the early 20th Century. Sika deer were imported from Asia over 150 years ago and fallow deer were introduced by the

Normans around 1100AD. Even roe deer have been reintroduced to England from European populations after their extinction several hundred years ago due to overhunting.

There should be a certain threshold when an animal deserves to stay and is treated with respect.

Name and email supplied

GETTING MY
DOG SHOOTWISE

Your article in last week's issue (*How to be 'shootwise'*, 4 October) could not have come at a better time. I took my labrador, Charlie, out for an early-season pheasant shoot just a couple of days before and

FREE SCAN ME
FOR THE
NEWSLETTER!



he was bloody useless. As Ellena Swift pointed out, four-year-old Charlie is likely to be victim of the interrupted Covid and bird flu years. I have not been able to



Sika deer were imported from Asia more than 150 years ago, but the EU has plans to classify the species as invasive



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AN OFF-PUTTING EXPERIENCE

Many years ago, I was shooting on a day near the Solway Firth in Dumfries and Galloway and it was raining cats and dogs. A sodden pheasant that was clearly exhausted from overcoming its terrestrial anchors was flying exquisitely slowly when it was shot landing in a burn in spate. A brave and foolish springer spaniel promptly launched itself into the surging stream to retrieve it and was at once swept away.

A quick-thinking Gun took in the scene and raced down the small valley to a wooden footbridge. On reaching the bridge he lowered himself into the prone, flung down an arm and grabbed the ailing dog by the scruff of the neck as it passed beneath. Showing enormous strength, the Gun bicep-curved the poor devil

from a certain watery grave. The spaniel, overwhelmed by the whole situation, bit him hard on the wrist, drawing blood. This day put me off spaniel ownership.

Concerning dogs, I endeavour to avoid animals that are unable to recognise their own deliverance.

Name and email supplied



Spaniels don't often hesitate where water is concerned

enjoy as many days in the field as I would have liked since 2019 and Charlies' form has no doubt suffered.

He is, by and large, a pretty switched-on dog but he is overly

Below: Ellena Swift's article in the 4 October issue of ST offers advice on how to prepare your dog for the first day of the season

friendly. His time around new Guns and new dogs really threw his concentration. I have gone back to basics with him now and, as Ellena suggests, started to encourage Charlie to sit calmly as I expect him to do on peg.

It's a funny thing; you often don't notice or identify these problems throughout the summer. I certainly didn't.

It's not until 1 October rolls around that you can see where you've been going wrong.

I'd also like to wish outgoing Editor Patrick Galbraith all the best and send my thanks for creating a great magazine for many years.

Ted Hunt, Dorset

CORRECTION: Further to Doug Fawcett's recent letter printed in the 20 September issue of *Shooting Times*, we have received correspondence from the Chargot Estate who wish to make it known that they hold the letter to be factually incorrect.

A day was offered to the team and the contract clearly stated the outcome in the event of avian influenza striking the shoot. *Shooting Times* apologises for not contacting Chargot Estate before printing the letter.



“The wildlife of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.” King George VI

In the media

In the *Shooting Times* Podcast, Mark Avery argues that driven grouse shooting is all but finished and that wild bird days are the future...

Your responses:

“An independent scientific review was done on this subject – which, if I'm right, the RSBP agreed to – found in favour of grouse moors. So why do they not listen or even promote this? Worse still, we don't promote ourselves enough for fear of the sabs attacking our cars, homes or whatever.”

@jason_mayhew_gundogs

“The scientists in Future Landscape Forum, who have spent most of their academic lives studying carbon capture on our uplands, contest the view expressed by Mark Avery that current management is bad for climate change. His argument should be with them and not shooting. It will take some courage because they have a lot of up-to-date science to back up their position.”

@owen_r_williams

“Sounds sensible. Never understood why shooting doesn't get the same attention as hunting when it comes to animal welfare. Foxes, the vast majority are wild, whereas the opposite is true of shooting.” **@CharliePyper**

“Totally shambolic that *Shooting Times* would consider listening to this utter contradiction. The very man who campaigns so noisily to ban the very activities that are vital to conserve wild birds.”

@banjodog4

“If Wild Justice really want to do something to reverse woodcock declines they would be urging better woodland management.

We know poor woodland management is a major driver of decline of woodcock. Some of the best management happens to be on shoots. Awkward.”

@woodcockringer

➔ The *Shooting Times* Podcast is available from bit.ly/3rle4VW





Chris Rogers is a deer manager in East Anglia, CIC head measurer and NGO committee member

Stalking Diary



Chris Rogers takes the opportunity to swap his rifle for a thermal imager as he looks to build an accurate picture of the estate's deer

The red rut is later than usual this year, most likely due to the warm weather and less competition on the estate



As I write this at the start of October, the red rut should have been in full swing for the past week or so. Instead, it's been unusually quiet on the estate and other areas in the region. This is most likely due to the warm weather we have had, with overnight temperatures being well over 10°C and simply too hot for the excursion of a full-blown rut.

A heavy cull in the area last season has clearly reduced the numbers of reds, or moved them somewhere else. Perhaps this has created less competition than in the past and the stags feel less need to show off, as the bigger stags are spread out further and there are fewer hinds for them

spring. Their dependence on their mothers for milk may, in turn, run on later into the summer and autumn for the very late offspring.

As the nights draw in, I have resumed my regular thermal counting route for the herding species. It's something I've done more regularly over the past few years, particularly with the current pressure on retaining data to justify what we are up to with deer numbers. Generally, it confirms my feelings on the number of deer we have, but it obviously gives you a firm figure you can record.

Of course that figure isn't entirely accurate in terms of a total number of deer you have on the land, but it gives

course, estate and farming practices such as cropping and livestock rotations will influence the outcome of the counts, but if done regularly you will gain a trend that can help with cull plans as they evolve throughout the season. Modern deer management plans like to have fixed cull figures that are set out for around five years, but as with all things in nature, precise number planning is not practical and a cull number that can be correct for year one is unlikely to result in the cull numbers sticking to the proposed figures in year two through to five.

Sensible approach

Thermal drones are becoming a hot topic now for deer surveys, and they seem to produce fairly accurate results. However, like all deer-counting methods devised over the years, there will be some discrepancies in the figures. There will always be an element of suck it and see, and increasingly I'm wondering if the idea of accurate deer numbers is essential. Of course they are helpful but, in most areas, looking at the impact of deer on the ground and culling to reduce, maintain or in some cases increase them seems the more sensible approach. 🦌

“With all surveys, the key is to be as scientific and methodical as possible”

to compete for. In situations like this, it's very hard to say what the cause of a change in behaviour is but we all like to have our theories. Unless one keeps meticulous records of rut start times, weather conditions and temperatures, it's all just an opinion and guesswork.

The British Deer Society is looking into calving times, which are clearly linked to rutting times, the theory being as the ruts come later, so will the calves the following

you a minimum number. The trend in deer numbers can be tracked over the weeks, giving you a good idea of how the herds move on and off the estate depending on several factors including culling pressure from us, our immediate and regional neighbours.

With all surveys, the key is to be as scientific and methodical as possible. The count follows the same route, at the same time after nightfall throughout the year. Of

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JOTTINGS FOR WILDFOWLERS

◆ A CLASSIC SERIES REVISITED ◆

Wildfowlers need to be mindful of public perception at all times and must always ensure a sustainable harvest, writes Mike Swan



Wildfowling are under ever-closer scrutiny, but we should not be afraid to stand up for our sport

Do you look at the weekly news from BirdGuides? If not, maybe you should; it certainly gives an insight into the attitudes of some people who view birds and their conservation very differently from we wildfowling. A couple of weeks ago there was much whooping about the fact that the Irish government had removed four duck species from the quarry list, because they are in decline there.

“Breasting birds on the marsh and throwing the rest away is not acceptable”

Birdwatch Ireland had been calling for more species to be removed, and criticised the Irish government for not publishing the rationale as to why it had withdrawn some species and not others. I’m guessing that Irish wildfowling are being equally critical and asking if there is any scientific evidence that shooting is driving any of these declines. Is the Irish government just

pandering to the sentiments of an anti-shooting lobby?

Meanwhile, in the forum that follows the article, there were several comments welcoming the news, and then other stronger views; “Who from the Irish government checks every bird shot as to species? Trusting murderers to tell the truth...” And then, “All shooting should be banned. You can always buy a supermarket chicken; no one needs to shoot to eat...”

I usually keep quiet over these things, not least because adding a view can sometimes cause the debate to run and run to no useful effect. But that last comment got to me, and I had to reply.

So, I wrote asking why there is such vitriol about shooting among a small minority of birdwatchers, when we all want to look after our birds and their

habitats. I also questioned which was more sustainable, a wild shot duck or an intensively reared chicken, pointing out the ongoing nutrient pollution issues from intensive poultry production.

Now, I am a bit of a hypocrite, because I do eat chicken, but I am increasingly concerned about the water quality problems caused by spreading poultry manure as a fertiliser in valleys like that of the Wye, so I wrote about that too. Maybe the debate had run its course, but I seem to have closed it off, because three weeks on, the only addition is that someone has clicked the ‘like’ button after my comment.

Hit the headlines

I tell this tale not to claim any special credit, but because we wildfowling need to be mindful of a wider world. We are under ever-closer scrutiny, and any mistakes that we make, however minor, are increasingly likely to hit the headlines. Perhaps we are lucky that most of what we do is carried out in the poor light of dawn and dusk, when the public are not likely to notice us, but even so, I do not want to hide. I am happy walking off the marsh and into a group of birdwatchers with my gun in its sleeve and my gamebag over my back, and I always greet them.

Most of the time this works just fine, and there have been some great conversations over the years. They usually get the sustainability of what we do too, but we need to be careful not to jeopardise that. It worries me, for example, that two clubs I am in have felt the need to write to members to remind them that just breasting birds on the marsh and throwing the rest away is not acceptable. Lugging a brace of Canadas across the mud may be hard work, but breasting and allowing the fuselages to wash up on the strandline is no advert for sustainable wildfowling. 🦆

🦆 Mike Swan is a keen wildfowler and the senior adviser for the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust.

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Willie Athill

Country Diary

The accident and incident clause of a new wildfowling licence from the National Trust reminds Willie Athill of an unfortunate outing



The arrival of the pinkfeet heralds the start of a new season for Willie Athill

It is with great excitement that I write this. The National Trust has agreed on our wildfowling licence for the 2023–24 season and, as I give a nod to the pinkfeet that are overflying my office at this very moment, that is wonderful. Overall, it is reasonable licence and I would like to thank the National Trust for its ongoing and generous understanding of this age-old local, peaceful and environmentally safe pastime of wildfowling.

One clause in the licence is, however, a bit onerous and short on understanding, and that is you have to be off the marsh at 8am. In midwinter this only gives the wildfowler the shortest possible time in decent shooting light and does not take into consideration that wildfowl mostly flight on the tide rather than the light. The legislators and/or the negotiators of our lease were obviously only thinking about flightponds, where fat old gravy-makers (mallard) flight in at dusk to feed on a fed pond, or they were thinking about an inland water where fowl go to rest in the day.

The last clause is fine and concerns accident and incident reporting, which takes me on to an incident a good few years

ago when I took a friend of mine out as a guest on a morning flight. It was on the first big tide in November and he brought along his little son, who must have been about six.

Unexpected bang

Before first light I put him in position by boat and, taking his boy with me, went on to another place about half a mile away. As the morning came I heard him having a shot or two, and as the light came on further I heard a big old bang. Every curlew and wader jumped up and shouted. “What the hell was that?” I thought. I had binoculars with me and looked down the harbour to where he was. The tide was across the marsh, shining silver and pink in the morning light. I could see my friend in the distance, but he looked wrong.

“Hop in the boat, boy,” I said. “We are going down to see Dad.” When we drew near, I could see him hunched over holding on to one hand, with no gun to be seen, and I thought, “Hello, that’s not good.”

I anchored the boat on the side of the creek and told the boy to wait in it because I thought that might be best, and I went over in knee-deep water to where his father was.

My bitch Inky was working about busily. As I came up to him, he said, “I’ve blown a couple of fingers off.”

Luckily, I had on me a quite clean handkerchief – this is thanks to my brother, who has never been known to leave the house without at least two clean handkerchiefs. I dressed the wound well, set him in the boat and had a look for the missing finger just in case they could sow it back on, him being a very good pianist and all. I couldn’t find it, but Inky looked shifty and to this day I believe she had an early breakfast that morning.

I found the gun underwater near where he was, and sure enough the right barrel had a ragged hole coming out the side of the barrel above the fore-end, just where a 20-bore cartridge would have got stuck and had a 12-bore cartridge loaded on top of it. A hard lesson, but luckily he still plays the piano beautifully and likes wearing mittens. 🐦

Willie Athill has lived on the North Norfolk coast all his life. He now farms oyster and seaweed beds.

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Mark Fitzer is the head gamekeeper on the famous Holkham estate in North Norfolk

Gamekeeper



There are plenty of unavoidable costs that a gamekeeper must account for, writes Mark Fitzer, and animal care is no exception

The other day, as I drove down the track alongside one of our woods, I was met by what I considered to be a stunning sight: stood right in front of me on the track was a magnificent red stag. Dawn was just breaking and he was shrouded in a light mist. I switched off the engine and just sat there, admiring him for a few moments. After he had eyed me for a little while, he majestically walked across the field and disappeared into the mist. I restarted the buggy and continued on my way, thinking to myself what a privilege it was to see such a magnificent beast.

Total destruction

I continued my way down the track, and as I got to the feed ride my thoughts changed. "That bloody creature ought to be roasting on a spit," I thought. Every hopper on the ride had been trashed. Not content with just knocking one feeder over, he had done the lot. Obviously he decided he should check every feeder to see if there was any difference in the type of feed they contained, then, on discovering they were all the same, he proceeded to have an hour or two playing football with them.

While I was tidying up the carnage, I pondered how much feed our pheasants

and partridges actually eat. I know how much I place in the budget but how much is consumed by something else? I have always been taught that it's good to share, but there is a limit. Deer, geese, ducks, hares, pigeons and jackdaws are but a few of the species that predate our hoppers and feed rides. Not all our game is hopper-fed and a large proportion of our game is fed by spin/trail feeding, but even this is prone to

considerable number of days here and the work for the dogs is tough. We have a lot of ground cover, particularly bramble, and it can be hard going, especially this time of year when we are dogging in through the nettles. The dogs need a rest, hence the need for a goodly number.

The cost of feeding the dogs is also considerable, but this is a cost you can budget for. The one thing that is always a

"I am aware that the cost of everything is rising but there must be a limit"

attack as it doesn't take long for something to take advantage of what's on offer. If we knew how much feed was being consumed by everything else, it would be almost as frightening as how much I'm having to pay for the wheat at the moment.

A few months ago, I lost my old German shorthaired pointer (GSP). She was a great worker and an even bigger character, and so the other day I said to the wife, "You know what, I really miss the old pointer," to which she responded with a plain expression. "When's it coming?" she asked. So, now we are awaiting the arrival of Saxon the GSP puppy. Dogs are a big part of my life and a large part of my job. We shoot a

worry is vet bills. I have huge admiration for the skills of the vets in general and the vet I use for my gamebirds is, in my opinion, second to none. I have been thankful to vets on several occasions, when without their skills I would have lost a dog.

I certainly have no problem with paying for their expertise but I sometimes feel a little put out by the mark-up on the medication they prescribe. With the number of dogs I have, I cannot afford to insure them, but I am fortunate to be able to make contingency plans. I understand this is not the case for everyone. I am fully aware that the cost of everything is rising but there must be a limit. 🐾

A lone red stag is a magnificent sight on a misty morning





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Putting the ghosts to bed

Charles Hartley finally gets another chance to take on the redlegs after nearly a decade of waiting

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN GARNETT



Waking up in 2014 in the biting cold of a clear sky in Bude, Cornwall, I had the morning jitters of a day's shooting ahead. I was joined by my then girlfriend and future wife Lucy, as well as good friend Patrick on an adventure far from home promising wild birds and a mixed bag of everything from pheasant to woodcock and snipe.

The day was a bonanza of sport and I managed my goal of both waders as well as some wonderful pheasants. But on one walked drive, Patrick and I - with the help of his

wonderful lab Scoop - flushed a pair of redlegs. They split between us as Patrick and I lifted our barrels in unison. A report from each of our guns left Patrick's partridge barrelling to earth, but I watched gobsmacked as my own flew on untouched. A decade later, I still feel the sting of that miss and indeed can still hear the smug comments from Paddy as the now late Scoop came galloping back with his French prize.

Since that day I have visited many shoots that boasted partridge, but the curse has continued with the little blighters always missing my peg or, when I am really lucky,

coming straight to me, typically at knee height and untouchable. Each time I am forced to remember that day in Bude.

But a few weeks ago in mid-September, I found myself on my home soil of West Yorkshire, a stone's throw from the hamlet where I was born, to put this ghost to bed. I had taken a day with Double Stones shoot, hosted by Paul and Steve, whose ground spans 10,000 acres of Addingham and Silsden moor, as well as some wonderful farmland below it. I have had good pheasant shooting here, but this time I was here for driven partridge. ➔



Double Stones shoot in West Yorkshire spans 10,000 acres of Addingham and Silsden moor as well as some wonderful farmland

Driven partridge



There is action for all the Guns as the birds pass over in great waves

After a late summer and high temperatures at the start of the month, with a day's shooting on the horizon, of course the weather came in. My old Subaru was practically rocking from the wind and rain that thrashed its flank as I parked up to meet the other Guns and prepare for the shoot briefing over a welcome bacon butty. With pegs drawn, we loaded up into the shoot bus, which rumbled us across the moorland edge to a farm that sat under the overhang of the moortop above.

Beautiful patchwork

The first drive, Bothman's Farm, was the perfect representation of this part of the world. We stood in our peg-drawn line at the edge of heathland that leads to Ilkley moor, a beautiful patchwork of heather, moss and moorland grass above us; an old reservoir pumphouse sat in the mossy bank ahead and behind me lay the post-industrial splendour of towns nestled into the base of the Aire valley under a moody sky.

The driving rain brought a crisp sting to our faces as excited babbles of grouse could be heard with the occasional husky chirps of partridge, unseen in the ground ahead. Then, all at once, a flurry of redlegs came coursing over the horizon, hammering towards myself and my fellow Guns. Mark, on the peg to my right, struck a nice early bird with his first barrel, as Matt to my left brought another good bird to earth. Twitching on my peg, I picked a bird from the next flurry but missed cleanly behind.

Loading another cartridge, I brought my gun up on instinct, folding a wonderful crosser that had hugged the topography before lifting high into the air. All at once the pressure was gone.

The birds flew in furious waves, proving testing in the high winds, but all the Guns were seeing action. And as for those at my end of the line, we were having a festival of fun. Although Mark's balance was being tested in the wind and for much of the drive I was blinded by the rain, pegs one to three ended with the whistle of

“This kept the footwork lively and the barrels warm”

the first drive smiling from ear to ear. Mark and I had seen our fair share, but Matt, who had seen a few partridges this season already, had certainly come to the shoot with his eye in and saw some amazing sport.

The second drive, Middle Ghyll, lay a short walk from the first through thick patches of gorse and undulating



The third drive of the day is a chance for some testing shooting at high partridges

topography. The Guns were laid out in a deep ravine that cut into the hilltop edge, and around each new bend lay a peg where you could stand almost completely alone with the steep bank ahead of you and a small window of sky where birds may only be seen for a second.

Flashes of partridge

I waited with a babbling brook at my feet and a hilltop waterfall to my left, the noise of the water drowning out any activity from the beaters. Suddenly, guns started to echo up and down the bank and flashes of partridge began dotting about on the horizon. Although I could not see the peg next door, a loud report from his gun sent a feathery parcel whizzing past my head as a covey of birds broke left to right across the skyline, allowing me to take the first bird before they were gone.

This continued with a mixture of testing shots, with birds coming from two very different directions, some jetting straight over the ravine top and others trying to sneak across the hill. This kept the footwork lively and the barrels warm, as my gun hardly rested for a second.

Possibly my best bird of the day came on this drive, as I plucked a high partridge over my right shoulder moments before the window of opportunity was gone. The final whistle blew and I was left breathless with effort, something that does not happen often on a driven day. It really was snap-shooting at its finest.

After a warm and very welcome shoot lunch back at base, and some great hospitality from Steve, Paul and the beaters, we were back on the shoot bus heading to Stanley's, the third drive. So far, we had been treated to a fine display of how



Driven partridge



The beaters work hard all day to produce some great sport for the Guns



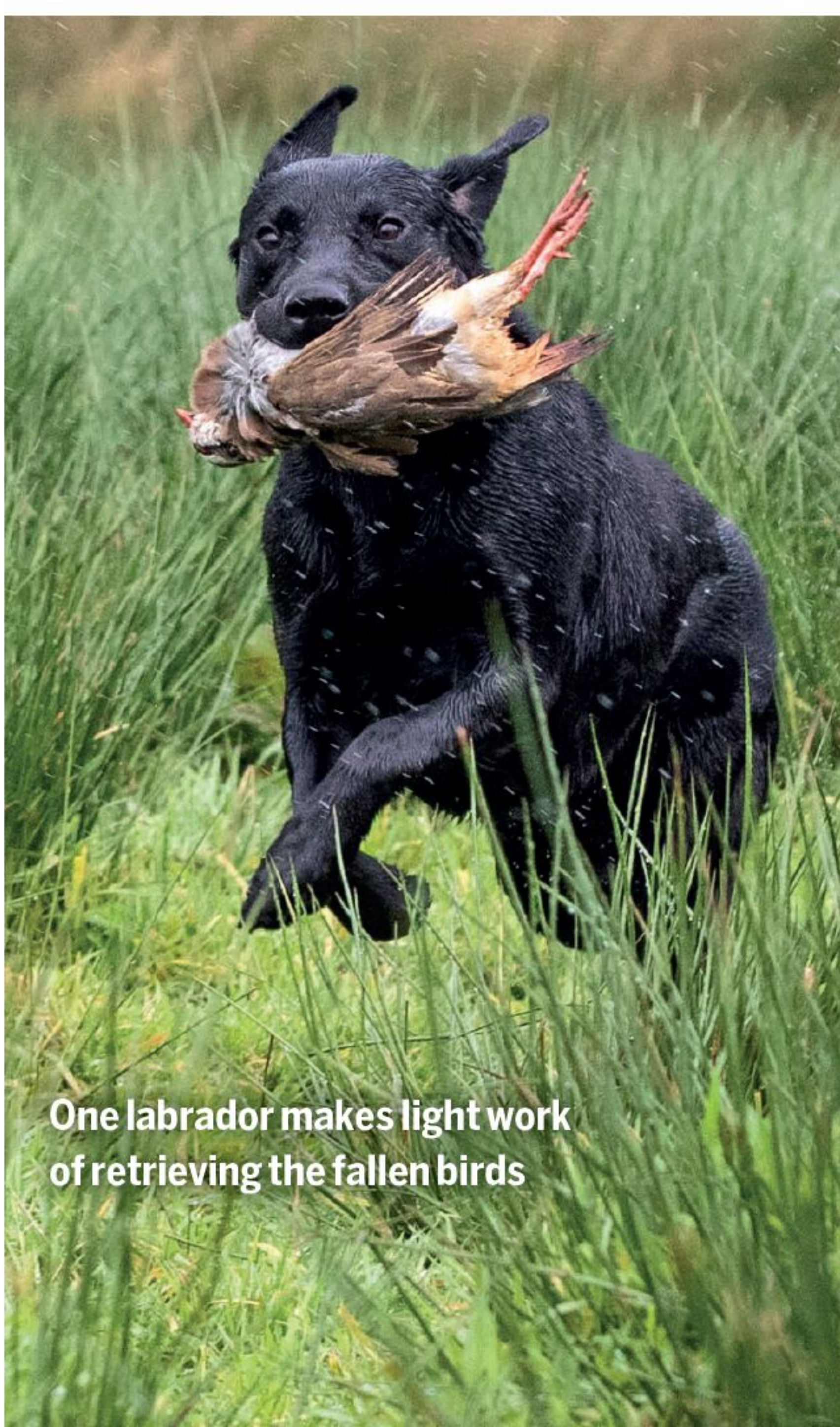
The picking-up dogs are happy to get to work at the end of each drive



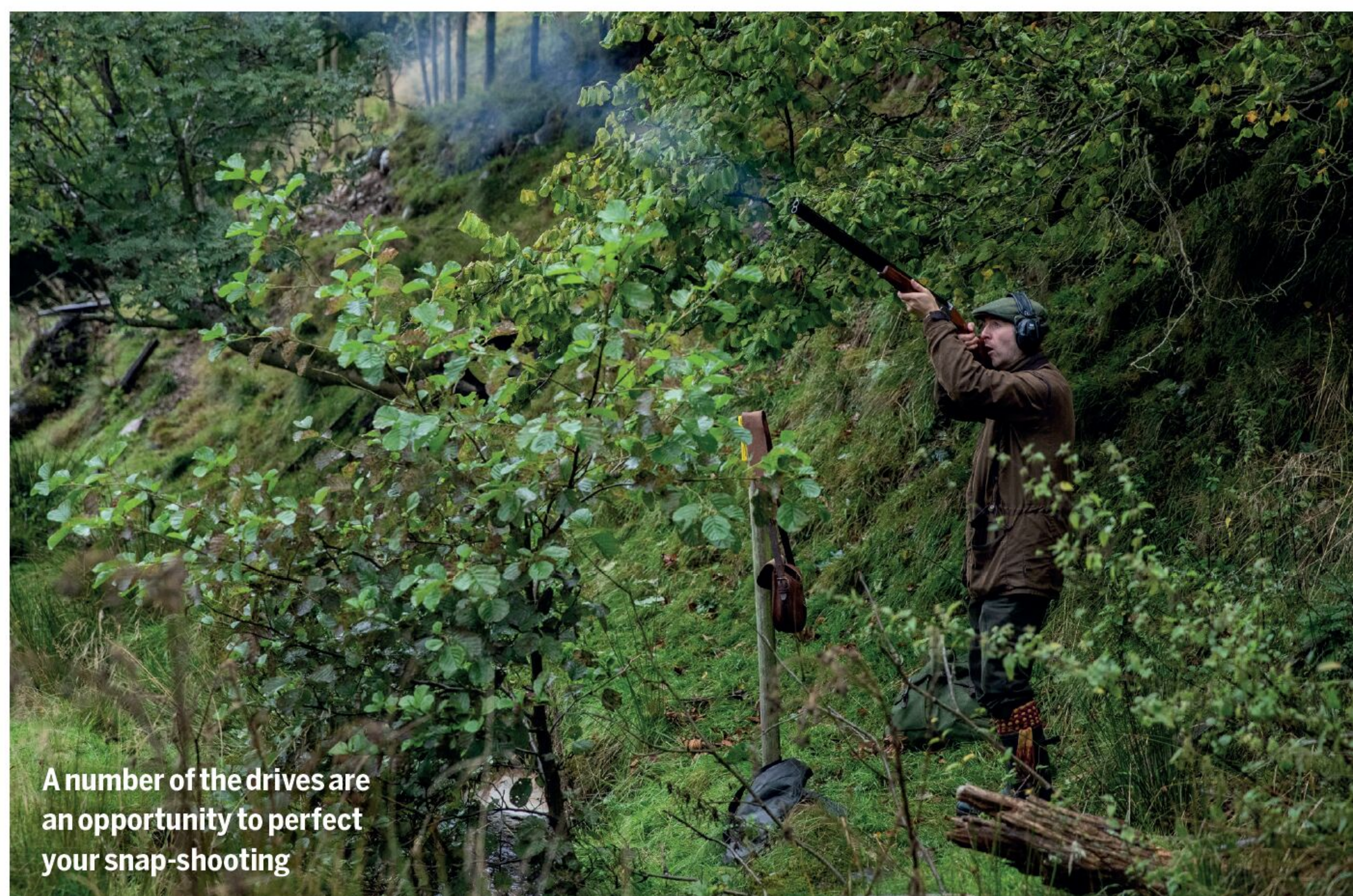
The Guns make their way to their next pegs through the rolling farmland



A peg dog waits patiently with its eye on the prize as the Gun swings through a redleg



One labrador makes light work of retrieving the fallen birds



A number of the drives are an opportunity to perfect your snap-shooting

Driven partridge



With the last of the birds picked, it's the end of a busy yet immensely satisfying day for all involved

upland partridge are presented to Guns, but here we were in a more familiar setting, with the full line of Guns in sight stood neatly on pegs across two pastures. Here we would see the birds coming, but they would have time to gain some real height. Their time in the air would allow Guns to make the classic mistake of thinking too much.

This is a wild shoot and we were all told at the briefing to be live on

we snapped our shotguns closed and readied for action. On this drive my biggest challenge was picking a bird from the larger coveys that came one after another; being used to pheasant I had not often had this problem. By now the Guns had got their eyes in and there was some wonderful shooting from both ends of the line.

The day was finished on a brilliant duck drive that provided the highest birds of the day, with some very

“I was more than happy to finish with a first-barrel tall drake at the last gasp”

our pegs, but with sloe gin on our lips and a morning of fun, Matt and I were chatting too much and getting ready too slowly as a huge covey of partridges dissected our position. Although we had metaphorically dropped the ball, attention was soon drawn to a wonderful high duck that was taken brilliantly by Steve; on this

healthy and strong-flying mallard. The most interesting part of this drive was the fact that, intermittently, small coveys of partridge would take to the air, providing too much for the brain to compute as high ducks were punctuated by comparatively low but fast Frenchmen. This meant speed of swing and lead were being constantly



The Guns load back up on to the shoot bus to head for home after some exhilarating shooting



The whole team at Double Stones come together to put on one hell of a show for Guns

changed, proving quite testing and certainly unusual from drives I have shot in the past. Matt, to my left, was in full competitive swing, plucking one particularly high duck and a couple of left-and-right partridges. At the very edge of the line, I was more than happy to finish with a first-barrel tall drake at the last gasp of the drive.

Chatter and merriment

All the Guns had had a fantastic day and were brimming with chatter and merriment on the journey back. The birds had been testing yet plentiful, changeable yet reliable, with Paul, his brother Steve, keepers Eric, Gary and Paul H and their merry band of beaters putting on one hell of a show.

There was no question in my mind as to why so many of the Guns that day had been there before and why they had travelled from across the UK, spanning from Shropshire to Aberdeen.

A special mention must go to Paul who, after a trying 2022 season, has put in some serious work, if only in getting the GL43 licence sorted; one of the difficulties of running a shoot in such a beautiful place. 🐓

∞ Double Stones still have pegs available this season, so if you fancy a day on anything from grouse to pheasant, they have a mixture of days available. Do not hesitate to get in touch with the team on bosacki@hotmail.co.uk or 07723 073736.



Z6i
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SECONDS
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SEE THE UNSEEN



SWAROVSKI
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Stalking among beavers and chanterelle

A dawn stalk, just a stone's throw from the Great Glen, teaches Felix Petit a practical lesson in conscientious venison production

After three wonderful days grouse shooting on the Isle of Lewis, I had a jolly long drive home to Sussex. I decided to defer the slog down the A9 and stop off with some friends at their croft near Beaully, in Inverness. I was spoiled with an extremely convivial evening of champagne, garden tatties and home-reared roast beef.

My motivations for the stop-off, however, were slightly more Machiavellian and not entirely social. Sam Kelly, a local stalker who I've known for a long while and shared many a dram with over the years, had just built himself a state-of-the-

art new venison processing unit that I was itching to have a look at. Sam, a full-time agricultural contractor by day with two young children, somehow manages to find time to shoot 100 red deer a year (around 80 hinds and 20 stags) plus various roe, fallow and sika. Sam was generous enough to not only show me around the processing facility but give me a holistic look at his whole venison production process from hill to plate.

It still gets light early at the start of September in the Highlands, so Sam said he'd pick me up at the slightly eye-watering time of 4.30am. When that uncivilised hour rolled

around, Sam found me in the kitchen, staring at an untouched steaming mug of tea looking a bit dazed. He called me to arms, so I unsteadily rose, pulled on my boots and followed him into the darkness.

Shaping the environment

Sam has the stalking rights over a number of farms and estates near Inverness. Today, we would be winking out a stag or two on the ground where I had been staying in the hills just a few miles north of Loch Ness. The plot on which my friends have their croft is remarkable in its own right and has been at the vanguard of beaver reintroduction in Scotland. Their first beavers found their way in and began to thrive over 15 years ago and have been industriously shaping their environment ever since.

As we made our way towards the southern end of the farm round the loch, the beaver dams and lodges were in clear evidence, extending the wetlands far beyond the incised edges of the burn. Wonderful for waders and wildlife, but it did make heavy going in the near pitch black and I went in over my right welly. We gained height as I squelched through mixed deciduous and birch forest, taking care not to crush the carpets of chanterelle mushrooms pushing up through the wood bristle moss.

It's a beautiful start to the morning as the pair make their way to some ground just a few miles north of Loch Ness





The morning mist burns off as the sun rises on the rolling hills

As we marched, Sam and I chatted in hushed tones about the upcoming abolition of the close season in Scotland for male deer, the tabled legalisation of thermal scopes to shoot deer at night and the evolving government targets for deer densities. Sam thinks authorities should shift their focuses away from

of dealers’ websites, some of their venison even comes from New Zealand, which is bonkers with the local wild supplies. Sam also spoke of how he believes consumers are far more judgemental of venison. If they get a low-quality piece it tends to put them off the meat in a way that it wouldn’t with poor-quality beef.

“It was still too dark to take a shot, so we hunkered down and waited for light”

just numerical deer densities and try to take a more holistic view, based on browsing damage to trees and crops. The Scottish government wants 50,000 more deer killed each year, but Sam expressed concern about the lack of a central plan for maximising the final food product.

Some gamedealers already offer prices for deer carcasses as low as £1 per kilo, and there is no grading system. If you look on a number

Sam is passionate about doing everything he can not to give people an excuse to discriminate against venison. This includes a perfect head or neck shot to avoid the bleeding spoiling the meat, a clean gralloch, tidy butchering (right down to minimising the use of water on a carcass as this encourages mould) and fastidious cleanliness during storage.

Silence fell as we broke free of the woods and emerged on to open



Sam spots a group of reds among the woodland and heather

Felix’s stalking kit list

- Sako Finnlight in .243**
gmk.co.uk
- Zeiss Conquest V6 3-18x50 scope**
zeiss.co.uk
- Swarovski 8x42 binoculars**
swarovskioptik.com
- Pulsar Quantum HD50S thermal imaging scope**
thomasjacks.co.uk
- Lowa Hunter GTX boots**
lowa.co.uk
- Norrøna Kvinnherad smock**
norrøna.com
- Helle GT Outdoor knife**
eu.helle.com
- Stoneycreek Microtough trousers**
stoneycreekeurope.co.uk

moorland just a few miles west of the north shore of Loch Ness. Sam scanned the terrain with his seasoned Pulsar thermal scope. He spotted a large group of around 30 reds on another piece of ground and handily a lone pair of stags on our patch, one of which had a dangerous sabre antler. The two stags needed to come a little closer and it was still too dark to take a shot, so we hunkered down and waited for it to get light.

Cacophony of sound

As the first rays began to show, refracting off the dew-dropped spider webs strung between the heather, a cacophony of sound erupted ➡



Evidence of overgrazing from the local deer is easily seen in patches of forestry on the estate

Deerstalking



Sam downs two stags in quick succession then begins the gralloch

around us. First a single ‘goback goback goback’ from right next to us, and then the same from a few hundred yards away. Eventually, the waking grouse were tuttering every few seconds. We feared they might spook the stags. They didn’t.

When it was almost light enough for a shot, as I fiddled with my camera, a guttural, primeval moan emanated from lower down the hill. “Did you hear that?” whispered Sam. “That was the first roar of the rut.”

Two for two

It was light enough. The stags had been very accommodating, grazing their way towards us. *Boom... thwack!* Sam felled the first, a quick reload and the same again. The second one down cleanly too. Reload again and

“By paying such attention to his meat’s quality, he is able to get a fair price”

calm. Both were down to stay so we quartered in a patch of marsh grass where they’d fallen for a moment before finding them.

Sam was clinical with his gralloch; the gloves were on and the oesophagus was quickly tied to avoid contaminating the meat. The first beast done, I felt I had to shake my status as a total passenger on this stalk and assert my worth, so insisted on dragging it to the road for



It’s an impressive processing facility, and Sam gets to work skinning the stags



Sam is fastidious in his approach to preparing venison, selling it directly to farm shops and butchers

collection. Panting and perspiring, I returned and the second was already dealt with.

We headed back to get the pickup, and on our return journey we took a slightly longer route through some forestry. All along the road were these strange stretched hour-glass-shaped trees, with dense foliage at the bottom and then a bottle neck at red deer

browsing height, topped off with sparse, pole-like branches above. These were the result of overgrazing by deer. If they survive at all, these trees take much longer to break out above browsing height. It was a stark picture.

Back to the larder and I got to see the latter part of the process. In order to avoid the low prices offered by gamedealers, Sam has built this small but perfectly formed butchering

and processing facility. He has his own burger production and vacuum-packing assembly line, the products of which he sells to local farm shops, butchers and caterers to cut out the middleman of gamedealers. The rails and winches for hanging up the carcasses run from the entrance through to the chiller and back through to the processing room.

Sam understands the niche that gamedealers occupy, as not everyone has cause to sustain such a facility, but by paying such attention to his meat’s quality, he is able to get a fair price, build relationships on the back of his product and grow demand for venison.

With his fetching white butcher’s jacket on, Sam trimmed the last bits of fat off a beautiful chunky fillet, vacuum packed it and handed it to me. That was supper sorted but I still had that dreary drive home. 🐗

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Zoli Kronos M-Sport £4,700

This may not be the most eye-catching over-and-under in the gun rack, says Jonny Carter, but it performs up there with the big boys



The Monte Carlo stock comes with an adjustable comb as standard

The walnut is fairly simple with a basic oil finish

The action is matt black with some small gold accents and stippling

The machining and finishing inside the action is done to a fantastic standard



A 10-year warranty backs up the Kronos' impressive action, which is detachable and created from one piece of stainless steel

OUR VERDICT

The brief when designing this gun was to build a shotgun to fill the role of a 'multi-discipline' competition shotgun in the Zoli range. What they came up with was an 8lb 8oz Monte Carlo gun with a step-up rib, which shoots like an absolute demon and is called the Zoli Kronos M-Sport.

The name was a little confusing and felt like a bit of a nod at models from other manufacturers, however

doing my due diligence and checking the manufacturer's website revealed a half-decent explanation of the nomenclature. The Kronos is the model, the Sport is because it's a Sporter and the M comes from the matt-black finish,

Monte Carlo stock, multi-discipline design and its mid-height rib; all the things that make this gun special.

Let's start with outward aesthetics. This gun is no classic beauty. No fancy wood and no fancy engraving is present here, and this will put quite a few people off straight away, especially at the price of £4,700. Every penny of that money with this gun goes towards technical spec, so let's perhaps look at what this gun gives you that may enhance the shooting experience.



Jonny Carter puts the Kronos to the test in the field and finds it swings through lines well and is predictable to shoot

NEED TO KNOW

- Make Zoli
- Model Kronos M-Sport
- Price £4,700
- Calibre 12-bore
- Weight 8lb 8oz
- Barrels 29.5in and 32in
- Chokes Multichoke
- Stock Monte Carlo adjustable stock
- Finish Matt-black finished barrels and action
- Fore-end Beavertail
- Warranty 10 years
- Importer edgarbrothers.com



The stock is a Monte Carlo design with an adjustable comb as standard. Adjustable combs on any gun are of great benefit when it comes to having the gun fitted to you, and I would prefer to have one on any clay gun given my ever-changing body shape and waist size. The Monte Carlo shape of the stock helps many shooters with speed and consistency of mount. This is because the comb on these stocks is much more parallel and the drop to the pad usually greater, allowing your head to remain slightly more upright.

“The Monte Carlo stock helps many shooters with speed and consistency of mount”

You will either like this or not, but I was actually very partial to how it felt, and with a slight tweak of the adjustable comb my sight picture was just how I wanted it.

The walnut is pretty uninspiring and the oil finish not too lustrous, both things I would like to see changed a bit. The guns this model competes with all have a little more pizzazz to the woodwork and would perhaps make me look in their direction more as a lover of nice wood.

The fore-end is a manageably sized semi-beavertail that feels great in the hand but is of the same dull wood as the stock. Of course, wood is a natural thing and perhaps the gun I got was plainer than the rest, who knows?

Top-quality standard

The action is the same as all other Zoli Kronos guns, which is a detachable trigger-action made from one piece of stainless steel. All of the machining and finishing inside is done to a great standard, leading to fantastic trigger

breaks and good enough reliability to offer a solid 10-year warranty.

The detachable trigger is removed with a small hex-key, and the process involves a bit of learning; it's not as intuitive as some others. Unless you're me, however, how often are you even going to take the trigger unit out for a play?

The outside of the action is matt black with small gold accents and some stippling in all the right places to cut glare down. It may be plain, but

it looks like it means business. The barrels are finished in the same matt black, are of monobloc construction and are multichoke as standard, being provided with a set of five different internal chokes. Barrels are available in 29.5in and 32in with external chokes being available to order. My only gripe when testing this gun was the small amount of surface rust I got on the flats of the barrels within 24 hours of shooting it, but that was down to me not giving it enough oil. I send my apologies to Zoli.

The rib on this gun is a step-up style rib, which I think looks cool. The technical side of a step-up rib is to get your eye clear of the action and barrels, increasing your field of view while looking down the gun, without looking as crazy as a true high rib or messing with the centre of gravity like a high rib does.

To sum up this gun, it's a well-thought-out tool, made to the highest standard, but it's not going to draw attention in a gun rack. This being the case, let's move on to the all-important question - how does it shoot? 🦅



SHOTGUN TEST

FIELD TEST

In short, the Kronos M-Sport shoots very, very well. Before writing this, I took this gun out on three occasions – twice on clays at Barbury and once into the pigeon hide. The first stand out with the gun was a proper ‘big boys pants’ stand, a teal shooting up and away starting at 30 yards, followed by a left-to-right looper at 60. Why start easy? With a gun that weighs 8lb 8oz, you have to walk into a stand with a plan.

It’s a big, heavy gun and needs to be shot accordingly, moving hold points out and reducing movements down so that you’re not chasing clays in vain and tiring your arms out too.

Smooth recoil

I walked out of that first stand with a 9/10. This gun, when moved correctly, is as sweet a gun to shoot as they come, moving well with very smooth recoil. I went on to shoot five more stands and although there were some misses, they were few and far between. I was feeling it that day and the gun and I really got on.

Compare this to the next time I took it out, when after a long day of filming I grabbed this gun and went for another 100

to see how I got on. This was a different experience again. Being tired, I found myself walking into stands and just hoping I would hit some clays with little forethought and poor concentration. I missed a lot more than that first time out.

How did it get on in a pigeon hide? Very well indeed; I even put my auto down in the end. On a day when most birds were not coming within 30 yards, the control on this gun actually helped out, although my arms were pretty tired at the end of the day.



It may not be a starter gun, but as a second gun for all-round clay shooting it performs very well

CONCLUSION

This gun is forgiving when you put the effort in, it swings through lines well and its very predictable. Transversely, this gun is unforgiving when you are tired. Its heft does not suffer fools lightly and I would not recommend this as a starter gun. As your second gun for all-round clay shooting, once you’ve had a few lessons, it gets my vote.

My only worries with this gun are secondhand values, but if you’re buying this gun to shoot and not to sell on two months later because it hasn’t turned you magically into a world champ, then that’s not a concern.



While the Zoli has a solid action and handles very nicely, its looks are more on the plain side

16 /20 Action and barrels Solid action and great barrel spec	18 /20 Handling Amazing when used correctly	19 /20 Trigger Almost perfect, I couldn't fault it	16 /20 Stock Solid condition and spec but plain looks	14 /20 Value Not expensive but no bargain	83 /100 Overall score Fantastic on clays but could be prettier
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Waste not, want not

In the hands of The Poachers, a historic RAF station in Rutland is being transformed into a modest shoot with stratospheric benefits for all wildlife, discovers Matt Kidd



MATT KIDD

The second drive of the day takes place next to the main runway, extending as far as the eye can see



Over the past eight years as a country sports journalist and photographer, the number of shoots I've visited must now be well into triple figures. Despite them all essentially being pretty similar, there's always been something or someone unique to talk about, if not a number of them. However, I believe all of them have been pipped by way of 'uniqueness' by a shoot in Rutland I visited last November.

It was only the second-ever driven day this particular shoot had hosted, following a couple of successful walked-up days in 2021. Much of the topography is uninspiringly flat grassland. The 19-strong syndicate have mucked in together to erect pens, feed and release the pheasants across the 300 acres of shooting ground. But that's about as 'ordinary' as it gets, for the shoot in question is within the confines of the Kendrew Barracks, headquarters for the 7th

Light Mechanised Brigade Combat Team, 7th regiment Royal Logistic Corps and 2nd Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment 'The Poachers'.

While home to British Army forces today, the Kendrew Barracks was formerly RAF Cottesmore, which has a rich aviation history dating back to 1938. Despite being used throughout

"The land was largely lying fallow, but I believed it could make a great shoot"

World War II, the station was most known for its expansion in readiness for the Cold War era, where its vast runway was utilised by the V Bomber Force, carriers of Britain's nuclear deterrent, most notably the iconic Avro Vulcan bombers, until 1969.

Squadrons of Canberras to Tornados and Harriers would then be based here in the intervening years until RAF Cottesmore was eventually closed in 2011 due to funding cuts and

reallocated to the Army. Therefore, over 2,000 acres of land has been left to Mother Nature for a decade except for training exercises.

As one would imagine, there are many obstacles, processes and challenges with projects like setting up a game shoot over military land. Over breakfast, before the briefing in the local pub, I was able to chat to the driving force behind the shoot's inception and its eventual captain, Lieutenant Colonel Ben Hawes MBE, commanding officer of The Poachers.

Decommissioned airfield

"A few years ago, I actually shot on the military game shoot at Thorney Island in Chichester Harbour, East Sussex, which is similar to Cottesmore in the fact that it is a decommissioned airfield. They planted trees in the 1960s or '70s, which are of substantial height now, and I wanted to investigate what we could do with the land here," remembered Ben. "The land at Kendrew Barracks was largely laying fallow, but I believed it could make a great shoot."

"A number of veterans and serving members agreed to look at the space available in the summer of 2021, and by Christmas that year we had our first walked-up day. Without any form of gamebird management, it showed huge potential with good pockets of wild game.

"We developed the idea for a syndicate further with three key principles: one, offering affordable shooting for veterans, serving ➤

It's a happy team of Guns that make up the small syndicate



Driven shooting

For a two-day-old driven shoot with little topographical aid, the sport proves to be rather impressive

members and local country folk; two, being an example of great conservation; and three, being somewhere to introduce shooting to the next generation,” explained Ben.

“Following that, we had to consider what impacts we might have on training areas, other activities, being sensitive to anti-shooting personnel living on the barracks, and in particular the infrastructure for planting any crops and building pens. Once we knew where we could shoot and where we would like to position our drives, we had to get the Defence Infrastructure Organisation to approve the land as there’s no end of cables that aren’t particularly deep surrounding runways.

“It’s early days but, as you’ll see already today, we are meeting our three principles,” he added.

Wild game

Shortly after, Ben gave the drill for the day, which included a large passage on wild quarry species that were to be left untouched, including English partridge, snipe and woodcock – a great sign. It was then to vehicles, travelling in two convoys. For the first drive, half of the Guns were pegged around a belt of covercrop and taxiway, while the rest would enter the airfield through a crash gate and be walking Guns dispersed evenly throughout the beating line.

Unusually, I chose to be with the latter to experience more background of the shoot, which didn’t disappoint. To an eerie, dystopian backdrop of huge, grass-covered old nuclear payload stores, warning signs and

“The walking Guns made up the majority of the bag”

12ft barbed-wire fences, it wasn’t long until we worked our way as a line through a mix of grasses, wildflowers and covercrops.

The walking Guns made up the majority of the bag after the first drive, and as a line we had flushed two coveys of greys and, in the distance, we heard no end of shrill curlew calls.

“It is typical of airfields to be surrounded by red-top ryegrass, which is mown to 6in every six to eight weeks specifically to discourage birds from landing on it, for obvious



It might be an eerie, dystopian backdrop to a new shoot, but there are endless Guns wanting to join the syndicate

reasons, due to the strong, spiky stems,” explained Simon Walker, who runs the grounds team, crunching back thick a handful of grass. “Five years or so ago now I was contracted to mow the grass twice a year to 4in site-wide, which would take six days. We noticed that during the period it was allowed to grow long and mature, it offered good habitat for curlew and other wild birds.

“So, I managed to get permission to leave areas where we were finding curlew, and our population of breeding pairs has gone from four to over a dozen in just a couple of years. And in other areas we now cut in short grassy strips of no more than 16ft wide for the greys, which like the short grass provided there is nearby cover from predators offered by the longer grass. Plus, we have more yellowhammers, skylarks and finches than ever before, and in the last year we have also found rare bee orchids.”

After a short elevenses we walked to a second drive, located next to the main runway which extended as far as the eye could see into the distance with a control tower and hangars adjacent to it. A better drilled beating line this time saw the Bazanty pheasants take off and rise



The shoot enjoys little pressure from foxes, stoats and weasels thanks to the land being fenced

into the sky like their Tornado and Harrier forebears and over the line. For a two-day-old driven shoot with little topographical aid it was rather impressive, not unlike a drive on a seasoned Lincolnshire wild Fenland shoot.

Team effort

“It has been a real team effort to get it up and running,” explains Poachers veteran Glen ‘Spike’ Smith. “Colonel [retired] Richard Chesterfield

has been really supportive with organisation and ensuring everything runs smoothly. And local gamekeeper James Whatthorne and farmer Ben Hollis [whose ancestors farmed the land before the airfield was built], were really helpful in helping us decide where to create drives, what to plant and so on.”

As no farming had taken place here since World War II, they had no idea how well crops would grow. “It was therefore suggested to try Kings’ ➔

One of the day's
spaniels waits patiently
for its next instructions



Take-Off Mix, which includes kale, fodder radish, red millet, triticale, perennial chicory and more, which offer benefits of being fairly hardy, easy to establish and great cover from winged predators,” added Ben.

“As the land is fenced, and with the surrounding shoots hot on predator control, there is little pressure from foxes, stoats and weasels. As you can see, it is doing very well and we only lost one patch of crop due to the drought.”



Four young lads experience their first taste of a game day in the beating line

A jovial BYO lunch and a third drive followed, with the flushing point surrounded by a large ammo dump. Again, this showed great promise, though offering some lessons for future days on where to position the Guns and beaters.

Future plans

On the way to the fourth and final drive, I joined Ben again to talk about the future plans. “Over the next couple of years, we will add to the acres of covercrop and extend the areas we set aside for the shoot. We will also aim to increase the numbers of birds we put down and add a pen or two, but only very steadily. While

Crossing off the final point of Ben’s key principles for the shoot, the average age of the beating line was around 20, drastically lowered by four lads who experienced their first taste of a game day and were loving every minute of it. Not only that, but his son Jack shot his first pheasant on the final drive of the day.

As an interesting side note, it is likely you are familiar with the famous Cottesmore Hunt, one of the oldest foxhound packs in Britain. Indeed, the RAF Cottesmore Badge included a hunting horn in homage to the hunt and to symbolise its location within this hunting country.

“Over the next couple of years, we will extend the areas we set aside for the shoot”

I have endless amounts of people knocking on the door to join the syndicate, there is no desire to make it a ‘big’ shoot,” he explained.

“Further helping to fund conservation work, we are also in talks with a local wildlife photographer, Tom Robinson, on the potential to host photographic hides in the spring and summer,” Ben continued. “Plus, we would like to get approval for some Government or military funding to add to our trees.”

But that’s not all, RAF Cottesmore’s motto was: “We rise to our obstacles”, and is said to be another reference to the hunt while conveying the spirit with which the Royal Air Force confronts difficulties. Perhaps, back in 1949 when the badge was granted, they saw the potential the grounds would make for a pheasant shoot. And who better to overcome the challenges of running one here than The Poachers, both serving and veteran? 🐔

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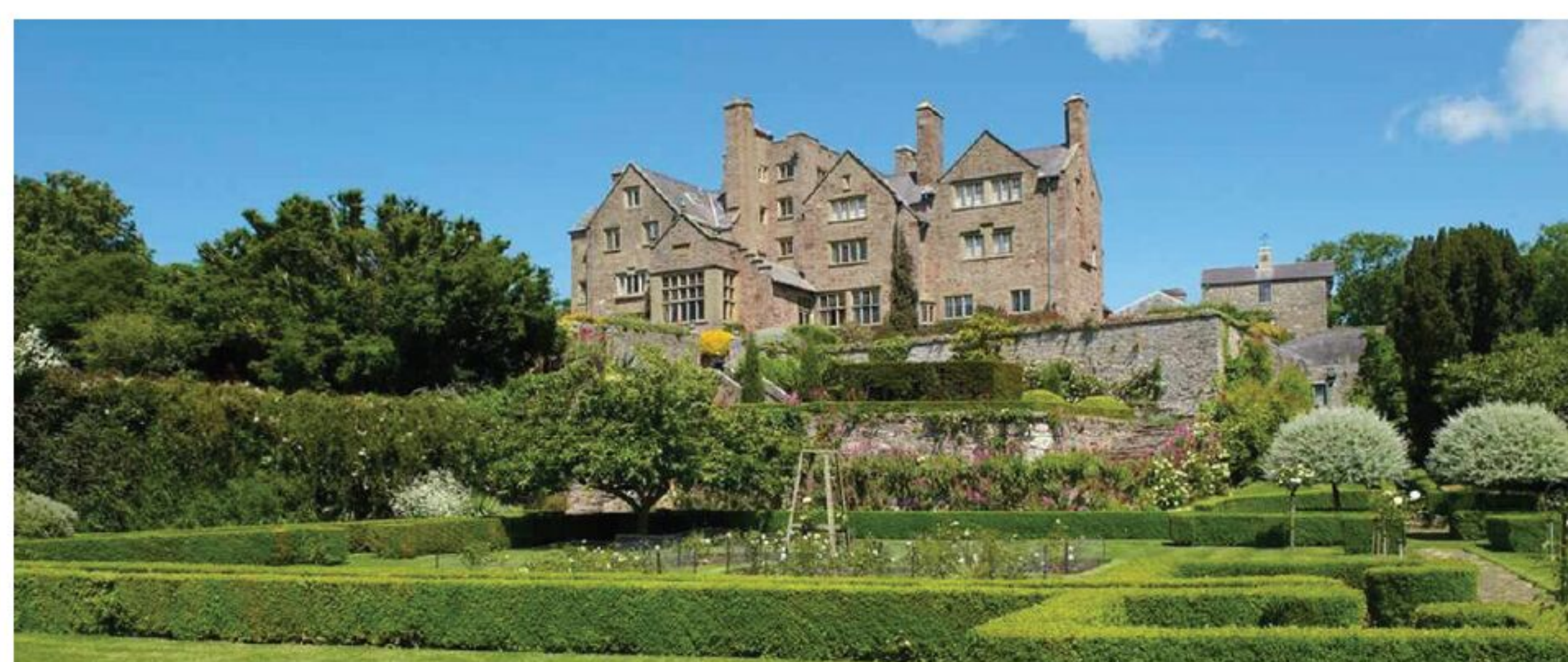


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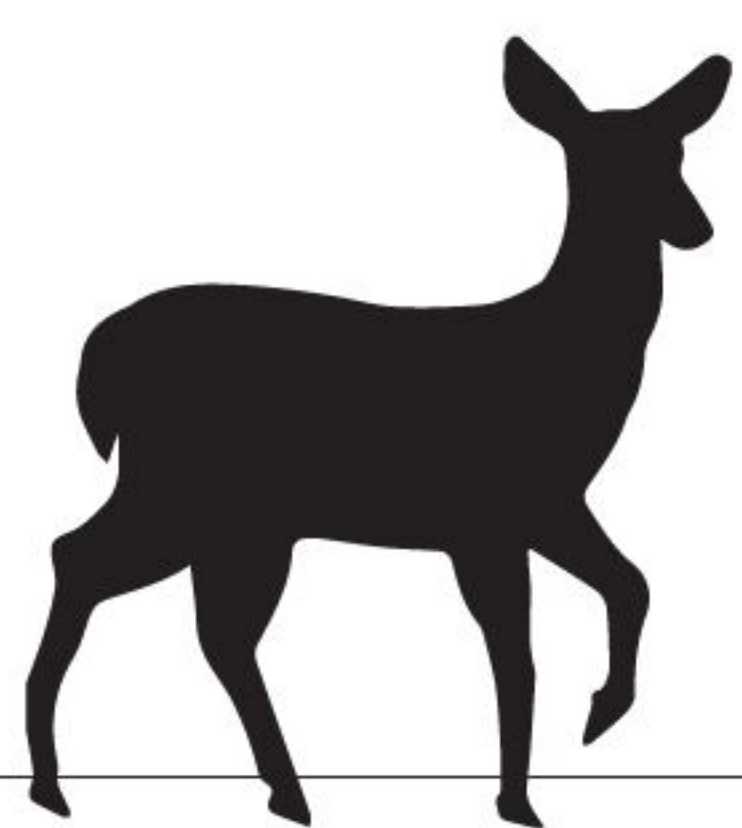
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Game Cookery

They might not be at the top of every menu, but smoked stag tongues make for a meaty and flavorsome lunchtime dish, says Tim Maddams

Boiled tongue probably isn't at the top of everyone's most-wanted-for-lunch list. Perhaps it should be on yours? I know that a lot of folks these days turn their nose up at offal of any kind, not least of all the tongue – it's fair to say it has fallen from favour faster than a UKIP economic policy.

The thing with stag tongues though is that they are not only extremely meaty, but

because they are from a stag they are also seriously flavoursome.

For this recipe, I used red stag tongues shot during the rut. Some 'timid of palate' folk may suggest that this is less of an

sophistication not often found outside of the smartest of smart restaurants.

Yes, there is some work involved here. The preparation and cookery time will be off-putting for many, and the hassle of

“For those of you who stay the course, I assure you, astonishing things await you”

advantage than I propose, but the addition of the curing and smoking to the raw product here tempers the rugged zeal of the tongue meat with an enchanting

sourcing a stag's tongue or three will put off even more, but for those of you who stay the course, I assure you, astonishing things await you. 🐾

Ingredients

⚠️ **PREP TIME:** 2 DAYS

⚠️ **COOKING TIME:** 3 HOURS

FOR DRY-CURING THE TONGUES

🍷 2 OR 3 STAG TONGUES

🍷 100G FINE SEA SALT

🍷 100G DEMERARA SUGAR

🍷 4 FRESH BAY LEAVES

🍷 10 BLACK PEPPERCORNS, LIGHTLY CRACKED

🍷 4 CLOVES, BASHED

🍷 6 ALL-SPICE BERRIES, LIGHTLY CRUSHED

FOR COOKING THE TONGUES

🍷 A BAY LEAF

🍷 6 PEPPERCORNS

🍷 3 LARGE CARROTS, PEELED

🍷 1 LARGE ONION, PEELED AND HALVED

TO GARNISH

🍷 1 SMALL COURGETTE, THINLY SLICED

🍷 1 HANDFUL NASTURTIUM LEAVES, WASHED AND WELL DRAINED

🍷 1 CLOVE OF GARLIC, VERY FINELY CHOPPED

🍷 1 TSP FRENCH MUSTARD

🍷 A GOOD GLUG OF OLIVE OIL

SMOKED STAG TONGUES

THE METHOD *Serves 4 to 5*

1 Rinse the tongues well, then weigh them. Mix all the other ingredients to make a dry cure mix. Calculate what 4% of the weight of the tongues would be and weigh out this amount of dry cure mix.

2 Place the tongues in a plastic tub or vacuum-pack bag and add the weighed-out dry cure. Turn them over a few times in the cure then pop the lid on the tub or seal up the vacuum bag. Place in the fridge and leave there for 48 hours, remembering to turn them every now and again.

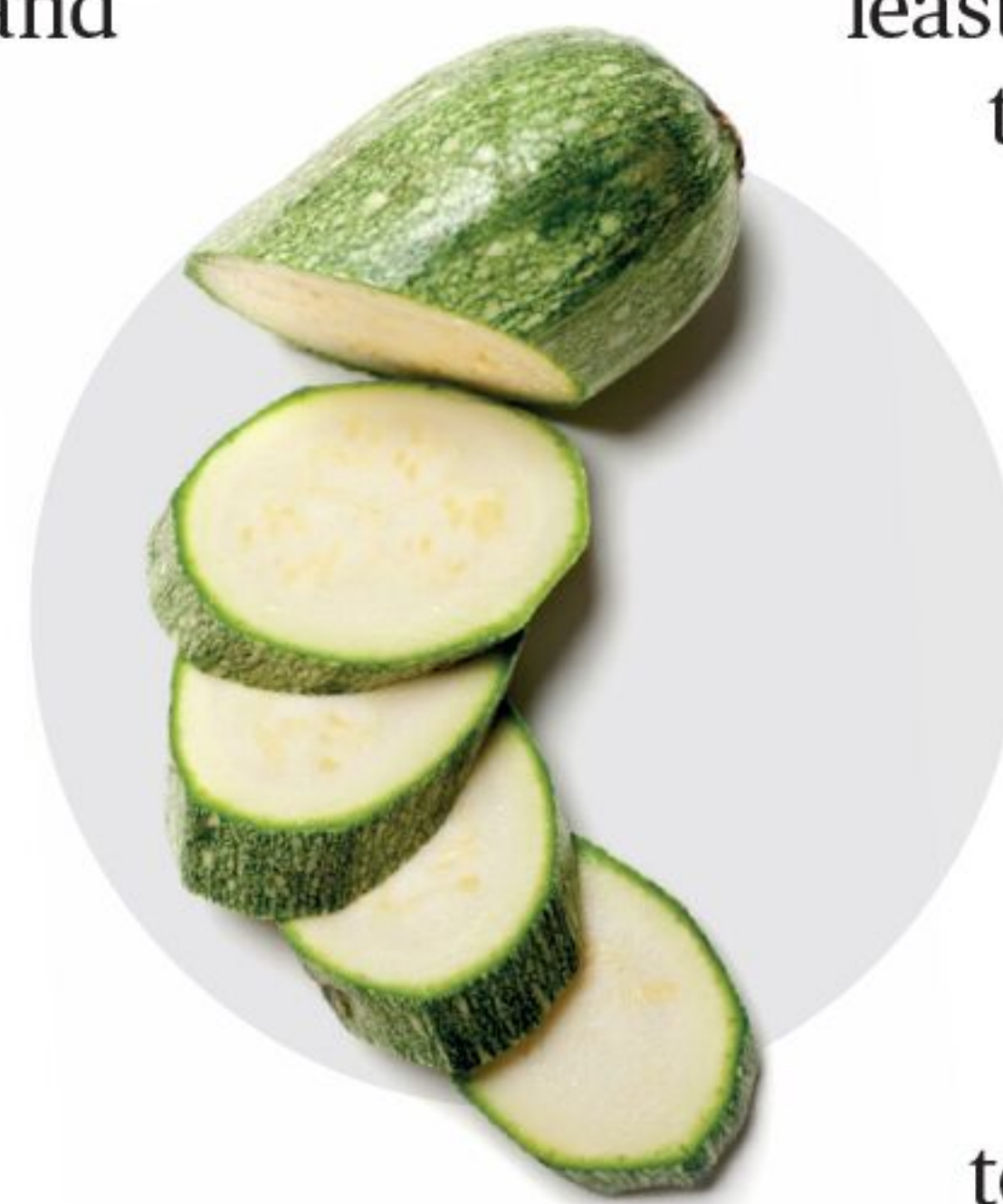
3 For smoking the tongues, remove them from the cure and discard any leftover fluid. Rinse quickly, towel dry them then leave them in the fridge (uncovered) for a few hours to allow them to dry thoroughly and get them ready for smoking. Cold smoke them for two hours over oak or cherry or a mix of the two – at this stage you can either vac-pack them or wrap and tub

them and freeze them until you want to cook them.

4 Simmer the tongues in enough water to cover them for around 2½ to 3 hours. Add the fresh bay leaf and a few more peppercorns to the cooking water. Once they have had at least 2 hours of simmering, add the carrots and onion.

5 Lift the tongues from the broth and allow them to cool a little. Peel off the tough outer skin, which will be grey and slightly rubbery. Take care not to scald your fingers. Slice up the tongues and serve them in a bowl with some of the carrot, onion and broth.

6 This is a strong dish, so a robust garnish is needed. Mix all the garnish ingredients together in a small bowl and serve with the tongue and broth, and maybe some hearty home-baked bread to go with the feast. You could add watercress too, if you like.





Success isn't in numbers

Rough shooting when his dog had the largest share of Tower-Bird's bag



"We did find a mate for the partridge and the rabbit – a mallard, which Don caught on the far side of an old canal"

IT was an excited Don who watched me, just before bedtime, sorting out cartridges and dropping the gun in two parts into the ancient canvas leg-o'-mutton case. After that, he had not been sleeping, stretched out on the floor at the foot of my bed, for more than 20 minutes, when he started to dream with yelps, which grew louder and shriller and with feet twitching, until I bawled at him to be quiet.

It must have been soon after 3am when his cold nose came into shocking contact with my face and I shouted at him again, when he

hurriedly retreated, and presently I heard him cast himself on the floor with a loud bump of resignation. He had obviously and naturally thought we were off fowling, whereas, for once, I intended to dig up my four remaining rows of King Edwards and then set out for a couple of hours' rough shooting at a spot that I seldom visit, and then only in early September.

It was a patient dog that watched me digging and grunting on the allotment, occasionally straightening a bent back to look out towards the marshes to see if the fog-like mist, or

the mist-like fog, was thinning. It was about 9.30am before my task was finished, and a fairly good crop of rather small potatoes lay drying on the rough ground from which I had lifted other rows a fortnight since.

Soaked through with sweat, I walked up the slope leading to my cottage, had a swill down at the sink, a quick change into a darker shirt and was outside when the bus drew up. Thereafter it was but a matter of time before we left the vehicle to tramp a couple of miles to our destination.

Even if we did not get a shot, there was plenty of deep mud, water,

reedbeds and ground cover to give the dog enough exercise. Had I made an honest guess at what the bag might be, I felt that I should be contented with a duck, a couple of snipe, a couple of pigeon and maybe a partridge. Last year, at about the same time, it had been two duck, a snipe, three pigeon and a single shot at a partridge which only caused that bird, a laggard from a small covey, to tread on the gas.

“Out into the clover he ran, twisting and turning at speed”

On our two-mile walk I allowed Don to run ahead and examine the patches of bracken and brambles and the dense hedgerows, for I knew the owner of the place and no harm could be done here in any case. At one point I saw the dog leave the hedge-side ground to nose at a pace that plainly indicated he was on the hot line of a pheasant that had not so long ago issued from the cover of the hedge. Out into the clover he ran, twisting and turning at a speed that showed off to perfection the fine order he is in and the muscles that much swimming and running have steeled.

Temptation

Out he shot now almost into the centre of the small field, and all but caught a cock pheasant that rose noisily in front of him. A sharp whistle and he steadied up, and then started to quest at speed again, flushing two more pheasants - another cock and a hen - before finally dashing back to me panting and asking for praise that he had not given way to the temptation to chase the first bird



“Thereafter it was but a matter of time before we tramped a couple of miles to our destination”

into the next parish. For a time, as I pushed along the rough path through knee-high grass, I lost sight of the dog; then, hearing a faint noise behind me, I looked round to see him thrust his way out of a patch of bracken carrying a half-grown rabbit, which he brought up to hand.

On the rough shoot ground I kept the dog strictly to heel, for, though we passed several long reedbeds where he obviously became interested in various scents that reached him, I wanted to walk round a piece of rough grass where I would most likely find the covey of birds, if, indeed, there were any partridges on the place.

In fact, I later congratulated myself on this astute move, for we had no sooner circumvented the rough cover, putting ourselves between any

possible birds squatting there and a wide stretch of water, when up went Don’s nose to wind the air, and when he looked at me, the expression on his face was unmistakable. We walked forward very slowly. Even so, five birds were up and away 50 yards ahead and I stood still to watch where they dropped. They carried on, as I knew they would, over the boundary, to land far out on some barley stubble.

A long shot

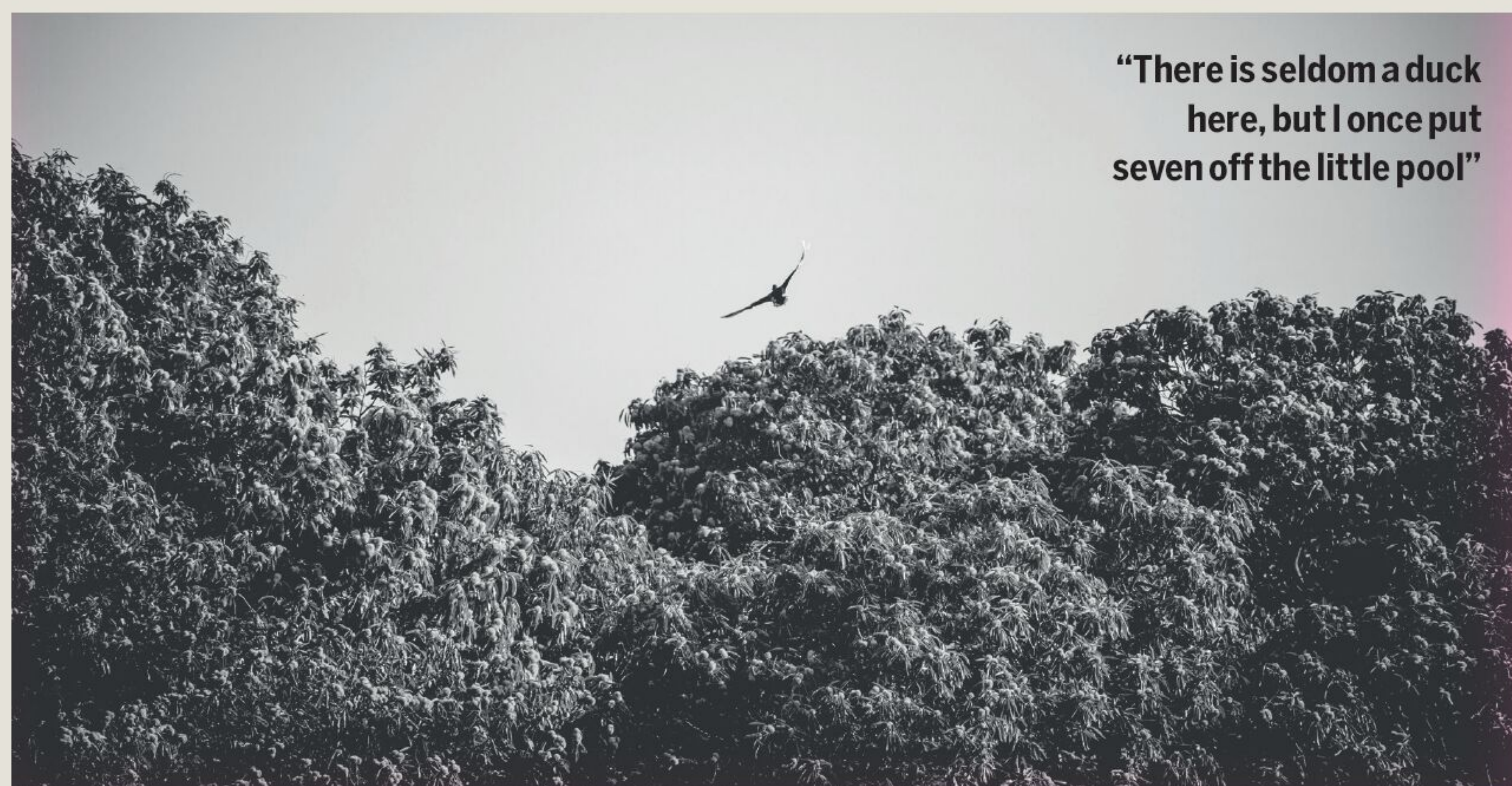
As I bent down to pat Don and then walked forward, I was surprised by a single partridge getting up a bit leftward of where the covey had flushed. It may have run there, but I rather fancy it had strayed from the main body and had hugged the ground in fear or uncertainty as the covey had departed.

It was a long shot, but not too long for my heavily choked barrels and even before it hit the deck, I spoke sharply to the dog as he started forward, and then we both moved carefully towards the fall, quite ready to deal with any more partridges that were playing Br’er Rabbit.

But, alas, no more rose, and I sent Don to collect the half-brace - a young bird, though early hatched. The legs were of a mellowing yellowness, but the two shorter well-pointed primaries (as opposed to the



“There is seldom a duck here, but I once put seven off the little pool”





rounded ones of old partridges) were, as always, my yardstick for age, although I grant that only by experience can one make a happy guess at about the correct time when the birds were hatched.

Our next step was to walk a considerable distance to a bit of marshy ground where tall reeds hide a small pool. This spot sets a problem, for it is not easy to approach it quietly, there being soft patches of squelching mud well trampled by horses and cattle. There is seldom a duck here, but sometimes there is, and I once put seven off the little pool. Thus, one is torn into making a decision should snipe rise, as rise they nearly always do, from the surrounding soft ground and from a patch of reed-tussocks close to the pool.

“I was so certain of killing it as it slowly departed that I completely muffed the shot”

If one decides to leave the snipe alone when they zigzag up, hoping that he will find duck in residence, it is 10 to one that no duck are at home and he curses himself for not having shot at the snipe. If, on the other hand, he feels pretty confident that there are no duck there and that he will shoot at any snipe flushed, be sure that he will miss a snipe with both barrels and watch a couple of fat mallard rise from the pool among the reeds and clear off towards the distant marshes.

Perhaps it is a good idea to let well alone any snipe that rise before one gets within range of the pool, then, if a long-bill rises, to have one shot at it

and quickly open the gun and insert a cartridge held ready, thus being in a position to kill a snipe and two duck.

Empty of water

On this morning I was quite glad when no snipe rose as I gingerly approached the pool, but I was not so pleased when I found the pool not only empty of duck, but empty of water. It was while I was standing considering things that a pigeon flew over my head from behind, and I was so certain of killing it as it slowly departed, not having seen us, or having mistaken us for a cow and her calf, that I completely muffed the shot.

For half an hour we hunted out the edges of an almost-dry lake, and only after Don had almost pounded himself to a standstill in the thick,

black, sticky mud did we find a mate for the partridge and the rabbit - a mallard, pricked or in part-eclipse, which Don caught on the far side of an old canal.

As we tramped back the way we had come, I kept the dog at heel, for I could see his thoughts, long before we reached the place, were on those pheasants, and it is good at times to keep a check on enthusiasm. Only as we neared a stile across which lay the hard highway did I allow him to investigate the hedge in which he was

taking an unusually keen interest. I wondered idly what his nose indicated, for I did not expect to find a pheasant here, or even a rabbit.

“Go on,” I said; “what do you make of it?” For perhaps 15 seconds he stood, head held high, nose working hard, then dashed back some 20 yards before shooting through the hedge-bottom. He was evidently intent on driving something out to me. As this was not my ground however, I kept my weapon slung. A minute passed then suddenly I heard a short hoarse roar, and from my side of the hedge rushed a large black and white cat, which took the stile almost at a bound and vanished across the road just as a lorry thundered past.

I whistled to Don who came through the hedge with a comic ‘where is it?’ look on his face and his hackles upright on his back. When I called him to heel, he gave a snort of disgust and then proceeded to tell me in a flow of high-pitched talk what he thought of cats in general and this one in particular and exactly what he would have done to it if he had caught it - until I told him smartly to dry up.

Not a very successful morning, particularly as I had hoped to pick a bag of mushrooms and had found none at all, but it had been no less enjoyable than any other morning when we are well away from the noisy haunts of my fellow men. 🐦

➡ This article was first published in the 10 October 1963 issue of Shooting Times.



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Goosebumps

Peter Theobald and his friends enjoy a memorable adventure up in Orkney



A predawn start on the first day's shooting does little to dampen the team's enthusiasm

Should you find yourself in the quaint town of Kirkwall on the Orkney Islands and wander down one of the many cobbled side streets, you will come across an unpretentious shopfront with the name of William Shearer above the door. If you live on Orkney you will almost certainly frequent this shop, as it sells everything from drawing pins to garden furniture, plus everything else in between.

For the shooting man, the real gem lies at the back of the shop in the shape of a tiny room stuffed with guns, cartridges and all the gear any wildfowler could ask for. Pictures of bags of geese adorn the walls, for this

is the home of Orkney Island Goose Shooting, run by Raymond Shearer, professional goose guide. Raymond is the sixth-generation Shearer to run the shop over its 167-year history, but he only decided to start guiding five years ago, mainly to help farmers deal with the plague of greylag geese that denude their crops. Raymond is uniquely placed in this respect, being an Orcadian. He also sells the grass seed that every farmer on the island plants.

Ring the changes

The Essex Boys Goose Shooting Club, which comprises Robbie, Mick and me, have been coming to Orkney for a number of years but decided last

self-catering cottage, exhausted but excited at the prospects for the ensuing few days. Raymond phoned to say he would pick us up the next day at 4.30am and, as usual, we were raring to go.

When I shook hands with Raymond on greeting him, he showed me the result of an accident sustained from a rope banger. Part of his agreement with the farmers is to scare geese off the standing barley outside the shooting season, which he does by lighting rope bangers. On this occasion he'd removed one of the bangers from the rope, but on lighting it, it exploded, removing the top half of his thumb and forefinger. Needless to say it was his trigger finger, so he has had to learn to use his second finger to shoot.

On the way to the field, Raymond explained that harvest had hardly started on Orkney, so it was going to require constant reconnaissance to keep up with the geese as they sought the latest stubble. This would be standard practice for me as a pigeon

“With six geese shot in the air at one time, we were up and running and had a morning's bag off to the processor”

season to ring the changes, including the time of year we visited and the guide we used. Thus it was on 30 August, after a 14-hour journey by car and ferry, that we arrived at our

shooter but meant, if we got it right, the geese would be less likely to go somewhere else once they found a stubble to their liking. As it happened, the field we were on the first morning

Though the lie-down blinds are slightly awkward to shoot from, they certainly prove very effective





Decoying the barley stubble turns out to be the perfect plan

had been cut for silage, but there were enough whole ears of barley lying around to keep the geese interested.

Limited cover

Due to a lack of cover we decided to use lie-down blinds, the ones where you lie inside with just your head poking out, throwing open the lids when the time comes to shoot, rising like Dracula from his coffin. Mick was sceptical of this, but I was happy to give it a go.

So, after setting about 20 decoys, we laid back and watched the dawn unfold. On Orkney you are never far away from water, and on this morning a large body of water lay at the bottom of the slope some 300 yards to our left, so I assumed this was the direction geese were likely to come from. On still mornings such as this, you can nearly always hear the distant call of geese, but on this day there was an eerie quiet, save for the melodic burbling of curlew flying along the tideline.

My heart rate soared a couple of times when approaching geese miraculously turned into curlew as they got closer. Three more ‘curlew’, but wait, these really were geese, flying silently but directly for our field. “This is it,” I thought as they brought their paddles down, swooping towards the decoys. I threw open the lid and swung the Browning, loaded with 42g No 3s, then *click*. Damn!



A lack of cover means that lie-down blinds are the best way to ensure the Guns stay hidden

Misfire. On closer inspection, the firing pin on the bottom barrel had broken, so with no spare gun, I had to confine my shooting to the top barrel only as the flight really got underway.

Though it was awkward to shoot from the coffin blind, the geese never suspected a thing, decoying right over us no more than 30 yards up. We were all shooting well, and with six geese shot in the air at one time we were up and running and had a morning’s bag off to the processor to be turned into burgers and sausages. It was a remarkable start to what was going to be a remarkable trip. ➡➡



The Essex Boys enjoy a cracking start to their Orkney adventure

In position and ready for action in the lie-down hide

“The secret was to wait perfectly still until they were directly overhead”

The next morning, in flat-calm wind conditions, Raymond set the decoys on a very inviting barley stubble. Geese were soon on the move but were strangely reluctant to commit, with most skeins passing just out of range and piling into another stubble a mile away. Inevitably, some came close enough for a shot but, again, my gun consistently would not fire the bottom barrel.

As a pigeon shooter I wanted to know why these geese decided to visit another field when the one we were set up on was covered with them yesterday. Fresh fields were being harvested on a daily basis, so the geese had no need to be loyal to any one field for more than a day or two before moving on.

Frustrated by my malfunctioning Browning, I decided to visit

Raymond's gunshop in Kirkwall to see if I could borrow a suitable replacement for the rest of the trip. Going through the racks, a 32in-barrelled Beretta pricked my interest as it came up to the eye very smoothly. We were to flight a large pond behind Raymond's house in the evening and with the wind increasing in strength, anticipation was high.

Six for six

Thankfully, geese began to arrive in good light, intending to pitch into the pond behind us. My opportunity came when a skein of some 20 geese tacked into the wind straight at me, no more than 30 yards up. The secret was to wait perfectly still until they were directly overhead before shooting. The first goose folded without so much as a twitch and, as the remainder clawed their way skywards, a second crumpled to the ground. I was impressed; a right-and-left with the first two shots of a borrowed gun. Unbelievably, the next two skeins suffered the same fate - six for six. I was so pleased with the Beretta that after a bit of bargaining with Raymond, we agreed on a straight swap with my compromised Browning. Result.

I was now in serious business, and with the wind set to hold for the



Following a malfunction with his Browning, Peter Theobald swaps to a Beretta for the rest of the trip



A quick inspection of the decoys on the stubble from one of the dogs proves all to be in working order

last day of our trip, it was going to be a restless night. We got a chance to watch the intended field on our way to evening flight, a barley stubble with big round bales still waiting to be carted. The geese, a full 600 birds, were just beginning to leave for their roost, skein after skein, lifting with all bands playing, a truly breathtaking sight. To save time in the morning we returned to the field after dark and rolled six bales to make two hides 20 yards apart, creating a large clear area to set the decoys on.

Returning to my comparison of pigeon shooting to goose shooting, there are occasions when all the stars align and you enjoy an exceptional day. Well, this was going to be such a day. The geese had been feeding on this field exclusively for a week and

had just started to overflow into a field of standing barley, already trampling 20 yards into the field. The wind was blowing from the roost, so flighting geese would not hear our shooting.

Enticing calling

The first geese came early, Raymond coaxing them into the decoys with some enticing calling. And because we knew they would be confident, we did not need to put the decoy spread at maximum range, which seems to be what most goose guides do. Under the circumstances, it was not surprising that we all shot well, substantially adding to our processing bill.

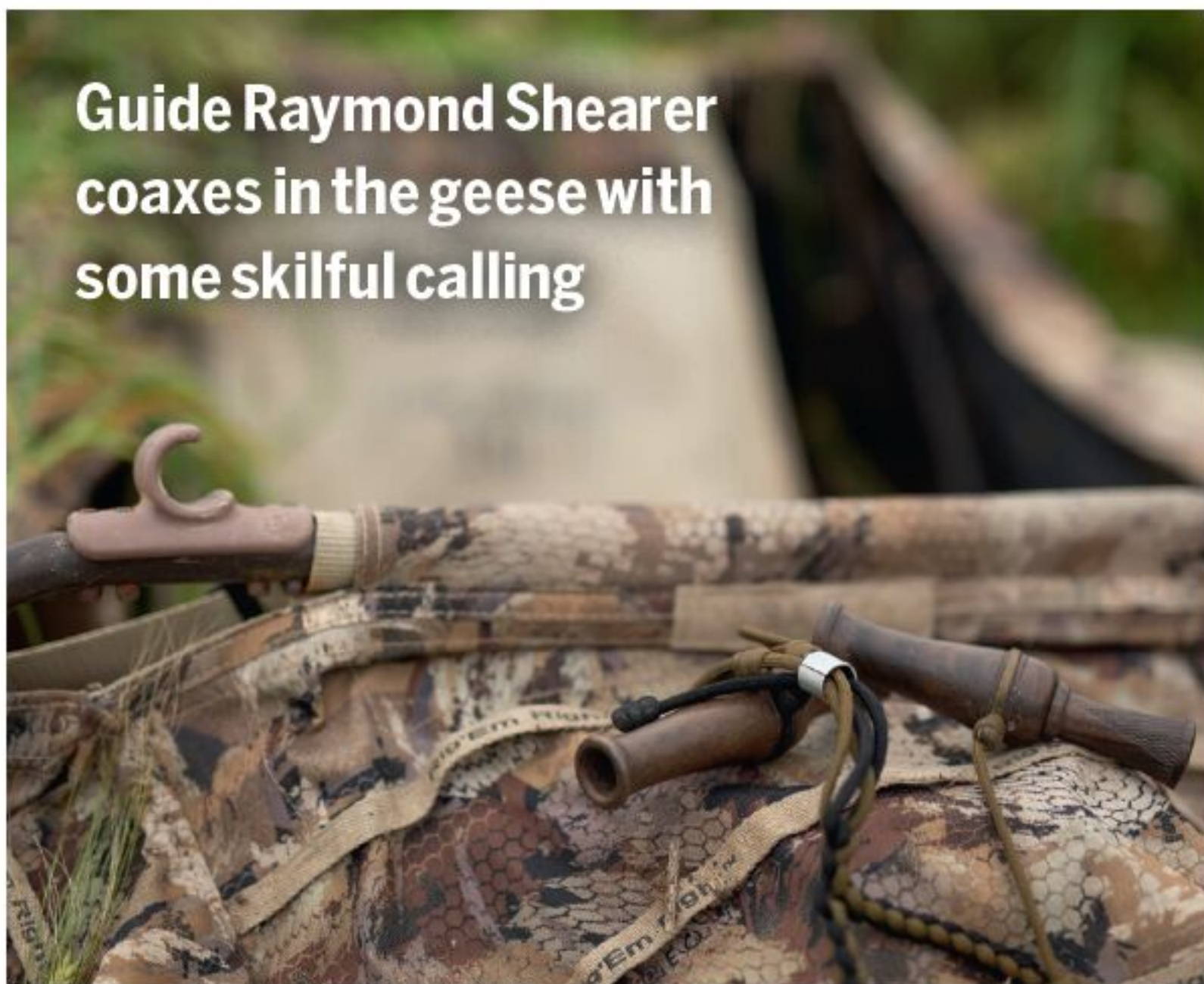
But still the best was to come. Raymond had deliberately saved an evening roost shoot for a day like this, when the wind was blowing

at 20mph. We were on a relatively small piece of water but the banks and waters' edge were literally inches deep in goose muck and feathers. Even as we geared up, geese were whiffing in, in small skeins. In all my 50 years of chasing wild geese I have never seen geese cascading in like this, some almost turning upside down in a display of aerobatic mastery.

After shooting our fill, we sleeved our guns, sat back and enjoyed the spectacle that only a few privileged wildfowlers have witnessed. 🦆



The decoys are set out on a large clear area between the two hides on the second day



Guide Raymond Shearer coaxes in the geese with some skilful calling



A good day's sport with superb shooting adds to the final bag, and everyone leaves feeling satisfied

An odd month

September has brought with it a host of surprises, writes James Sutcliffe

September has been an odd month. I'm seeing foxes pairing up and we heard the first stags start to roar in the first week or so of the month, so everything seems to be happening earlier than one might expect. I put this down to the bizarre weather we have had this year, with blistering heat going straight into torrential rain.

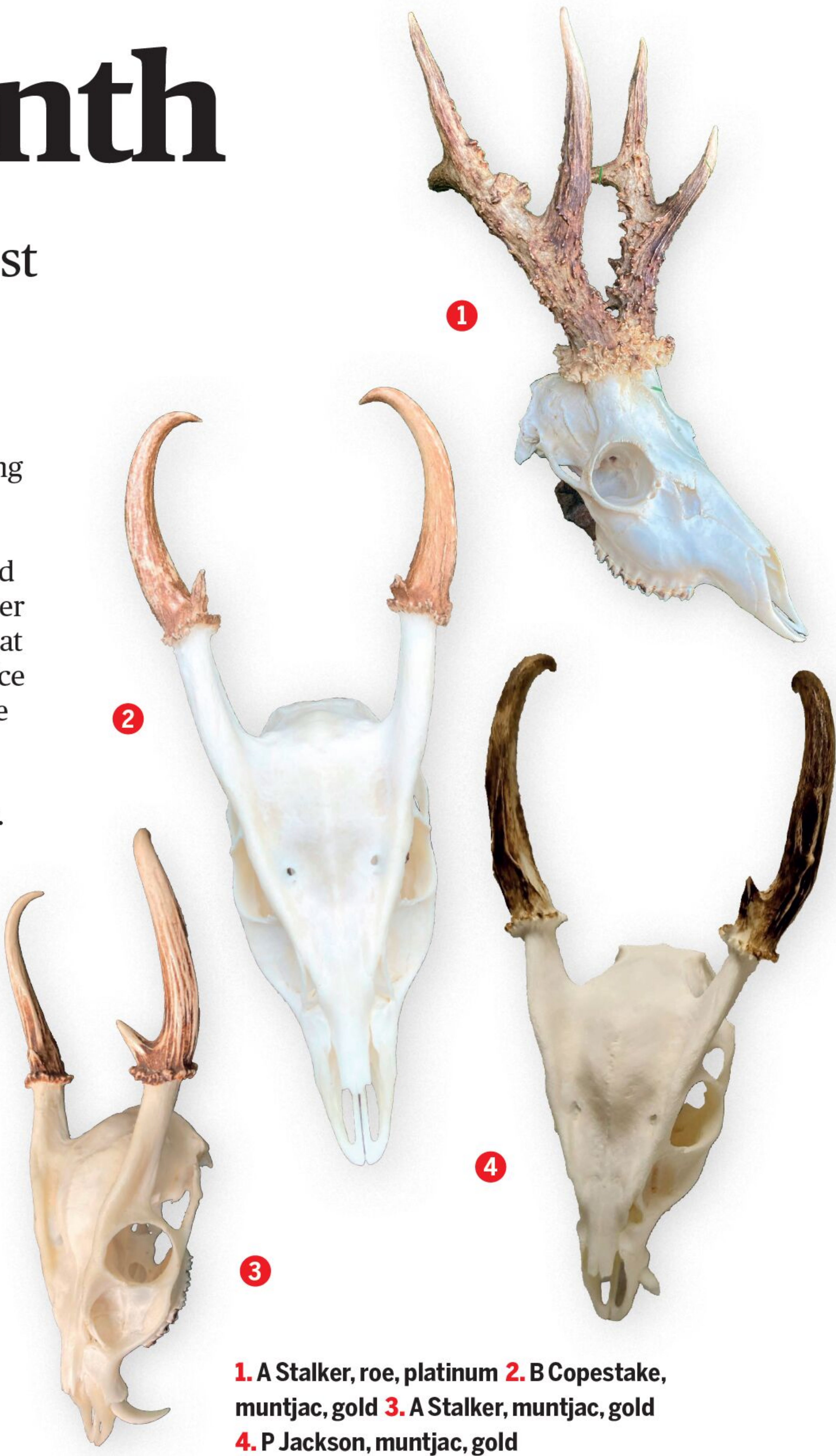
That being said, deer management needs to happen regardless of the weather, and we have a good selection of heads across several species to look at. Kicking things off has to be A Stalker's platinum medal roebuck from Hampshire (no, that's not their real name, they preferred to remain anonymous). With very impressive weight and volume scores, the pictures really don't do this head justice. Believe me, I'm the one who got hands-on to measure it.

Several medal muntjac came through our hands, but the one that stood out was

M Ellis' silver medal from Shropshire. As a Shropshire resident myself, its interesting to see just where these little deer are appearing, but this head was the first medal head the stalker had got. While over the moon, he let me know that he doesn't set out to shoot nice heads, they just happen to be a happy by-product of their regular deer management. A refreshing attitude to hear.

Representing the bigger deer, J Hetherington's silver medal red stag was millimetres away from making it into the gold medal class, but that detracts nothing from how impressive the head is; a truly stunning example of the species.

We also had a gold medal Chinese water deer and a host more medal-class muntjac and roe deer, including one of my own, a rare thing indeed. 🦌



BASC AND BDS HEADS

ROE						
Name	County	Avlength	Span	Wght	Vol	Score
Platinum						
A STALKER	HAMPSHIRE	28.4	9.6	648	220	154.4
Silver						
J RICHARDSON	YORKSHIRE	22	10.2	425	170	116.5
Bronze						
G DePAEP	BERKSHIRE	23	6.2	440	150	108.5
J SUTCLIFFE	LANCASHIRE	25.5	10.2	445	145	106.2
G WHITTINGHAM	LINCOLNSHIRE	23.4	8	430	165	110.2

CHINESE WATER DEER				
Name	County	LengthL	LengthR	Score
Gold				
A STALKER	BEDFORDSHIRE	82	83	224

RED					
Name	County	Antler Lgth	Nos of Points	Net weight	Score
Silver					
J HETHERINGTON	N IRE	84.25	13	7.06	194
MUNTJAC					
Name	County	Span	Length L/R	Brow L/R	Score
Gold					
B COPESTAKE	NORFOLK	11	12.7/12.4	1.2/1.7	63.6
A SMITH	BUCKS	10.5	11.5/11.4	3.0/2.5	61.3
P JACKSON	NOTTS	11.8	13.0/13.4	1.4/0.0	63.5
Silver					
MELLIS	SHROPS	11.1	10.7/10.7	1.3/1.5	58.5
Bronze					
DRAVENHILL	SUFFOLK	11.6	10.9/10.9	1.0/0.0	56.4

➡ If you have a head you would like to submit for measurement, or require more information, email BASC's deer team at deer@basc.org.uk



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➡ MARK RIPLEY

Well-known fox controller and long-range shooting expert

Contact the team

Email: ollie.harvey@fieldsportspress.com



Multi-pointed muntjac attract attention from stalkers because they are different to the norm

An abnormal specimen

➡ STALKING

Q There are two multi-pointed muntjac running about on one of my permissions. Both are mature animals, and I haven't seen them in previous years. Do you think these are becoming more common and what is usually the cause?

A Multi-pointed muntjac are more frequently seen these days than they were in the past. There are several

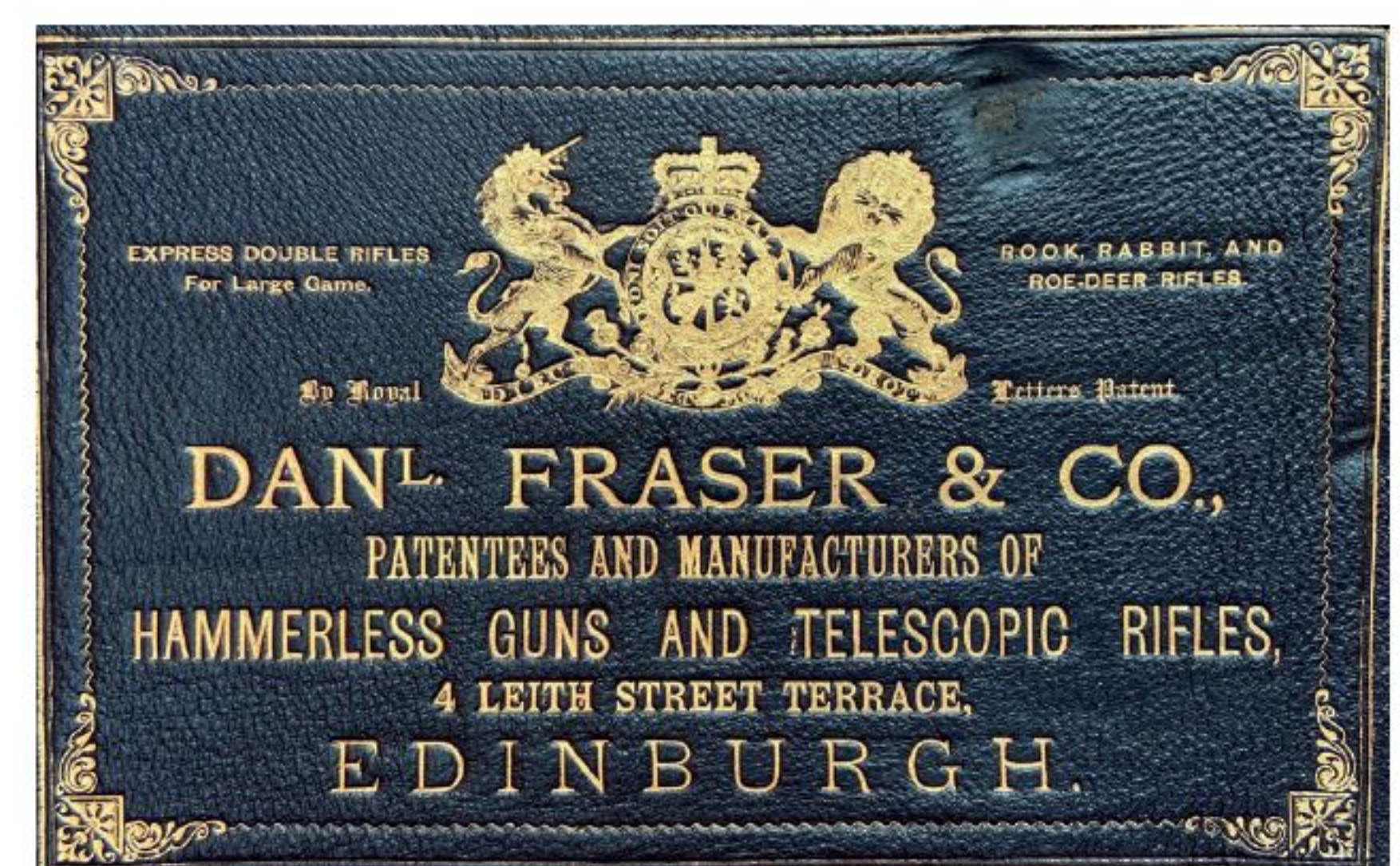
reasons why this is the case; firstly, as the population of muntjac and stalkers has grown, more have been taken, and so occurrences of them cropping up get more frequently commented on via social media and on the internet. A bit like roe, abnormal specimens attract attention because they are different. The causes I think fall into one of two categories; either they are genetic or, more likely, they are the result of mechanical damage or injury while the animal is growing its antlers. **IW**

GUN CASE OF THE WEEK

DANIEL FRASER

The Royal Warrant proudly adorns this handsome leather label with gold embossed images and lettering. Daniel Fraser was established in Edinburgh in 1888, at 4 Leith Street Terrace, as stated on this label. He stayed there, styled Daniel Fraser & Co until 1911, when it became a limited company.

The company specialised in rifles and took out several patents, becoming well regarded at a time when rifle development was moving



from the blackpowder to the cordite era. Today, Daniel Fraser is part of the John Dickson group of companies and still manufactures rifles in Scotland to traditional designs. **DH**

Long-range performance

AIRGUNNING

Q I have read a lot about the exceptional long-range performance of airgun slugs. Most people seem to use them with high-power air rifles but I only shoot a sub-12ft/lb model. Is it worth me giving them a try or is my gun too weak?

A It seems that slug ammunition does work best when driven at the high muzzle velocities achieved

by high-power airguns. That said, more and more manufacturers are making slugs specifically for use with sub-12 airguns, and plenty of shooters seem to be getting decent results with them.

There is no harm in giving slugs a try, but take care because their improved ballistic coefficient means they carry further and are more likely to ricochet than pellets. Remember also to use a chronograph to make sure they don't push your airgun's muzzle energy over the legal limit. **MM**

Adding rifles to a licence

LICENSING

Q My shooting friend has terminal cancer and wants me to have his rifles when he is gone. In order to save his wife the grief of sorting this out at what will be a traumatic time, is it possible for his rifles to be put on to my certificate now?

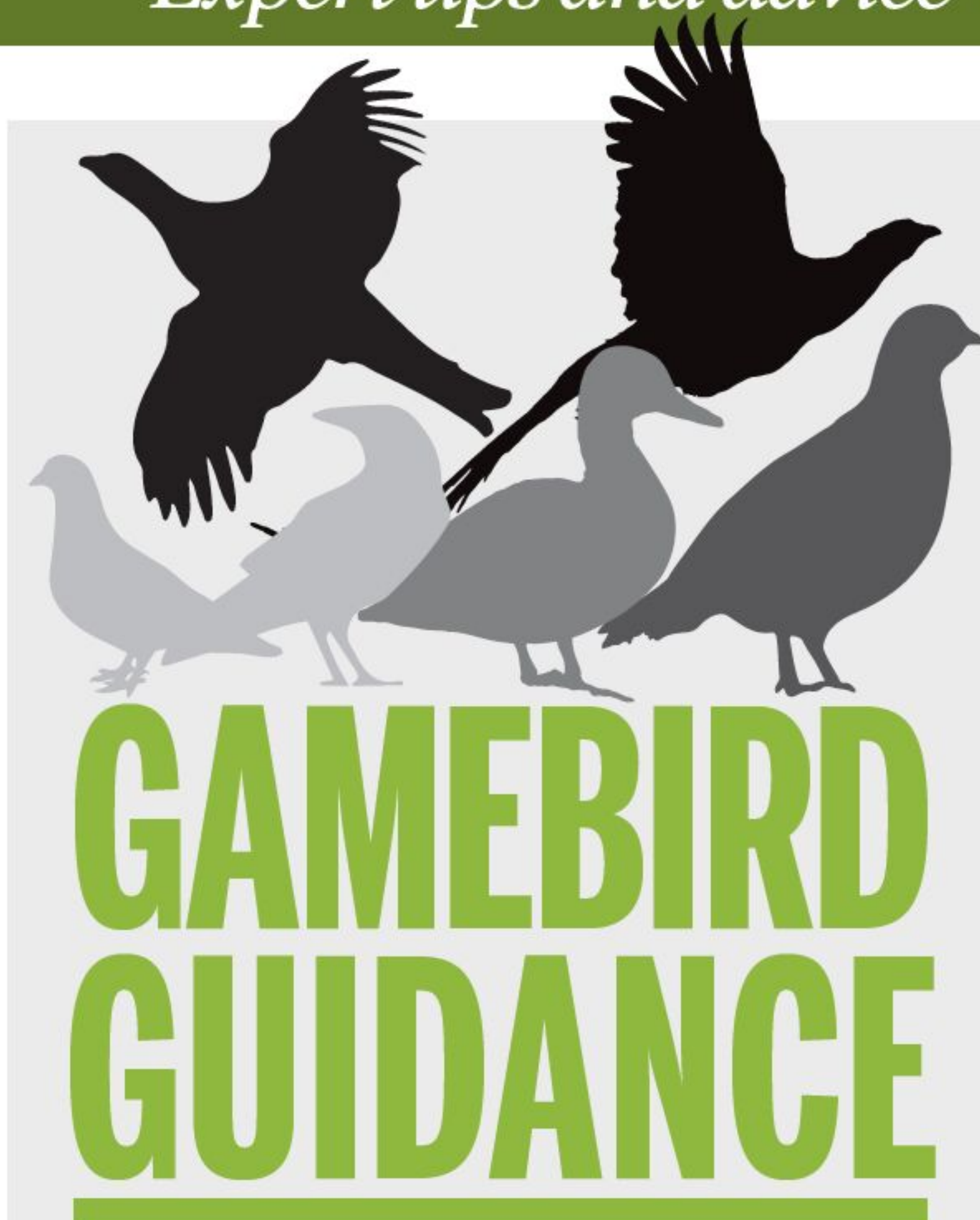
A A firearm or shotgun can appear on any number of different people's certificates at the same time. Your suggestion is a very good idea and will allow your friend to pass his rifles to you when the time comes that he can no longer shoot. At the same time, he can continue to use them himself for as long as he feels able. You will need to complete the variation form (201V) and

pay £20. When it comes to demonstrating that you have a good reason for acquiring the rifles, explain what you want to do in a covering letter. By preference, discuss the matter with the firearms licensing manager first.

My experience is that the police will be helpful and will do their best to accommodate you in such circumstances. After all, this arrangement is to everybody's benefit. From the police point of view, it means that they will not have to issue a section seven temporary permit to your friend's executors and the rifles will remain properly secured after he has died. When that happens, his certificate can be cancelled by clipping off the top right corner (like a passport) or returned to the licensing department if it has no sentimental value to his family. **BH**



A firearm can appear on any number of different people's certificate at the same time



Bird flu levels have remained fairly low, which is positive news for shoots

With the shooting season now in full swing, we are seeing varying levels of success in terms of bird health, welfare and numbers. There is naturally some regional variation, but generally there has been no major disease outbreak, which is a real positive. Avian influenza levels across the country have been lower than they have been for a while, but we are expecting the geese to arrive in October so we continue to be vigilant and prepared.

The St David's vets have been busy doing checks for the GL43 licencing around Special Protection Area (SPA) sites. These checks have involved visiting sites and checking systems in place for bird flu as well as additional testing depending on species involved, in areas right across the country – in particular the coastal regionals in Yorkshire and down south as well. Although it has been a frustrating process for many involved, we are now seeing the situation improve for some, which is something to hold on to.

Dr Kenny Stokes-Nutting
BVetMed MRCVS, director of
St David's Game Bird Services

Tumours of the toes

VETERINARY CARE

Q My dog has a lump on one of his toes that my vet thinks may be a tumour and may have to be amputated. How well do dogs cope with having a toe amputated and will he still be able to work?

A The most common reasons for toe amputations are injury and tumours. Surprisingly, tumours of the toes are relatively common in dogs. Two large studies have been done on toe disorders in dogs. The first showed that 12 of the 96 dogs with disorders of the nail and nail bed had cancerous tumours and the second study included 124 dogs with toe masses, of which 101 were tumours. This shows that while not all swellings on the toe are cancerous, it is worthwhile having your vet investigate.

Dogs have five toes, with the dew claw being counted as the first toe, which is not in contact with the ground. That leaves four toes on which it bears weight. The third and fourth toes are the major weight-bearing toes and these are the ones that are missed the most by a dog, even if only one of them is amputated. If a weight-bearing toe is amputated, small-breed dogs are less likely to be lame than larger dogs. Even though the second and fifth toes are important, they are not major weight-bearing toes and dogs do quite well if these are removed.

Consequently, the outcome will depend on which toe is affected, the size of the dog and how well the dog is able to bear weight using the remaining toes. **TB**

Harris bipods are a good, high-quality option



Which bipod is the best?

ACCESSORIES

Q I'm looking for a decent bipod for my .223. I'm thinking probably a Harris bipod, but are these a good choice?

A The Harris bipod is indeed a good choice and very much the benchmark of quality by which all other bipods are measured. For the price, the Harris bipods are certainly a good purchase. I used a Harris 9-13in bipod for many years and it served me well.

More recently I've started using an Atlas bipod, which is a fair bit more

money but is a cracking bit of kit. It's very quick to deploy and quickly adapts to almost any scenario you choose to throw at it.

Be very cautious of cheap imitation copies of both these bipods online - they are not made from the same quality materials and are more likely to snap, wear more quickly or let you down when you need them most.

Like most things in life, you get what you pay for. I'm a strong believer that this is particularly true when it comes to shooting equipment, so it's always worth buying the best you can afford. **MR**

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Foreign woodies

WILDLIFE

Q Many years ago, I remember listening to various old countrymen who insisted that every year there was an influx of continental woodpigeons to this country. You could, apparently, tell them apart from our birds because they were smaller and darker. It's rare to hear such stories today, so was there ever any truth in them?

A Stories of great flocks of foreign woodies invading our shores are part of legend, but as far as I can gather there is little evidence for them. The woodpigeon is one of Europe's most successful birds, with numbers increasing almost everywhere in recent years. Here in the UK the population is largely sedentary, and though flocks may move around, they seldom travel far. In contrast, birds from northern Europe and Scandinavia are highly migratory, moving to southern

Can game be reheated?

COOKERY

Q I have been told that it is dangerous to eat reheated pigeon meat. Is this true? If so, why is it different to other game meats, which don't seem to carry this danger?

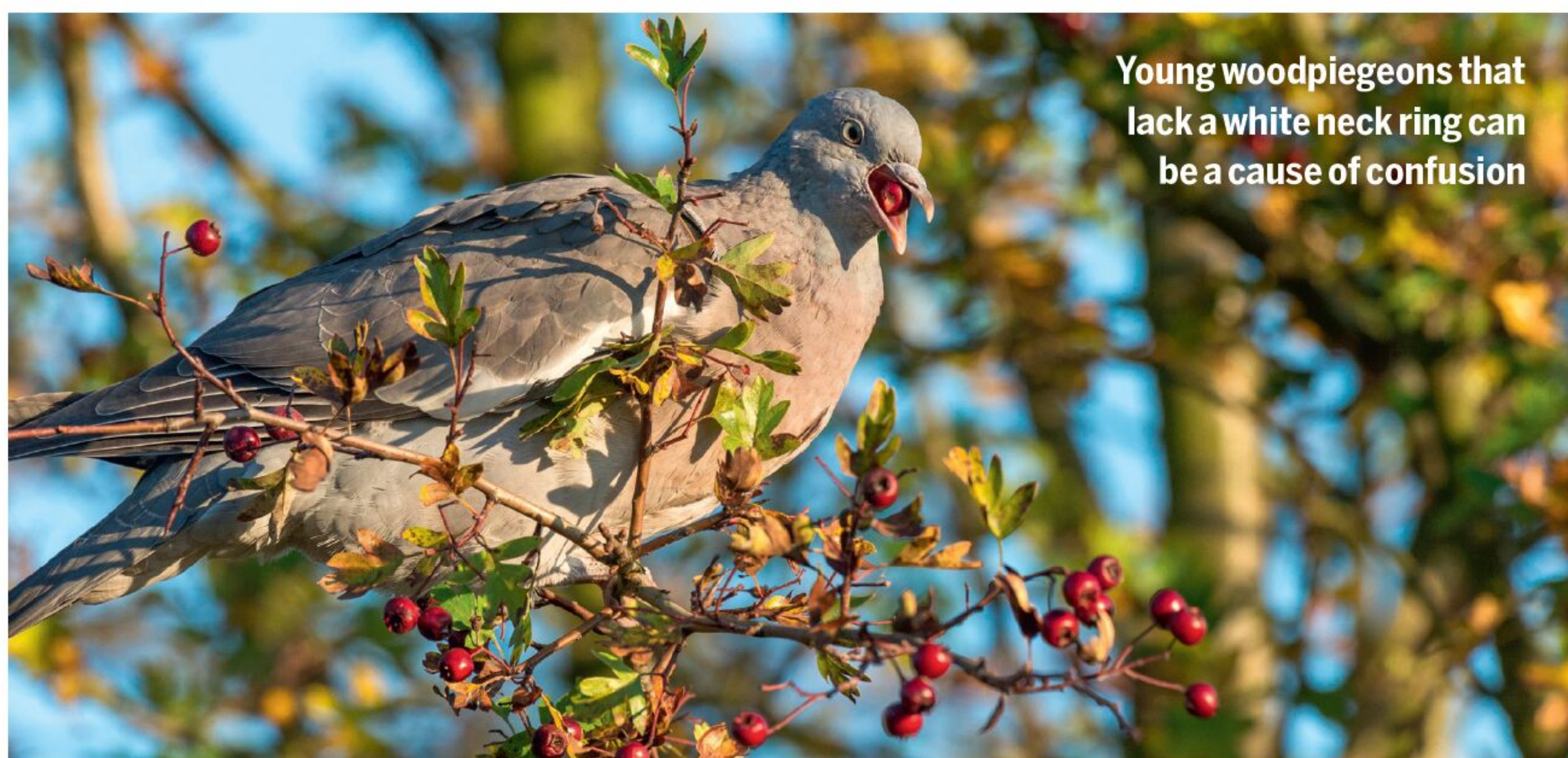
A Cooking, or reheating leftover food, kills the bacteria that may cause food poisoning. All meat may have bacteria on the outside but

some, such as poultry and pork or processed meat such as sausages or burgers, may have it on the inside as well. This is why chicken or pork must be cooked right through and not eaten 'pink' or raw.

The potential for unprocessed meat to have bacteria inside it is related to intensive production methods associated with pigs and poultry, so wild game such as woodpigeon is not affected and may be eaten 'pink' or cooked rare-. **GD**



Wild game such as woodpigeon is perfectly safe to be eaten 'pink' or rare and also to be reheated



Young woodpiegeons that lack a white neck ring can be a cause of confusion

Europe in winter. However, it is thought that few of these birds come to Britain.

Though there are three subspecies of woodpigeon, the nominate form *palumbus* covers much of Europe, which means that a woodpigeon from Finland is identical in appearance

to one from England. Thus it would be impossible to identify a claimed migrant as anything different from a native bird. Young birds that lack the white neck ring may be the cause of confusion, and these are most numerous in the autumn. **DT**

Setting up an accurate zero

RIFLES

Q I have read many times that when people are setting up stalking rifles, they set zero an inch high or more at 100m. I am not really sure why this is, surely you set up the hit on the bull?

A Good question, and to be honest it is really a matter of personal preference. As long as you have the rifle set to know where your particular round is hitting at a given distance, and logically this should be at the range your quarry is normally at when you take the shot, then that is the best option. Many modern scopes now have adjustable turrets that effectively allow you to set up dead-on at 100m and then have dials or markers you can simply turn to alter that strike at 150/200m and so on.

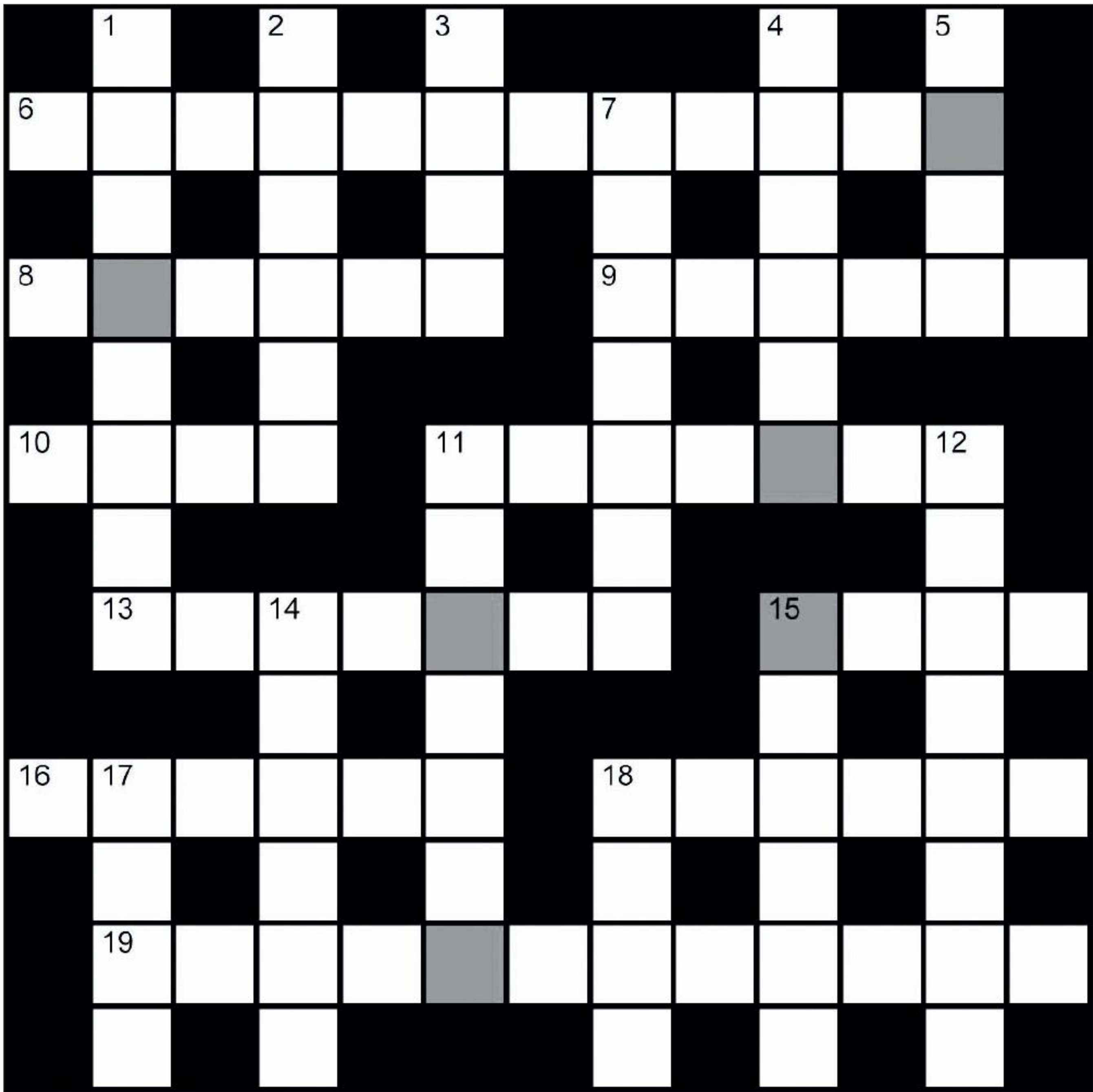
Personally, I am a bit old school and I set my

scope to 1½in high at 100m, and then shooting out to 200-plus I make very little adjustment to my point of aim when I am stalking. I do find many others do the same. I have scopes with ballistic turrets and I don't use them, much preferring to make the calculation if I need to from experience as I know how my round performs. But really you should use the method that works best for you and make sure you fully test that on the range.

Using the same rifle and round combination, shoot distances both less than your zeroed range and further than it. If you find you are not grouping at longer ranges then don't try to shoot deer at that distance. Instead, use your fieldcraft and skill to get close to your deer, which after all is what stalking should be all about. The further you try to shoot, the larger the margin of error becomes. **CD**



Use the method that works best for you when zeroing your rifle



Crossword / Compiled by Eric Linden / 1634

Across

- 6 Confidential photo assignment at a hunting venue (7,5)
- 8 A crop will turn the private investigator upside down (6)
- 9 Extends shotgun certificate validity with reference to current events (6)
- 10 Gun safe openers from the islands of Florida (4)
- 11 See 3 down
- 13 Go round in circles with one Italian gundog (7)
- 15 A cut of lamb for the gun keeper (4)
- 16 The CZ 550 rifle pays tribute to Jeep adventure (6)
- 18 An old computer disk makes gundog ears

droopy (6)

19 Does too much gun use lead to pilots misjudging landing on the runway? (12)

Down

- 1 A US resort designs breeks and the like (8)
- 2 Steven goes wild at country shows and game fairs! (6)
- 3 & 11 across Gundog trainers give it a blast to prevent a signal from the referee (4,8)
- 4 A waspish type with real calibre! (6)
- 5 Make a meal of hares while we taste wine, inside (4)
- 7 A regular job for gunsmiths worthy of an additional charge? (7)
- 11 Pigeons informally have

wounded bodies, on both sides (7)

12 How hunted animals are giving their pursuers the slip with an unusually nice gasp! (8)

14 What scopes display while game is served up (6)

15 Places where birds rest or toss around (6)

17 The UK river is Slavonic at heart (4)

18 Get the measure of a hunt follower (4)

Solution 1632 / 27 Sep 2023

Across: 5. ISSF 7. Wellington 8. Weight 9. Moults 10. Vets 11. Insects 14. Brogues 16. FAIR 19. Broods 21. Canvas 22. Syndicates 23. Bevy

Down: 1. Receiver 2. Flight 3. Knots 4. Stamina 5. Insure 6. Scut 12. Threaded

13. Lessons 15. Glossy 17. Annual 18. Scrim 20. Rope

PRIZE WORD: SETTERS
WINNER: GRAHAM KINGSTON, LANCASHIRE

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Rules: Entries must be received by 18 October 2023. All usual conditions apply. Solution and winner will appear in the 25 October 2023 issue.



The Shooting Times Almanac

— 11 - 18 OCTOBER 2023 —



OCTOBER MOON PHASE



6th



14th



22nd



29th

| Saturday, 14 Oct



Sunrise 07:22



Sunset 18:10



Moonrise 06:53



Moonset 18:05

TIMES SHOWN FOR LONDON

ON THIS DAY - 12 OCTOBER 2000

Incredible tales from the Shooting Times archives

Ronnie Crowe, who spends his waking hours saving and collecting shooting nick-nacks, gave me a little present at a country fair. It was a one-bore pinfire cartridge case, a rare thing indeed. It was made to be shot in a huge stanchion gun on wheels, designed for the great Victorian game shot Duleep Singh. He wanted to creep up behind a hedge and blaze into whatever unfortunate birds had flocked on the other side.

Ronnie decided to make the cartridge safe by removing the

blackpowder. Pinfire cartridges can be unstable, for a bang on the protruding pin is enough to set one off and if it happens to be in a trouser pocket at the time, the victim might find himself singing soprano. He left the little pile of gunpowder on the bench in his workshop. The next day, Ronnie decided to do a little angle grinding, but he forgot the powder was there and a stray spark set it off. With a plume of smoke, up it went – along with Ronnie's eyebrows. You get quite a lot of gunpowder in a one-bore cartridge. **John Humphries**

THE FINER THINGS

Trinidad Topes

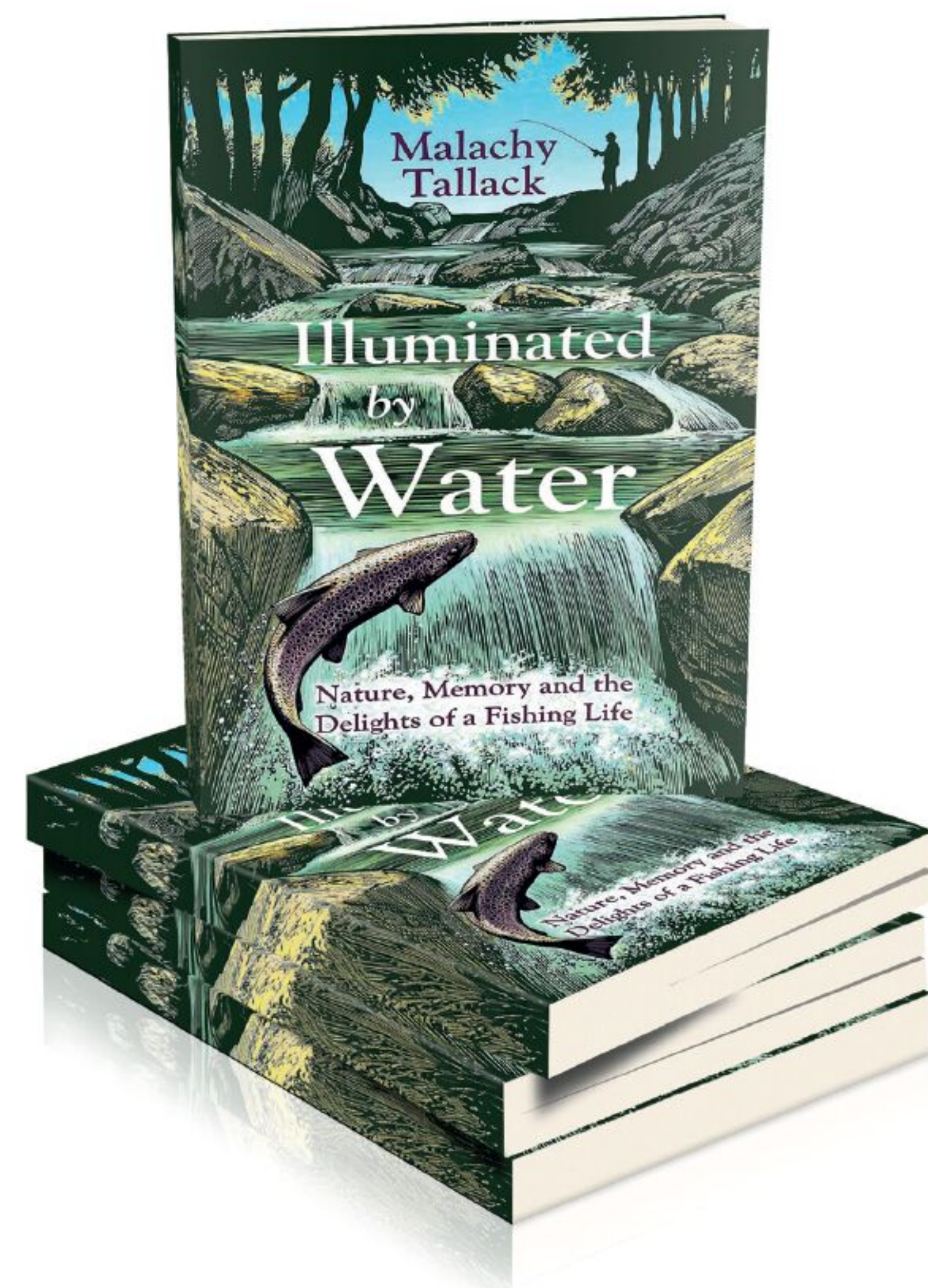
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If you're in the mood for something punchy then you won't go wrong with the Trinidad Topes. At 47/8in but with a big 56 ring gauge, it's a cigar you must grin to get it in. Medium to full in strength, the Trinidad range has always been a consistent and delicious smoke. Often producing large plumes of impressive oaky smoke, they are well made and have a lovely draw to them.

Paired with a good cognac or whisky, this is a cigar ideally suited to a post-dinner wind-down and not to be rushed, even though it's only a short stick. When I first tried this stick a couple of years ago it was retailing for around £40 but has more than doubled in price; this is very much the case across the cigar market, with prices increasing quite dramatically lately.

Nathan Little



Malachy Tallack's book is an engaging read for those interested in fishing

BOOK CLUB

Illuminated by Water
by Malachy Tallack

Published by Transworld Publisher Ltd priced £10.99

Malachy Tallack is a talented young Scottish writer, whose fishing adventures from Canada to New Zealand form the basis for this engaging book. His love of the water and for the mysteries of casting a line and tying a fly are explored to a point where fishing becomes philosophy. His writing forms part of a long tradition of writers finding freedom, joy and often also frustration when pursuing wild game in wild places.

Simon Garnham

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Sharpshooter

The US gun control lobby has been thrown into confusion over the indictment of Hunter Biden, says Alasdair Mitchell

Those who are determined to enforce gun control can get an uncomfortable ride when those same laws come too close to home. The US president, Joe Biden, is a case in point. Hunter, the president's 53-year-old son, has recently been indicted on three firearms charges. They relate to the allegation that he purchased a handgun in October 2018, at a time when, as he has admitted in his 2021 biography, he was using drugs. He has been charged with lying on his application to buy a handgun, lying to a federally licensed firearms dealer and illegally possessing a firearm while addicted to drugs. The first two counts are punishable by up to 10 years in prison, the third by up to five years.

Gun rights activists have reacted with glee. They regard Hunter's father as an inveterate "gun grabber". To put Hunter's plight into a UK political perspective, the hypothetical equivalent would have to be something like Tony Blair's son being charged with illegal foxhunting.

When news of Hunter's indictment broke, Gun Owners of America (GOA), a campaign group, tweeted: "Good!"

accompanied by a clapping emoji. They said: "If his father wants to work with us to repeal unconstitutional gun control, our lobbyists will be at the White House in an hour. Until then, Hunter shouldn't get any sweetheart deal!"

GOA later followed with a further statement: "GOA opposes all gun control, but so long as this president continues to use every tool at his disposal to harass and criminalize guns, gun owners, and gun dealers, his son should be receiving the same treatment and scrutiny as all of us."

According to the liberal *New York Times*, actual prosecutions of individuals who have lied on their applications for guns are rare. The paper points out that Hunter never used the weapon, had no criminal record and committed no violent act. Many of those accused of lying on a federal firearms application "negotiate deals that include probation and enrolment in programs that include counselling, monitoring and regular drug testing," it stated. Clearly, some believe Hunter is being treated harshly because of who his father is.

The question now being asked by conservative groups is, will the president

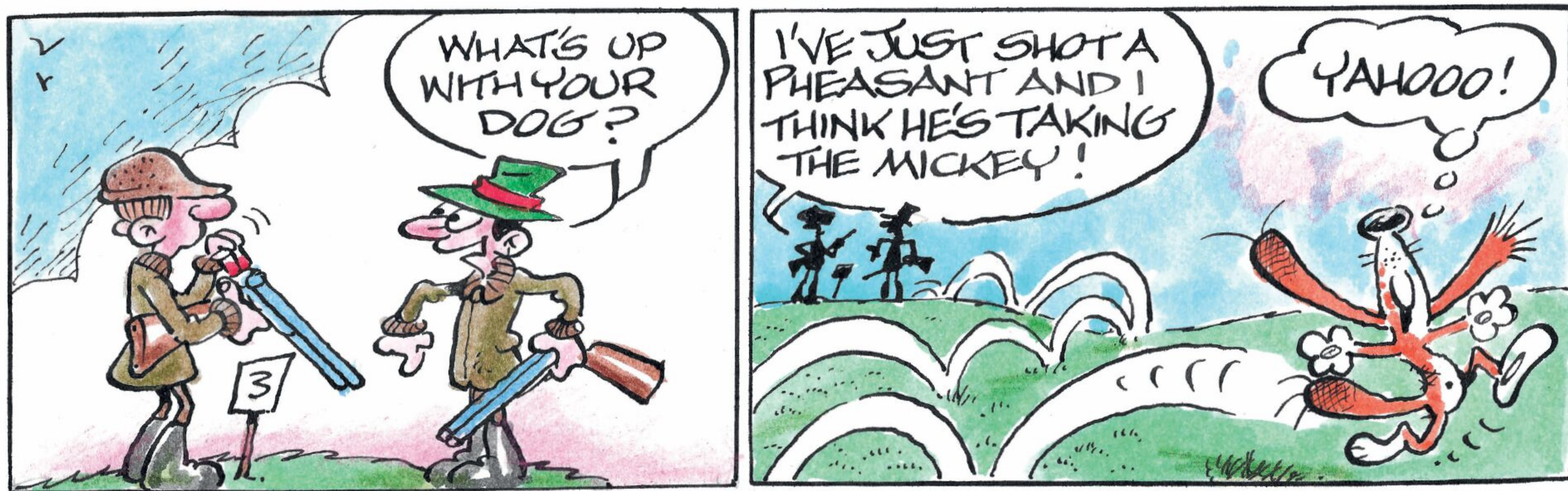
support the deployment of legal tactics aimed at getting his son off the hook – or will he simply cut him adrift?

The Second Amendment Foundation, which opposes restrictions on guns, responded to the indictment by quoting an article from a conservative publication: "The law spells it out pretty clearly that a person like Hunter Biden shouldn't be owning a gun. And if you're not going to enforce it against Hunter Biden, I don't know how you're going to enforce it against anybody." The National Rifle Association issued a terse statement: "Laws should be applied equally against all criminals."

Yet Hunter's legal eagles are now making an argument in his defence that might have been written by hardcore gun rights activists. The statute his client was charged under, his lawyer said, was "likely unconstitutional".

So, a lawyer acting for the son of a president who supports tighter gun control is making a fairly extreme case for the constitutional right to bear arms. The conversation around the Biden family's dinner table at Thanksgiving might be a little awkward this year. 🐦

DOG BY KEITH REYNOLDS



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