

NEWS: FLY-FISHING CLUB CALLED OUT FOR SEXIST PRACTICES

SHOOTING TIMES

10 APRIL 2024

& COUNTRY MAGAZINE

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Gearing up for roebucks

How to prepare for deer management this spring

**THE
STALKING
SPECIAL
ISSUE**

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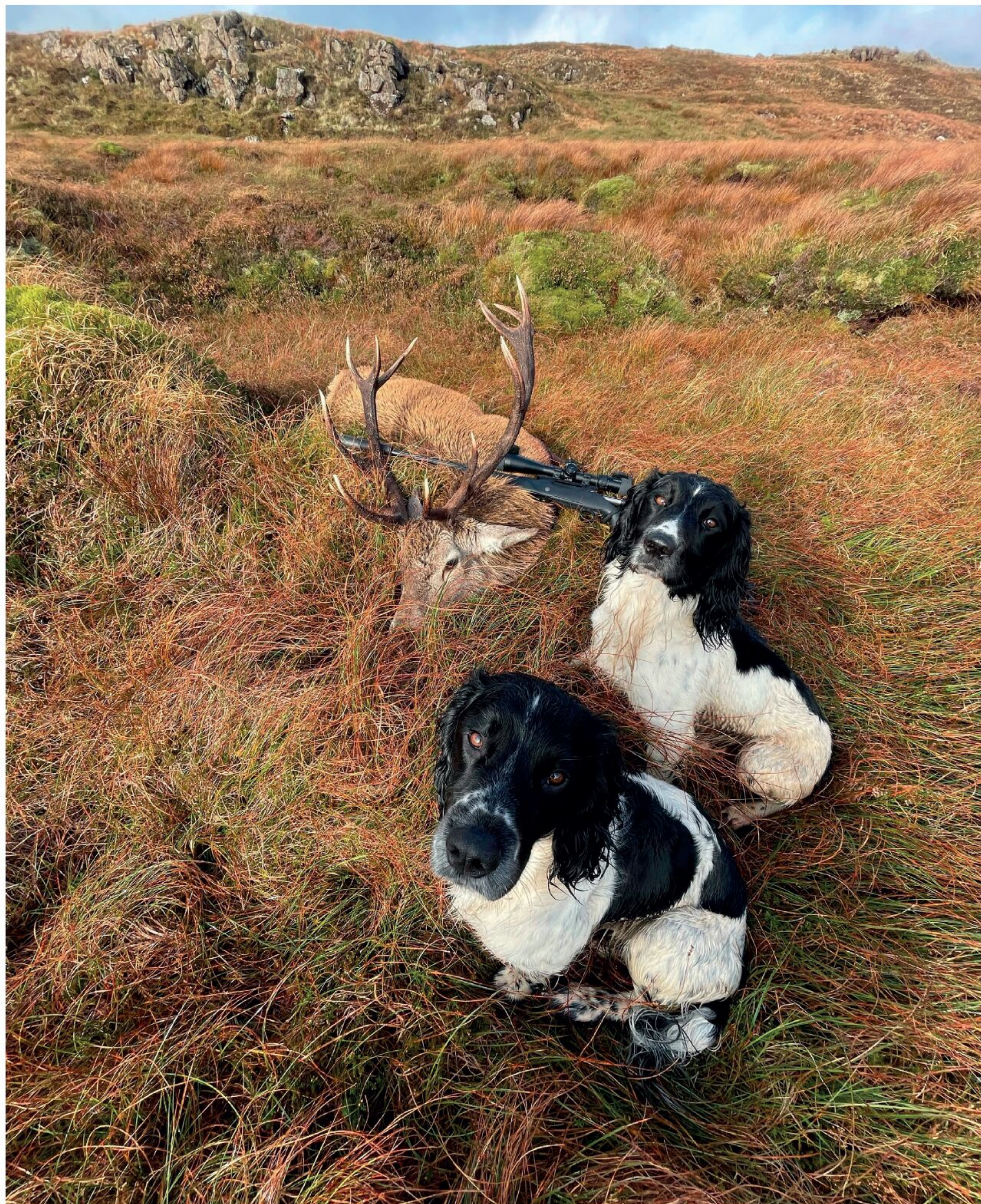
& COUNTRY MAGAZINE



SKINNER'S

BORN TO BE OUTDOORS

DOG OF THE WEEK



Huginn and Muninn

Of the two English springer spaniels, Huginn at four is used to deerstalking so stays at heel, but two-year-old Muninn has no off switch; he loves to flush birds and hares or rabbits.

Owned and photographed by Alexander Kennedy

10.04.24
Issue 6,456

SHOOTING TIMES

One for stalkers



I'll be disappointed to miss the Stalking Show this year, but the irony that I will be on my stag do instead is not lost on me. I visited the first Stalking Show a few years back with trepidation; during a busy show schedule, how would this one stand out? But in a couple of years, the organisers have managed to establish this event as the premier show for deerstalkers and rifle shooters alike.

Perfectly timed to coincide with the start of the roebuck season – which this stalking special issue also celebrates – the show has attracted a number of high-profile advocates, from hobbyist stalkers to professional deer managers. With culling and pest control in the news more than ever recently, it is the ideal place to meet with like-minded individuals and discuss the future of this essential sector of fieldsports.

Or if you don't have many opportunities to get out with a rifle, why not head along and get involved. Simply buying a ticket (stalkingshow.co.uk) enters you into a draw to win a red stag stalking holiday in Scotland. I'm disappointed not to be attending. You don't have to be.

Ollie Harvey, Managing Editor



Contact Ollie at ollie.harvey@fieldsportspress.com

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This week's cover image was supplied by Shutterstock

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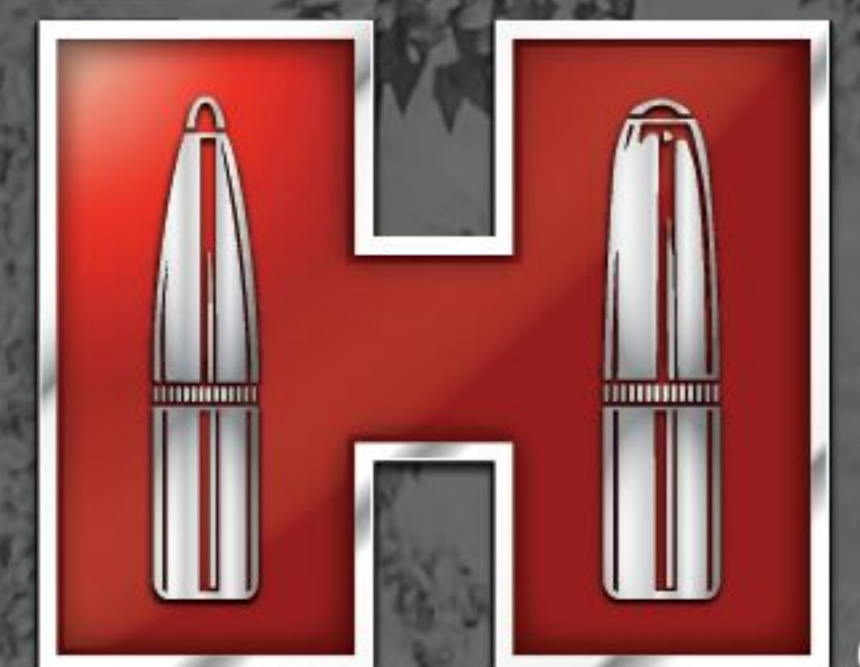
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Shadow Environment Secretary Steve Reed says Labour will ban drag and trail-hunting in its first five years in power



Even party members are confused by hunt plans

Mixed messages from Labour are causing confusion: the party says it respects the rural way of life – while insisting it will ban hunting

When shadow Environment Secretary Steve Reed insisted a Labour government would prohibit drag and trail-hunting in its first term, 10,000 members of the public emailed Mr Reed within 72 hours.

In an interview in *The Times*, Mr Reed initially made the comments relating to foxhunting, while also stressing that the Labour Party wanted to shift from being “narrowly urban” and show the countryside that the party “respects their way of life”.

The Countryside Alliance and other rural organisations have been working with Labour since these comments, and believes

there is confusion in the party about the current approach to a full hunting ban.

Mr Reed has given two major interviews since he spoke to *The Times* without mentioning trail-hunting. He has also assured rural lobbying groups

positions such as banning grouse shooting and introducing a right to roam.

Countryside Alliance chief executive Tim Bonner has suggested the positive steps by Labour to court the rural vote will be undone if it does

suggestion that Labour has a renewed respect for rural communities. Keir Starmer will have to decide whether he really is going to change Labour’s approach to the countryside, or whether he is going to enable another attack on hunting.”

Shooting Times’s hunting contributor Rachel Green said: “When Labour win the next election have they really nothing better on their agenda than to ban all forms of hunting? It seems neither they nor the present Government have any interest in the countryside or farming. Reed and Starmer can rest assured their proposed full ban of all forms of hunting will only find favour with a small percentage of voters.” **FP**

“Starmer admits Labour has lost touch with rural Britain”

that Labour’s plans regarding foxhunting are limited to a minor tweak to ensure that the law is being adhered to.

Sir Keir Starmer and Mr Reed have both publicly admitted that Labour has lost touch with rural Britain and has already backtracked on other policy

decide to launch another attack on hunting. “Labour is not following public opinion with its commitment on trail-hunting, it is bowing to a small group within the party for whom hunting is a totemic political issue.

“It is impossible to square such an approach with the

Hatfield hunt was ‘entirely legal’ despite sabs’ claims

Hatfield House has said a hunt on its land was “entirely legal”, after saboteurs claimed illegal foxhunting was taking place. Hatfield Park, the Hertfordshire home of the Marquess of Salisbury, hosted the Cambridgeshire Hunt with Enfield Chace’s closing meet of the season, an event that dates back to the 18th century.

Activists from North London Hunt Saboteurs and East Northants Hunt Saboteurs were in attendance to “monitor” the event, with member Rhys Giles claiming the group saw “hounds sent into woodland and hedgerows” as part of illegal foxhunting.

In a statement, a spokesman for the historic Hatfield House said the event was “entirely legal”, because drag or trail-hunting were taking place.



Saboteurs say they ‘monitored’ the history Hatfield House meet

“Hatfield Park has always supported the rural economy and country sports operating within the law and realms of good practice,” it said. “Contrary to certain reports, the hunt were drag or trail-hunting with hounds

following a trail laid by hunt staff on a quad bike. No wildlife or animals were harmed during the day and the day’s activities were entirely legal. Hertfordshire Police were in attendance to witness events.”

Defra restricts amount of land going into SFI scheme

Defra has announced a cap on the amount farmers in England can claim on environmental incentives. New applicants of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) scheme will only be able to put 25% of

their land into the six SFI actions that take land out of food production, which include planting winter bird food crops on arable land.

The schemes pay farmers to improve the environment alongside

sustainable food production and the new cap comes in response to industry concerns about food security. Defra Minister Mark Spencer said: “Food production is the primary purpose of farming, and today we are taking action to clarify this principle.”

Most of the land in the SFI scheme continues to produce food but about 1% of farmers who applied to SFI 2023 wanted to put 80% or more of their farm into these six non-productive actions, which prompted the clarification. It came on the same day as farmers formed a protest in Westminster against what they said was a lack of support for food production in the UK.

Farmers in tractors bring chaos to Westminster



Weekend X poll

What was on the table for Easter lunch?

16% Roasted venison

54% Classic leg of lamb

9% Pigeon breast

21% Something a bit different

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To do this week



CLEAN

Good gun care is vital to keep any shotgun or firearm performing accurately, safely and with reliable precision. Regular cleaning and lubricating will help to avoid build up, corrosion and keep moving parts working smoothly.

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FISHING

Look for big pike in the shallows. As the weather warms up, mature female pike will move into shallow water to breed. Stealth and cunning will reap rewards when fishing for the largest specimens.



Female pike move into shallow waters to breed so now’s the time to catch a beauty



Royal Mail says it will carry knives that 'can be used for hobbies and trades and butcher knives', which covers most used by hunters

Royal Mail backtracks on plans to ban blades

Small businesses would be penalised under a blanket ban on bladed items but campaigners have convinced Royal Mail to scrap its plan

Royal Mail has shelved its plans to impose a blanket ban on the carriage of knives, which would have unfairly penalised hundreds of small businesses across the country.

Rural lobbying organisations including BASC have written to Royal Mail's chief executive, pointing out the ban would severely impact retailers across the UK that rely on online orders for knives (News, 14 February). The rethink of the policy was urged by campaigners who highlighted that Royal Mail will continue to deliver other age-restricted items, such as alcohol, and had failed to offer any clear explanation for imposing a ban. BASC also sent a letter to Business Secretary Kemi Badenoch, asking her to intervene.

The rethink comes after the initial policy announced that the ban would include "sporting equipment with a blade", which would have extended to articles such as ice skates. Other items that appear to have been dropped but were present on the initial list of

banned items included cutlery knives, scissors and razor blades.

Despite initially stating this was a business decision and "not open to discussion", Royal Mail has now said that, following feedback, from 7 May there will be a list of prohibited bladed items it will not carry, and a list of restricted bladed items that can still be sent using its age-verification service.

training, which could result in unfair penalties. BASC will continue to press Royal Mail for further clarity."

Leo Donkersley, international sales manager at Casström Knives, said: "I'm encouraged to see Royal Mail reconsidering its blanket knife ban. Recognising outdoor knives as essential tools, and not weapons, is a crucial distinction. This rethink reflects

"Recognising knives as essential tools, and not weapons, is a crucial distinction"

BASC's head of policy and campaigns Dr Conor O'Gorman said: "While this is welcome news, the devil is always in the detail. The initial feedback we have received from retailers and trade members on the restrictions due to take effect are that the definitions are too vague and leave them open to their deliveries being randomly stopped by postal staff with little

a thoughtful approach to balancing safety with the needs of legitimate users."

Royal Mail will now continue to carry "any knife or knife blade, including cutlery knives, bread knives, knives that can be used for hobbies and trades, butcher knives (including meat cleavers), felling axes and razor blades". **FP**

Britain's oldest fly-fishing club is 'anachronistic'

Lucy Mantle, chairman of City Flickers, a fly-fishing club that tries to involve young people in the sport, has written an open letter to Alastair Collett, president of the Flyfishers' Club, criticising the club's male-only membership policy.

In an open letter posted on Instagram, Ms Mantle branded the club's membership practices "anachronistic and archaic". She added: "There are many of us, both men and women, who view the policy as indefensible, unsustainable and above all unwise."

"At a time when the need to defend our environment, and in particular our precious rivers, is paramount,

the exclusion of half the population from entry to debate in the corridors of influence seems profoundly unwise," added Ms Mantle.

The Flyfishers' Club, which was founded in 1884, said in its original prospectus

it aimed "to afford a ready means of communication between those interested in this delightful art".

The club has had several homes over its 140-year lifetime but is now based at the Savile Club in Mayfair.



Fly-fishing, as Ms Mantle points out, is not strictly a male preserve

Doubts on deer management

The Scottish government's new deer management nature restoration orders (DMNROs) continue to meet resistance in the sector.

As we reported, the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) declined to engage with the consultation that came up with the DMNROs, as well as an extension to the female

deer season (*News*, 27 March). The consultation closed on 29 March.

Now, the Association of Deer Management Groups has expressed "deep concern", calling the proposals the "most radical changes to deer management in living memory".

It is feared that DMNROs could mandate the reduction

of deer populations to yet unspecified levels, with fines of up to £40,000 for non-compliance.

James Scott, Scottish policy officer for the British Deer Society (BDS), told *Shooting Times*: "We don't agree with DMNROs because we think there are other mechanisms that could be tweaked to achieve a similar effect. It is still unclear under what circumstances they would actually be used, and the notions of 'enhancement' and 'restoration' are yet to be defined."

"However, over our discussions with NatureScot and the Scottish government we felt that they had learned lessons from previous consultations and this time they are paying more attention to the opinions of deer managers. The questions they have asked seem more genuine and the answers do not seem to be a foregone conclusion."



The Scottish government's consultation on deer has now closed

NEWS IN BRIEF

Owl among dead animals dumped

A 37-year-old man has been arrested after a number of dead animals were left outside a shop in Hampshire. An investigation was launched when 50 dead hares, a kestrel and a barn owl were found outside Broughton Community Shop on 15 March.

Examinations showed the barn owl and kestrel had both been shot, despite being protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

On 28 March officers arrested a man from Totton on suspicion of criminal damage, night poaching and other offences under both the Firearms and Animal Welfare Acts.

Clean-ups funded by fly-tipping fines

Funds raised from fixed-penalty notices for fly-tipping and littering will be spent on cleaning up and enforcement. The new rules ring-fencing the money was confirmed by Recycling Minister Robbie Moore and came into force on 1 April.

CLA president Victoria Vyvyan welcomed the new rules, commenting: "As well as incidents on public land, farmers are also victims of fly-tipping and have to pay to have dumped waste removed from their land, only adding to the injustice. Therefore fixed-penalty notice receipts must be used to help clear up incidents on both public and private land."



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How will your PCC deal with licensing?

With elections for Police and Crime Commissioners on 2 May, members should ask their candidates about firearms, urges Conor O'Gorman

I have worked as a polling station clerk in various elections over the years and the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) elections are undoubtedly the graveyard shift, with the paucity of visitors making a 16-hour day drag even more interminably.

That public apathy about who becomes their PCC is surely an opportunity for the shooting community to make candidates realise that firearms licensing is a key issue for active voters in their constituency.

Last year, tens of thousands heard BASC's call to act now in opposing a proposed ban on gamebird releasing in Wales, and on the Home Office's firearms licensing consultation.

Our weight in numbers is making a difference but we need more of you to join the fight. So let's keep the momentum going and make this year's PCC elections a political marker. We must get the point across that we are passionate about shooting and are politically active — and prospective politicians had better start to listen to our needs and act upon them. So what is this all about and what can we each do to help?

Obligations

The PCC elections take place in England and Wales on 2 May. One of the key roles of a PCC is to hold the force's Chief Constable to account for service delivery. The PCC also signs off the police budget and policing plan. As such, they play a vital part in ensuring that their force fulfils its obligations on firearms licensing and delivers the service in an efficient manner that protects public safety. Ahead of the PCC elections, BASC has launched an online campaign that allows each of us to find our local candidates and email them about improving the efficiency of firearms licensing.

Visit bit.ly/yourpcc or search online for "find my PCC candidates" and email some or all of them directly as you wish. The following text may help in drafting your emails.



If we all work together, we can get firearms licensing to the front of the agenda for our police forces

"I am writing to you as a candidate in the upcoming elections for Police and Crime Commissioners, as a constituent involved in shooting. Firearms licensing comes within the PCC's responsibility for policing plans, budgets and holding Chief Constables to account. I hope you share the objective of your force running a firearms licensing system that protects public safety and provides an efficient service to those who shoot.

As firearms licensing is an administrative, rather than an operational function, if elected you would have a vital role in the allocation of resources and accountability for your Chief Constable's performance. Should you be elected, I would like to know if you will ensure that:

The firearms licensing department is sufficiently well resourced to deliver certificate renewals and grants in a timely manner — 95% of all renewals and grants (except those involving serious safety concerns which may require more investigation) are completed within 17 weeks. If it doesn't already exist, will your force be setting up an independent advisory group, where key stakeholders can give feedback to the force on its decisions and performance with respect to firearms licensing?

Both objectives are referred to in the latest College of Policing approved

professional practice. If elected, you should reference this in your policing plan and it should be included in the Chief Constable's strategic demand assessment of the force's firearms licensing department. Both documents should be published on your PCC website.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read this and reply to me. I will be notifying BASC of your response, which will be made available ahead of the election to those who shoot in your area."

If you receive a reply from any of the candidates please forward them to BASC (politics@basc.org.uk). Let's all work together to get well-resourced firearms licensing at the front of the agenda for our police forces. 🐦

➡ To identify your candidates and contact them regarding an improvement in firearms licensing scan the QR code



Dr Conor O'Gorman is BASC's head of policy and campaigns. He has over 25 years of experience in conservation and land management and a keen interest in wild grey partridges. Contact him at: conor.ogorman@basc.org.uk

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—PRESS—**

SHOOTING TIMES 17 April

How to pick the perfect
poult, cooking fallow
in the field, celebrating
clumber spaniels and
testing the HikMicro Lynx
thermal monocular

... AND MUCH MORE!

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Is it time to stop baiting flightponds?

Nearly four years ago *Shooting Times* contributor Richard Negus wrote an excellent article about whether flightponds are ethical for wild duck shooting. Going by wildfowling returns and feedback on end of season discussion forums, it appears numbers continue to decline in some of the popular species. Your duck shooting contributors and Editor at the time also voiced concerns on the commercialising and monetising of wild ducks.

We need to be considering options that will help to increase numbers again. There is lots of good work with nesting tubes by wildfowling and a few commercial duck shooting companies. There should be sustainable bag limits and I would suggest a ban on bait-feeding flightponds used for wild duck shooting, as is the case in other countries where numbers were decreasing. BASC's new guidelines on sustainable shooting of wild ducks at 10 per Gun per day is way off the mark and more than many wildfowlingers shoot in a season.

A ban on baiting flightponds would help restore numbers, eliminate excessive bags, and encourage wildfowl to return to rivers, coastal marshes, and estuaries. These may be a more natural surrounding for them than heavily fed, overshot flightponds that undoubtedly take a toll on their numbers.

Robert Findlay, by email

BASC's head of wildfowl and wetlands James Green responds: The sustainable shooting code of practice for wildfowl quarry species

serves as a minimum standard for self-regulation. Affiliated clubs already lead the way in this respect, and are engaged in data collection conservation efforts, the establishment of bag limits and moratoriums. This proactive approach serves as a testament to the commitment of fowlingers to the preservation of our natural heritage. But the code of practice is aimed at all who harvest wildfowl so while BASC's recommended limits may appear generous, they serve as maximum thresholds rather than targets.



WITHAM GROUP LETTER OF THE WEEK

Each week, the best letter wins a gun-care range that includes high-quality gun oils and a choke and barrel cleaner. Visit withamgroup.co.uk for further details. If your letter is chosen, please contact samantha.toombs@fieldsportspress.com to claim your prize.



DID THE GAME-FLUSHER WORK?

I was reading a classic tractor magazine's auction pages and came across a wondrous piece of vintage equipment; a Ferguson game-flusher. Designed by the prolific inventor and engineer Harry Ferguson, it was only one of dozens of labour-saving implements built for use with his ground-breaking TE tractors, which were fondly known as the "little grey Fergie".

The game-flusher appears to be a front-mounted side-bar with nine weighted chains. From the images I would think the flusher was around 9ft or so wide and the design allowed the driver to bring the tractor alongside a narrow strip of cover crop. Once moving slowly, the pendulous chains would brush through and presumably flush any game in the crop. It would have to be a fodder beet/root crop, kale or possibly a mustard-type of crop because the bar was roughly

level with a grey Fergie's bonnet, but I suppose it was invented before maize became popular.

It would be interesting to know how effective the game-flusher was in the 1950s. I see no reason why it couldn't have been reasonably effective. It is now the rarest grey Fergie implement and enthusiasts are prepared to pay around £10,000, so I doubt we will ever see one being used for its intended purpose any time soon.

M Lorne, by email



Scott Allan's comments about working lurchers have struck a chord — do you agree with our letter writer?

DON'T STOP USING A LURCHER

I was saddened to read Scott Allan's comments about working lurchers (*Working*

Dogs, 27 March) dying out as a hobby. I don't want one person to stop their dog work, ferreting and lamping rabbits with use of a lurcher. In fact, I would be happy to hear that person had a change of mind and persuaded

a younger member of family or friends to take up the offer and really enjoy the sport.

I personally feel the police are not going about things the right way — though I'm sure many people will disagree. I am not here to start a disagreement, I'm only trying to save that one person and to make them change their mind. It's so sad that people can't simply crack on and get on with what they enjoy.

Name and email supplied

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Those taking part in the boat race were warned about river pollution

THIS STINKS OF INCOMPETENCE

Laurence Catlow says anglers frequently campaign against pollution (*How can we grab some of fishing's PR?*, 3 April). Before the famous Oxford-Cambridge boat race during the Easter weekend, both squads were warned not to dunk the cox into the Thames as is customary

for the conquering side, because they were likely to contract E.coli. High levels of the bacteria were detected in the part of the river where the race is held.

I am astonished the media did not make more of a fuss about this, particularly since Thames Water is currently at risk of, if you'll pardon the pun, going under. It was described

ina national newspaper as a "financial basket case", with debts of £18.3 million. Thames serves (if you can call it that) 16.5 million customers in London and the south-east. They are a captive audience so how on earth as it managed to make such a mess, both literally and figuratively? Put a couple of fishers in charge, they'll sort it.

Sarah Cookson, Norfolk

FREE SCAN ME FOR THE NEWSLETTER!



"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

Bright Seeds technical advisor, Marc Bull looks at the changing approach to cultivation for game and stewardship crops, and how the favoured option of minimum tillage can work best



Higher rainfall in the first quarter of the year has become commonplace, often delaying the use of machinery on the land. Reducing cultivations is the preference of many — an approach that chimes with current environmental policy.

The benefit of fewer machinery passes reduces soil compaction, helps retain moisture in the event of a dry spell and is a more efficient use of fuel. Heavy cultivation has the downside of releasing more of the soil's stored carbon into the atmosphere, particularly with excessive ploughing.

Lessening soil compaction, achieving soil that crumbles easily and maintaining moisture are the main considerations, achieved through minimum tillage, or min-till. Min-till works down the top few inches of soil with a power harrow or disc before drilling. Some have taken the principle further and adopted no-till where seeds are direct drilled into uncultivated land.

Ploughing every three years or so, coupled with a suitable crop rotation, can be a happy compromise in terms of helping retain organic matter and controlling weeds.

A suitable rotation might be game maize followed by brassica- and kale-based stewardship mixtures in the second and third year. The spring- and summer-sown options mean there can be significant intervals between plantings to allow for cultivation and other preparations, such as soil analysis and application of fertilizer and herbicide.

Unlike a commercial cash crop, game and conservation crops benefit from not being driven by yield, which invariably means the grower can wait for the most favourable conditions before planting. This is a great advantage and should be used to best effect.



Alan Edwards is conservation manager at Bywell, a Purdey Gold Award estate in Northumberland

Gamekeeper



With spring under way, it's important for keepers to curtail nature's most effective predators if our most vulnerable species are to survive

My arm strained as my fingertips tentatively reached for the upper branch that supported the nest. Words of encouragement from far below gave me the courage to take that final handhold as I pulled myself within inches of the suspected carrion crow's lair. I was filled with apprehension — never had I been this far up a tree — was the nest occupied? Was there something that would give me a shock and send me tumbling? Once the nest was fully investigated, how would I get down?

"Is the nest a fresh one, Edo?" came the calls from my Scout patrol below. "Put your hand in the nest and see if there are any eggs in there."

My fingertips explored the platform. "Only some rotting vegetation," I said.

"Well, push the nest out and be quick about it, we need to move on," came the disappointed reply.

"Corbie nights" were one of my first introductions to the fascinating world of nature as a youngster. As a new recruit into the Dumfriesshire-based Springkell Scout Group, I became one of a few boys who experienced scouting in a unique way. Our leader, Major Brian, took a range of boys from the local area and immersed them in the ways of the countryside, folklore and tradition, and gave us the opportunity to experience a range of countryside activities and skills that have propped up the running of most country estates for decades.

Corbie nights were a way for Scouts to interact with nature and give a helping hand to the keeper, to whom important

"Corbie nights were one of my first introductions to the world of nature"

information was passed the next day to alert him to active nests during the busy spring period.

Today things are quite different. That said, the spring campaign on legal predator control takes on a fresh and new urgency at this time of the year. Days are lengthening and despite the cold and persistent rain, which has been the norm now for months,



The ways in which keepers can deal with nests and predators have changed but control is vital

wildlife is making the first and important steps towards its collective breeding cycle. Now is the time to act and reduce the impact that some of nature's most effective predators can have on our most vulnerable and important species.

As a boy I didn't need to consider the consequences of our actions. It is wrong to say that we weren't compliant with the legal responsibilities, but today the law and public opinion have moved on. Careful consideration and implementation are required today if you are to avoid scrutiny by the authorities and members of the public who object to perfectly legal and sustainable control.

Advances in cages, principally the

Larsen trap, have transformed corvid control. Long gone are the days when the only way was the gun, hours spent attempting to stalk up on an active carrion crow nest, only to be thwarted as the bird spotted your advance and disappeared.

If you destroyed the nest at this stage the bird would likely build another when the leaf was open and your job would become

impossible, resulting in a success for the crow. That would mean a negative impact on a range of adjacent birds. Huge and valuable lessons were learned in this period of my early keeping career. Fieldcraft was everything and to achieve it you needed a greater understanding of your quarry.

Sustainability

The local library became a regular haunt. I still have copies of the GWCT's booklets on all aspect of predator control; they became trusted text. I pored over the pages, looking for inspiration. Somehow, you felt you were connecting with people at the forefront of the struggle. The GWCT still plays an important role in our daily activities and there's no doubt we would have been looking at quite a different picture if the science it provided in defence of legal predator control hadn't happened.

Those who practise predator control have a burden of responsibility that goes way past legal requirements. So as you approach the season for control, please act thoughtfully and responsibly, with an eye on the future.

Time taken now to get it right will pay dividends later, I assure you. Wild game can only thrive if you practise sustainable predator control. 🐦

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Country Diary

Trail-hunting demonstrations show what takes place, so fewer hunts are hassled and less police time is wasted by nuisance accusations

I am sure regular readers of *Shooting Times* will have breathed a sigh of relief after my last entry, assuming that because the hunting season was over, I would stop talking about hunting. Well, as many of my teachers at school said, I specialise in disappointment so here is another column on the subject.

In March, the British Hound Sports Association (BHSA) and some of its registered hunts organised demonstration trail-hunting events throughout the country. There was one in Wales, one in Sussex and one in Yorkshire. The point of this was to show people, who otherwise might not know, how trail-hunting works.

Invitations were sent to police forces and their rural crime teams, local MPs and media organisations. Presenting as it did the perfect opportunity for a “20 years on” type of headline — as the Hunting Act 2004 passed into the statute books — many local print and broadcast news bodies turned up. They asked sensible questions, engaged with the presentations, and it felt like perhaps the BHSA’s aims had been achieved. A fairer representation of our sport might now be seen in the larger, non-specialist, media.

Resources

But there was a disappointing lack of interest from politicians and police. I understand the only one of these demonstrations to enjoy police attendance was in Sussex. Those police forces who had indicated they would attend the other demonstrations did not turn up. I appreciate that police resources are finite and the calls on their time are endless, especially for those officers who are working on rural crime teams. I am sure many readers will know there aren’t enough of them, and those who do exist don’t have a huge amount of time.

In fairness to the police, at least they had shown an inclination to show up, before operational commitments took them away. But it is a shame they weren’t there, to see how trail-hunting works, to ask questions that might help them understand the workings of the sport



Police forces have little time but it is a shame so few managed to attend the hunting demos

and to provide them with the answers they need when our critics accuse them of shielding a bunch of criminals.

The suggestion that more 10,000 days of trial-hunting in the past season were all days of organised crime is palpably laughable, but until we can explain this properly, and to the right people, it is a claim that gains credence.

It has always been important to explain this, so fewer hunts are hassled by ill-informed opponents and less police time

rather pander to their own base than support legal activities, is very alarming.

This is why the absence of politicians at these trail-hunting demonstrations is as noticeable as the absence of police. Again, I recognise that MPs work in London, it is not always possible to be in their constituencies listening to their constituents, and it might currently seem like a political red herring to be bothered by a 20-year-old piece of legislation and how it is implemented.

“The suggestion that 10,000 hunting days were organised crime is laughable”

wasted by nuisance accusations. It has also always been important to keep our own house in order, so that when the law is broken, proper action is taken — not only by the legal authorities, but also by the hunting authorities.

But at the moment, it is even more important. There will be a change of government later this year. The fact that there are those within the Labour Party who do not wish to listen to the concerns of the fieldsports community, and would

But it is a red herring that Steve Reed, the shadow Defra Secretary, has made clear he intends to serve to the Labour Parliament, and if we can make ourselves heard now, we will have a better chance of protecting our sports then. 🐾

🕒 Patrick Leigh-Pemberton has recently bought a small farm in County Durham. Here he intends to graze beef cattle and follow hounds in his spare time.



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JOTTINGS FOR WILDFOWLERS

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Wildfowlers mourning the end of the season can rest easy – there are plenty of jobs to be getting on with before the start of the next one

As I write, a full five calendar months stand between us and the start of another wildfowling season. What on earth are we to do with so much time on our hands?

Bag returns have long since been completed, or at least should have been, so the poor club secretary doesn't spend their evenings telephoning tardy club members to get them done. Completing the annual bag return is a condition of membership in most wildfowling clubs and our future sport depends on returns being provided to the appropriate stakeholders on time. The same can be said for membership subs, which should be paid as early as possible before their due date to help clubs with their cashflow.

Apart from these bureaucratic tasks, there are practical duties to carry out around club foreshores before the nesting season. The most important of these is the erection of duck nest tubes. The Waterfowlers' Network, of which BASC is a member organisation, initiated the Duck Nest Monitoring Project in 2021 to counter the drop in the number of mallard in the UK and Europe. For those unfamiliar with the project, the idea is to erect raised nesting tubes made of straw and wire mesh for mallard to use as nest platforms. The tubes are fixed on to scaffolding poles to enable mallard to build their nests safely out of reach of predators, people and dogs.

Cleaning

Another date for the wildfowler's diary will be their club's AGMs, which mainly take place during the close season. With securing shooting leases becoming more problematic from year to year and more red tape to cope with for club committees, it behoves each and every club member to at least attend their club's AGM with a view to asking the committee what they may be able to do to help the club carry out its myriad tasks.

Wildfowlers are great collectors of kit on which they rely to carry out their sport. Watercraft of all designs will at least need running repairs during the close



Important jobs include the erection of duck nest tubes before the start of the nesting season

season. Similarly, duck and goose decoys, which may have suffered hard use by being thrown into the back of a 4x4 after spending several hours bobbing about in water, or standing to attention on a muddy saltmarsh, will appreciate a touch of fresh paint to make them resemble a particular wildfowl species once more.

The same applies to camouflage netting and sticks that kept the wildfowler hidden from the sharpest avian eyes will also have picked up multiple layers of mud during six months of hard use.

Other kit that will need cleaning as well as checking for leaks are waders. It's best to discover your favourite neoprene chest waders have sprung a leak by inspecting them carefully on a warm summer's day than when wading a deep gutter on a cold, dark November morning.

Talking of cleanliness, most wildfowling clubs organise regular litter-picking work parties around the foreshores they shoot over. These can be fun days out for both the club members and their friends and family, and it can only ever be a good thing to demonstrate to the public that wildfowlers

take care of the environment and don't just visit the foreshore to pull the trigger.

The wildfowler's gun may also require a service after the season and other dates may also be set for club dinners, barbecues, work parties, clay pigeon shoots and other social events. The fowler's faithful hound may also benefit from a summer refresher course in retrieving from water or other such essential canine duties. Oh, and there are all the country fairs to attend as well.

With so much to occupy the summer months, it will be 1 September again before we know it. 🦆

➡ If you would like to know about the Duck Nest Monitoring Project, there's more information on the BASC website, so please scan the QR code

SCAN ME



🦆 Gethin Jones is a keen wildfowler and rough shooter. He joined BASC (then WAGBI) at the age of 16, the day after he shot his first mallard.

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Davy Thomas is a professional deerstalker and estate manager in the Highlands



Stalking Diary

It is the countryside that suffers the most when lawmakers and their legislation prevent land managers from doing what they do best

Water drops have proved vital in battling wildfires but gamekeepers use their expertise and knowledge to help too



April has arrived and I am content that the hinds that I have been feeding during the winter will be in as good a condition as I could hope for, so they can produce good, healthy calves come June. A population of healthy deer is our objective, after all. The older beasts we culled during the winter were prevented from suffering a slow death in the relentless wind and rain, and have gone into the food chain where appropriate.

Soon we will perform our annual census of deer, which I always leave until April so it will account for any natural mortality among those we might have missed. Therefore we can set our culls according to what is actually on the ground. Much thought goes into this because we need to

private sector, and that there needs to be a “more carrot, less stick” approach if we are to achieve some of their aims. I agree with this wholeheartedly. While we try to be sympathetic, much of this legislation only fits their agenda, not ours, without a single thought towards those at the coalface who are expected to carry out the deed. Our motivation is not financial, and our job satisfaction is largely taking pride in seeing healthy beasts on a healthy hill.

In every place my career has taken me, I frequently see the valuable contribution made by gamekeepers and deerstalkers upholding local emergency services. These include Mountain Rescue, which has a valuable knowledge of the hills, RNLI members with an acute knowledge of the seas and volunteer firefighters who possess

to invest the large sums we do into the firefighting equipment that is so often utilised, regardless of who owns the land, when disaster strikes.

Water drop

The helicopter company Skyhook played a massive part during that event. It is safe to say that I have attended many wildfires, but the water drops deployed by Skyhook were the most precise I have ever seen. Without this coalition, Cannich had the potential to develop into the largest wildfire in our history.

With the increase in ground turned over to rewilding, these large, unmanaged areas of land will eventually become a ticking bomb each spring. Just as plans are being unveiled to change the muirburn season, in my part of the world it has simply been too wet to burn until April. Now, years might pass without a single plume of smoke.

Laws are being changed by those that have no knowledge of how Mother Nature works. I doubt any of the lawmakers have had to gralloch a hind with a well-grown foetus inside her that needed to be despatched separately. Neither have they witnessed the birds flying back into the ash, looking for their young in the aftermath of a wildfire that was entirely preventable. 🐦

“Laws are being changed by those that have no knowledge of how nature works”

consider our objectives and habitat impact and try to act in harmony with the ever-increasing legislation forced upon us.

The Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) has recently pointed out to the vote-seeking politicians that 80% of the deer in Scotland are culled by the

the unique knowledge of how wildfire works and methods to mitigate it. Last year's Cannich wildfire was testament to this; many gamekeepers travelled miles to attend, using the tools and knowledge we have to fight it. Put simply, if you remove our right to burn, we will lose the incentive



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Orchestrated manoeuvres in the park

With fallow numbers at unsustainable levels, a military operation is undertaken in the landscaped parklands of Grimsthorpe Castle

WRITTEN BY FELIX PETIT | ♦ PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT LIMB

Grimsthorpe's chief wildlife ranger Brett Clifford lines up on the fallow herd in Capability Brown's parkland with the castle in the background



Fallow stalk

Towards the end of March, as spring was beginning to flutter its eyelashes and the scent of wild garlic was in the air, I found myself barrelling north for another sporting adventure. I was bound for the rolling parkland of the magnificent Grimsthorpe Castle in south Lincolnshire. I was once again a guest of fellow Household Cavalry alumnus and managing trustee of the Grimsthorpe & Drummond Castle Trust, Sebastian Miller.

I was most generously put up in the beautifully renovated top floor of the castle. The route to my billet took me past ancient fire buckets that still hung on the walls in the basement and into the rickety birdcage lift, where I played gecko to squeeze myself in. My quarters were wonderfully comfortable and afforded expansive views to the south over formal yew hedges and topiary, which eventually gave way to a sweeping avenue and woodland.

Up early, I creaked through the castle, following my trail of breadcrumbs back to the front door. Then I crunched out on to the gravel to link up with Sebastian and the two stalkers, Alastair and Paul, who had made the journey down from Drummond Castle for the week to help with the fallow cull. We set off across the vast 3,000-acre expanse of the Capability Brown landscaped

“The atmosphere was jovial but today was about getting the job done”

parkland to meet up with the rest of the team.

Over a cup of coffee and an egg-and-bacon bap, I was introduced to Grimsthorpe’s resident agent Harry Coups and the estate’s chief wildlife ranger, Brett Clifford, who were formulating plans. A far cry from my teenage stalking days of creeping around woodland hoping to spot a roe, this was a major operation. Although the atmosphere was relaxed and jovial, today was about getting a job done.

With a plan set, we separated into four packets and set off in various vehicles to hunt for the herds of fallow. I hopped in with Harry who



Drummond Castle stalker Paul Rafferty, down for a week to help with the cull, lines up on the sticks



Felix and Harry try to get into position by the shepherd's hut in a spinney prior to Felix's first fallow



did a wonderful job of multitasking as he scanned the landscape for deer and coordinated with the others, reeling off place names like Bracken Beds, Elsey Wood, Dobbins and Queen Anne's Ryde over the radio. Zooming down pitted tracks, he gave me a running commentary of the history of the estate and pointed out the various land uses and projects.

The idea was that we would all take up complementary positions so when a herd was found, each group might have a few shots at it before it departed towards a location where the next shooter was set up. This may sound unsporting but the overpopulation of fallow deer in Lincolnshire is at such a level that it is essential to make the most of an outing. Harry explained that with 18 tenant farms at Grimsthorpe and the potential of deer to do damage to livelihoods, woodland and cause road accidents, the deer issue shapes a great deal of what they do.

In the Highlands, the Deer Working Group



Felix joins Harry Coups, Grimsthorpe's resident agent, to travel around the castle's 3,000-acre park to find the herds of deer

recommended that NatureScot adopt 10 red deer per square kilometre as an upper benchmark for acceptable densities. In Lincolnshire it is more than four



Sebastian Miller with his stalking dog, a springer spaniel simply called H

times that. The South Lincolnshire Deer Management Group has been conducting thermal drone surveys over the past few years to get as accurate an idea of the extent of the issue as possible. It is this data that has been informing Grimsthorpe's culling policy.

Crisp shot

We paused on a disused railway bridge and glassed the surrounding fields and hills. Eventually, we parked up at the back of a conifer plantation and Harry scanned the scene with his thermal. He identified a group of fallow that I couldn't see with the naked eye 150 yards away and behind some trees. I took a knee to see below the thickest of the branches and spotted them. Harry was already in position and got a crisp shot away. A young pricket fell instantly. We padded up to it and, before I could blink, Harry had galloped it and signalled for us to move on, we would come back for this one.

Following the shot the herd had taken off towards Paul, who was in a high seat nearby. He felled one shortly after and radioed through to tell us the herd were headed back our way. We stood quite still on the edge of a broad ride. I heard a rustling and gently tapped Harry's shoulder and pointed. He had the rifle secure on the sticks in a heartbeat as the group of 30 animals cascaded over a ditch to our right and bounded away from us into the forest.

There was a leucistic animal among them that at once drew the eye, pallid among the rusty bracken. It didn't look like they were going ➡

Felix's fallow stalking kit

🔗 **Franchi Momentum Varmint Elite rifle** gmk.co.uk

🔗 **Swarovski X51 3.5-18x50 scope** sportsmanguncentre.co.uk

🔗 **Härkila Mountain Hunter smock** harkila.com

🔗 **Meindl Glockner GTX stalking boot** meindl.co.uk

🔗 **Kuiu Yukon TR Rain pant** kuiu.com

The herd of fallow in Grimsthorpe's park is at unmanageable levels and must be culled

Fallow stalk

Paul Rafferty hauls his first beast of the day back to the buggy before the action really gets going



to stop, but a few at the back paused to assess. They held just long enough for Harry to pick out a broadside shot and squeeze the trigger. The doe jumped 6ft in the air and toppled into a ditch.

We returned to get the buggy and pick up the first fallow, then Paul's on our way to Harry's second. This was like nothing I had ever experienced. Usually, stalking is a great deal of walking with a momentary opportunity to take a shot, followed by much more walking, scheming and hoping. This was action-packed.

Each time we moved across the estate we would spot a different herd or a rogue pair would leap over a hedge in front of us. They were everywhere. We were soon onto a different herd, pursuing them on foot along a thick hedgerow that poured partridge as we made our way along it. This herd made an escape away from the rest of our party but still Harry managed to pick one off as they stopped to sniff the air. What a singular day.

Waterlogged

Brett came to pick us up as we stood out in a waterlogged field next to the gralloched carcass. We hauled the deer into the back and set off to rendezvous with the others halfway down the Four Mile Riding, a magnificent horse chestnut avenue that runs from the castle to the boundary of the park. After a quick stop to talk tactics, Sebastian, Harry and I marched off into the Tudor oak

park to see what we could find. The oak park was utterly remarkable.

We wove our way round great gnarled English oaks, our eyes and ears straining. Harry explained that these massive wrinkled trees twist as they grow away from the prevailing wind, which over the centuries shapes their form.

Then Harry froze with the thermal to his eye. This time he had spotted a herd of red deer. He gestured to

of us for a little way before darting back to cover.

It was a glorious afternoon but still with a bitter wind. We stopped in a thin spinney of oaks that commanded a perfect view over the fallow. Harry told me they were 200 yards away and asked if I was confident shooting off the sticks at that range. I nodded. I don't do a huge amount of shooting from sticks so I was a little tense, but a couple of good breaths settled me.

“Another herd of fallow crashed through in front of us and sent the red deer fleeing”

me asking if I was up for a crawl and with double-thumbed affirmation I signalled that I most certainly was. We crawled 50 yards to the shelter of another hulking oak and Harry peeped round the edge, watching the reds through his scope. There wasn't a shot so we tried to slink a little closer.

However, no sooner had we stepped out of cover than yet another herd of fallow crashed through in front of us and sent the red deer fleeing. This outing was utterly mad.

After a quick lunch, we located a large herd of perhaps 50 fallow in the woods by the North Drive near the castle. With some difficulty we managed to cajole the herd into the great bowl by the lake. Now it was my turn. We crept along the margins of a small wood to get a good view of the herd. In doing so we disrupted a muntjac that snuffled along ahead

I gently squeezed the trigger and a yearling at the back of the group dropped. I sighed with relief.

A short clinical period from Brett, Harry, Alastair and Paul finished the day where they downed another eight or so taking the team's total for the week to just over 100. This sounds alarmingly high but it barely scratches the surface. The fallow – browsing, stripping, fraying and root crop nibbling – do enormous damage to the surrounding trees and farmland and the cull is an absolute imperative for the conservation of the landscape.

We returned to the larder and for 45 minutes the team toiled to prepare the carcasses for the game dealer. It hadn't gone unnoticed that this was my first fallow so, over a beer in the late afternoon sun, I scrunched up my eyes as Harry smeared crimson over my smiling face. 🦌



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The right tools for the job in hand

Deer managers demand the best kit for their vital work and Chris Dalton reveals the items he can't do without

March is a crucial time from a roe deer perspective. Both sexes are active now, which means I can confirm my female cull numbers and make sure my plan for the bucks is on track. That said, I still have work to do on one local estate where paths have been extended and hardened to provide access for those with mobility issues. The improvements are great, and I am glad to see that a lot of people are making use of them. However, it does limit my culling opportunities, particularly in the winter months and the short days.

On a Sunday morning, when most will have a bit of a lie in, I was on the ground well before first light; I hoped to get an hour before

the early walkers appeared. This is where quality optics really prove their worth and allow me to see and successfully shoot deer in the low light. A thermal is also a great addition to the deerstalker's arsenal and, with the help of a new Zeiss unit, I was able to sneak in and assume a position at the top of a bank, looking down

“I could see a luminescent line leading from the strike area into the bushes”

towards a rough patch of grass and rhododendrons. I was around 170 yards from the heat source.

I could make out a dark shape, I thought, but using my binoculars this shape was easily recognisable as a roe doe. I set the rifle on the sticks and

could clearly make her out through the scope, initially quartered away from me.

As I watched, she turned broadside. I took a breath, held it, and steadied myself while simultaneously increasing pressure to my trigger finger. The shot surprised me. I had an almost superimposed image

of her jumping up, landing, and charging headlong into the thick rhododendrons – she was gone in the blink of an eye.

I looked down at my dog, Zosia. She was rigid at the base of the quad sticks, every muscle tensed with her



head locked-on, staring at the exact spot the deer had disappeared. The shot sounded solid, the reaction indicated a heart/lung contact and the dog was sure. But you never know, there is always a doubt until you find the deer. I took a last look through the thermal before moving forward and could see a luminescent line leading from the strike area into the bushes.

I waited a while to let things settle before walking the 170 yards across to where the blood trail started. I quietly cast Zosia off with the command “show me” and she was gone. Seconds later she was standing over the doe 30 yards under the rhododendrons. It took me a moment to crawl under the interlocking branches and drag the young doe out: the shot had dissected the heart.

Left: Chris demands accuracy and robustness from his rifles and he has exacting standards for the rest of his deerstalking kit, too

Zosia waited expectantly for her reward of fresh kidneys. She knows what to expect of these kinds of outings now, but I wouldn’t enjoy as much success as I do without having confidence in my kit. And as I hung the deer for a suspended gralloch, I considered what essential equipment I couldn’t do without.

• Haenel Jaeger 10 Forest

As a professional stalking outfitter, I demand supreme accuracy and robustness in any rifle I use, and the Haenel Jaeger 10 delivers. My forest green version is a 6.5 Creedmoor and has been in regular use for over four years, which is testament to its toughness; it bears several battle scars to prove this but is as accurate today as it was when I first zeroed it in.

Supplied with a four-shot magazine, which is operated via a convenient lock and release lever just forward of the trigger, it has a solid, positive bolt operation and is factory threaded to M15X1. The overall length of the rifle is 42.75in (1,085mm) and it weighs in at 8lb (3.6kg), which is within my ideal weight range.

It has a single-stage adjustable trigger set at a crisp 3lb; the barrel is fully floated with a length of 22in (510mm). The safety catch, a raised lever, is easily accessed and applied. I like the fact that it comes with a Picatinny rail for scope mounting. In short this is, as you would expect from German engineering, a no frills, efficient rifle. It is well balanced, well made and has proved to be consistently accurate over the years.

And throughout that time it has coped with some pretty rough treatment out in the field.

• Leupold VX-6HD 4-24x52

I am looking for clarity and, specifically, excellent low light capability in my stalking optics, for which I find a 50mm or 56mm objective lens is ideal. The Leupold VX- 6HD fits the brief perfectly, delivering clear and precise images through its full magnification range. I will always set a variable scope to eight power when stalking. Leupold boasts a twilight, light management system in its lenses, which does deliver when operating in dull and murky light conditions. Fast focus is delivered through the eyepiece and there is large field of view.

The scope is very well balanced, feels solid and is very capable of withstanding some rough handling. Tube diameter is 34mm and it weighs in at a mid-range 23.4oz. It is finished in matt black and is fully waterproof, the turrets function with a positive, audible click and adjustment is ¼ MOA. The scopes also feature a useful electronic reticle-levelling system. If the scope becomes canted by more than one degree, the reticle will flash to alert you that the gun is not level.

It also has a CDS-ZL2 locking system, which provides two revolutions of elevation adjustment, while eliminating accidental dial operated by a push-button. It also features Leupold’s award-winning Custom Dial System (CDS), offering an option to order a laser-marked bullet-drop dial to match ballistics and conditions. These impressive scopes also come with a lifetime guarantee, offering users peace of mind. ➡

The Leupold scope is highly durable, offers a large field of view and a fast focus



Where to buy

- Stalking rifle
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• **Swarovski EL 10x42**
I have been using my current binoculars, Swarovski EL Range 10x42, for many years and they really take some beating. However, I gather there is an updated version of the EL with loads of additional features. In saying that, those binoculars



The Brandecosse Tasso hunting boots' nubuck upper makes them extremely comfortable to wear

oozed quality from the moment I got them and I consider them the most important item in my kit bag. Weighing in at an impressive 926g, the binoculars are supremely light while maintaining a good balance; they also fit snugly into my hands when in use in the field. The overall length is a compact 169mm and they are 136mm wide. The rubberised texture of the covering is coloured in the instantly recognisable Swarovski green and gives a good grip in even the worst conditions.

with a single press of a button on the right-hand side of the binoculars. The resulting dial display is clear, accurate and straightforward, allowing measurements beyond a kilometre.

• **Brandecosse Tasso 9in hunting boot**
The Tasso is a brand-new style from Brandecosse and adds something different to the range, while maintaining the quality of workmanship and finish that I have come to expect. The boots are

“My current Swarovski binoculars oozed quality from the moment that I got them”

The focus dial is centrally located and is easy to turn with a single figure as you look through the lenses. The clarity and the field of view in normal light are absolutely superb, but it is only when operating in low light conditions that the quality of these lenses can be fully appreciated. The rangefinding function is precise and is simple to operate

extremely comfortable from the off, I found no requirement for any kind of “breaking in” period. The boot is fashioned from quality Italian nubuck leather for the upper. This adheres to the premise that a one-piece upper results in limited stitching, which delivers maximum durability. Nubuck leather has a high resistance to scratching thanks to its



Above: The rubberised texture of the covering gives the user all-important grip in poor conditions



Stalking kit



The James Penny knife is fashioned out of stainless AEB-L steel and features stainless Corby bolts

finish, which I need. I seem to spend a lot of time negotiating thorn and heather, which are both notorious for shredding boots. The nubuck also allows a high breathability thanks to its porous nature so your feet remain dry and feel comfortable even after a long day on the hill.

One of the main differences in this boot when compared with others in the range is the type of outsole. The Tasso's cemented construction allows for a technical, multi-density midsole for maximum comfort and shock absorption, which again are essential for long days in challenging terrain. There is a cleave, roller-lacing system with ball bearings delivering easy tightening and protection for the

laces. Elsewhere, the waterline has been extended, which gives added protection for this 9in boot. They also have a fully waterproof Sympatex lining and the grippy Vibram outsole is fully replaceable.

• James Penny Hunter knife

This is a great-looking knife that can be made to individual specifications. The one I have been using, the Drop-Point Hunter, has a 125mm blade and is long and thin – 20mm at the widest

point. I like those dimensions as it allows for an effective bleed due to the ease and depth you can get when inserting it into the thoracic area.

The handle is bright orange and fits the hand precisely; you do not feel you will lose grip when wearing latex gloves on cold, wet hands. The knife is housed in a hard, black Kydex sheath and is held very securely when carried, preventing it working loose if crawling, for example.

Extremely sharp when it arrived, it was easy to sharpen with a strop after I had gralloched the doe.

Specification-wise it is fashioned out of stainless AEB-L steel hardened to 59-60 HMRC and has a 12 mm blade with satin finish. Handle scales are hunter orange G-10 with black G-10 liners secured by stainless Corby bolts and it is fully cleanable. I reviewed this knife in more detail a few weeks ago (*All the ins and outs*, 20 March)

• Zeiss DTI 3/25 Gen 2

The Zeiss DTI thermal imager impressed me. I like its compact design, which fits my hand perfectly with all the function buttons intuitive. The controls sit together on top of the unit behind an on/off button and it took no more than 10 minutes playing with the thermal to become familiar with it. The buttons are tactile and can be operated while wearing gloves.

The DTI offers eight colour mode options and has a 32GB memory for video and pictures.

Two of the side control buttons allow up to 4x digital zoom. The internal battery gives about eight hours of constant use, but the unit also has a smart standby option that extends this. The eye cap is comfortable and the focus control wheel at the front is easy to use. Spotting is possible out to 1,000 yards with resulting images sharp and clear, the field of view at 100m is 26m.

There are three pre-programmed functions – universal, detection and fog – when operating in detection mode any heat signature is enhanced, but the cold background is reduced giving a clearer view when looking into cover. I found that useful on a wet and dark morning. I was able to identify and distinguish a young roe tucked into a blackthorn thicket sheltering from rain. The Zeiss represents great value for money. 🐾



Spotting with the Zeiss is possible out to around 1,000 yards with images clean and sharp

The Zeiss DTI has a compact design and its controls sit together on top of the unit



Sporting Life

Time spent in the field is never wasted, such is its alluring beauty and tranquillity

The Latin phrase *carpe diem*, meaning seize the day, is well known. Perhaps less so is *carpe momentum*, suggesting that you should seize the moment.

The latter is particularly apt in all manner of fieldsports as, during the course of a day, there are often moments rather than prolonged periods to be enjoyed. I'm talking of those ephemeral feelings of simply being in the solitude and beauty of your surroundings. As the Welsh poet and writer William Henry Davies famously stated at the outset of his poem *Leisure*:

"What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare?"

I've sat quietly in the saddle when out hunting as hounds worked their way over the rough land of the Borders in Northumberland and, at the other end of the country, Dartmoor in Devon. The views have been immense, the hunting equally so and, on occasion, both have had the effect of overwhelming me so much that I've been close to tears. Nearer to home, both on foot and mounted, I've had the almost evangelical pleasure of hearing the choir of hounds as they gave tongue in woodland valleys — the topography causing their echoing cry to be amplified.

While boar hunting in France, I once stood in a woodland ride on a March morning when spring had definitely arrived early that particular year. In the peace and quiet before hounds found, the sun was on my back, the flora was just getting into its stride and the yellow brimstone butterflies were prolific. It was a magical moment.

Serenity

Despite my career as a gamekeeper, I've never been a particularly enthusiastic game Shot. Nevertheless, on several occasions when I've stood on a peg waiting for the beaters to start the drive, I've appreciated those thoughtful periods when — apart from perhaps the alarm call of a blackbird or the clattering of a woodpigeon well aware that something was amiss — no sound disturbed the quiet surrounding me.

Likewise when, line and fly on the water, the mesmeric flow and sound of the gentle current as it eddies along the bank edge intermingles with the birdsong. Coupled

with the surrounding scenery, it makes the actual task of fishing for trout seem quite an incidental thing.

On other occasions there are moments to be seized for very different reasons. Take, for instance, those frantic times when pigeons pour into the decoys in order to feed in front of your hide or other

It wouldn't be too much of an exaggeration to say there was frenzy; as soon as the fish were unhooked and the lines returned to the water we were pulling out more. It didn't last long — possibly 20 minutes or so — but it's an occasion that will long be remembered. So too are the memories of eating them, freshly smoked,

"I've had the almost evangelical pleasure of hearing a choir of hounds in woods"

place of concealment. It's necessary to make the most of it as, quite often, their determination to drop in and land might only last for a short space of time.

Similar to this was the memorable occasion when I was mackerel fishing from a boat on a Scottish inlet with Charlie, my wife's brother-in-law. Travelling out quite a distance before deciding to drop anchor, nothing happened for a good while after throwing in our lines and baited hooks and then, all of a sudden, we began catching with gusto.

accompanied by a glass or two of Loire muscadet brought out from Charlie's impeccably stocked cellar.

While such moments can never be planned — and if they could, they would soon lose their precious quality — participation in any rural sporting life may create many such incidents over the years. In whatever situation they occur, the (often brief but nevertheless intensive) thoughts along the lines of "life doesn't get any better than this" are to be appreciated, savoured and treasured. 🐾



The sight of hounds working reminds Jeremy that it is important to savour moments in the field

🐾 **Jeremy Hobson** was a gamekeeper for over three decades and now regularly acts as shoot host. He's a lifelong follower of hounds and claims to be an enthusiastic, but somewhat incompetent fisherman.



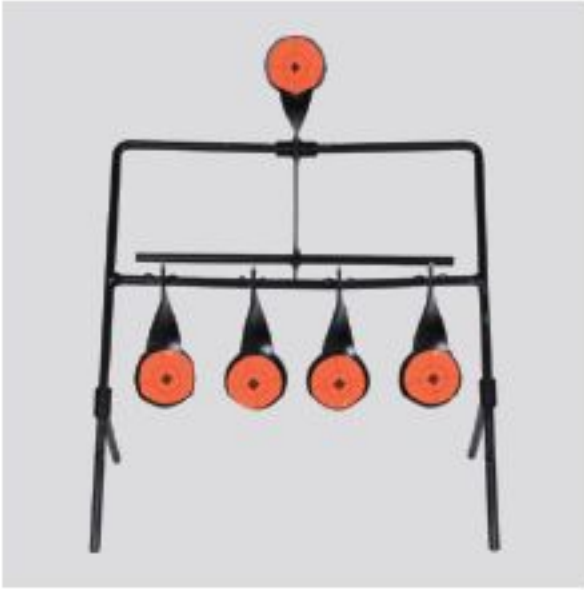
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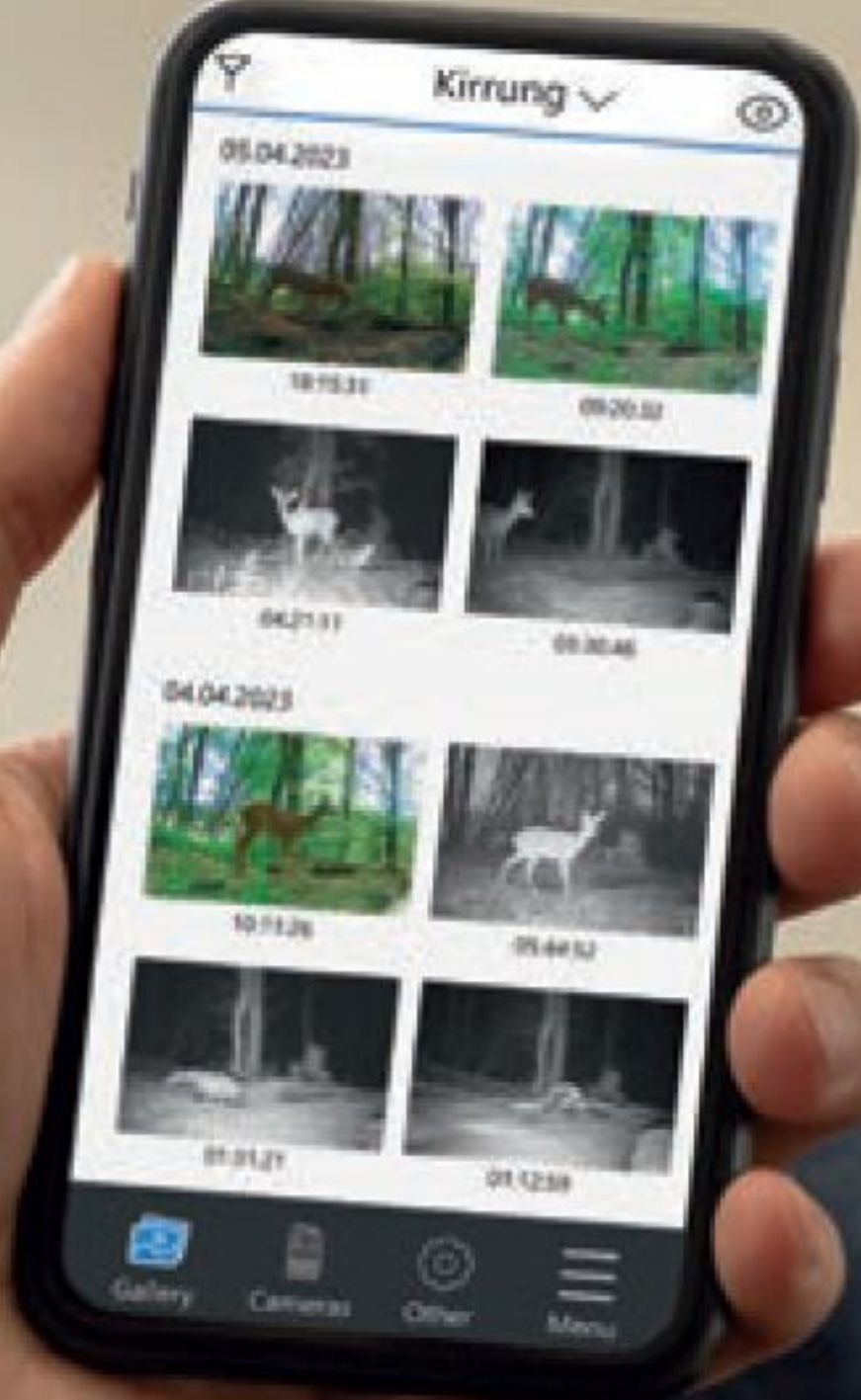
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Spotting a suitable beast — an old bull — Simon settles his Rigby .416 big game rifle on to the sticks



The huge herds of buffalo in the reserve illustrate perfectly that hunting and conservation can and do work together

It's like a war; something is going to die

Shooting a mighty Nile buffalo is a dream come true, but tracking the huge beasts across open country is anything but easy

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON K BARR



Sport abroad

**In the PiaNupe Wildlife Reserve
in east Africa's Karamoja region,
Nile buffalo congregate in huge
herds of 130 or more**





Glassing the expanse of the PiaNupe Wildlife Reserve, looking for a suitable bull buffalo to cull

Having stealthily crawled to within 30 yards of the group, our faint scent was carried on swirling winds to the herd, which then revealed itself to be far bigger than we had thought. Some 130 Nile buffalo hurtled off with drama and speed, mercifully in the other direction from us. This seismic act signalled the game was up for the morning. It was getting on for noon and the heat was coming off the ground in waves.

We'd all but turned back to head for camp when I heard a sharp inhalation from Gareth. "Stop," he whispered, as he crouched down, indicating I should do the same. "Under those trees. Two bulls." I followed Gareth's lead as he made his way, quick and low, from tree to tree, to get close enough for a look. Would they be the right age? Would we get a shot? My adrenalin was creeping up, while the humidity and temperature were making me wheeze. We paused under a thornbush tree where we finally had a decent view of their bulk.

This hunt, this place, was a dream come true, for we were hunting Nile buffalo in the shadow of Mount Elgon, one of east Africa's great mountains. This was the Karamoja region of

Uganda where my boyhood hero, Walter Dalrymple Maitland Bell, had gained his moniker of Karamoja Bell. I have read and re-read his adventures, for what young hunter wouldn't be inspired by this Scottish adventurer who was soldier, fighter pilot, sailor, writer, painter and big-game hunter?

WDM Bell's writing has had a lasting effect on me and is a huge contributing factor to why I do what I do. So to be hunting dangerous game on the hallowed ground that he likely hunted – he said he walked

rifle I knew and trusted, having used it on Cape buffalo.

I knew, too, from my lessons a few years ago with "the Doctor" – Kevin Doctari Robertson – that a shot at buffalo is not to be taken lightly. "It starts a war, someone or something is going to die as soon as that first shot goes off," he said. The pressure was on. We'd had several chances over the past week at single buffalo but, as so often happens with a hunting trip, a suitable old bull – our main objective – had remained just out of reach.

"It is a great showcase for the argument that hunting can help restore wildlife"

an average of 73 miles for every elephant he shot – was inspiring and intimidating all at once.

I'd been hunting plains game during my stay, but while I'd hunted Cape buffalo in other African countries, Nile buffalo was something I hadn't yet had the chance to pursue. Bell almost certainly would have used a .275 Rigby, famously preferring smaller calibres to hunt with, this is no longer allowed because it is simply too risky for dangerous game. So I chose a .416 Rigby big game rifle, a

For a number of days I hunted with Gareth Lecluse in the PiaNupe Wildlife Reserve, where Karimojong Overland Safaris (KOS) had gained the concession for sport hunting seven years ago with express permission from the president of Uganda. Thanks to sport hunting, the area has subsequently undergone a remarkable transformation and is a great showcase for the argument that hunting can and does help restore and preserve wildlife. Our camp was rustic but comfortable, and the

perfect jumping-off point for hunting all manner of plains game, some of which – notably the South Sudan Roan antelope – is unique to the area and cannot be legally hunted anywhere else in the world.

Close encounter

We had a close encounter two days previously, tracking a large herd by a river and closing in. But we were unable to make that final advance to identify an old bull before they blew out. The problem with big herds is that there are always outliers and so many eyes, ears and noses to pick up predators.

A huge herd had been seen feeding near Mount Kadam in the Debasien range, an area Bell refers to in his books. At first light we bounced our way across the country in the vehicle to get close enough for tracking. No one said much over the roar of the engine, the tension tangible – hope, nerves and expectations all bound up in this expedition.

Gareth skidded to a halt. “On foot now. Check everything,” he said as I got out, my teeth feeling like they’d been rattled loose from the ride. I loaded the rifle with three 400-gr Hornady Dangerous Game Solid cartridges then a soft, or DGX, of the same weight on top. I checked I had spare ammunition on my belt – carry as much as you can is the mantra for



Apart from the long grass and a scattering of thornbush trees, there is little available cover

buffalo. After grabbing the sticks from the vehicle, the three of us set off at a steady pace. “They’re moving. We’re lucky it rained last night, it has given us brilliant tracks,” added Gareth.

I followed behind him, looking at the ground to see the marks animals had left. It takes someone with huge experience and knowledge to be able to make sense of spoor from a herd that seemed to lead in every direction. Gareth walked at a good pace to catch

up to the herd while it was still cool. The country we were in was open and cover was sparse, which meant it would be hard to spot animals until you were almost on top of them.

Worse still, getting a clear, clean shot is definitely less straightforward. Dotted in the long grass were thornbush trees that cast a little shade and, as we neared the area the herd was in, we started moving between them and using them for cover as we closed in. “We’re now about 800 yards away from them,” whispered Gareth. “We need, somehow, to close that distance.”

Stop-start

Gareth paused while deciding how to proceed. There was a breeze – not much, but just enough to ruin this if we didn’t take precautions. We would have to loop around the herd, tripling our approach distance, but it meant we’d be in with a chance. We moved carefully, now in the stop-start, slow-fast movement familiar to anyone who hunts. Trying to keep my breathing steady and deep, not to let my adrenalin, nerves and excitement take over, I focused on following exactly in Gareth’s footsteps.

We’d managed our loop and now, unbelievably, were downwind of the herd and within spitting distance of being in range. Only 40 yards or so would do it. Gareth turned to ➡



The hunters abandon the bone-rattling vehicle, continuing their hunt on foot to get close to the watchful buffalo

me and indicated to get low. “Bum shuffle,” he said in a hushed voice. I laid the rifle across my lap, and copied his movements, hauling myself forward with my legs and hands.

We started closing the distance. Thirty yards. Twenty. Gareth paused for a beat, scanning the ground ahead of us before moving forwards again. I felt the vibrations before I heard the herd. They had bolted. Whether there was an outlier closer than we’d realised or, perhaps, they were spooked by us or something else, I don’t know, but our chance had gone.

The adrenalin that had been coursing through my veins vanished,

“There was a very alive bull, agitated by the battle”

and I felt exhausted, drained and disappointed. We stood, watching the huge herd heading off away from us. They weren’t stampeding, but they were moving too fast for us to catch up to them.

As we turned to make our way back to the vehicle, Gareth looked every bit as disappointed as I felt. We started to walk, but within two steps, Gareth dropped, and indicated for me to do the same. Slowly, cautiously, he grabbed his binoculars and scanned the ground to one side. “Under that tree. Two bulls, mature, 400 yards,” he whispered, pointing. I could just about see them.

For some reason, these two hadn’t moved off with the rest of the herd.

Simon’s kit box

Rigby Big Game Vintage Edition rifle in .416

Rigby Jungle Jim Canvas Courteney boots
johnrigbyandco.com

Hornady DGX 400-gr ammunition
edgarbrothers.com

Leica Ultravid HD Safari Edition 8x42 binoculars
leica-camera.com

In double quick time, we closed in on them. There was not a second to lose for at any moment they could decide to join the rest of the animals.

We closed in enough to give me a shot with the express sights of the Rigby. One bull was facing us, the other faced away. “Take the one facing us,” Gareth instructed. I steadied myself, trying to drown out the thudding of my heart, trying to still the shaking of my hands. I was attempting this 100-yard shot with open sights – a very different business from optics.

Breathing deeply a few times and gently squeezing did the trick and the boom of the rifle took me by surprise. I worked the bolt and reloaded. The two bulls moved off, not fast, but enough to make it a little trickier. My bull was in the lead, quartering away. My training with the Doctor took over and Gareth told me to take him again. I fired for a second time,

putting another fatal shot with a solid hit through the length of the bull from haunch through to left scapula. They moved forward again, slower this time. After 50 or so yards, they stopped under the shade of a tree.

My bull dropped to the ground, the other milling around restlessly and not giving me a chance to put in an insurance shot. We also didn’t want to get any closer. Not only could this situation fast become dangerous as we had a wounded and a very alive bull obviously agitated by the previous two minutes of battle, but we could also provoke a charge.

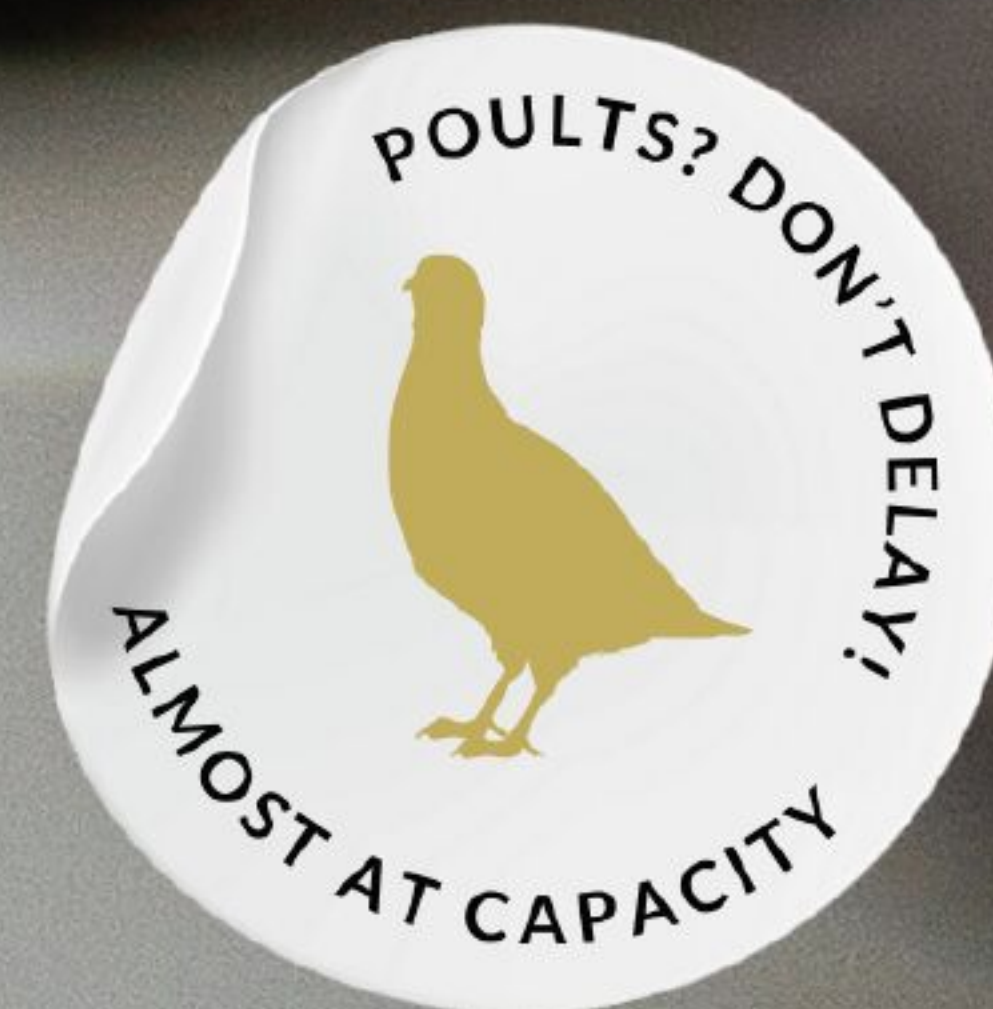
Death bellow

We waited, hoping to hear that death bellow and hoping that the other bull would move off. The second bull still stood over the wounded one, and we could do nothing but bide our time. “Now,” Gareth said, as the other bull moved away slightly. I fired one more shot. That did it and, after a few minutes, Gareth decided we could move on the other bull safely. We approached slowly and when we gave a few shouts and whoops, the other bull trotted off.

The buffalo lay dead, conveniently for the skinners and trackers in the shadow of a tree. Views of Mount Elgon to one side and Mount Kadam behind reminded me of Karamojo Bell and his tales of hunting on these very grounds. As a hunter, every animal I pursue is a privilege, but to do so on these hallowed grounds was something that I had long dreamed of. I hope it remains possible for generations to come. 🦋



Mission accomplished: with one buffalo down, the team heads back to the vehicle



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The unmistakable stench of success

Corvids are dropping unsavoury spoils on to farmland so an outing is required – but where are all the jackdaws, wonders Alan Jarrett

While mulling over my options for some spring sport, it was time to turn to my diary to see what had happened in the recent past. One of my permissions is on a major corvid flightline to a nearby sewage works. At times large numbers of corvids are attracted to this smelly fare and some very good bags have been made in the past. They consist of mainly carrion crows and jackdaws with a few rooks thrown in.

Even though it is on a strong flightline, a few decoys are pretty well essential to channel the birds into a narrower field of fire. This in turn requires the field to be in short grass or stubble for the decoys to be visible. Last year a crop of hay was taken and it looks like it will be hay this year.

Last year the field was laid in grass and, as we entered spring, it

was necessary to make a periodic visit to see how the grass was coming through. As ever, corvids keen on a meal were soon across the emerging shoots and the farmer wanted them moved on as soon as possible.

In places the field had lain very wet, in which case the grass was slow

“Too much white skin and the birds will be gone”

in coming through. This gave the corvids plenty of opportunity for a feed and there was a real danger of bare patches being left throughout the growing season.

In conversation, the farmer let it be known that he would be only too pleased to see the back of some of the

avian vermin. Not only had they been pulling up his grass seed, but they had also been dropping unpleasant items taken from the nearby sewage works on to his field. Such things would certainly not be a welcome addition to the eventual bales of hay.

The biggest problem was the time of year, with the first spring growth still coming through along the hedgerows. This always makes hide building a tad more challenging, for it is my general practice to build the hide and then augment it with locally growing vegetation. In other words to hide the hide.

Corvids are incredibly sharp-eyed and the slightest movement, or the sight of too much white skin, and they will tip a wing and be gone. It would be unwise to think that their floppy-winged flight makes them an easy target. That is true once they are



The hide isn't in the best spot but there is limited choice due to the layout of the field

in close and committed to a decoy spread, but in regular flight they can be surprisingly manoeuvrable.

As ever with corvids, an early start is essential if the most is to be made of the opportunity. They begin to move at the break of day and those first few hours can often provide the best of the sport. That day the alarm jolted me awake at 4.30am, but I was horror-struck to gaze out of the kitchen window and see the first faint signs of dawns well advanced.

At the field at 5.20am, it was almost fully daylight, although there was as yet no discernible crow movement. I was into the hide and ready to go 30 minutes later, when the first crow dumped on to the field before 6am.

Hush power

Mindful of neighbours being woken at an ungodly hour, my first 60 shots were using up some "hush power" loads given to me recently by a friend. They seemed to kill well enough, although perhaps lacked the punch of my usual loads. I am not sure there is a direct correlation between a loud bang and killing power, for these quieter loads were effective enough.

It was a windless morning and frustratingly the crows were, in the main, heading to the sewage works at considerable altitude – many passing high overhead out of range. I even had to pass up some of those in range because the site chosen for the hide was under some overhanging trees. Although it was a good choice when combatting sharp-eyed birds, it did

tend to inhibit the swing of the gun at those higher birds.

Initially, the decoys appeared of little interest to passing corvids, other than to encourage them to alter their line slightly so they could have a look. That was enough for



A jackdaw is set on a flapper and added to the decoy pattern but corvids don't always react well to such decoys, and often avoid them

the occasional shot, and slowly a reasonable bag was being built.

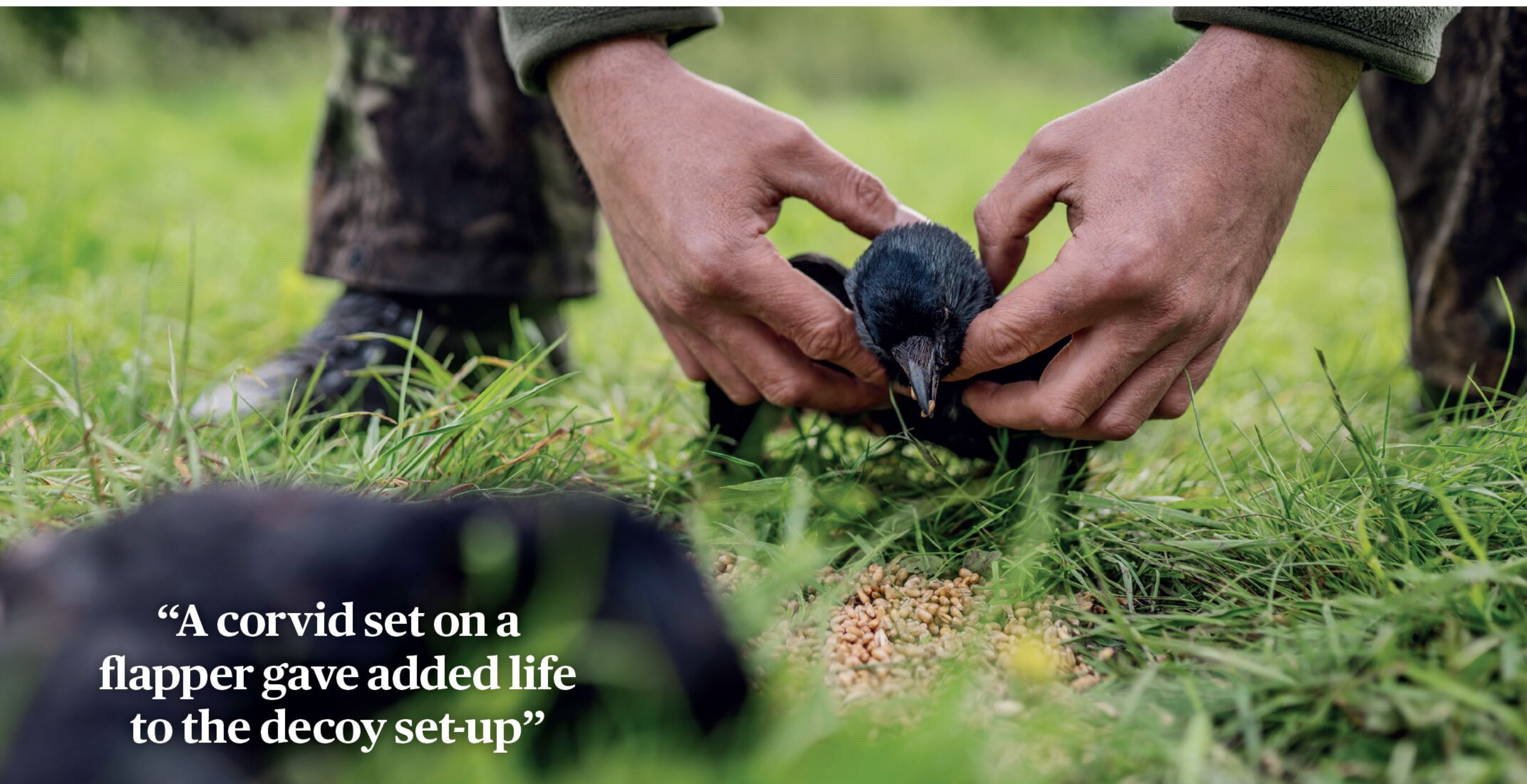
The bag was almost exclusively carrion crows, including plenty of smaller young ones from the year before. After fledging there can be occasional difficulties with distinguishing the difference between young crows and young rooks, but these were certainly all crows.

Reckless

In this area, it is often noticeable that jackdaws seem to arrive later than the rest of the corvid tribe. On this occasions they hardly arrived at all, with only the odd single bird pitching recklessly, and fatally, to the decoys. A couple of times a bunch of half a dozen came dashing past – managing to lose one of their number on each occasion.

The lack of jackdaws was a bit of a disappointment because on a big day at corvids they can make up a significant proportion of the bag. Indeed, there have been occasions in the past during a long day in the field when the majority of the bag has been jackdaws.

As the morning progressed a breeze got up and I hoped it might improve prospects – it didn't. In fact, towards the end of the session, as the wind strengthened further, the birds got higher still. One of the problems with my set-up was the inability to see anything approaching from the rear, due to a line of tall sycamore and beech trees. ➡



“A corvid set on a flapper gave added life to the decoy set-up”

The siting of the hide was unavoidable due to the configuration of the field. But it meant that birds returning from the sewage works would be well out over the field before being spotted, leaving insufficient opportunity for a shot. The exception was if the bird swung in slightly to take a look at the decoys, which a few made the mistake of doing. On occasion a bird went through, alerting me to the possibility of another following, which helped to build the bag.

Late in the morning a great cloud of birds came through from my rear, which made me think that someone

had disturbed them from their sordid probing among the sewage. There were three more similar flushes, one following another, with well over 100 birds coming through. On each occasion, one or two peeled off to take a look at the “flock” below. This allowed me to get a few shots away and add six more crows to the growing bag.

After seven hours of patience in the hide – only relieved by the occasion foray to chase down a winged bird – proceedings had come to a virtual stop. Those birds that came through were even higher, with long spells of nothing moving, and I decided to give

it one more hour in case things started happening again.

My corvid decoys had been augmented with a jackdaw set on a flapper, which gave added life to the decoy set-up. Corvids do not always respond well to a flapper – or indeed a rotary – but it is always worth a try. The advantage a flapper has over a rotary is that it is lighter and easier to carry and quicker to set up. I always give it a try and if it is not working bring it in again.

White feathers

It was a long final hour, during which only three more birds were brought down. Over recent years it has been noticeable how many carrion crows have had colour variants – primarily with white or off-white wing feathers. One bird came nicely to the decoys, looking curious as its wings flapped white as it came. It turned out to have a nice mix of white in its wings and as such was a notable bird.

Those final three birds marked the end of a productive session, and a bag of 70 corvids – the great majority of which were carrion crows – was ample reward for an early start and a long slog in the hide. As well as protecting the grass crop, the dumping of unsavoury items will have been reduced, while hopefully a few more of our vulnerable birds will have been protected from the depredations of these pests. 🐦



Some days the majority of the corvids in the bag will be jackdaws but this time they're mostly crows







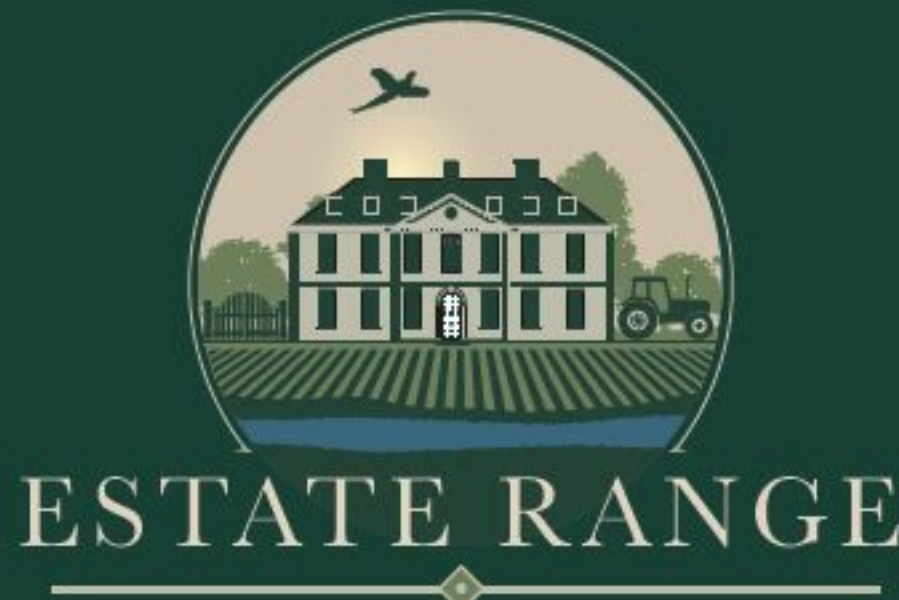

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Working Dogs



A young border terrier shows what he is made of when he gets the scent of a vixen that has been taking lambs

Once Meg had proved herself as a reliable, fox-bolting bitch, I was happy to breed from her. I selected a proven border dog and in due course she whelped a litter of five puppies, unassisted.

As Meg had only ever bayed at foxes and never tackled them, I chose to have her covered by a hard dog. I didn't want to risk producing pups that might be overly cautious about coming within range of a fox, which is possible if you continually breed from nothing but bayers. Ultimately, breeding working terriers is not an exact science and sometimes you simply have to go with your gut.

I placed two of the most likely puppies into working homes, with a view to selling the remainder. However, the prospective buyers of the last dog had to pull out so, I decided to run-on Percy — named after the Northumberland foxhound pack.

One April, while Percy was still quite young and inexperienced, I was contacted by a local hill farmer who reported he was losing lambs. I had been visiting this farm for years, using my terriers to manage fox numbers and limit their impact on lambs and wildlife. I knew the farm well and was already considering how to approach the most likely den site which was less than half a mile from the lamb depredations.

We approached the den without any chatter and with the wind in our face. From a few feet away, I could detect no signs of occupancy but this is fairly typical during the early denning period. Later on, a den can become littered with the remains of prey and stink to high heaven.

Three-holed den

My companion's young border bitch was secured to a tree, out of harm's way, and he made ready with the shotgun. I walked over to what I considered the most likely entrance to this three-holed den and held the leash so Percy could check it out.

He had other ideas, however, and pulled towards a shallow bank adjacent to the

disappeared down what was obviously a collapsed tunnel. He was wearing a locator collar but, due to the shallow nature of the den, it was easy to trace his progress underground simply by listening to the occasional bumps and scrapes.

After he'd travelled about 3m, he started to bay. I knew this den of old and the main chamber was several metres further on, by the roots of a spruce tree. The vixen had obviously decided that the best form of defence was attack so she came charging down the tube to repel the intruder.

It was a valiant move but doomed to failure because, young as he was, Percy was made of stern stuff and he stood his ground. As the vixen grabbed him by the

“As the vixen grabbed the dog by the muzzle, he grabbed her by the jaw”

entrance. It was into the side of one of these shallow ditches that young Percy stuck his nose and snorted. Then he moved an inch to the right and snorted again. Then he scratched at the spot. I became transfixed by what was unfolding so, having learned to trust my dogs over the years, I decided to unslip him and watch.

He proceeded to dig and, before long, first his head and then his entire body

muzzle, so he grabbed her by the lower jaw. It only took me about 10 minutes to dig through to them and when I did, they were still locked together. I quickly separated them and my colleague brought the episode to a speedy conclusion by shooting the fox.

We accounted for the cubs — a task I do not enjoy — and made good the den by reforming the tunnel roof with spruce boughs, covering with the dug-out soil and finishing with a layer of old spruce needles.

I have to say, impressed as I was by Percy's courage under fire; the way he stood his ground and, to be fair, gave better than he got, I was more impressed by the way he located the vixen. Any decent working terrier will go to ground and work a fox but to scent it through a wall of soil when it's lying several metres down a tube — that's not the kind of behaviour you can expect from just any terrier.

His performance that day was a little above and beyond the norm. Lamb killing ceased forthwith. 🐾

🔗 Martin Webber is a former keeper and lifelong hunting and working dog enthusiast. He lives in south-west Scotland where he maintains a small kennel of working Border terriers.



Young Percy the border terrier goes above and beyond to get to grips with a lamb-stealing vixen

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Some reasons to be cheerful



LAURENCE CATLOW, A PASSIONATE SHOOTER AND ANGLER FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS, HAS WRITTEN FIVE BOOKS ABOUT SPORT WITH ROD AND GUN.



March can behave like a stroppy adolescent but there are times when it can feel hopeful and exciting as much as challenging and fickle

March went out, not like a lion but rather more like a teenager. It was sometimes morose, sometimes smiling and kind, sometimes almost intolerably unreasonable, stroppy and obstructive. I spent most of my working life dealing with teenagers, which certainly had its ups and downs, but all in all it was rewarding and enjoyable.

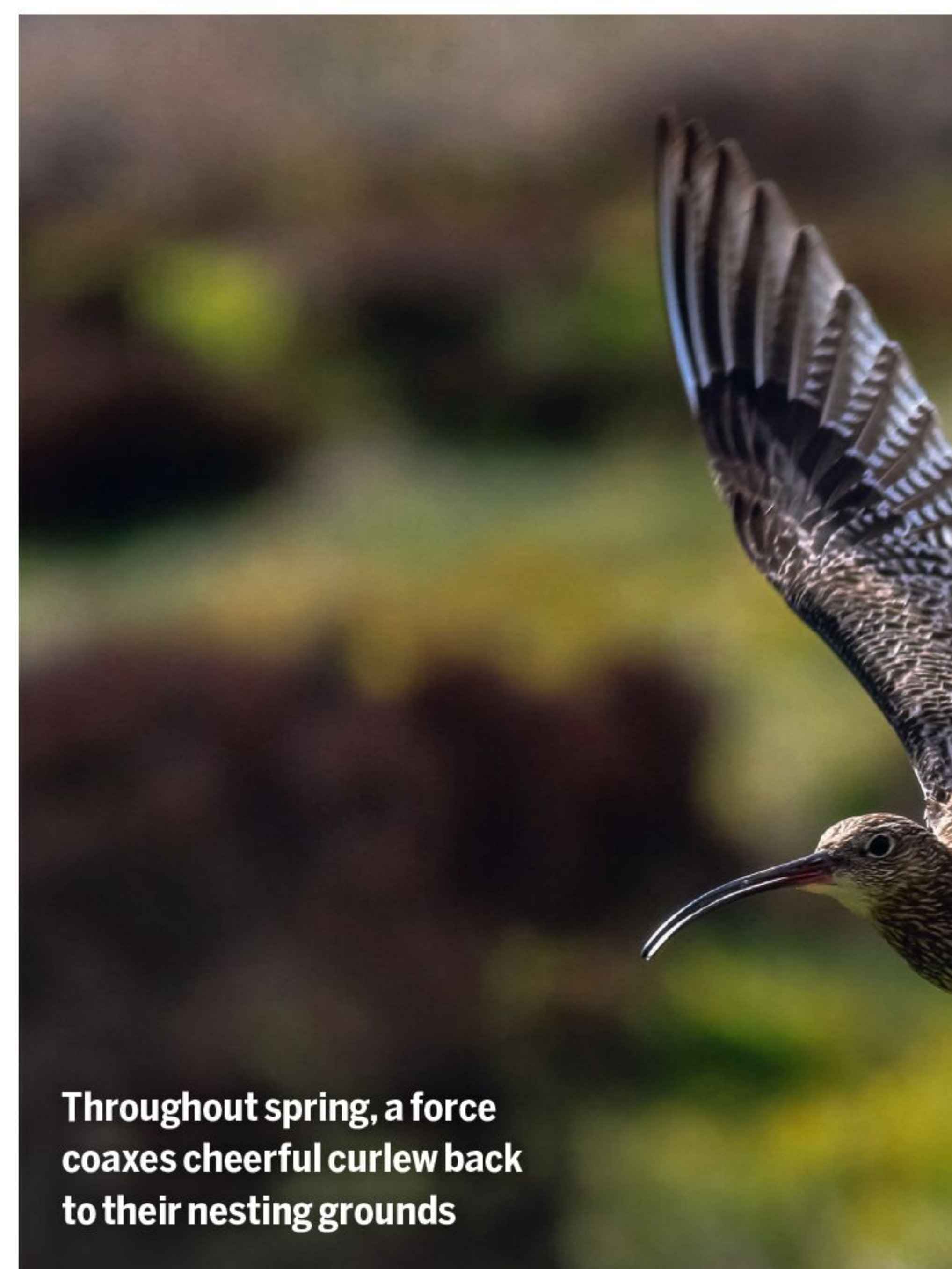
So it is for me with March; a month that, when it seems determined to plunge us back deep into winter, I find deeply frustrating. But whatever its moods, March undoubtedly belongs to the spring of the year. Yes, it is changeful and fickle; certainly it is often challenging, but equally there are times when it excites and exhilarates. On the whole I like teenagers and in a similar way I like

March. I find its unpredictability, its changefulness one of the reasons why I welcome its coming and its course.

Encouraging

Right at the end of the month I found myself doing what I normally do at 9am; wandering round my ground with a bucket of corn, scattering handfuls of wheat here and there in the hope of encouraging resident pheasants to stay put and persuading one or two outsiders to move in and set up home at High Park.

I had gloves on against the cold, there was a sharp wind blowing from the north-east and I was walking beneath a sullen sky. It was almost dry, with only a suggestion of dampness on the air, but it was certainly cheerless and dreary. Although there were jobs to be done, I was not sure that I wanted to spend



Throughout spring, a force coaxes cheerful curlew back to their nesting grounds

Wandering around High Park with a bucket to feed the resident pheasants – and perhaps tempt a few more – is always a pleasure

and the wrens and the chiffchaffs. In response to all this, I found that I was feeling every bit as cheerful as the birds, especially since yellow clumps of primroses were smiling up at me all along my path. Life seemed better with every step and I spent the rest of the morning at High Park and, of course, I returned there in the afternoon.

Momentum

I like the changefulness of March, but there is something beneath it that I like even more. For throughout the month there is a force at work much stronger than its changefulness, a momentum that drives things forward in defiance as well as in cooperation with March’s changing moods. It is the force that brings the curlew back to their breeding grounds, the force that tells birds to sing, that turns blackthorns white and gives green shoots the summons to push their way into the light.

It is the life force that is spring and it is wonderful; the adolescent tantrums of March are powerless to resist it. They may hold things up but the trees will put on leaves and the swallows will come and the mayflies will hatch and spring will yield to summer. And the year will move on until at last it tells me to get out my flanker’s flag and head into the hills.

But there is something in the month that I like even more than its changefulness or the driving force beneath it. March is the month that, after a separation that often seems almost endless, returns me to my rivers and to everything I find and feel along their banks. This is undoubtedly by far the best thing about March.

The Wharfe opens on the 25th of the month. I was there on the 26th, or

the rest of the morning out at High Park getting on with them.

I was something like halfway round when I noticed the sky was lightening. Then, to my surprise and delight, in less than five minutes winter had turned into spring. There were white clouds sailing across the blue sky, the sun was warm and the touch of the breeze was soft on my

“The swallows will come, the mayflies will hatch and spring will yield to summer”

cheek. The gloves came off, the scarf was stuffed deep in a pocket and suddenly the birdsong had turned from defiance into celebration.

It seemed to me that even the curlew were trying their best to be cheerful; there could be no doubt about the thrushes and the dunnocks

rather I was high up the dale on one of the river’s tributary becks. I love the streams that make the Wharfe and, when the water is right – which is not as often as I should like – I often fish one of them in preference to the main river. I fed my pheasants before setting off and, reaching ➞



The fishing season on the Wharfe opens on 25 March, but it is its tributaries that lure Laurence

my destination about 11am, decided to take an early lunch before starting to fish.

I felt it was my duty to drink a solemn beaker of red wine in honour of the new season. I felt, in fact, that it was my duty to drink two of them, which meant it was almost noon before I made my first cast.

First fish

You may be expecting me to tell you that before long I hooked a fish, a fish that stayed for the net and so became my first trout of the year, and this was only a beginning because I had soon caught another and that more followed. And I ended the day with at least half-a-dozen spring trout to my name. I only wish this is how it had been; it would have been wonderful. But the truth is that

after something like half an hour there was a pull on the line, telling me that a trout had touched one of my flies without taking a firm hold. This was the high point of the afternoon, as close as I got to catching a trout.

The day was bright but the air was cold and there was no hatch and the fish did not feel inclined to stir themselves. I persevered until 3.30pm then drove home.

I do not like blank days; they send me home with a feeling of failure, but it is somehow different on the first day of my season. It is, of course, much better if the first day gives me a trout or two but it is a day when I can contemplate an empty bag without too much disappointment. This is because the first day of my season is ritual as much as sport: a ritual of repossession and return, marking



The first day of the season marks Laurence's ritualistic return to his favourite river



Blossom appears, turning the trees and hedgerows white, another sign that spring is soon to turn into summer and all its joys

the renewal of my relationship with a river that has flowed through my life for more than 50 years. It has been, throughout this time, a rich source of comfort, of fascination and fulfilment and of very deep joy.

On my first day of the season, simply to be there is enough and it matters not if I find myself on one of the becks rather than on the Wharfe, as the becks are an essential and precious part of my favourite river.

“There was no hatch and the fish did not feel inclined to stir themselves”

At the time of writing I haven't made a second visit to Wharfedale, but I shall be there again within a few days. Now April is here I shall soon be heading off to the Tees. On both these days an empty bag will send me home downhearted, in need perhaps of an extra glass of fino to restore my mood. If, on the other hand, my bag returns home with a few trout inside it, I shall most certainly drink an extra glass of fino in grateful celebration of the fact that a kind God decided to make me a fisherman.

And mention of fino reminds me that it is gone 7pm and time to get the bottle out of the fridge, time to fill my glass, to take a few grateful sips before telling myself how good it is to have half a year's fishing stretching out ahead of me. Cheers and tight lines. 🐟

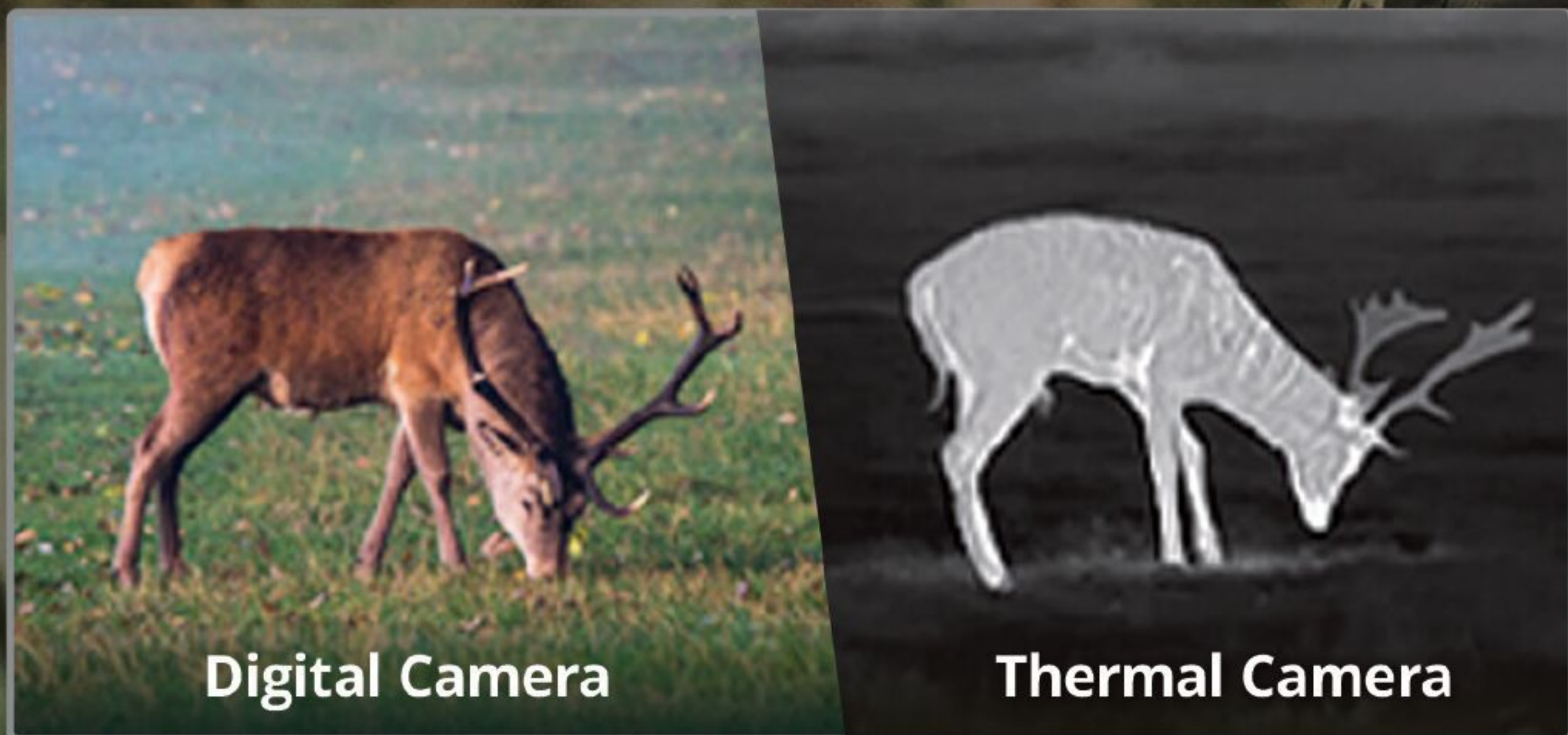


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The act of kindness that left a sour taste

Those who take part in fieldsports are often subject to abuse but an encounter on a country lane gives Alan Child a sense of injustice

As a university graduate, with degrees in both English literature and law, I have profound respect for the part that emotions and facts play in the ebb and flow of our daily lives. I also appreciate that so often our feelings override the evidence before us and may enrich or damage relationships. I admire those people with strongly held beliefs, but my greatest respect goes to those who can substantiate their passions with reference to something concrete.

I am fortunate to have only experienced on one occasion the disturbing interruption of a day's grouse shooting by antis. I was a member of the picking-up team and suffered much verbal abuse from a group of 10 or so protesters. They also decided to surround my truck and rammed clods of earth and stones under the wheels so I could not drive off the moor.

The arrival of mounted police a short while later thankfully brought the protest to an end and I eventually made it back to the safety of the headkeeper's yard.

Far more disconcerting was the leap to judgement made by a passing motorist literally 100 yards from my home. I was returning from an hour's dog training on my neighbouring farm, which is the heart of my small shoot. It had been a successful session with a young labrador, who had completed one or two excellent water retrieves as well as showing commendable steadiness in the presence of curious young heifers.

As I walked down the lane I took the opportunity to take the dog towards a field containing a flock of sheep and the first few lambs of the season. I moved to the gateway and sat the dog, who showed some interest in the joyful frolics of the youngsters. I scanned the field to check that everything was as it should be. As my survey drew to a close I noticed a squatting hare only 20 yards into the field.

A sudden flick of its ears gave away the hare's location and I smiled, thinking how well these animals harmonise with their environment. This was a training opportunity not to be missed.

My quickly devised strategy was to hold the dog on sit then tap the gate with my stick to encourage the hare to speed off. I knew that if my dog was unable to resist the temptation of this fast-moving quarry, the gate would prevent his chase extending beyond a few feet. As I tapped the gate I blew my sit whistle and prepared to correct my errant dog – or perhaps extend a word of praise and offer a tasty reward should he remain stationary.

The hare did not move. So I tapped again, but the creature remained motionless and my dog looked quizzically at my strange antics.

Awkward

I stared at the hare in some disbelief and it was only because of my intense concentration that I noticed its posture did not conform to that of the sprinter in his blocks ready to accelerate; no, there was something awkward about the legs' alignment. I decided to investigate further. I repeated my sit command to the dog and climbed over the gate. I walked slowly towards the hare but kept half an eye on my dog, who might be tempted to join me in my exploration.

As I neared the hare I saw blood stains on its haunches and the splinter of bone piercing the skin of one of its back legs. I guessed it had been injured by a passing car as it crossed the lane and did not make the safe haven of the field on its usual route under the galvanised field gate.

As I picked it up, the hare let out that spine-chilling cry which encapsulates all imaginable suffering and fear. I despatched it swiftly and humanely with my bare hands, while wondering how long it had been in such terrible pain. I pondered what fate might have befallen it had I not chanced upon it. It could have been a slow, slow death or the double ➔



SHUTTERSTOCK: GETTY IMAGES

Ewes and lambs in the next field offer an ideal opportunity to teach a young labrador steadiness

A detailed photograph of a brown hare standing in a field of green grass covered in dew. The hare is facing left, with its long ears perked up. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green. A quote is overlaid on the right side of the hare's body.

“The hare let out that spine-chilling cry which encapsulates all imaginable suffering and fear”



Motorists who travel country lanes at high speeds show little regard for other road users and native wildlife

agony of providing living flesh for the scavengers circling above, eager no doubt to pluck the eyes from lambs.

My dog had remained transfixed and for this I was immensely grateful. However, me clambering over the gate with a large hare was a little too much for the young dog, who simply had to investigate. I slipped on his lead and set off towards my home. There

“I wanted the motorist to know I had saved the hare from further pain”

I was, well-trained dog walking nicely to heel, hare in my right hand and my mind focused on making the most of this tragedy and, yes, anticipating the roasted saddle and the game soup I would make for my family’s delectation, when a small car came flying up the lane towards me.

When the vehicle was about 25 yards from me, it slowed and came alongside. The passenger window lowered and I was then abused by the driver, who called me various unrepeatable names then drove off with a squeal of tyres.

My first reaction was – and I am ashamed to admit it – to hurl abuse at the fleeing motorist. A little later as I prepared the hare for the freezer,

I still had feelings of residual anger but most of all I felt impotence. I wanted to correct the motorist’s impression that I or my dog was a killer.

Disregard

I wanted the motorist to know I had saved this animal from further pain, that the reason it has lost its life was down to those motorists who, like him, travel the country lanes at high speed in constant disregard for others who use it, whether they be walkers, agricultural vehicles, crossing cattle, errant lambs or other wildlife.

Even worse was the thought that my abuser would recount their

experience to their family and friends. He would perpetuate a myth about the man with the labrador and the hare he had killed on a glorious spring day and who had the audacity to walk down the lane with his trophy in full public gaze.

Illogical and inexplicable I know, but the hare never graced our table. It was donated, oven-ready, to some friends who thoroughly enjoyed the feast it provided. I do not know why I made this decision. Perhaps I feared its dying scream and the departing squeal of the tyres would leave a bitter taste, or perhaps it was the sense of mutual defencelessness. 🐇



The injured hare is put out of its misery, an act of mercy that results in an earful of abuse for Alan



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RIFLE TEST

Sauer 505 ErgoLux .308 Win £6,812

The newest incarnation of Sauer's silky smooth bolt-action rifle has a number of features that will appeal to a wide range of deerstalkers

+

The redesigned cocking system with its large red de-cock button is silent and fast to use in the field, and is one of the most noticeable tweaks to the 505

There is no loss of zero with the Blaser-type saddle mounting system

It's super-easy to change the barrel, with a choice of 19 differing calibres



OUR VERDICT

Sauers were always one of those rifles you aspired to own. The newest incarnation of its silky smooth bolt-action rifle is the 505 model that is kept current with new features including the all-steel action for a rigid and sturdy chassis platform, yet lightened by its skeletal form. You still have this modular design where the action/chassis acts as the backbone of the rifle, thus allowing a quick change of barrels – there are 19 calibres in all.

Gone is the old scope mounting system and in its place is a Blaser-type saddle system that improves the scope mounting with no loss of zero when removed or re-engaged.

The bolt is now one piece and as such is even smoother to operate with

“Sauer’s new design will appeal to hunters looking for a premium gun”

its 60-degree bolt lift, as is the silent redesigned manual cocking and de-cocking safety system.

The Quattro trigger system remains and its four-point instantly adjustable weights – from the lightest at 350g to 1,250g – are very handy. Safety features include the

MagLock integrated magazine safety system, which eliminates unwanted jettisoning in the field.



+

The Sauer 505 ErgoLux carries on the German brand's fine tradition for superb craftsmanship and elegant lines, with some very useful upgrades included

The rifle's barrel lengths differ depending on the calibre



The Sauer 505 ErgoLux .308's barrels are cold hammer forged



Sauer prides itself on supplying the correct fit and styling to its rifle stocks and the new 505 is no different. You can still switch from the traditional walnut – as featured on the ErgoLux – for a polymer Sporter or thumbhole designs to the adjustable Synchro XT carbon-fibre version for the real weight-conscious hunters by loosening only two bolts.

All of these little tweaks have improved some of the little niggles of the past and now, with the 505 model, Sauer's new design will almost certainly appeal to those shooters who are in the market for a premium gun that comes with a lot of flexible options to suit their needs in the field.



NEED TO KNOW

- **Manufacturer** JP Sauer & Son
- **Model** 505 ErgoLux
- **Overall Length** 40in, with 20in barrels
- **Barrel Length** 20in, thread 15mm/1,
- **Sights** None furnished, saddle mount for scope
- **Weight** Wood (ErgoLux) 3,450g, 7.6lb and Polymer (Synchro XT Black) 3,550g, 7.8lb
- **Stock** Grade 7 walnut (four other configurations including thumbhole, polymer and carbon fibre)
- **Length of Pull** 13½in
- **Finish** Oil finished stock, DLC (diamond-like carbon) coating on metal parts
- **Trigger** Quattro trigger 350g to 1,250g (0.77lbs to up to 2.75lbs) selection
- **Safety** Manual cocking sliding safety on tang
- **Magazine** Three or five rounds, MagLock system
- **Calibre** .308 Win on test, 19 available from .222 Rem to Swiss: 10.3×60 R
- **Price** £6,812
- **Contact** Blaser Group Ltd (01483 917412)



RIFLE TEST

IN DEPTH

The steel action is skeletonised around the magazine housing to save weight yet remains rigid, and the new saddle mounting system is quick and fumble-free to operate. The returns to zero are nice, too. Exterior protection comes via the DLC (diamond-like carbon) coated surface on the action as well as the barrel, so the worst of the British weather is held at bay.

Using a one-piece bolt improves the super-slick 505 action and its 60-degree lift via the six locking lug arrangement, and the plunger ejector system makes for an impressively speedy reload.

Also new is the revamped two-piece manual cocking system/safety located at the rear of the bolt. A light push inwards of the red section de-cocks the 505 and upward pressure on the black button re-cocks the action silently and smoothly, making it so much better than before.

Marvel

I really like the Quattro trigger mechanism. It is a marvel with its four pre-set weights accessed when the fore-end is removed. You have four settings on test: 1lb 4oz; 1lb 10oz; 2lb 7oz; and the fourth setting at 2lb 15oz for any shooting eventuality.

Feeding the 505 is via the detachable polymer three-shot flush fit magazine as standard — two-shot in magnum calibres — or via the extended five-shot model we had on test. New is the MagLock mechanism, in which a double press on the release button is necessary to release the magazine, eliminating accidental discharge.

The cold hammer forged barrel, which achieves great concentricity and longevity,

The accuracy from the bench at 100 yards was nothing short of amazing. The Sako Gamehead 123-gr bullets sped along at 2,809fps for 2,156ft/lb energy and I clustered three shots into 0.662in. Their 150-gr equivalents shot 0.720in groups at 2,693fps and 2,416ft/lb, so choose your deer species because these Sakos are super-accurate.

The heavier Hornady SST 165-gr had a healthy 2,702fps and 2,676ft/lb with a great 0.885in group. This would make a great fallow or red deer load.

Copper was no burden at all and achieved the most amazing one-hole groups with Hornady's 125-gr ECX bullets, which achieved a healthy 2,876fps for 2,296ft/lb and bughole groups of 0.44in. Similarly, the Sako Blade shot tiny 0.520in

groups at 2,503fps and 2,255ft/lb for its heavier 162-gr bullet prove this new Sauer 505 is not at all bullet fussy.

I did try a few reloads but that ECX load was so good I used it for the red deer hind stalk later on. However, the Sierra ProHunter 125-gr bullet shot very consistent 0.75in groups at 2,813fps and 2,197ft/lb with a load of 44.0 grains of Vit N133 powder. The Barnes TTSX 130-gr lead-free option produced 0.65in groups with 40.5 grains of RL10X at 2,864fps and 2,368ft/lb.

The reds had been feeding late in the evening on a wide-open field so I waited until nearly dark with my back to a tree. The ease with which the 505 nestled into the aim sent that 125-gr ECX into the vitals of the hind (*below*) at 171 yards.

as well as the ability to exchange the barrels, remains the same on the 505. Three numbered Allen bolts securing the barrel to the front of the action are removed in order and lowering the locating lever allows a swift exchange of the barrel. Lengths differ dependent on the calibre. This 20in version (15mm/1) muzzle thread on test this month has a 17mm profile, but a heavier varmint type at 19mm can also be ordered in .308 Win.

The detachable fore-end and the butt stock makes the swift

change between the luxury walnut to a weather-beating synthetic model a breeze. This ErgoLux grade 7 walnut stock has outstanding figuring with a lightly rubbed oil finish and well-executed chequering to the fore-end and pistol grip. The latter has a slight palm swell and classic Bavarian-type dropped cheekpiece. 🦋



CONCLUSION

Sauer firearms always look fantastic and handle so well. This 505 model, with its new steel action, scope mounting system, MagLock and one-piece bolt all add up to one magnificent stalking rifle in any configuration you choose.

20 /20 Accuracy Very good accuracy when using both lead-cored and copper bullets	18 /20 Handling Sauers always have that natural pointability and steadiness in the aim	18 /20 Trigger Safe and very clean four-position trigger for bench work or field work	18 /20 Stock Good handling and nice to be able to change from walnut to synthetic	18 /20 Value Great build quality and flexible design for the price buyers will be charged	92 /100 Overall Score A fantastic rifle that performs well and will be a sound investment
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Centre of attention

Roebuck season is here so if you're going to upgrade your rifle, we've picked five options

We are already a quarter of the way through the year and the roebuck season is upon us. Daylight hours have been lengthening rapidly and there is, at last, some warmth in the rising sun. There's a feel-good factor in the air and the deer must feel this too. They

browse for longer periods on the tender shoots and buds as they work to gain condition after the harder winter months. We've had to endure one of the wettest springs on record but as we gain more daylight hours, there are more opportunities to get after roebuck with a rifle. Here are five options to suit all budgets. 🦌

SAUER 505 BOLT-ACTION RIFLE

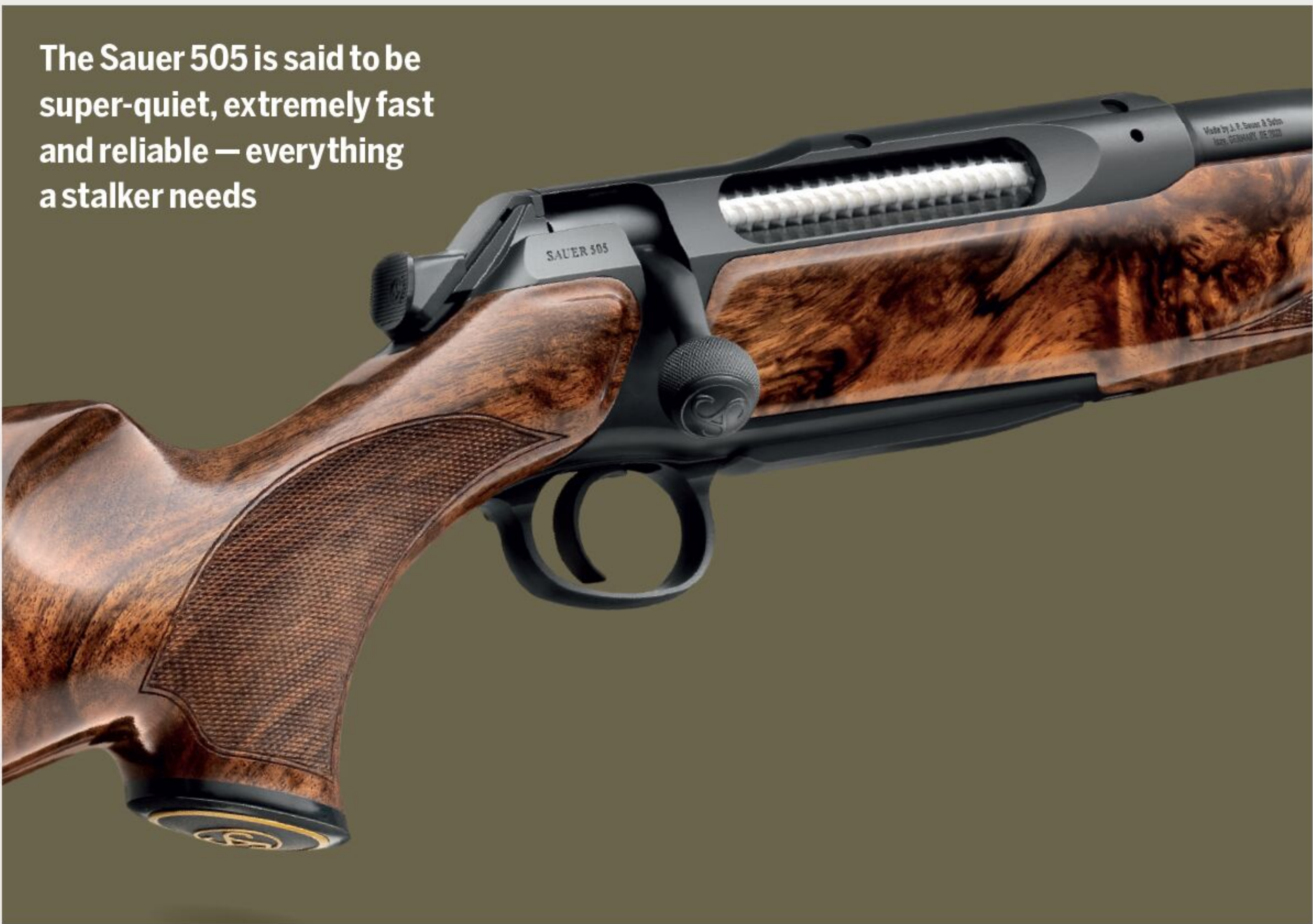
At the heart of the new 505 is the unmatched silky smooth bolt action that Sauer claims is super-quiet, extremely fast and reliable. The manual cocking of the Sauer 505 is new too and is designed to be safer, quieter and more comfortable than ever.

Thanks to the adjustable Quattro trigger, the ideal trigger-pull can be adapted for every situation and the

integrated MagLock magazine safety reliably prevents unwanted triggering of the magazine button.

Finally, the cold hammer forged rifle barrel guarantees the Sauer precision, whether you choose a polymer, carbon fibre or wooden stock. Read Bruce Potts's verdict on the 505 (see p56).

RRP £3,282 Visit sauer.de/en



The Sauer 505 is said to be super-quiet, extremely fast and reliable — everything a stalker needs

“The 505’s cocking is designed to be safer, quieter and more comfortable”

BRUCE POTTS

BERGARA B14 WILDERNESS THUMBHOLE CARBON

Bergara's B14 model is arguably the brand's most popular centrefire. The Wilderness model is designed for uncompromising performance in the real world, with a lightweight construction, Cerakote finishes, fluted bolts and a thumbhole stock with carbon or steel-barrelled options. The whole rig is only 6lb 6oz in .308 Win and balanced with a short 20in barrel that has a slimline steel barrel beneath a carbon-fibre wrap to add strength. This all adds up to a strong, weatherproof — all exposed metal parts are

Cerakote finished — rifle. In addition, a precision trigger mechanism and AICS-compatible detachable magazine, mean this B14 offers great value for money.

RRP £1,445
Visit artemisoutdoorsuk.co.uk



Bergara's rugged B14 lives up to its Wilderness tag as its construction is completely weatherproof



The lightweight K5 Black blends style with substance

MERKEL K5 BLACK

The Merkel K5 Black is sure to have old-school stalkers smiling, with its traditional Bavarian cheekpiece, stock and open sights. There are no signs of compromise with this rifle; a grade 5 walnut, oil finish and non-ejection systems are all classics, but the fluted barrel and nitrided Suhler tilting bolt lugs, trigger and automatic de-cocking systems add a modern twist to things. Weighing only 5lb with an overall length of 36.5in, the K5 blends style with substance. The Monte Carlo stock has a range of options — as does the K5 Arabesque model with superb engraving and non-fluted barrels. The range is available in calibres from .223 Rem up to 6.5 Creedmoor.

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The Browning X-Bolt Pro Carbon is the perfect weight for woodland stalking

BROWNING X-BOLT PRO CARBON

The Pro Carbon is the latest iteration of Browning's X-Bolt range. It tips the scales at 6lb 9oz (without a scope or moderator), making it the perfect weight for woodland stalking. All metal parts are finished with a practical and attractive Cerakote. The rifle's high-density foam core is reinforced with carbon fibre to ensure strength while keeping it lightweight. The action of the X-Bolt is relatively short and benefits from a 60-degree lift, making it easier to cycle and allows more room for a scope. The stock is a parallel comb design which reduces felt recoil and makes for a comfortable rifle in the field.

RRP £2,479
Visit browning.eu

“Stalkers have the ability to adjust stock, length and cheekpiece height”

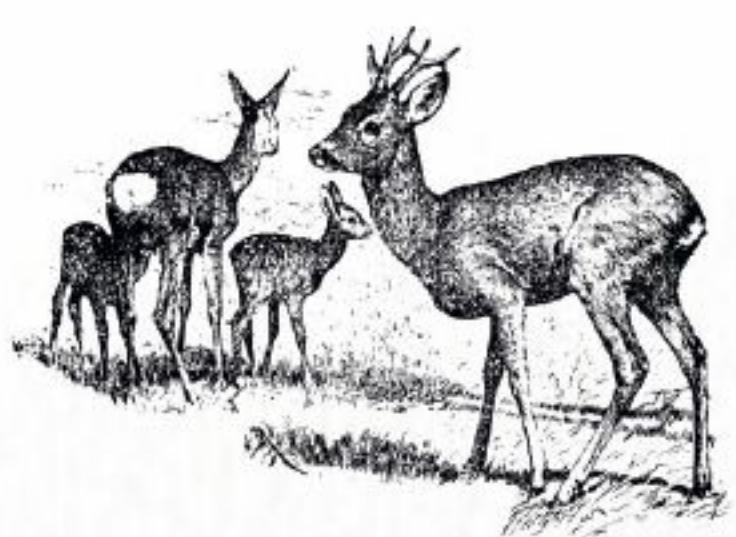
SAKO S20 HUNTER

The Sako S20 has been on the market for several years now but remains a favourite among stalkers. As well as offering great balance and handling, the S20 also features an innovative quick-detachable stock that facilitates an instant exchange of parts. This gives stalkers the ability to adjust and customise the rifle stock, length and cheekpiece height. These rifles are also fitted with a practical integrated Picatinny rail and metal parts are finished with a weatherproof tungsten Cerakote. The range is available in .243, .270, .308 and 6.5 Creedmoor.

RRP from £2,200
Visit gmh.co.uk

The S20 Hunter has an integrated Picatinny rail and all metal parts are finished with Cerakote





RUDI VAN KETS IS A BELGIAN GAME HUNTER WHO SPECIALISES IN DEER DOG TRAINING AND PREPARING HOUNDS FOR TRACKING TRIALS

A question of hunting ethics

Why the welfare of deer is more important than the individual agendas of hunters

Every year our hunting association sends out around 200 letters to all the wildlife management units in the Flemish region of Belgium. It is primarily an update of our membership, a report of the past year and includes the best practice guidelines for animal tracking.

We hope the person in charge of these wildlife management units informs their members so our message is well distributed. Unfortunately, even after 30 years of trying to educate hunters on animal tracking, there are still some who believe they know best and can conduct the perfect search across all circumstances. The consequences of this blasé attitude can be huge and further highlight the importance of education. I don't mean to imply that all hunters are irresponsible, as this

certainly is not the case, I only intend to highlight the risks of setting out without due care.

Roebuck search

A colleague received a call to search for a roebuck. The location of the track was half an hour's drive away and, as it was still early evening with plenty of light, he decided to set off that evening. When he arrived at the agreed place, there was no one waiting for him, so he gave the hunters a call. They responded and came to pick him up. When he arrived at the scene of the shot, he saw that another team was also searching.

The hunters had called several associations and another one had also responded and come out to search. My colleague confronted the initial caller about this, who explained they had called a few trackers so they had

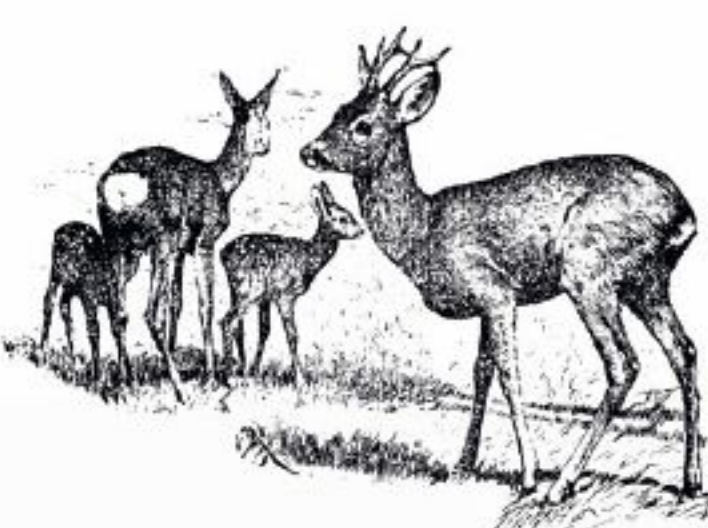
Above: Communication between tracking parties and land managers is key to avoid the whole exercise being a waste of time

a backup in case the first dog didn't find the deer.

I have experienced a similar situation. I received a phone call one night with a request to come out immediately. The drive wasn't long and to save time I asked my daughter to make sure that all the necessary equipment and the dog were in the car and ready to go. When we arrived, peculiarly, there was no one there. After a bit of hanging around, we decided to give the hunters a call.

The lady who had called me answered and I asked where the team were. Instead of an answer, I was told "you don't have to come any more, we've found the roe". At the same time, our contact arrived. This turned out to be the owner of the hunting ground. He was dumbfounded when I told him about the phone call. I think if an agreement has been made, they should stick to it or at least let you know you are no longer needed, thus saving you from making an unnecessary journey.

Another member of our group received a call at the beginning of the roebuck season. The day after the call, he drove more than an hour to the agreed place. When he arrived, he was met by one of the hunters. They

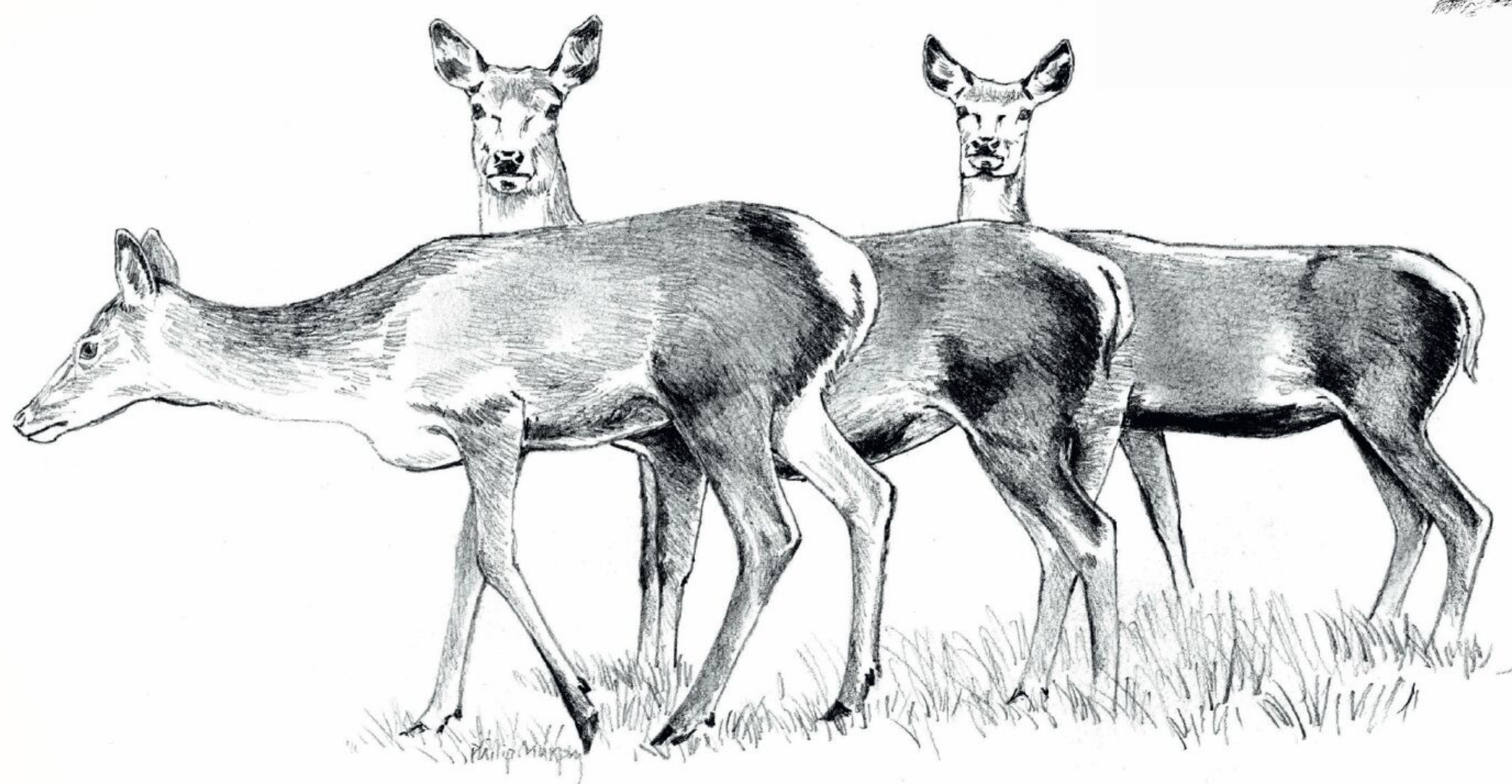


continued on to the hunting ground to the place where the buck had been shot. When they arrived, the gamekeeper was waiting for them.

The keeper told them to wait until the members of the hunting group had returned from their search. Half an hour later six people came out of the forest with a few dogs, and nothing found. It was now up to our member who, after a short but clear explanation, thanked everyone and drove home.

There are plenty more cases like this. Despite our annual attempts to train hunters in ethics, there is something primal about hunting that causes people to become a bit blinkered and forget themselves. They get tunnel vision and are only able to focus on the prize, forgetting the best practice guidelines that have usually been impressed upon them several times.

This phenomenon is as common with those sitting in a high seat as it is with those on a driven hunt. Shooting is important to a wide group



The thought of not tracking a deer that has been shot is totally incomprehensible to most hunters

animal following the impact. This is particularly true for wild boar.

Red deer are tough animals and they too give little indication of injury, even if the shot is well placed and they are mortally hit. However, we still sometimes only find blood after a few tens of metres. The majority of hunters have a lot of respect for the game and follow the rules closely,

the direction of shot and escape but most importantly they should have conducted only a limited search for blood spatters and have avoided using other dogs to keep the trail pure. This increases the success rate by 60%.

Saying sorry

Even a well-intentioned hunting group that has stays with you for the track can still accidentally make things difficult through not sticking to the rules. Last July I took a student with me on a track for a roebuck. The aim was that the student would take the lead on this track as an exercise to test the capabilities of their dog. Regrettably, the hunter had summoned a friend before we got there, and the friend had let his two small munsterlander loose on the track. One of the dogs quickly went missing and didn't return for more than an hour and a half. As a result of the contamination of the trail by other dogs, it was pointless for us to start.

This particular occurrence came to the attention of the owner of the hunting area and in turn led to a few strong words. A few weeks later I received an invitation from a hunting group to participate in a joint hunt on roebuck. During the post-hunt dinner, the owner of the land had a quiet word with the attendee who had been responsible for the bungled munsterlanders incident. Afterwards the chap who had let his dogs go stood up and apologised to the association.

This must have been a tough moment for the fellow in question, but his humility was very much appreciated and demonstrated the support, respect and appreciation for the voluntary service that we provide with total dedication. 🐾

“The chap who had let his dogs go stood up and apologised to the whole association”

of people but there is still a prevailing mindset that if the animal is not dead on the spot, they have missed it. Disappointingly, there are still plenty of hunters who cannot be bothered to search and follow the animal's trail for even a few meters.

A lot of game is hit but gives little initial indication of injury, meaning the shooter is unaware of the status of the quarry. It is the shots you think you have entirely missed that you must examine with particular care. From experience we have found that often there is a lot of blood to be found after about 30m. The signs of catastrophic injury from the bullet sometimes come very late due to the speed of the

making every effort to track down injured animals.

If groups contact us to request help with a search, we know they are following the rules. In 90% of cases the hunter will accompany you on a track. They should have marked

Dogs brought along to help with the search must not be allowed to contaminate the area before the tracker gets there



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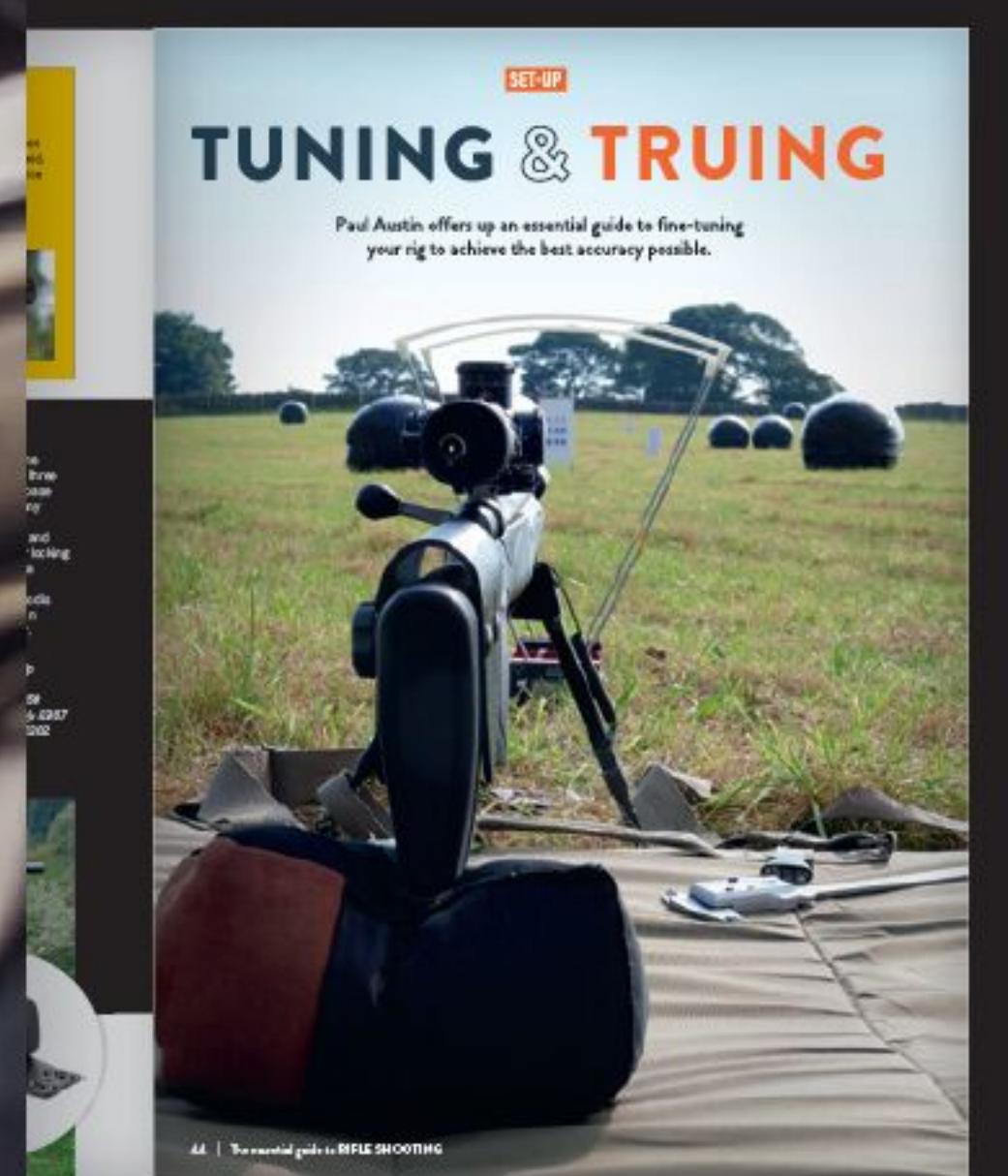


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The Fisherman's Diary

Fly-fishers casting in challenging conditions need to use common sense, says Jeremy Lucas

With grayling now out of season, we are focusing on trout. Suddenly, we find the countryside by our rivers and lakes enriched with the delicate flowers of violets, celandine and wood anemones. Everything is changing, almost day by day, and the trout are feeding voraciously. It is not necessarily easy fishing, however, because we are often met by inclement conditions and we need to adapt accordingly.

With the incessant rain, coloured water plagued us all winter, and this has persisted into the spring. Friends in northern England fared much better, even with similarly high flows, because hatches of early olives brought hungry brown trout up to the duns. Hatches are usually short-lived and sport is frenetic in these conditions.

Given that much of our fishing is below the surface in coloured water, it pays to increase the visibility of the flies. I often put a hot spot of fluorescent green or orange in my nymphs for both river and lake. Typically, this will be a few turns of appropriately coloured floss tied in at the head or collar. I strongly recommend not overdoing this, however, particularly if you are targeting wild trout. Too much intensive colour in a fly can easily spook the fish. Of course, this does not apply to freshly stocked fish; but then again, most of us are not interested in these until they have become naturalised.

Prime food source

Just lately, my stillwater visits have been similarly disappointing for fly hatches, though the buzzers (chironomid midges) have been active, as expected, in their larval and pupal stages. I have always loved buzzer fishing, particularly from the banks of large lakes and reservoirs. These insects are preyed on by trout throughout the year, though it is probably fair to say that from now until early June, buzzers in one stage of the life cycle or another are their prime food source.

You cannot really go wrong by using a floating line and long leader with a team of buzzer-like patterns. I always favour Cove-style Pheasant Tail on the point, with Diawl

Bach variants or buzzer pupa imitations on the droppers.

For the latter, black is a good starting point, particularly with a hint of bright green or orange in the thorax region given the coloured water that most of us are dealing with at the moment. I usually look for a side wind rather than one directly off

at a consistent depth following the pupae rising and falling in the column.

If it is mild and the light intensity not too strong, we are often blessed with trout high in the water as they begin to take the emergers. I often stay with a team, as above, but change the top dropper or point fly for a dry pattern. This way, all three

“I usually look for a side wind rather than one directly off or onshore”

or onshore. I cast across the wind with a long line, mending if necessary to allow the nymphs to sink, and retrieve very slowly, with occasional accelerations which can induce a take.

We have to be careful to avoid an exposed clay bank where the wind is cutting across, because this will inevitably be the muddiest water in the lake, and trout will avoid such areas completely. Look for a point where there is a reasonable side wind and explore the water column with long casts and slow retrieves. The trout will soon reveal themselves, usually taking

flies are close to the surface. These were the conditions today, resulting in perhaps 20 takes and converting a dozen of these to rainbows brought to hand. Every single fish came to the top dropper, a Diawl Bach variant, size 12. Even though the water was not clear, I was surprised this fly was favoured over the more brightly coloured nymph. It is remarkable how trout can pick out such small, inconspicuous food forms.

With warmer weather and clearer water, we're more consistently seeing trout near the surface now. We can expect some dry fly action soon on river and lake. 🐟



The presence of coloured water has called for imaginative solutions when casting for trout

🔗 Jeremy Lucas is a lifelong fly-fisher, multiple England Team member and author of the landmark Presentation Fly-Fishing. Now he focuses on conservation and dry-fly.



Serious matters

Several reasons why every deerstalker needs some thermal-imaging optics in their kit bag

For a long time the only things that helped me see in the dark were carrots. When I went to Sandhurst I had my first taste of night vision. They lumbered us with a delightfully ropey head-mounted system that they assured us was state of the art. It was a bugger to fit on to your helmet and, considering the model we were issued took only a single AA battery, you had to put a fresh one in every time you used it. This system had the added disadvantage of protruding from your helmet about 6in and thus required a counterweight that was stuck to the back of your helmet, meaning your head weighed approximately the same as a neutron star.

My next tangle with night vision was during tank training at Bovington. Part of the course was learning to drive a tank over rough terrain at night with “hatches down”. This meant you had to glue your eyes to the night-vision scope to see anything at all as you hauled at various levers to keep even a semblance of control. The scope afforded you swimming green vision that distorted all sense of perspective and eventually reality. You quickly became horribly seasick over the off-road course.

Game-changer

These outings scarred me somewhat and for a long time I avoided any sort of image intensifying or thermal sight. I pretended to myself that this wasn't because they made me ill, but because I wanted to be sporting or it might cause my ability to effectively glass a hillside to atrophy. However, I can accept I was dead wrong. Thermals are an absolute game-changer, and anyone who is even vaguely serious about their stalking needs to have one in their pocket.

Thermals are the difference between a blank day and a riotous success with significant conservational benefits. A couple of years ago, I relented and purchased a decent thermal-imaging monocular.



The Infiray Gemini multi-spectral thermal imaging binoculars offer stalkers pin-sharp images

This little number helped out no end and, with a really decent detection range of well over a kilometre, it made life much easier. All of a sudden I could bore my friends with videos and pictures of distant animals, and it revolutionised my ability to locate deer in densely forested areas. I have to admit I used it in daylight too as it helped me pick up deer across a vista that I would have whizzed past with regular binoculars. However, as you become increasingly reliant on a bit of kit, you discover the outer

help out with a replacement for my loyal little unit. An almost indefensible luxury, but I bought myself the Infiray Gemini multi-spectral thermal-imaging binoculars from Scott Country. Before Scott moved to ecommerce, its shop was a firm favourite of mine, a mere eight miles from the remote moors where I grew up.

Admittedly, the Geminis are more of an investment than my pocket money purchases of 20 years ago, but my gosh they are worth it. My eyes no longer get

“Thermals are the difference between a blank day and a riotous success”

parameters of their use. I began to find that on occasion it would let me down if scoping a distant hillside or in horrible down-the-back-of-your-neck sort of rain.

The thermal optics game is an expensive one and evolves apace, but I was hard pushed to justify an upgrade. However, my grandmother is endlessly trying to dish out her cash to her grandchildren but likes it to be on something worthy. Thus, when I had dropped enough hints, she offered to

tired, it has a rangefinder and a detection range of over 2.5km — it's sensitive enough to pick up a chilly shrew on the horizon. There are so many bells and whistles that I am still learning how best to deploy them and the scalpel-sharp image almost brings me to tears. If you're dilly-dallying over an upgrade and you can afford it, go for it. 🐾

➔ For more thermal-imaging options, visit scottcountry.co.uk

🔗 **Felix Petit** is a conservation and fieldsports enthusiast who grew up in the wilds of Galloway. He recently left The Household Cavalry

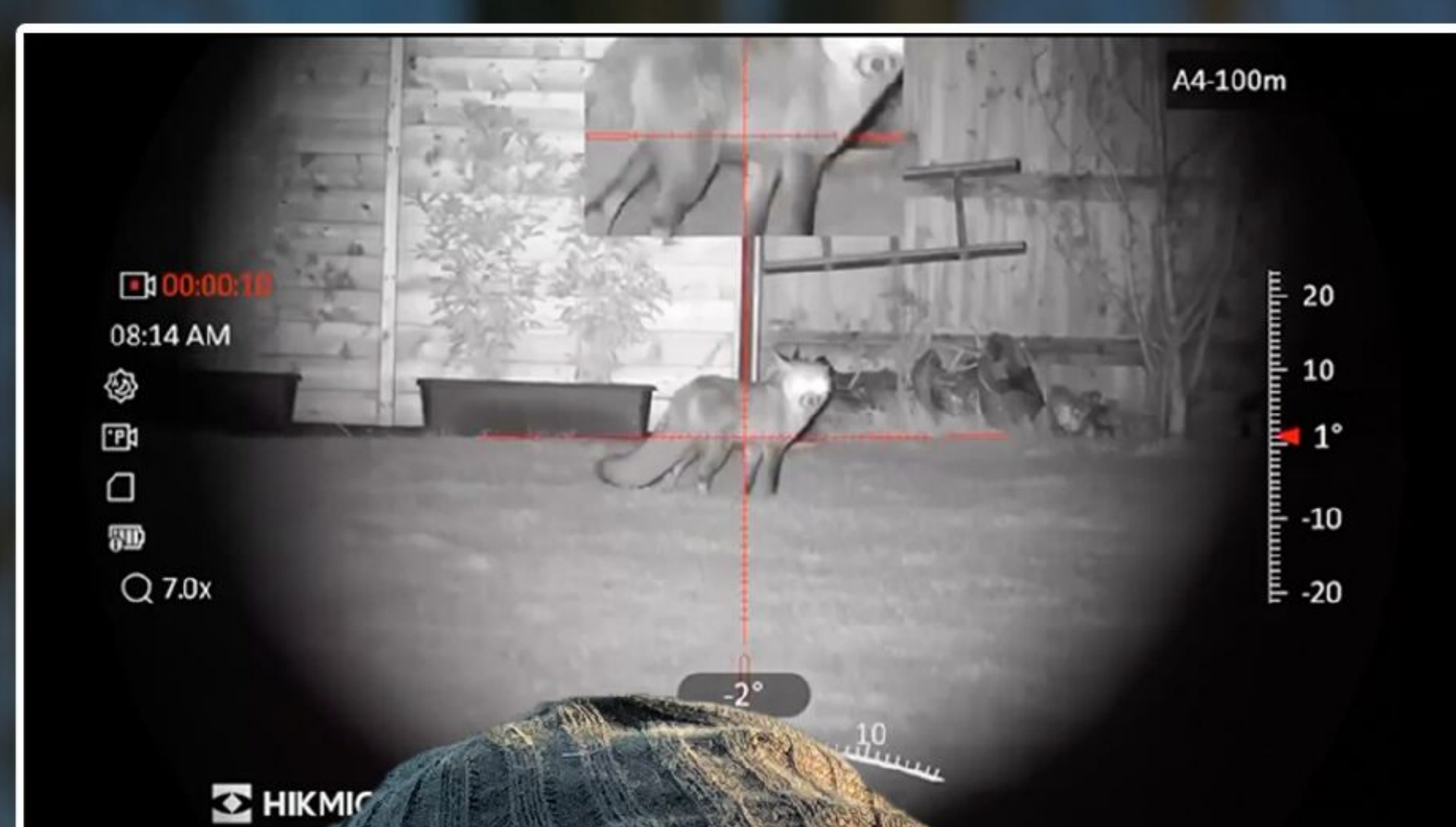


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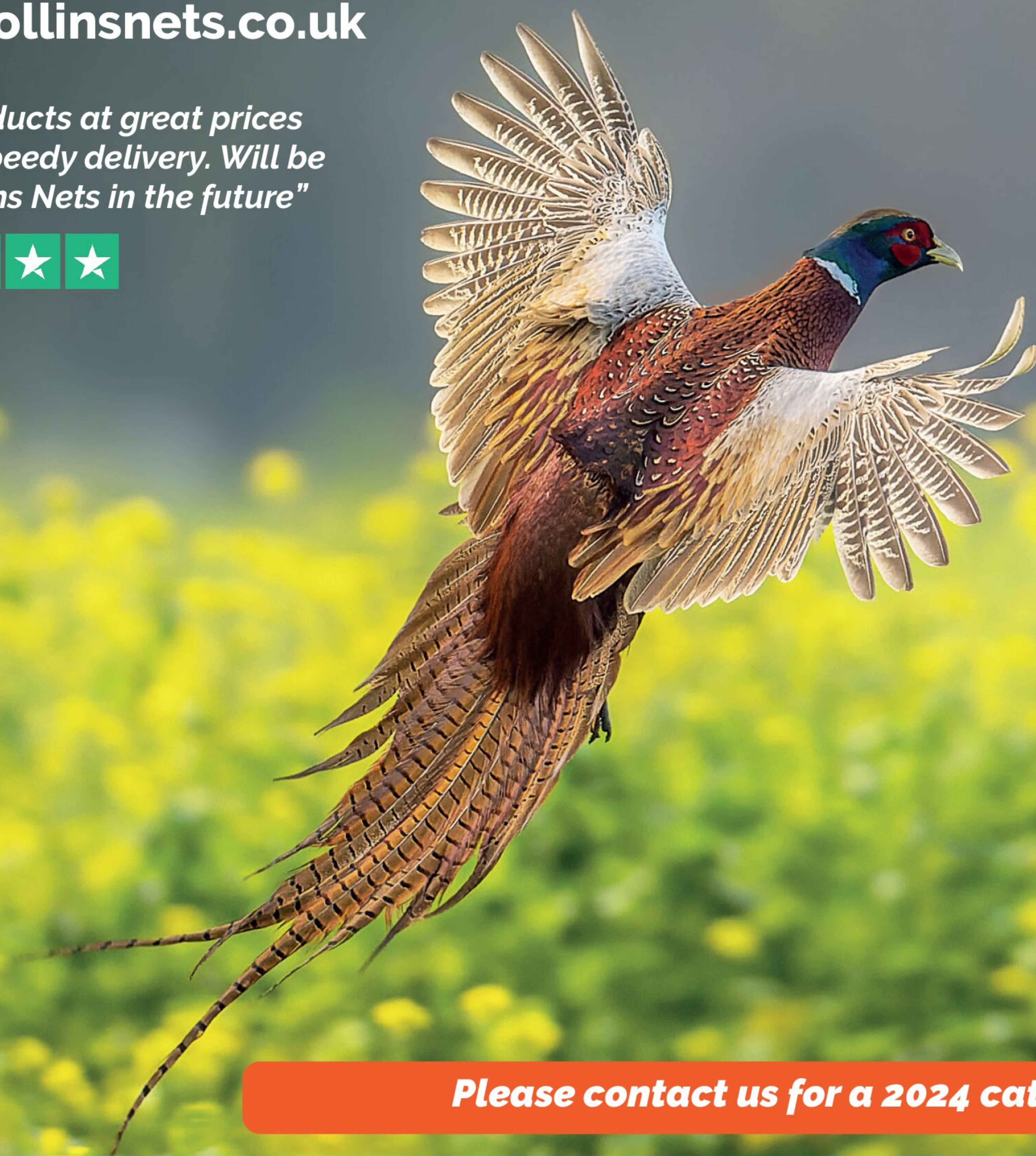


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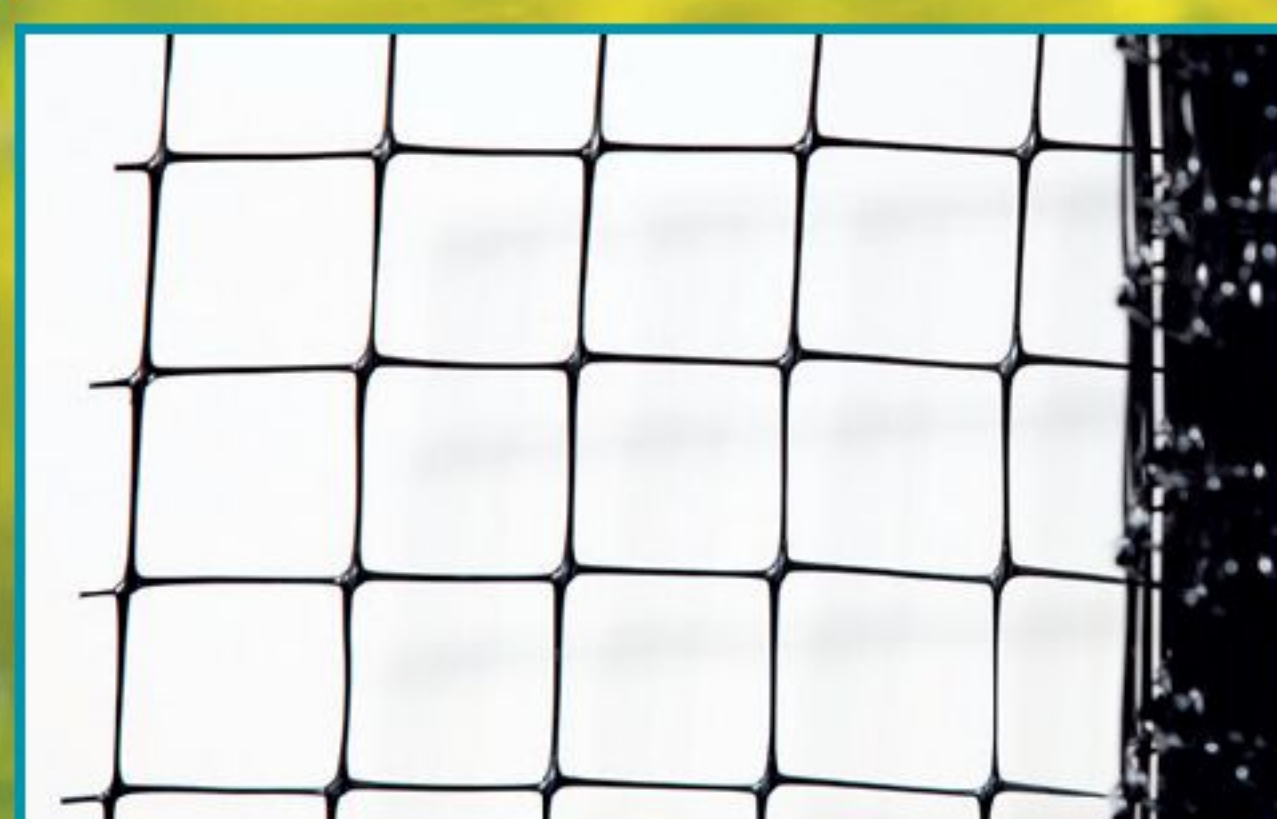
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Colossal offensives

Carrion crows will attack ewes and take lambs, as well as plunder the eggs and young of any bird so there must be no mercy, says David Imrie

On a Saturday evening the Keswick wildfowlers' club had their first offensive of the year against carrion crows in the Derwentwater area. This time there was a notable difference. The lake was frozen on that occasion to a depth of 14in; so the Guns who went to the islands of St Herbert's and Rampsholme were able to walk to their stands. The weather was calm with a clear sky, not the best conditions for defeating a wily enemy and, although the size of the bag is unknown to me at the moment, I estimate that it is rather small.

There were hundreds of carrions as usual, but they simply refused to cooperate. And one factor was in their favour. No stands were occupied in our main covert, owing to the presence of herons at their nesting sites. We did not wish to disturb them.

According to one wildfowler – who placed himself to intercept the homing crows on the roadway at the north end of Catbells, which is probably 100ft above the lake – the black hordes took evasive action almost immediately. After the first volleys from the islands they dodged away, instead of attempting again and again to reach their roosting quarters as was their custom in former years.

He saw them settle, one flock after another, on the fellside nearby, croaking vociferously at a fully

recognised, though unseen, danger. Then in the gathering darkness they went high and higher on the treeless fell and finally vanished in the direction of Borrowdale. No doubt they would seek roosts in the National Trust properties of Brandlehow or Manesty, but no Guns were waiting there for them.

Ideal roosting

Usually those wildfowlers on the islands can guarantee to get a shot or two at incoming cormorants; but the lake being a sheet of ice, they were totally absent. They generally favour Rampsholme, because a fallen tree

propped up over the water provided them with ideal roosting.

Probably they had gone during this severe weather to the sea to join the swans. A few weeks ago I saw whoopers fly over the valley on their way to the coast. They remained until they could remain no longer, and I assume that their last days here must have been spent near the river outlet.

Ducks, snipe and woodcock have fared badly. The chap who had been doing ice patrol on Derwentwater on behalf of the Council for several weeks told me he had seen mallard in Cockshot Wood, searching for anything edible on the barer ground.



"The club had their first offensive of the year against carrion crows in the Derwentwater area"



“Complaints had been made by a farmer, pestered by carrion crows among his lambing ewes”

Most of them flew off at his approach, but odd ones had been unable to fly. And he had picked up a few dead. I have not found any mallard casualties, but I have flushed a considerable number from ditches under trees, the only softish places in a frozen landscape.

Newborn lambs

Since the first attempts were made about a decade ago to reduce those lakeside crows the organisation has shifted from the Ministry of Agriculture to the wildfowlers. In fact, the original attack was made by a team headed by a pests officer following a complaint by a farmer, who had apparently been pestered by carrion among his lambing ewes and newly born lambs.

Half-price cartridges were available then, and there can be no doubt that this concession induced Guns to turn up who would not otherwise have done so. Even so,

“Lapwings hardly have a chance to rear a family”

flockmasters were conspicuous by their absence. They ignored requests to attend a shoot that was designed to benefit them exclusively, although game derived an indirect advantage also.

When the cheap cartridges faded away, many of the more tepid Guns faded with them, until only the genuine sportsmen were left. They

were prepared to destroy crows gratis because they were fond of shooting.

Then the wildfowling club was formed and established in the district a hard core of Guns who were willing to organise everything themselves, without worrying whether farmers blessed their activities or not. And the farmers have allowed them to carry on. Two days ago I mentioned the shoot to one who lives within sight of the lake. He had no idea that anything of the sort had taken place.

Although I have hinted that this Saturday’s bag was probably rather

small, our earnest crow shoots produced three-figure bags several times. Those were colossal offensives. I shot then either on St Herbert’s Island or on our own shore and the flocks of carrions had to be seen to be believed. They tried to reach their customary roosts among the island hardwoods repeatedly until it became too dark to shoot. On our shore the situation was similar. And the racket of the birds was tremendous.

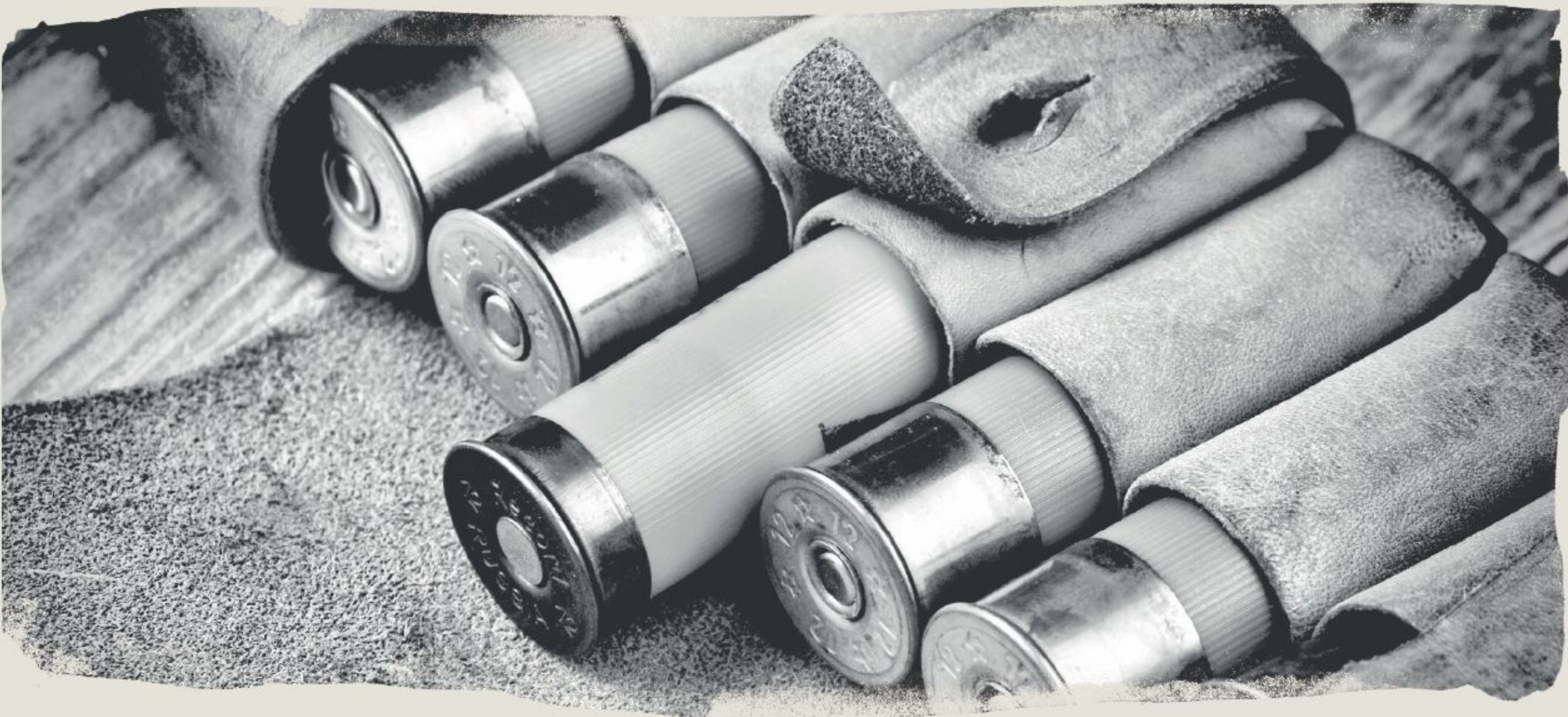
Intense

One island incident remains with me vividly. I was with Dan Foster, the area pests officer, behind a curtain of evergreens that had a gap in it big enough for shooting but not big enough to allow the crows to see us easily. Among the stones at the water edge were several dead birds and the sight of them roused the incomers to a frenzy of excitement so intense that they paid no attention to my shooting. I fired barrel after barrel while Dan blew his hardest on a metal call to keep the excitement going. I stopped only when I had shot off every cartridge in my possession. That was my hottest stand ever among the corvids.

This illustrates one important point, that carrion crows are less frightened by the sound of ➡



“Those wildfowlers on the islands can guarantee to get a shot or two at incoming cormorants”



“When the half-price cartridges faded away, many of the more tepid Guns faded with them”

shooting than they are at the sight of the shooter. So during those offensives you must take cover. There is a tendency among inexperienced Guns to imagine that they may stand with impunity at the fringe of a cover as night begins to fall, so they may be able to spot their targets in good time; but they can be assured that they will be seen first. And although they will try to make the best of a bad job by firing long shots, they will do no good whatever.

Anyone who has seen the astonishing number of carrion which can collect at a winter roost is apt to wonder what the effect on feathered wildlife would be if those nuisances could be wiped out drastically, for they will pillage any nest. I have

found sucked eggs of herons and sparrowhawks, proof that even those tough birds could not guard their property from the artful dodgers.

They have a diabolical technique. One or more carrion crow will fluster a hen from her eggs or young, then keep her occupied while another swoops in for booty. Lapwings in the open fields have hardly a chance to rear a family and it may be that corvine depredations are responsible for the virtual extinction of landrails.

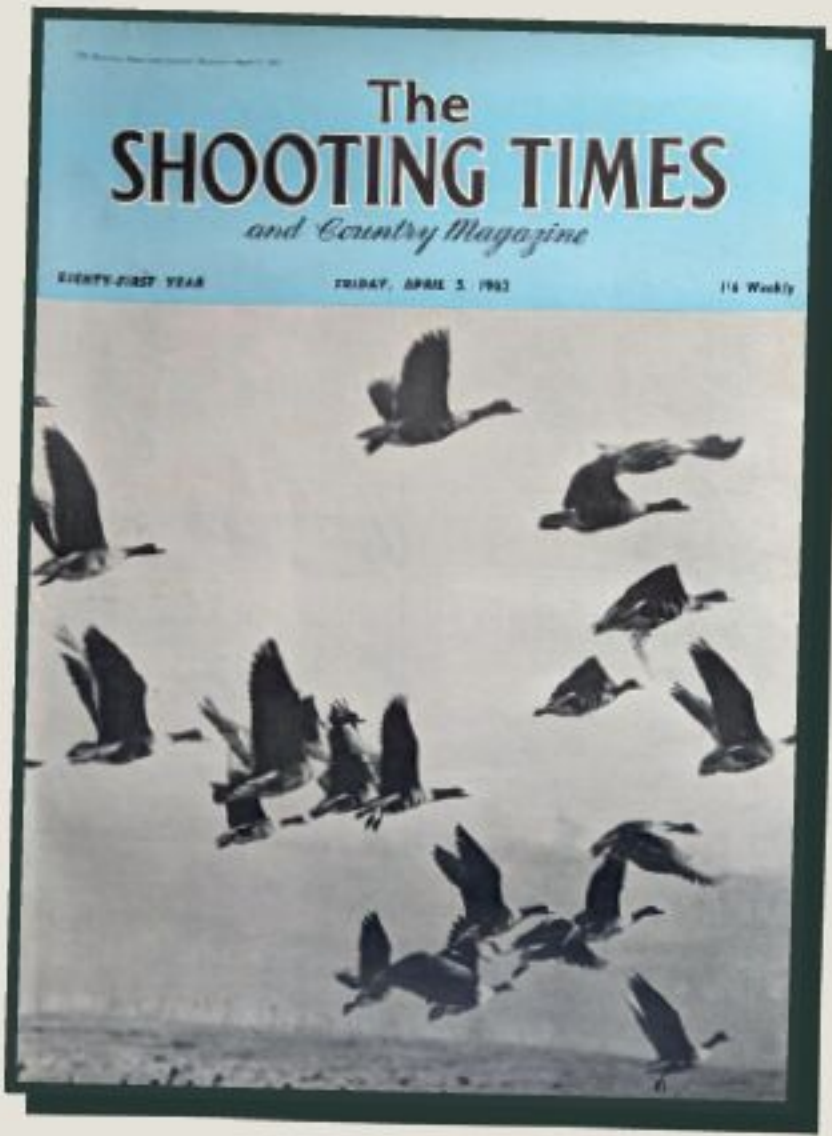
In the days of intensive game preservation, thousands of carrion crows were trapped by keepers every spring. Thousands more were shot at their nests and a certain number

were surreptitiously poisoned, often with a preparation manufactured for rats, which was deadly. In the remoter past, strychnine was laid freely on flesh, when that drug could be bought easily. Nowadays, adverse legislation hampers the keeper and helps the carrion in its work of destruction.

Someone may suggest that cage traps can still be set legally. That is quite true. But are they of much value in this case? I have kept them in action for weeks and weeks in severe weather without catching a single crow. Therefore I always feel rather doubtful of enthusiastic claims that boost their efficiency.

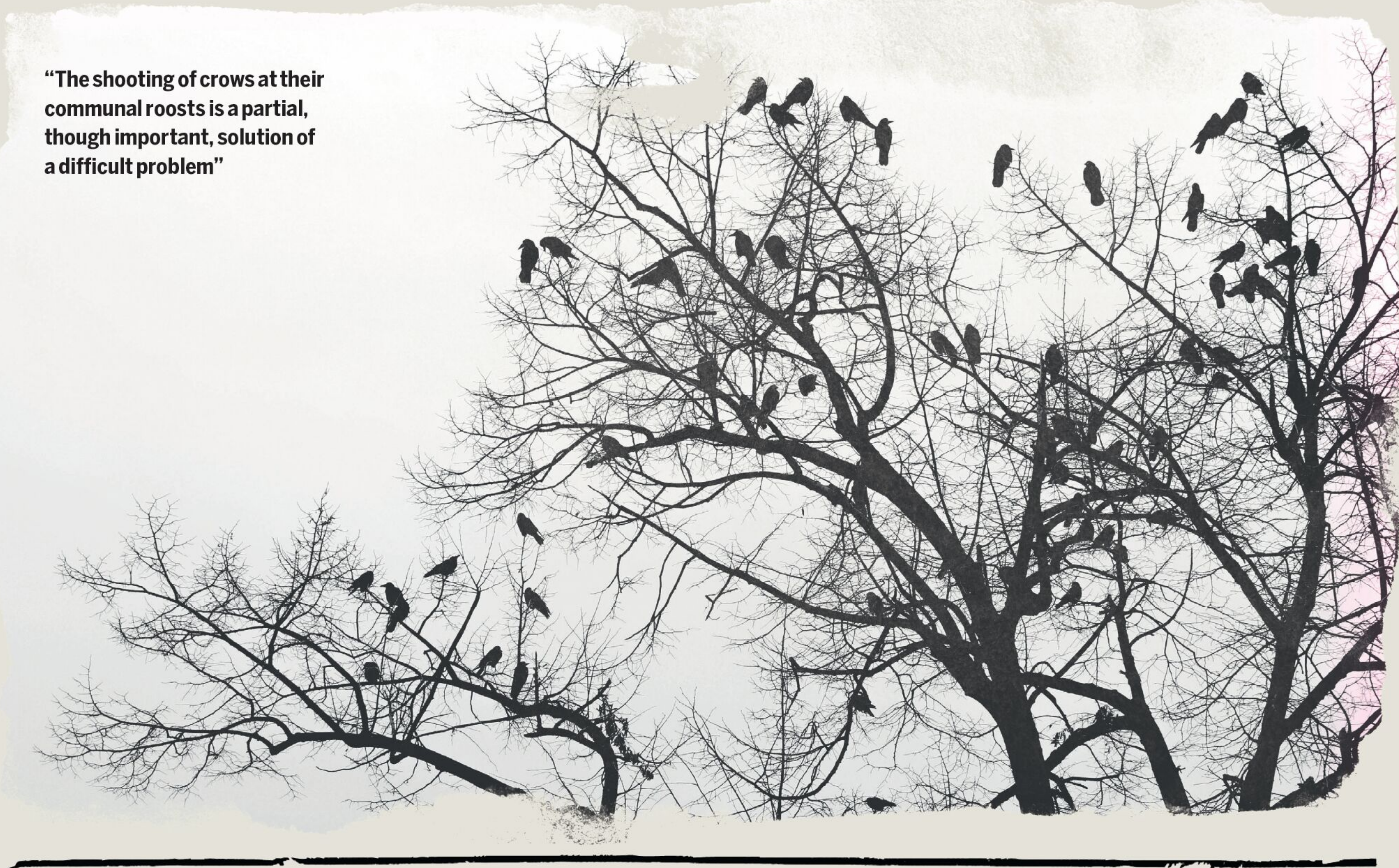
As things are, the shooting of crows at their communal roosts in mid-winter is a partial, though important, solution of a difficult problem. And every flockmaster, game preserver and ornithologist ought to be thankful that there are

men who are willing to spend time and money on a minor sport which, incidentally, helps to rid the countryside of a cunning pest. 🐦



➔ This article was first published in the 5 April 1963 issue of Shooting Times.

“The shooting of crows at their communal roosts is a partial, though important, solution of a difficult problem”



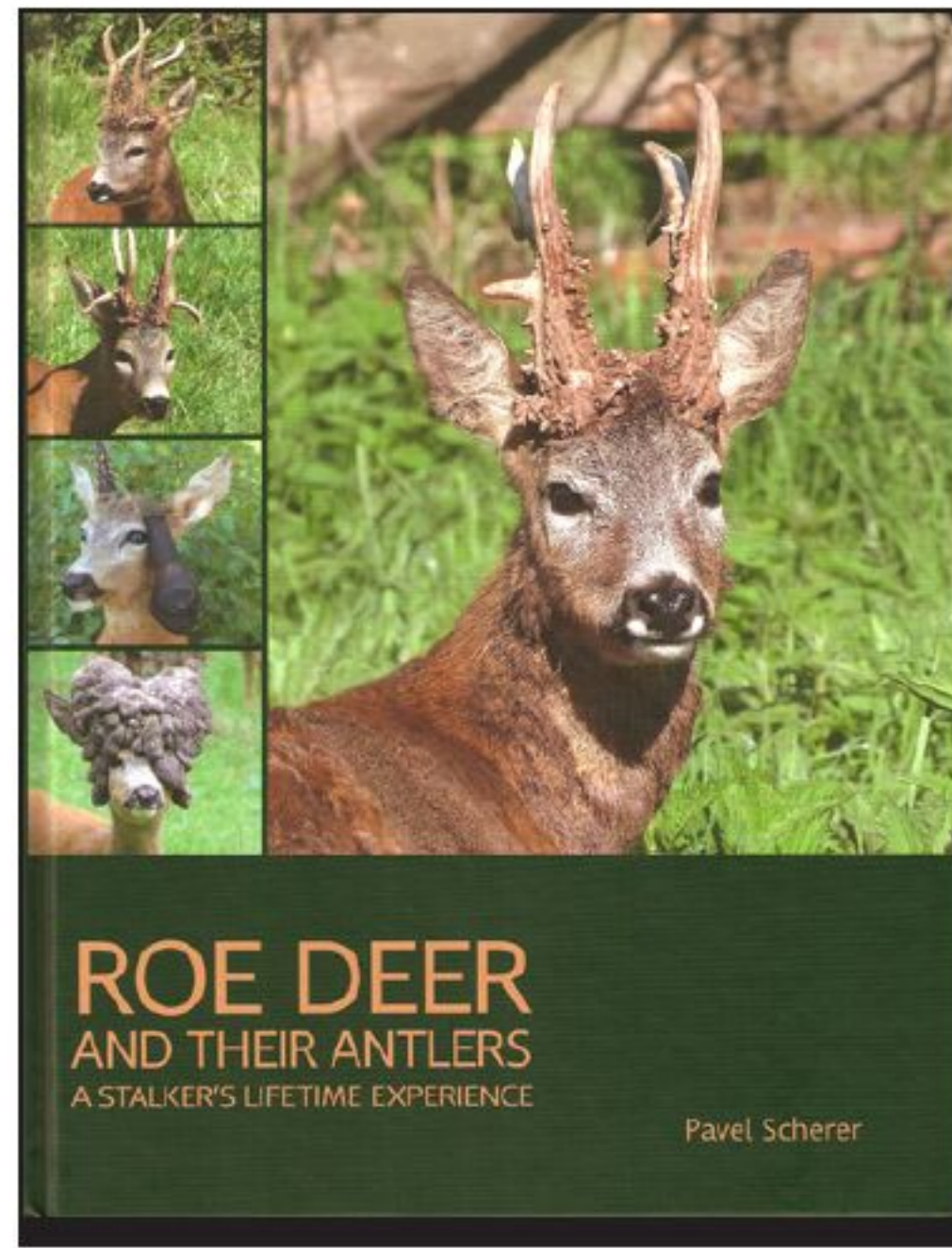
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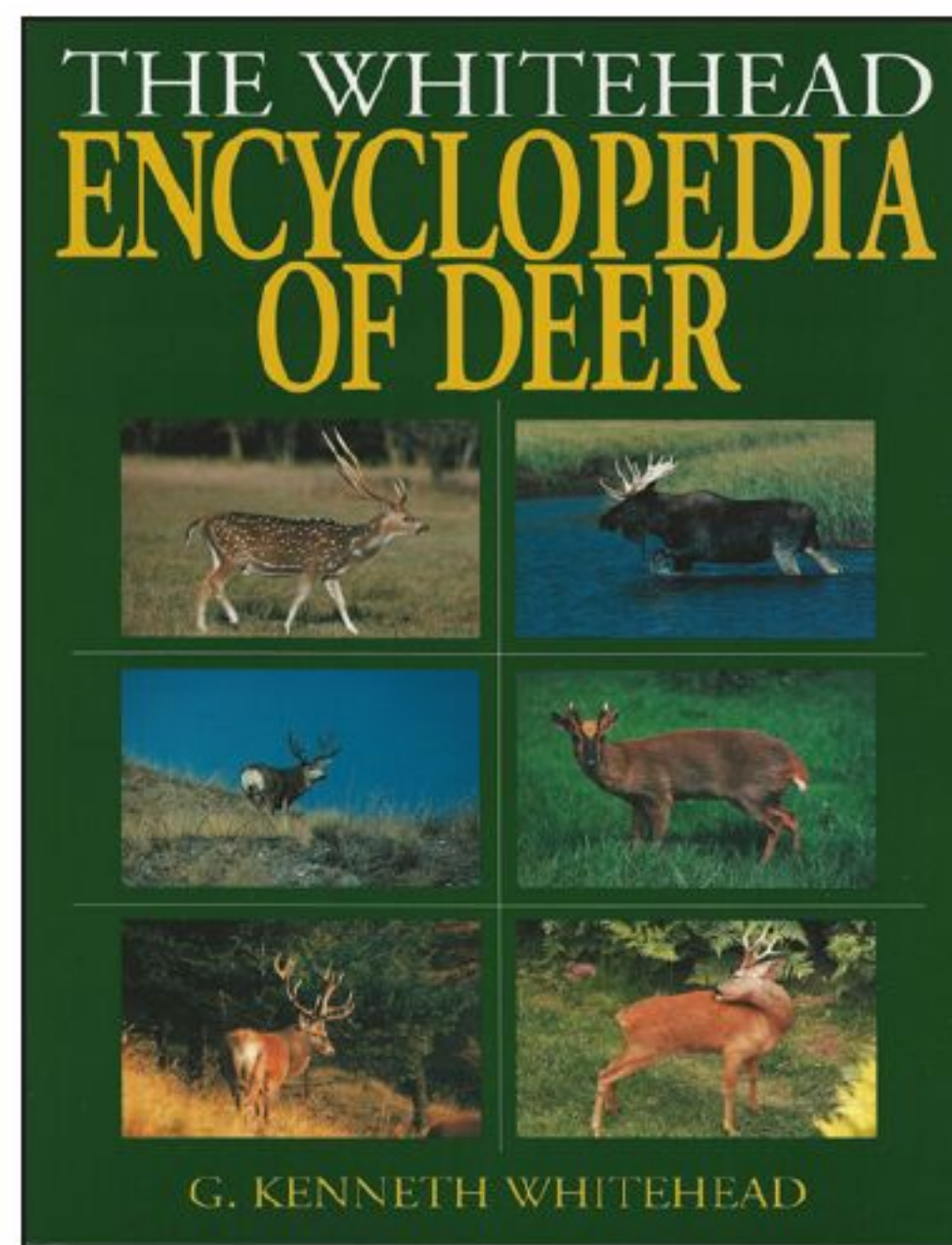
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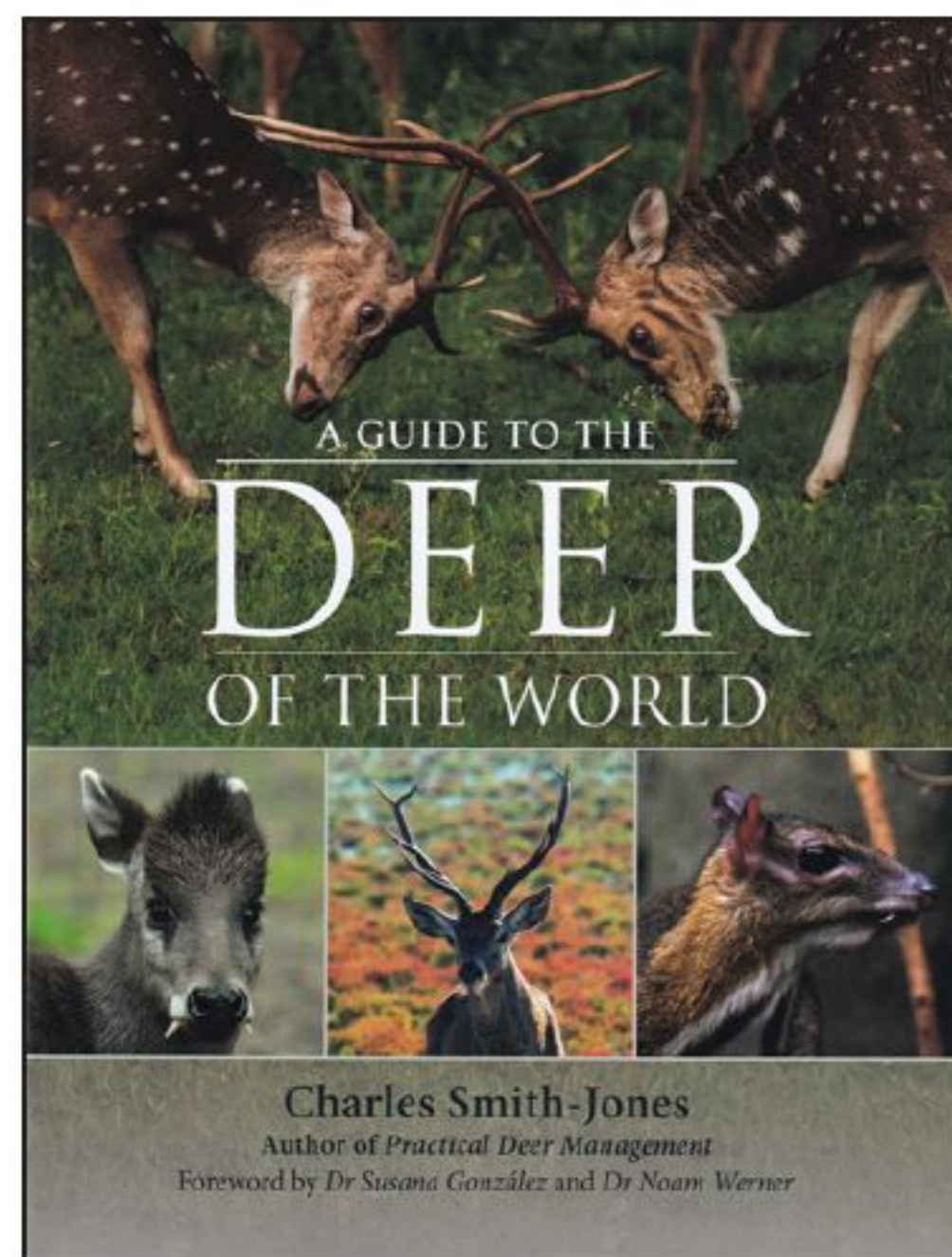
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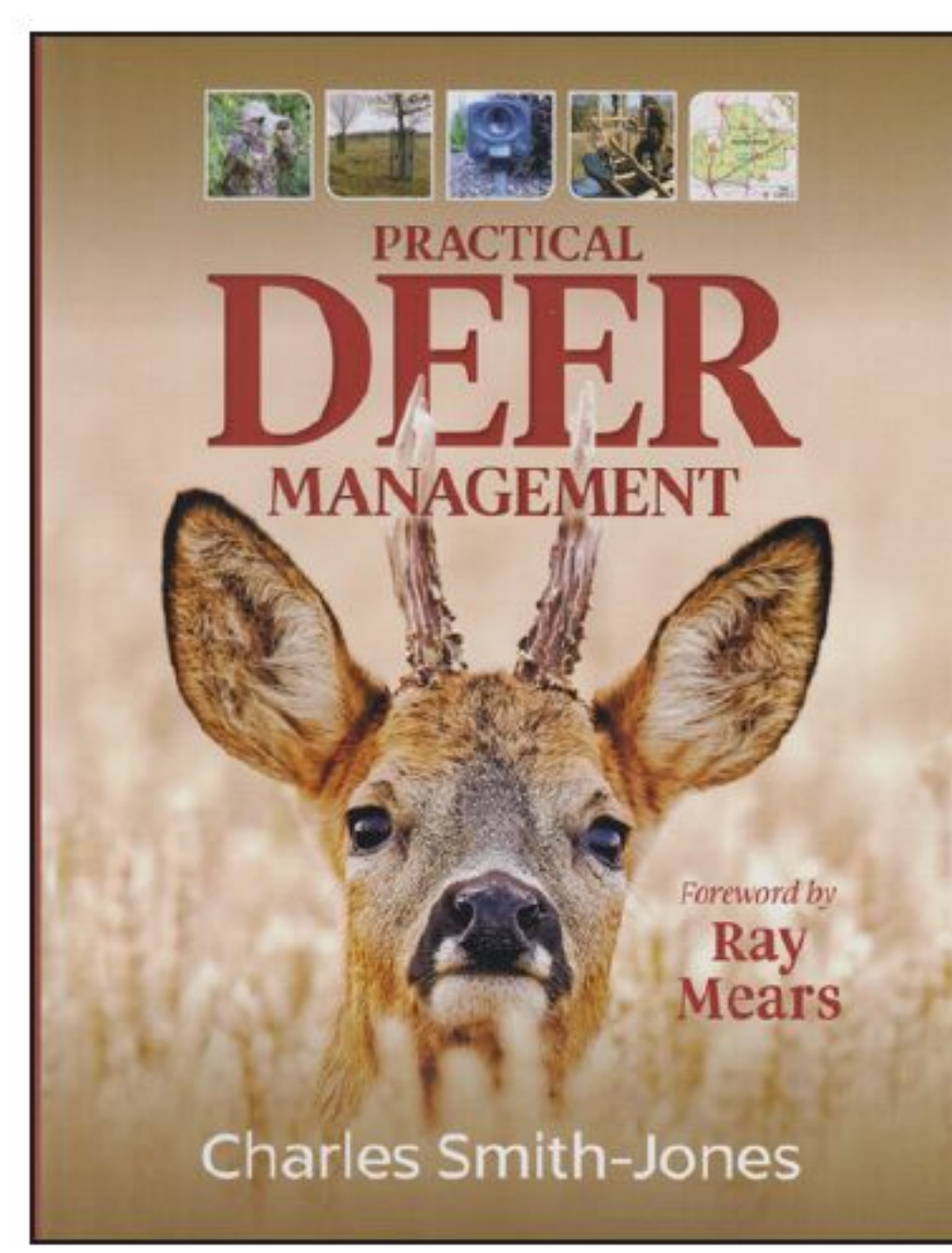
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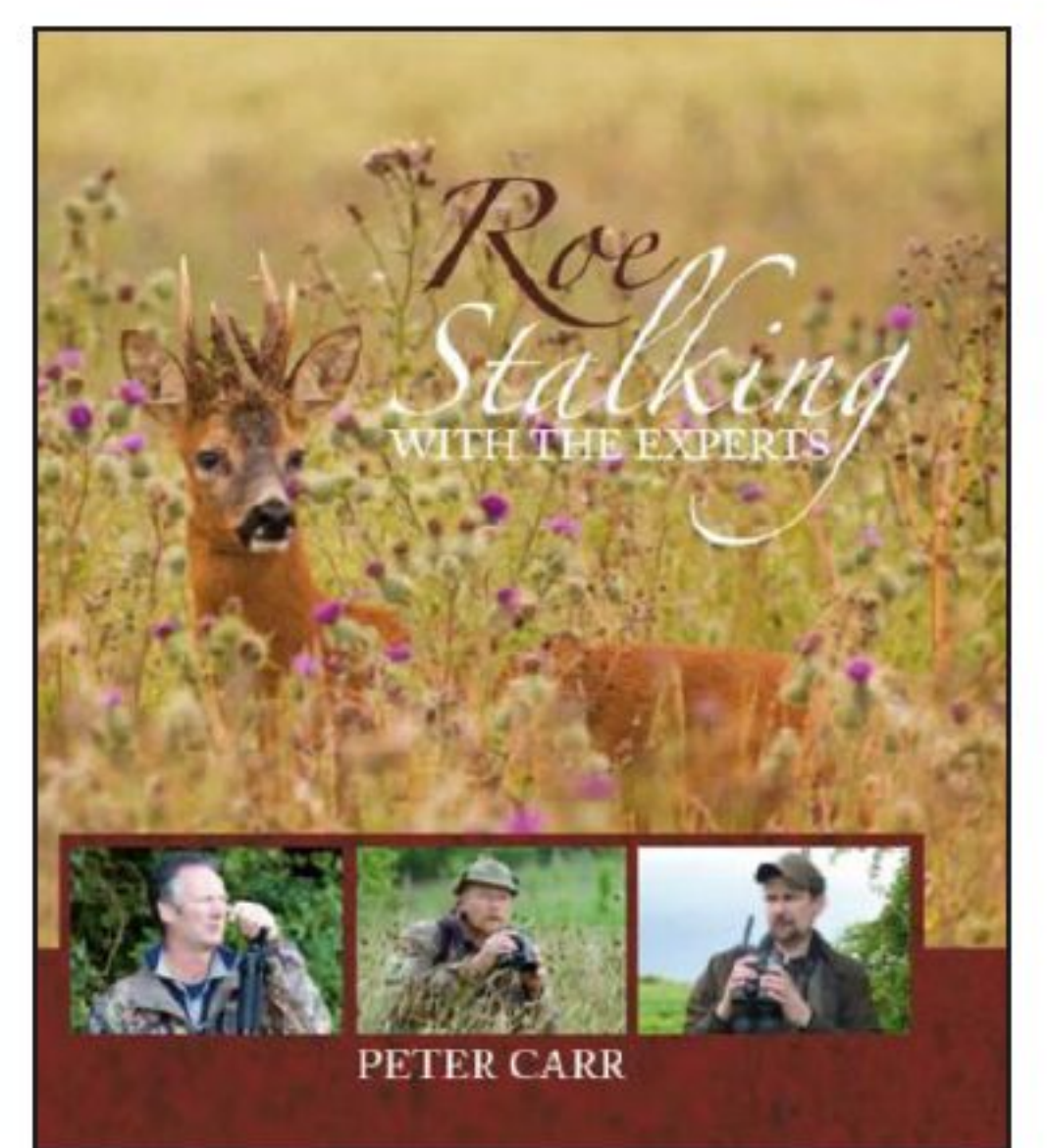
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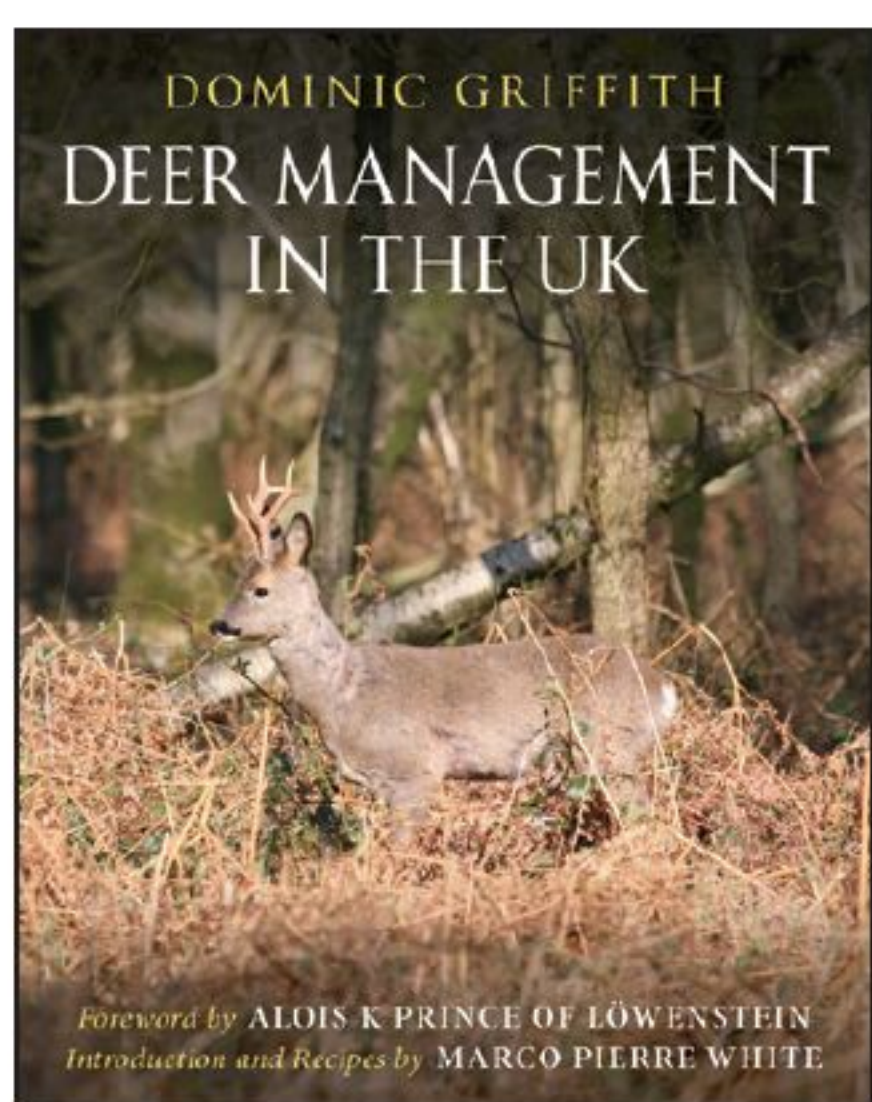
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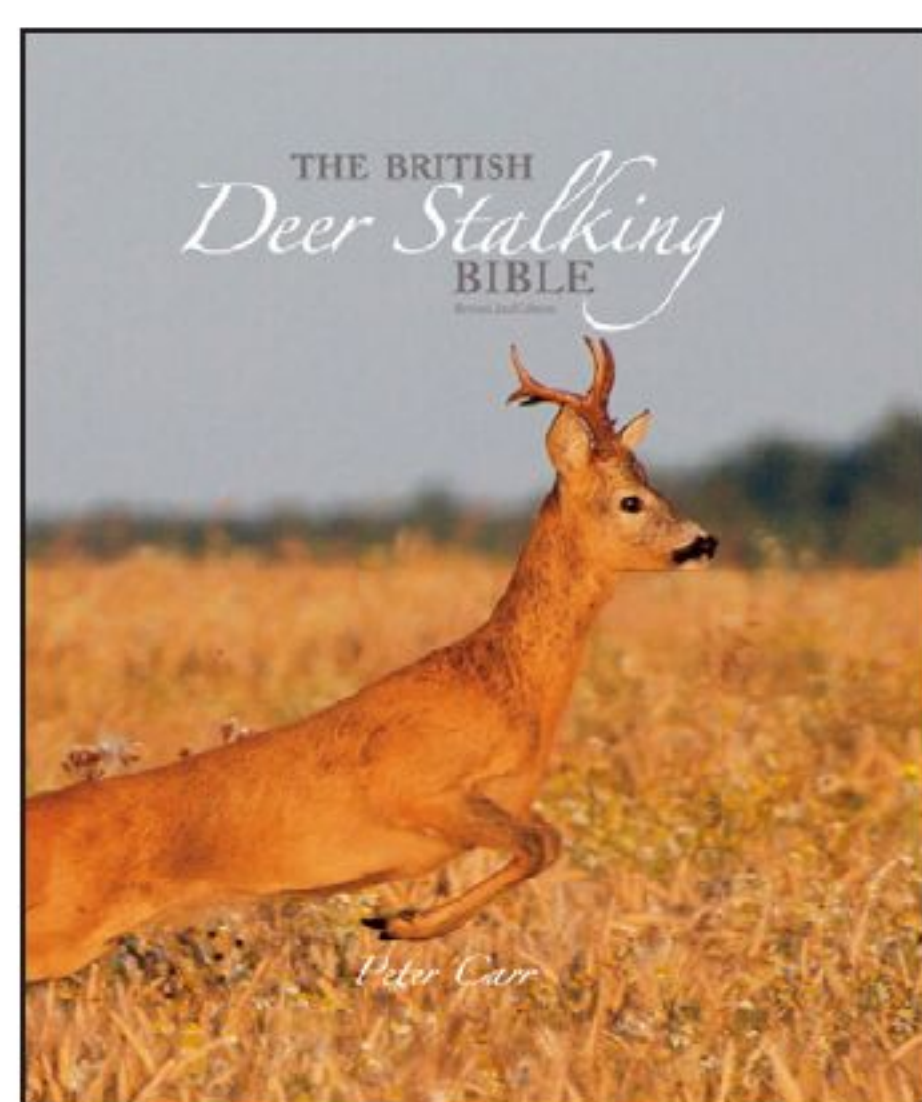
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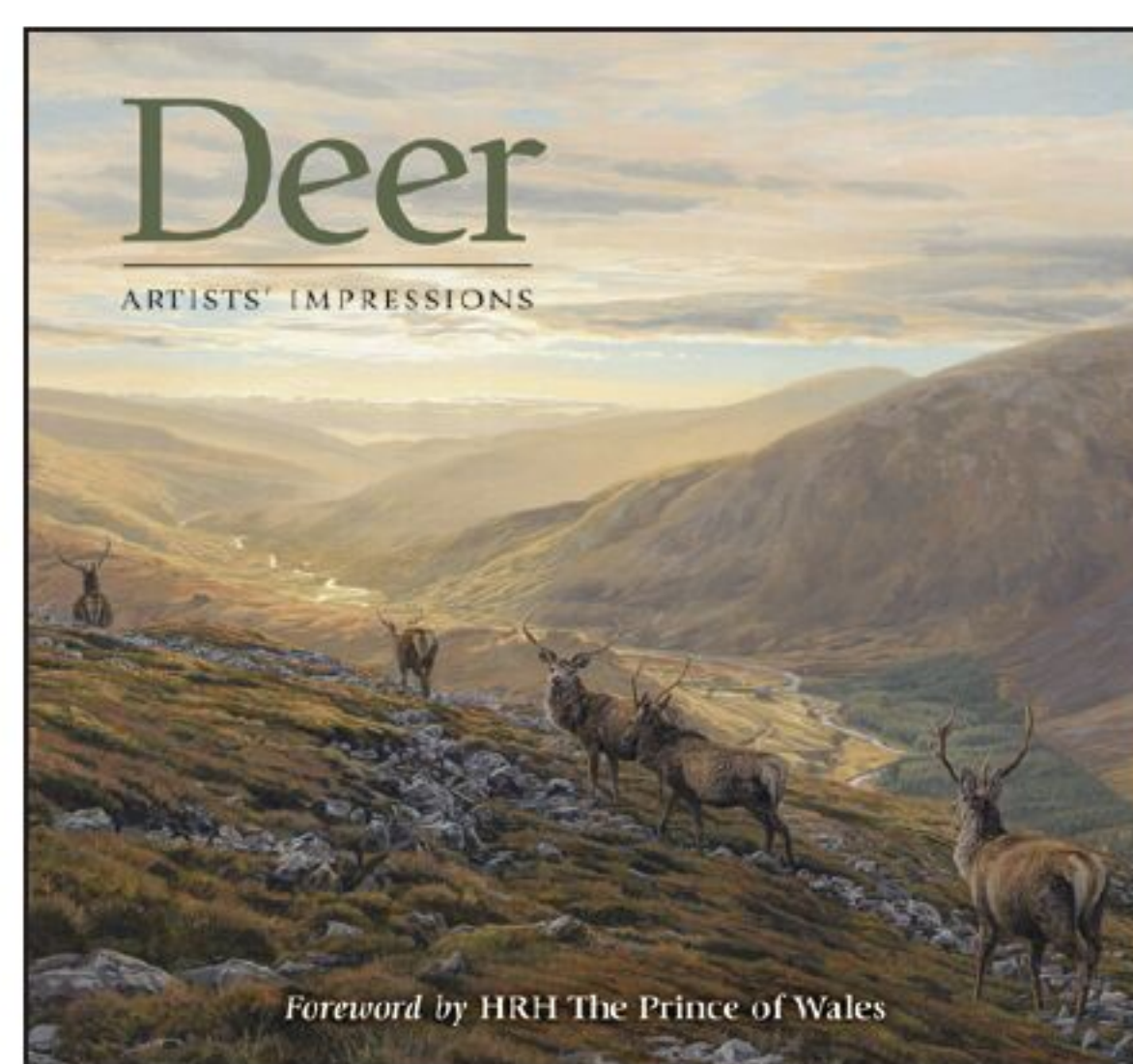
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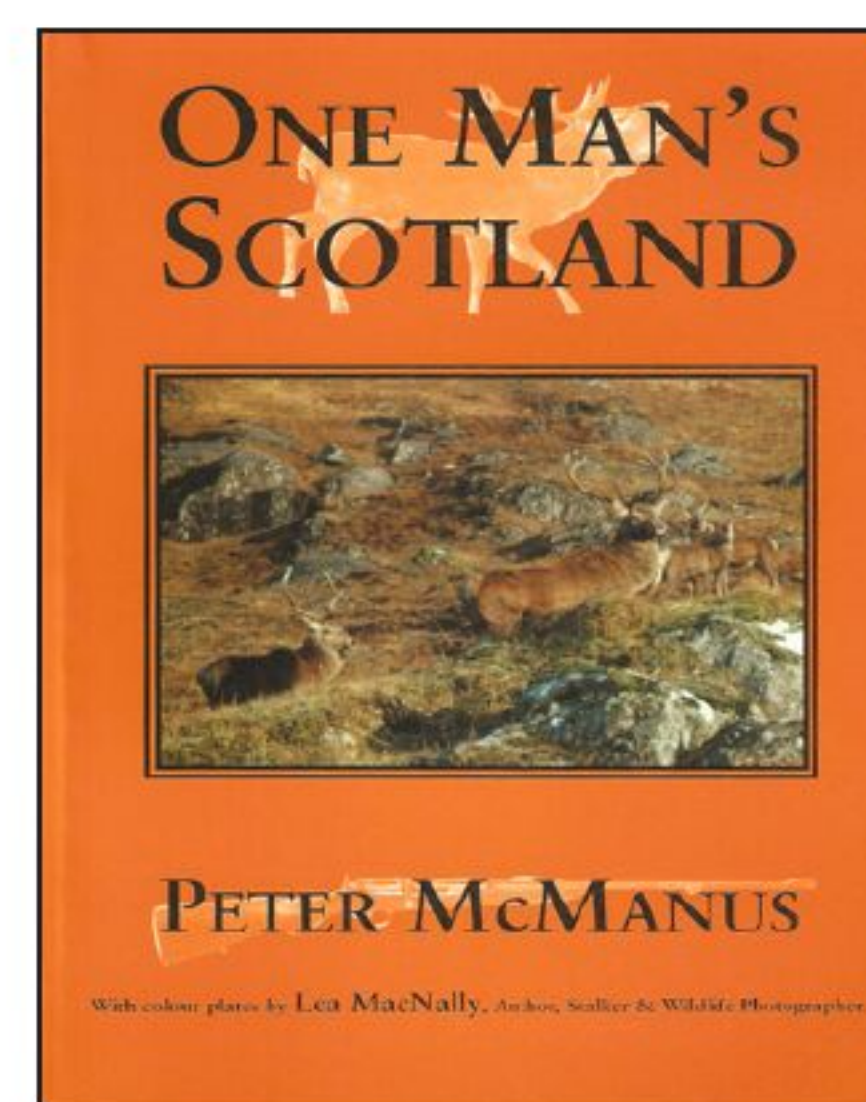
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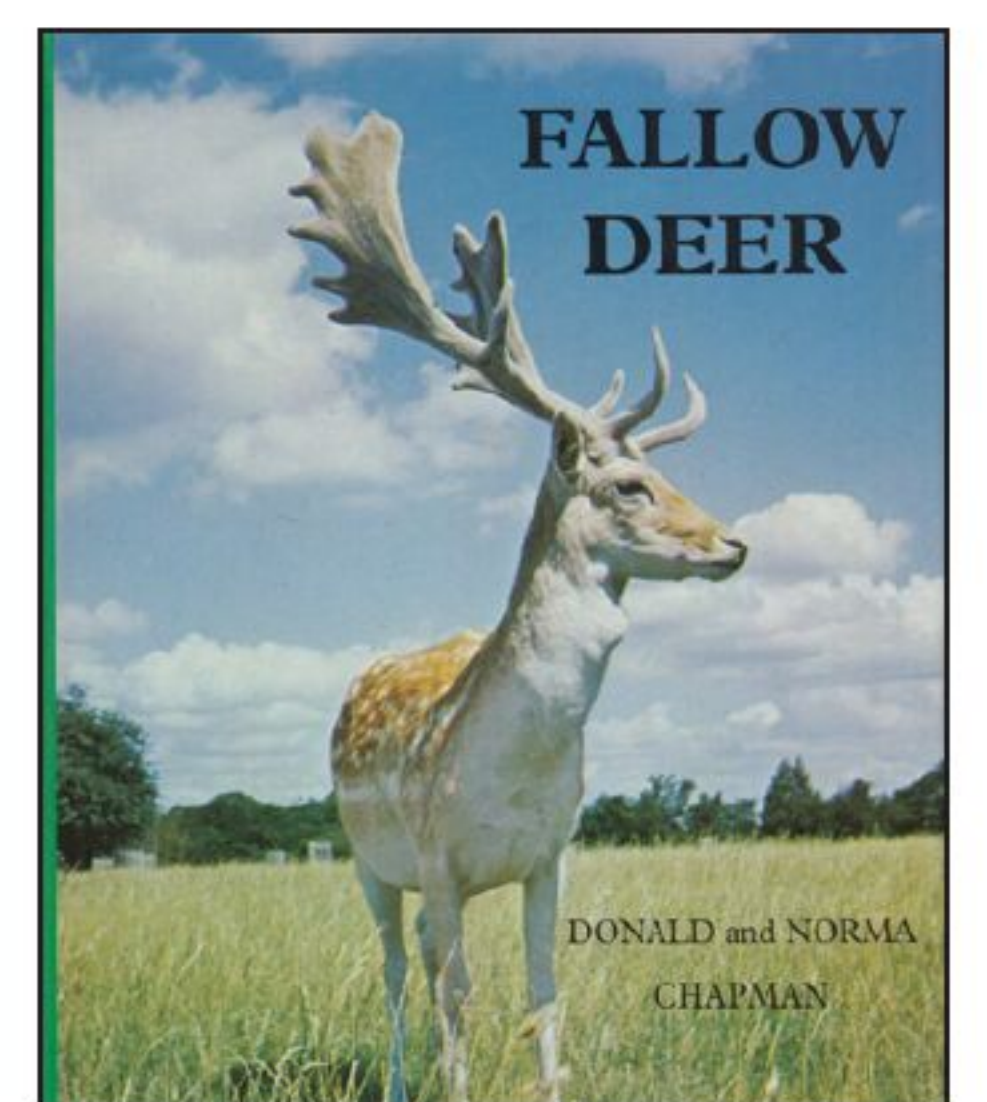
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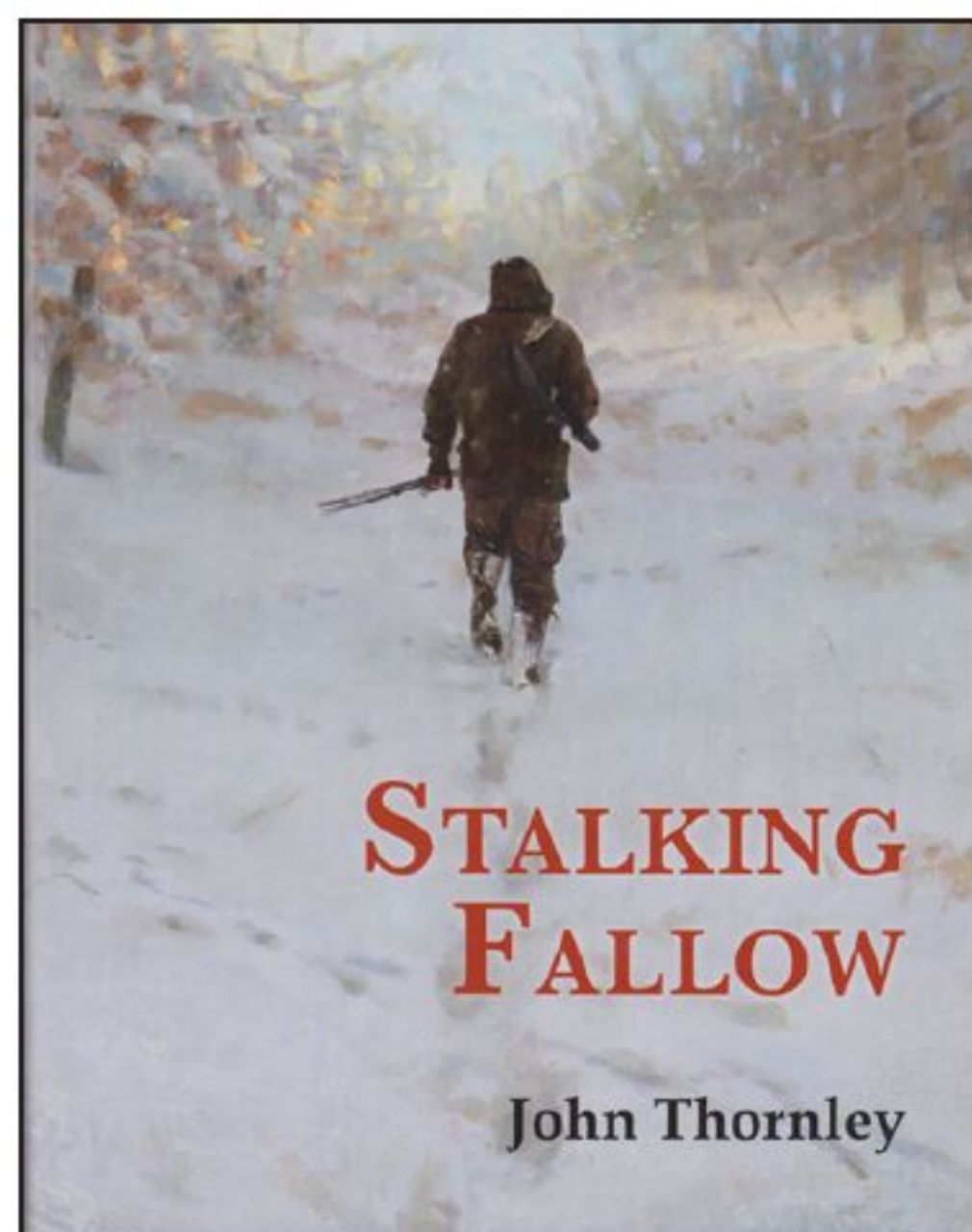
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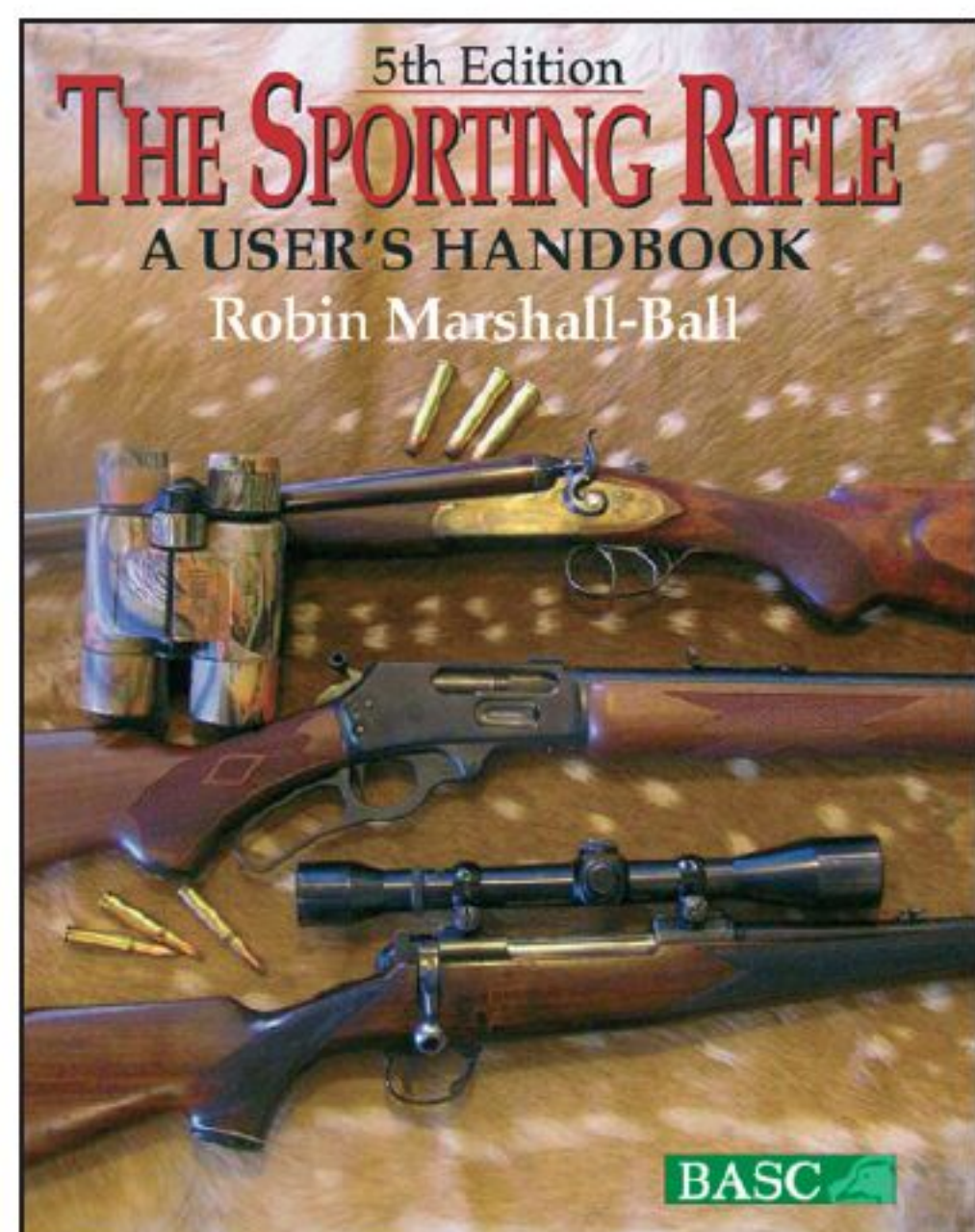
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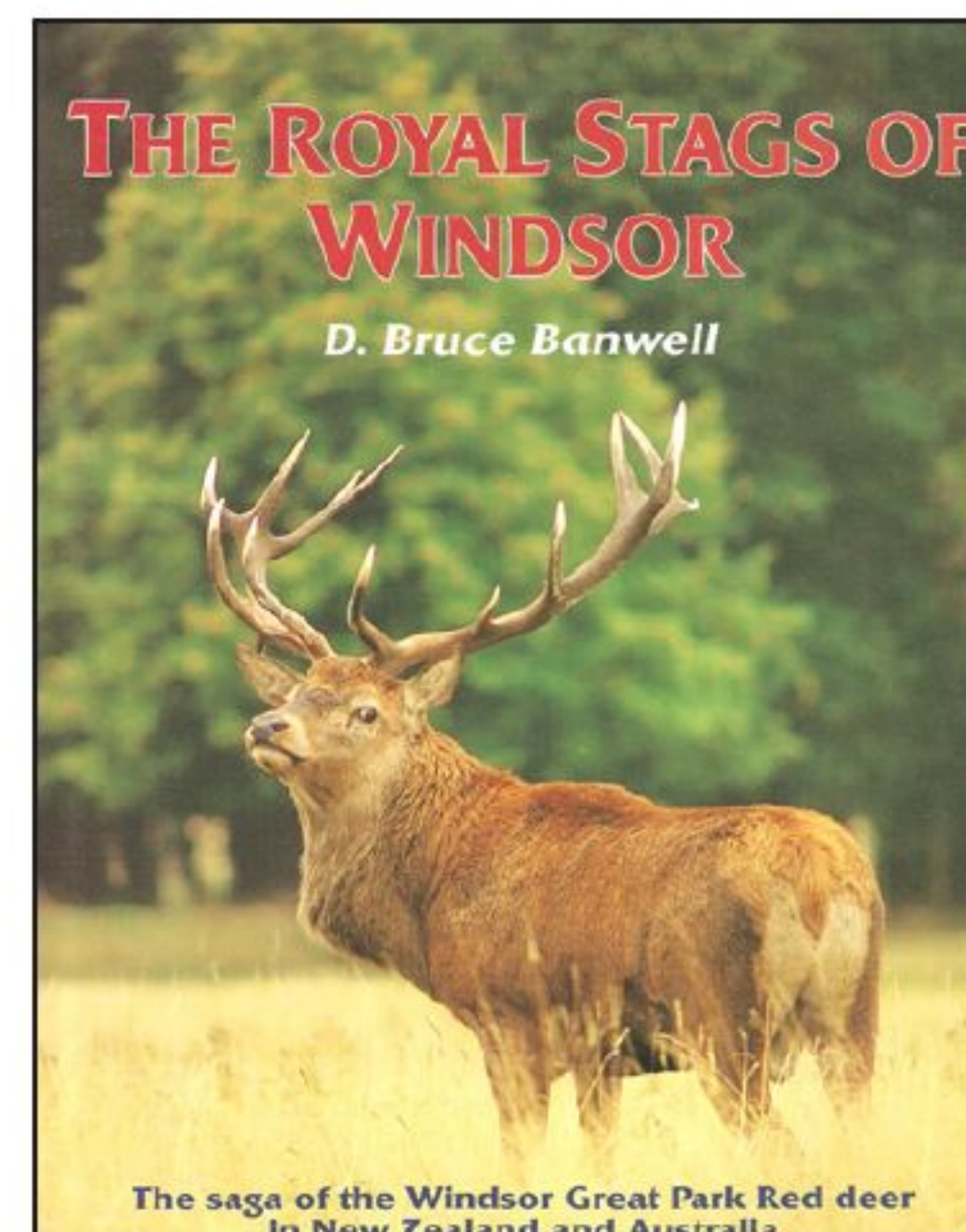
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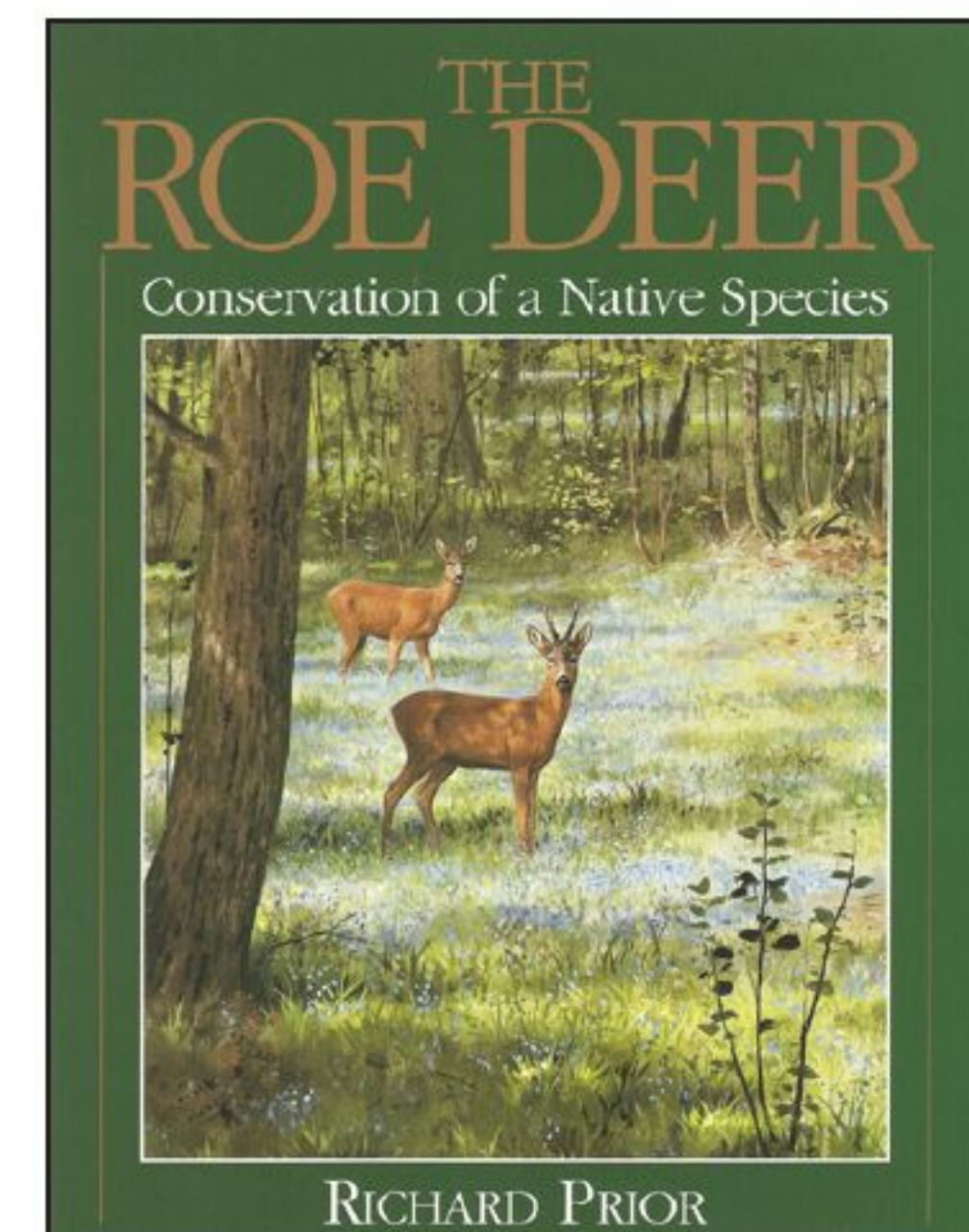
Hbk. £25.00 £12.50



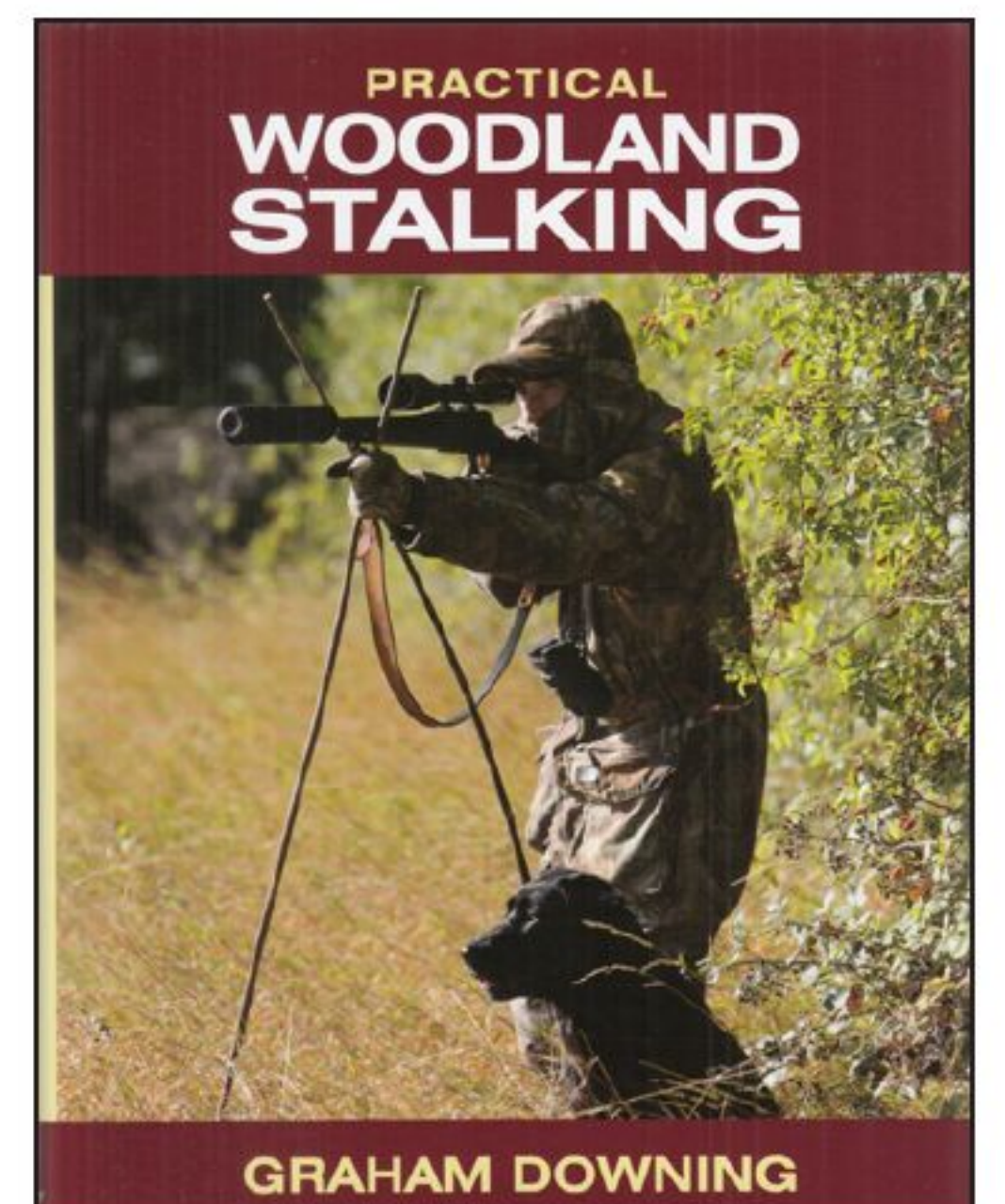
Hbk. £25.00 £7.95



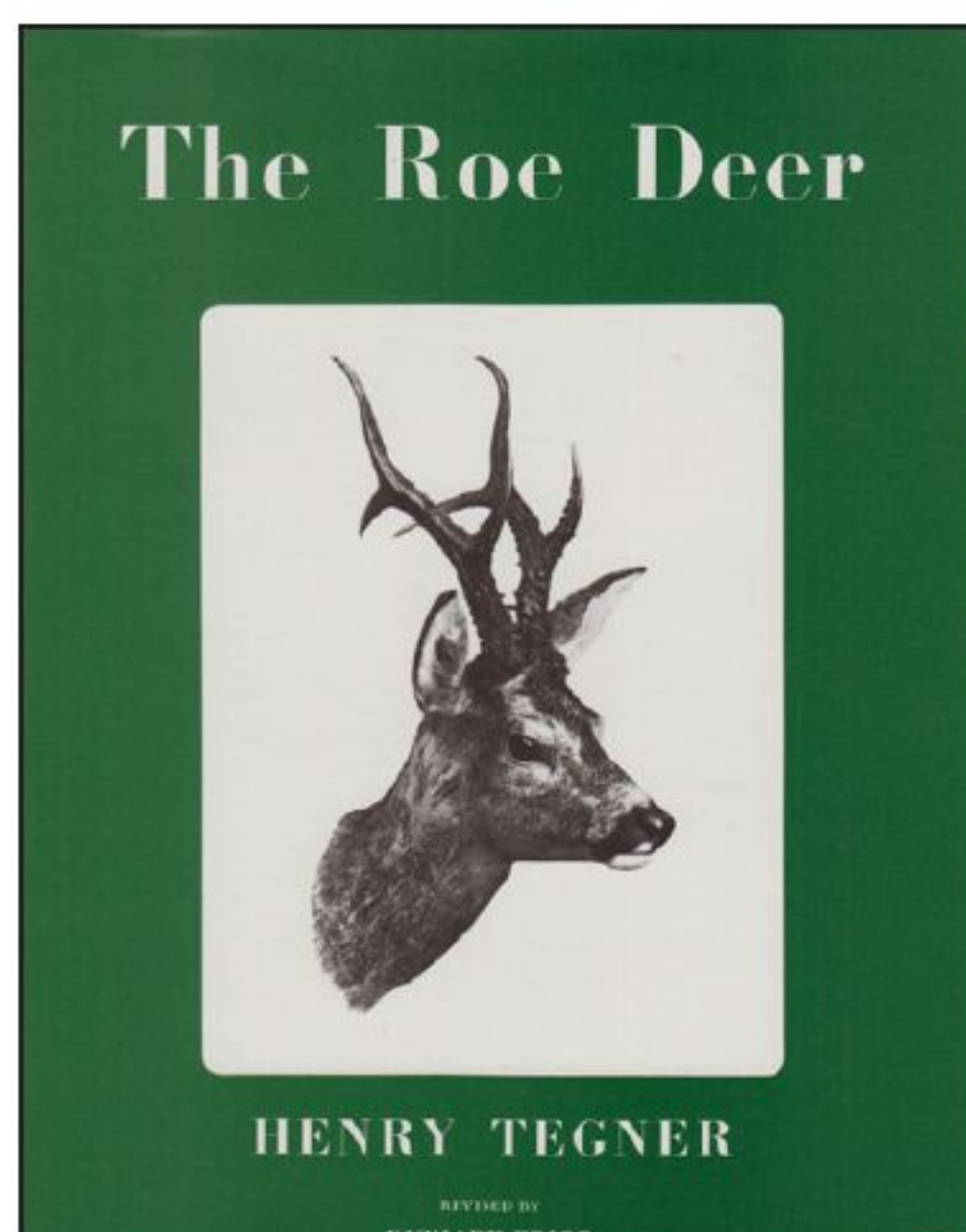
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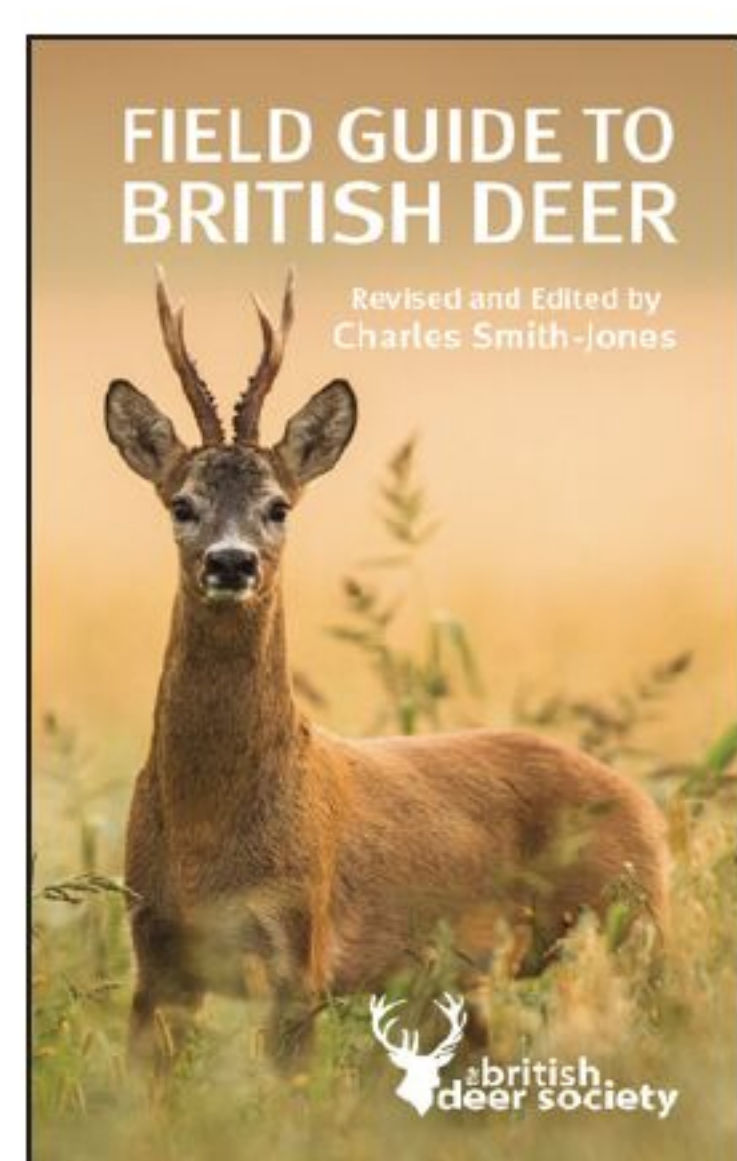
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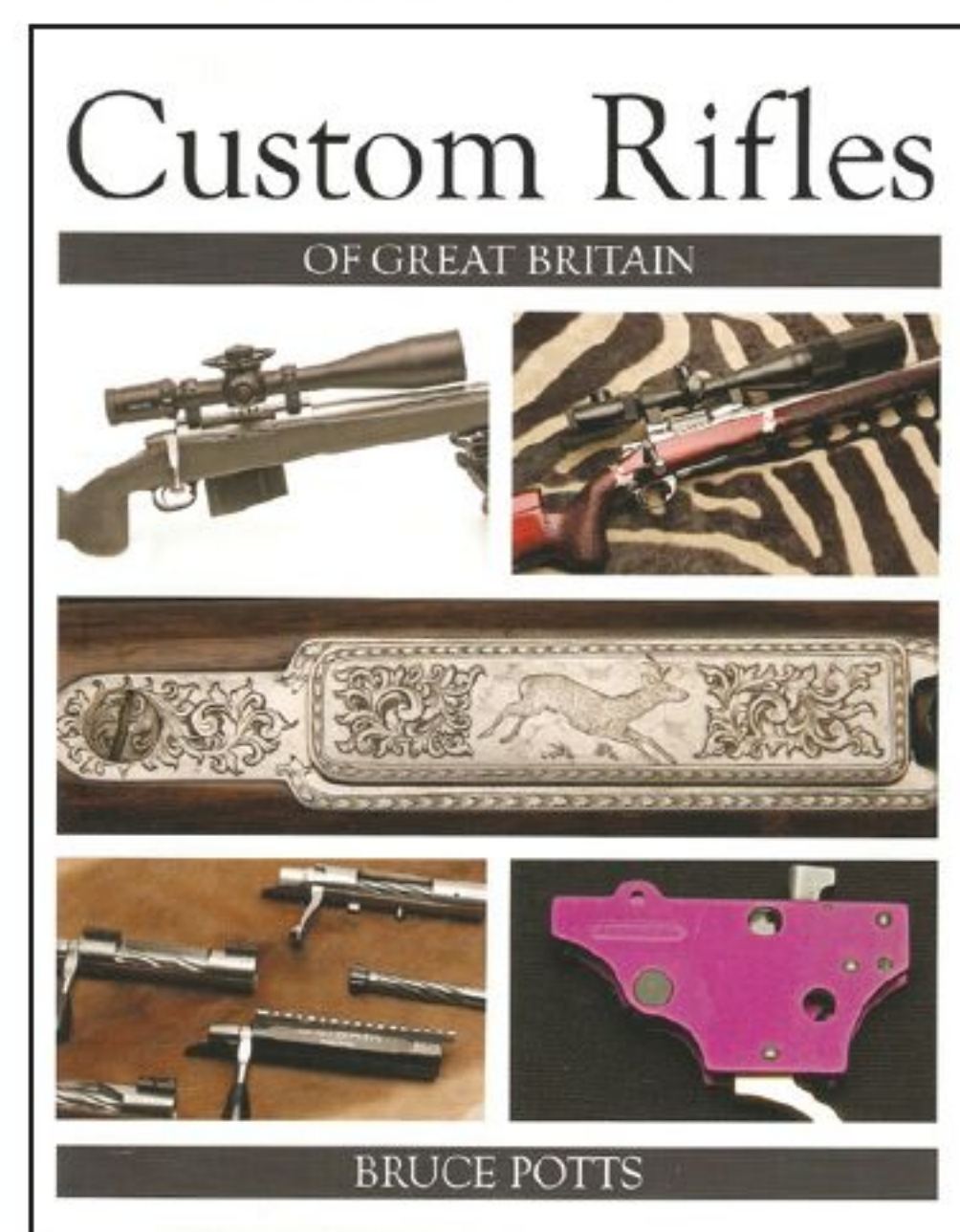
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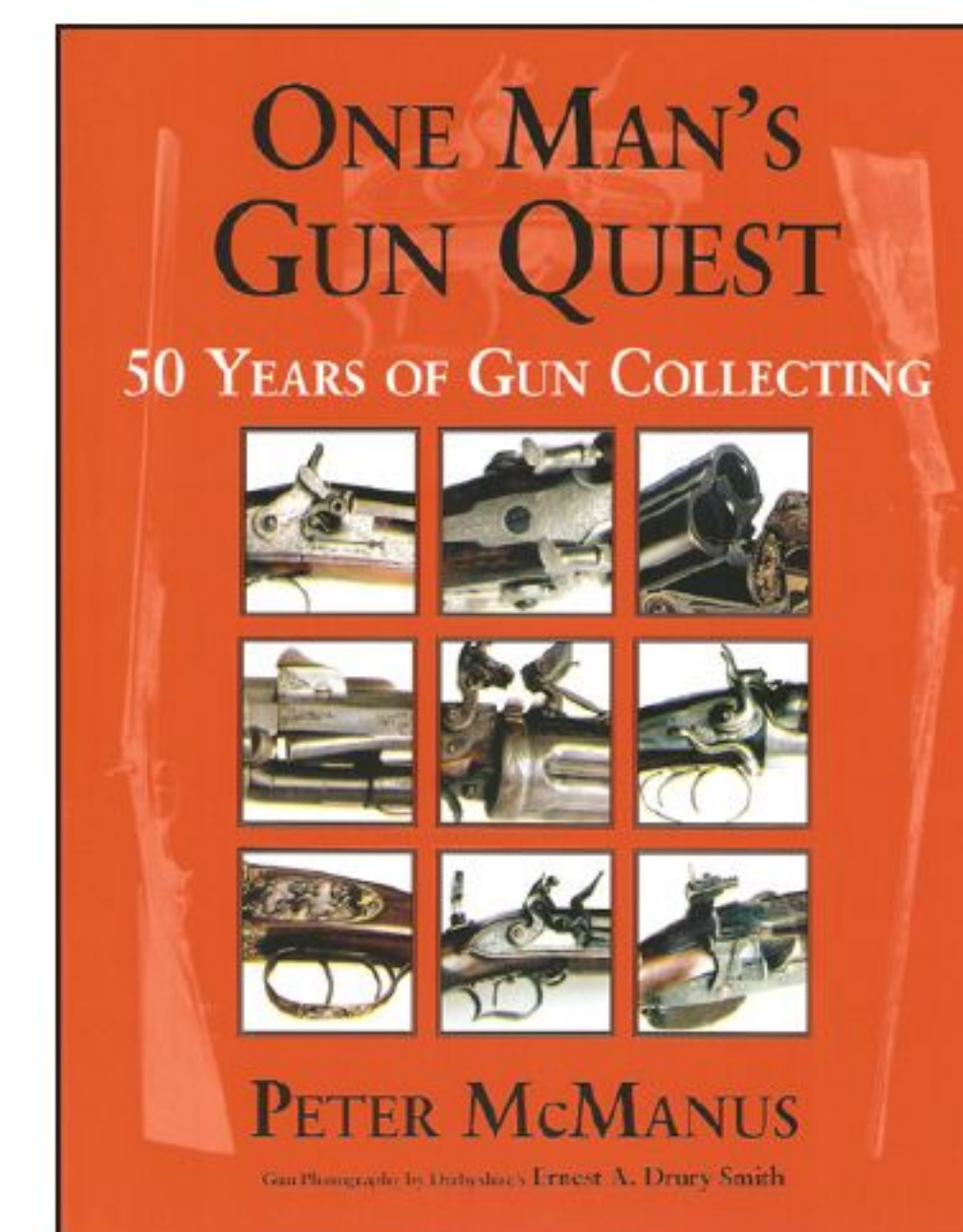
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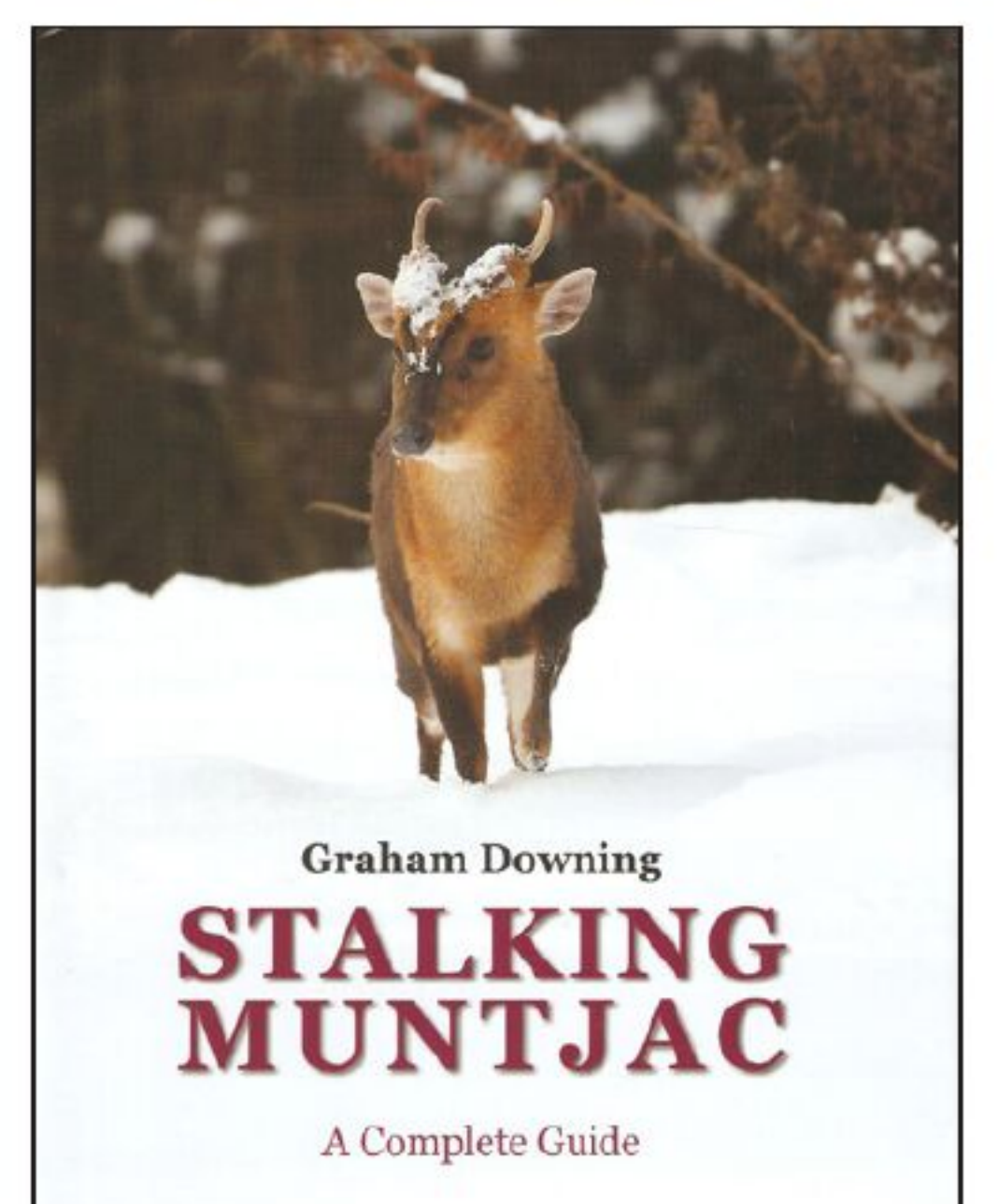
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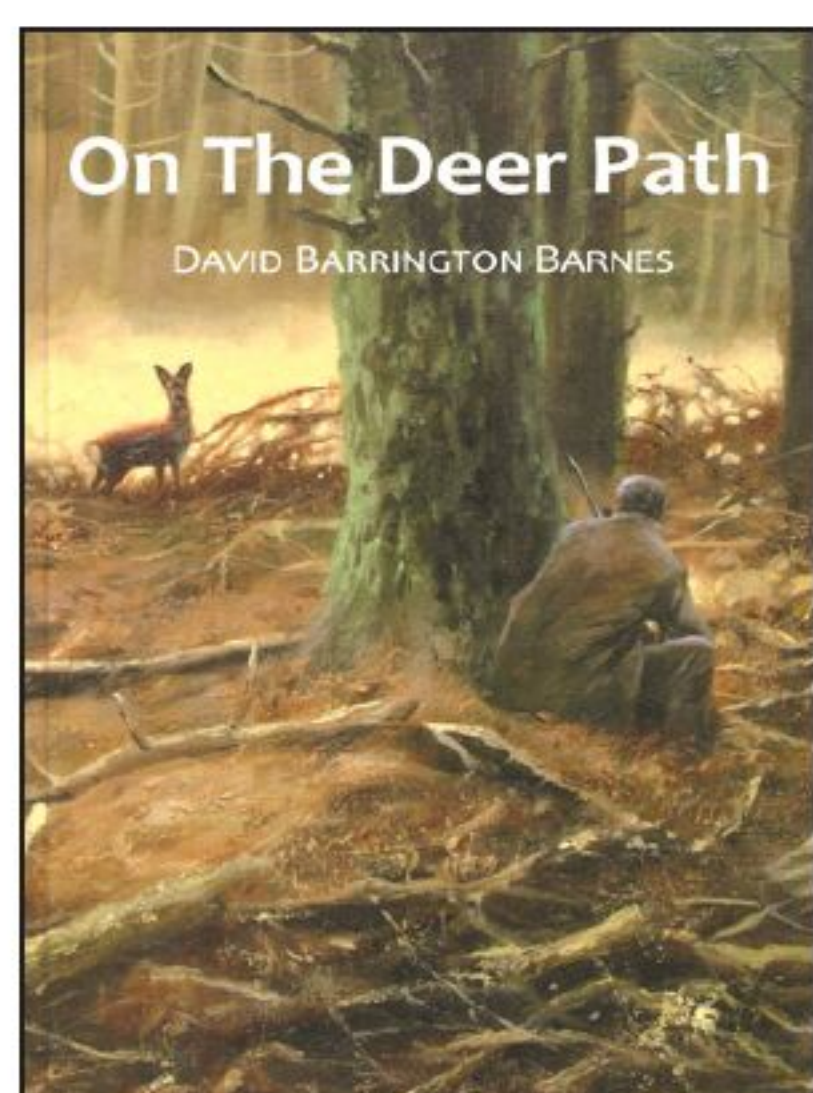
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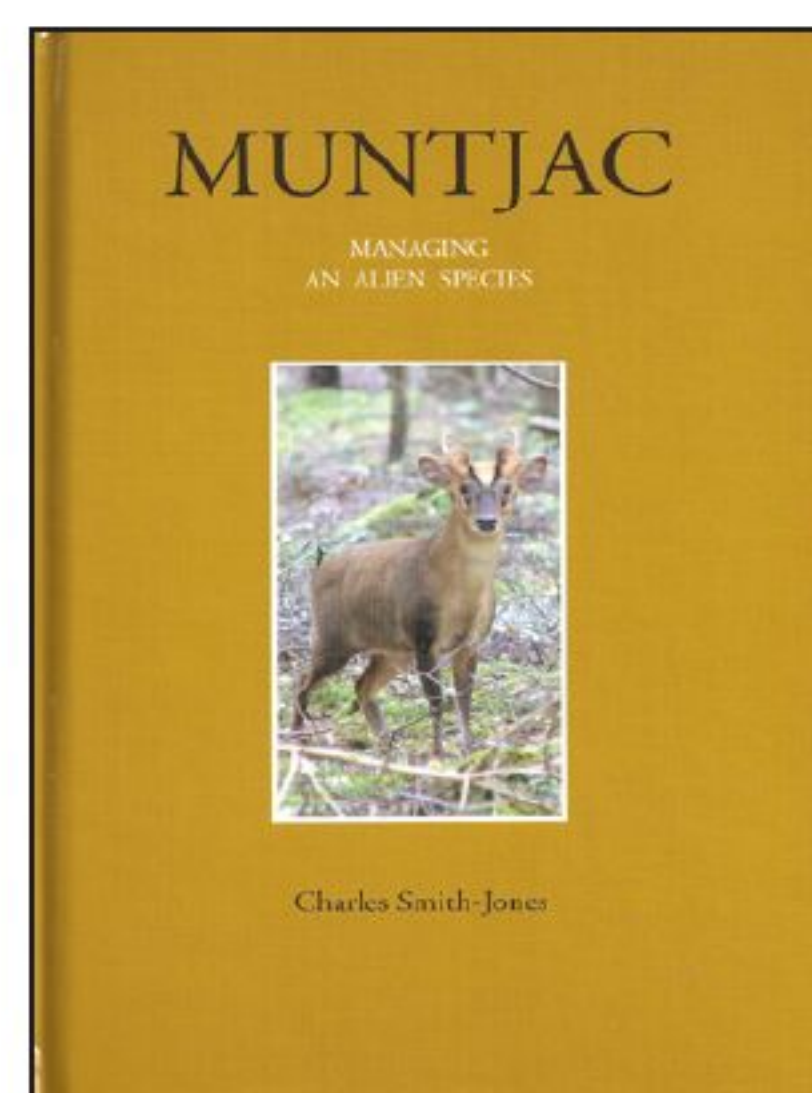
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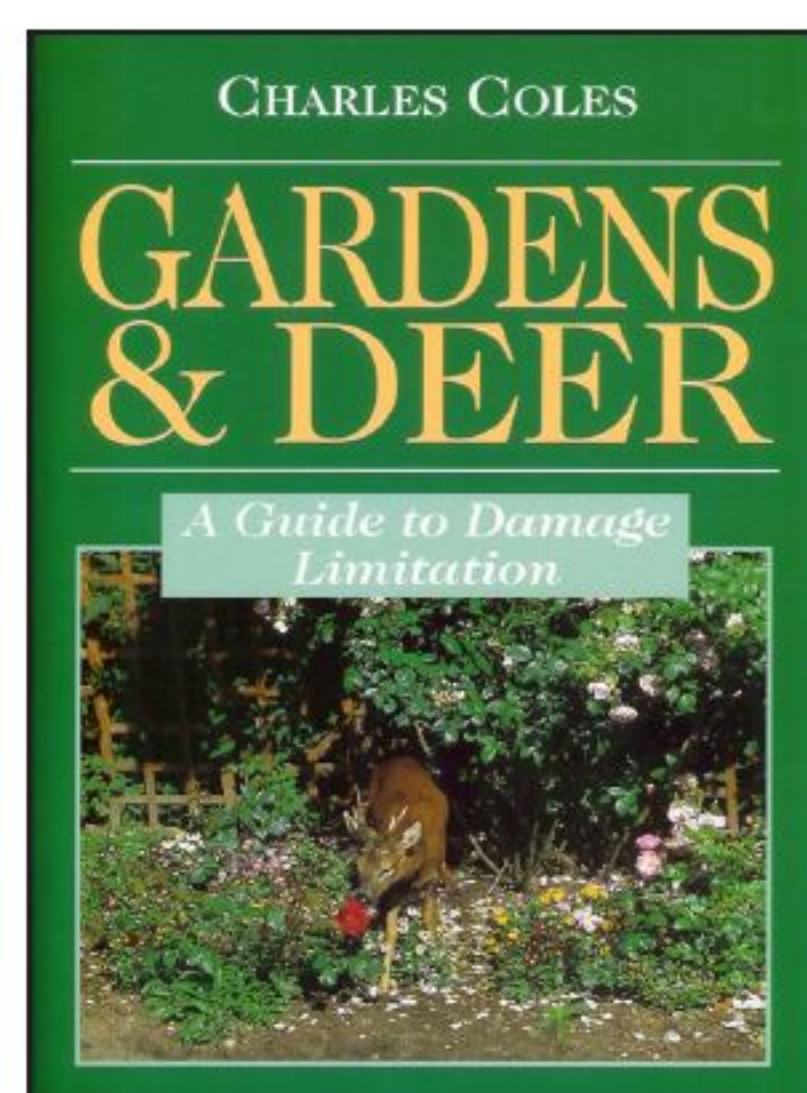
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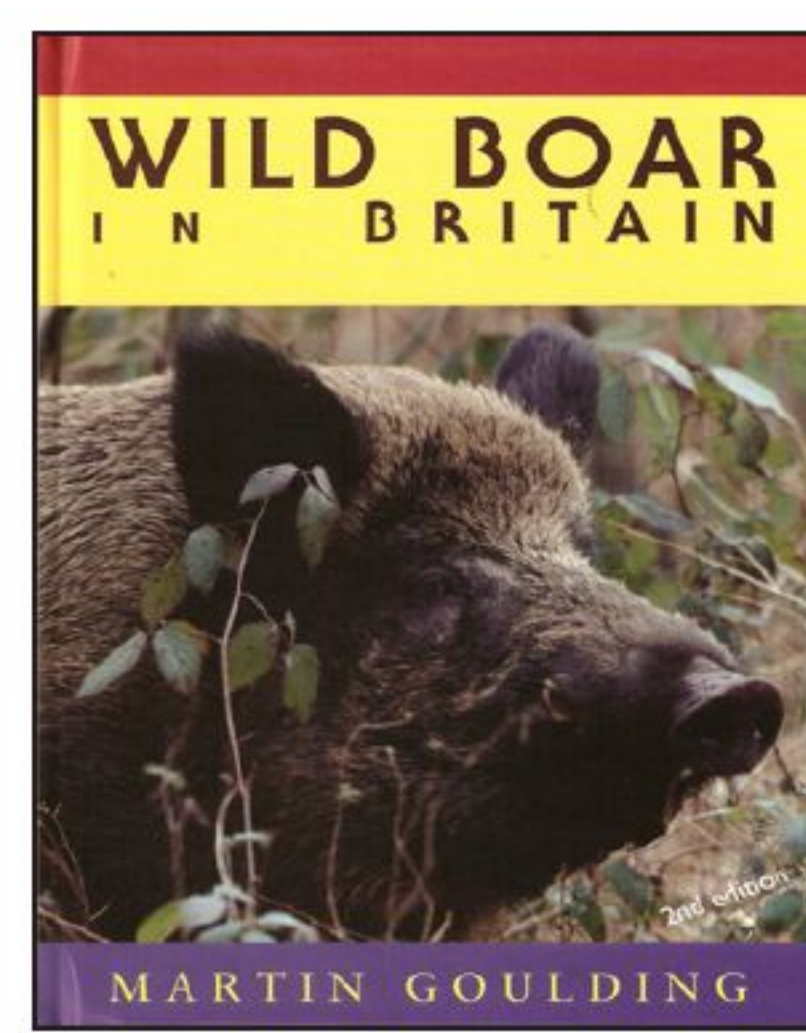
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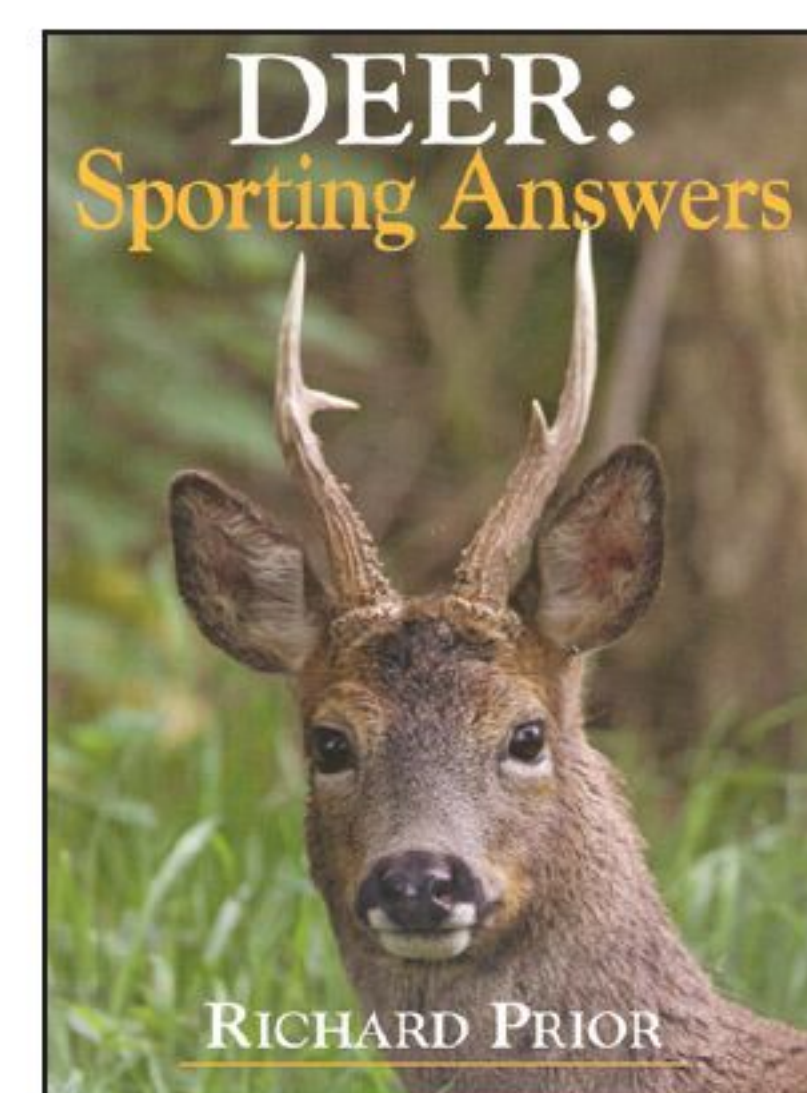
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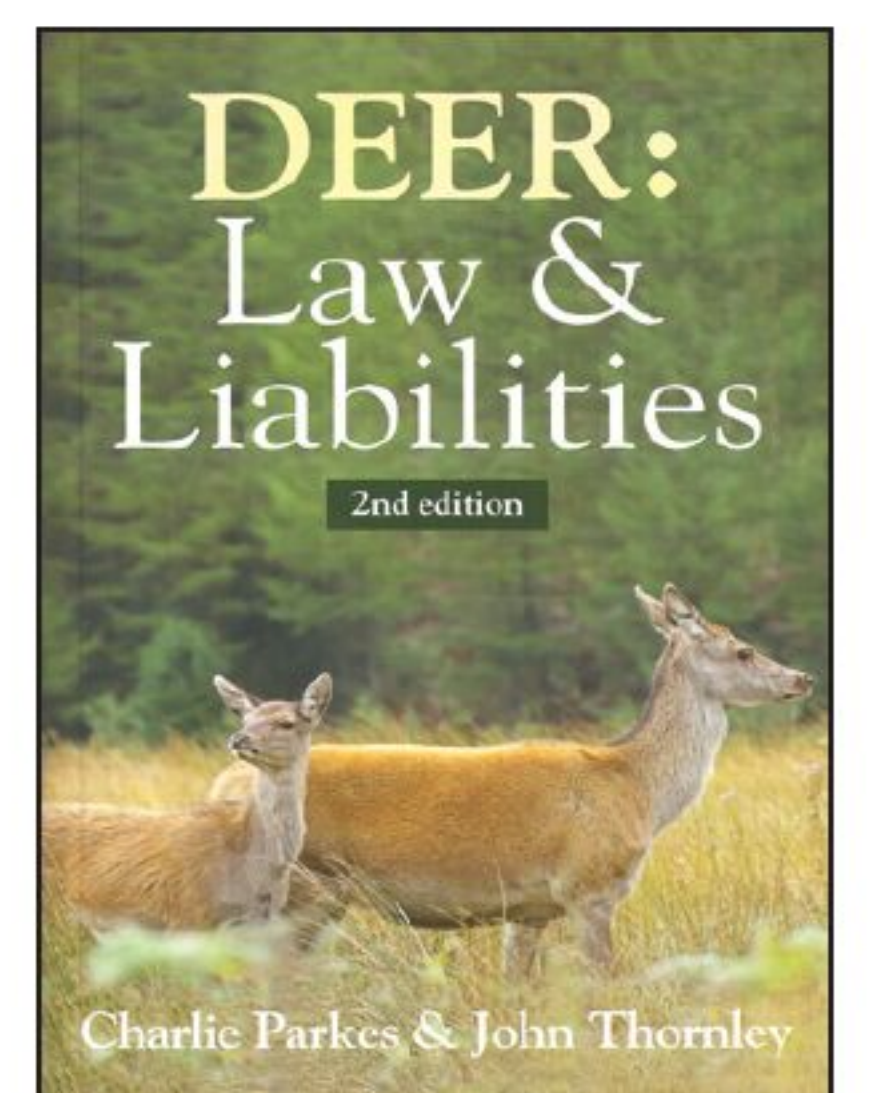
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Game Cookery

Black beans have been a staple in Chinese cuisine for centuries and their unique flavour perfectly complements the natural richness of venison

Marinating venison in a blend of soy sauce, ginger and garlic, infuses the meat with subtle yet distinctive flavours. The addition of fermented black beans lends a savoury depth to the dish, complementing the natural richness of the meat.

The use of black beans in Chinese cooking goes back a long way. They were

found in a tomb that was sealed in about 165BC in south-central China, which makes them the oldest known soy food worldwide.

The beans themselves look far from appetising, being dull black and somewhat soft and shrivelled. Never eaten alone, they

have a complicated flavour. It is possible to make your own black bean sauce, but various brands are readily available in supermarkets. And it's worth it for this dish, as the sauce adds a richness that works well with the venison. 🍴

“Black beans were found in a tomb that was sealed in about 165BC in south-central China”

Ingredients

⚠️ COOKING TIME: 20 MINUTES

🍴 2 X 250G VENISON STEAKS

🍴 1 TBSP CORNFLOUR

🍴 2 TBSP SESAME OIL

🍴 1 LARGE WHITE ONION, CUT INTO THIN WEDGES

🍴 1 RED PEPPER, DESEEDED AND SLICED

🍴 1 GREEN PEPPER, DESEEDED AND SLICED

🍴 2 FAT GARLIC CLOVES, CRUSHED

🍴 1 THUMB-SIZED PIECE GINGER, PEELED & GRATED

🍴 1-2 RED CHILLIES, FINELY CHOPPED

🍴 5 TBSP BLACK BEAN SAUCE

🍴 1 TBSP RICE WINE VINEGAR

🍴 2 TSP SUGAR

🍴 STICKY RICE, TO SERVE

🍴 CORIANDER LEAVES, TO SERVE (OPTIONAL)

VENISON IN BLACK BEAN SAUCE

THE METHOD

Serves 4

1 Begin by removing the excess fat from the steaks – this is usually minimal with venison. Slice the steak into 1cm-thick strips. Toss these strips with cornflour and a generous amount of seasoning.

2 Heat the oil in a large frying pan or wok, turning the heat to maximum. Add the steak strips, moving them round in the pan for 3 mins until they are browned all over. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the evenly seared strips to a plate.

3 Now add the onions and peppers, letting them sizzle for 6 to 7 mins

until they begin to soften. Add the garlic, ginger and chilli to the mix, and cook for another minute to allow the flavours to develop.

4 Stir in the seared venison, then mix everything with the black bean sauce, rice wine vinegar, sugar and a splash of water if needed. Make sure it is all well mixed before removing the pan from the heat.

5 Serve the stir-fry in deep bowls, accompanied by mounds of sticky rice. Crown your creation with fresh coriander and some more chillies, to your personal taste.



Paired with black bean sauce and other rich flavours, venison is elevated to a whole new level



For more tasty game recipe ideas from the team at Eat Wild, visit eatwild.co

The experts

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➡ TOM PAYNE

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➡ ELLENA SWIFT

Award-winning gundog trainer and canine behaviour specialist



➡ TIM MADDAMS

Former head chef at River Cottage and runs a shoot in Devon



➡ SIMON WHITEHEAD

Author, professional ferreter and rabbit controller



➡ IAIN WATSON

Keen stalker and senior CIC international trophy judge



➡ CHRIS DALTON

Professional stalker and regular presenter on *The Shooting Show*



➡ MARK RIPLEY

Well-known fox controller and long-range shooting expert

Contact the team

Email: ollie.harvey@fieldsportspress.com

Fallow deer heads with a weight above 3.5kg tend to score well in medal tables



What is a good weight for a fallow head in Britain?

➡ STALKING

Q I larded a fallow buck at the beginning of January that was particularly mature for our area. By mid-February, the skull and antlers weighed 3.9kg. Is this an exceptional weight for a British fallow head so is it worth me having it scored?

A Your example is certainly at the top end of the weight class for a wild head from the UK and is in the range where you can comfortably expect it to be in the medal category.

A quick check of the weight records suggests that, depending on the quality of the antlers, it should be in the upper end of the medal tables.

Fallow heads with a weight above 3.5kg score well, in the same way roe do when the head weighs more than 650g or red deer at 7kg.

Depending on their genetic origins and environment, some fallow deer can develop heads of quite considerable size. In central European countries, for instance, and particularly in Hungary, heads with a dry weight in excess of 5kg have been recorded. **IW**

Tips on laying purse-nets

➡ FERRETING

Q I was ferreting some ditch sides recently, but I had trouble getting and keeping my purse-nets upright against the steep bank. How can I combat this, please?

A I was always taught that the best way to lay any purse-net is to imagine how the rabbit will run or walk out into it.

Think about how your net will react and how the drawcord will either ease the pursing action or give the rabbit an unexpected avenue of escape. Ensure that the rabbit holes are free from

debris. Not all nets will be laid in the conventional way, so the scenario that you have described will require some thinking outside of the box. Take your time, avoid getting complacent and try not to miss any holes.

If the holes are vertical in a steep bank, you can stop the net from falling down by simply pushing in a small twig, or a golf tee, to hold it upright without hampering its pursing action.

If the net is correct, as soon as the rabbit hits it, the drawcord will pull on the peg and draw shut. But, like everything else, you will probably need to practise, practise, practise to get it right. **SW**

Angles and adjustments

➤ RIFLES

Q What is the difference between minute of angle (MOA) and milliradian (Mil) in relationship to scope adjustment?

A The old “one click equals a ¼in movement at 100 yards” is so imprinted in my mind that it’s hard to grasp another system.

Basically, these are angular units of measurement that refer to changing angles or degrees of adjustment, as in a compass. One minute of angle (or MOA)

is actually 1/60th of 1 degree. In linear terms, this means 1 MOA equates to 1in at 100 yards. The true value is really 1.047in at 100 yards, but the reality is we all use an inch. It’s easier. So, at 200 yards, it would be 2in, at 300 yards it is 3in and so on for each click of the scope.

A milliradian (or Mil) is defined as one-thousandth of a radian. In linear terms, 1 Mil is 3.6in at 100 yards (though the true value is 3.438in). So, if your scope has ¼ MOA adjustments, it means a 0.25in movement of the reticule at 100 yards, or 1/10th Mil moves it 0.36in. **BP**

My springer won’t jump

➤ GUNDOG TRAINING

Q I have an 18-month-old English springer spaniel that has a massive aversion to jumping into my truck. I actually have to carry him to the back and put him in. As soon as he knows that we are going in the truck, he cowers. I am pretty sure his behaviour isn’t related to pain because he will happily jump in the front if I leave the door open. I normally don’t mind lifting him, but in awful weather he is filthy. I didn’t ask him to jump into the truck until he was well over 12 months old and, to my knowledge, he has never had an accident happen when he has jumped. How can I fix this problem?

A Despite assuming there is nothing physically wrong with your dog, it’s worth having him checked by a vet. This will rule out any physical issues that could be causing him pain.

Normally in trucks, the front footwell is significantly lower than the back and so it might be that it doesn’t hurt him to jump in the front.

The second is to rule out travel sickness. This is more common than you might think and medication can help to alleviate symptoms. Again, this is something to discuss with your vet.

If none of these problems apply, you can begin training. Use a bale of straw or a step and teach him to jump on and off. Walk with him so you step up and down, encouraging him to follow using the lead. Move the step closer and closer to the back of the truck.

Once he is happily stepping up with you, encourage him to follow you into the back of the truck. Once in, sit with him. When he has settled, allow him to calmly follow you out.

Repeat this daily and start to offer him a meal in the truck. When he is confidently jumping up, remove the step and encourage him to jump in unaided. **ES**



A bale of straw can be used to teach a dog how to jump up

Seasonal changes

➤ FERRETING

Q I have enjoyed my first season keeping ferrets, but have not been told about their seasons. What should I look out for?

A The physical signs of a ferret in season are obvious, but only if you know what you are looking for. The hob is usually first. His testicles will drop and there will be an increase in his odour. His attitude will alter in sync with these physical changes. The jill’s vulva will swell. Ferrets stay in season until mated, injected or they naturally come out of season around September.

The ferret’s breeding season is governed by the hours of daylight over the hours of darkness, known as photoperiodism. Both sexes will exhibit different characteristics due to their hormonal balance. The first mating is usually in March or April and the pregnancy will last 42 to 44 days.

The act of a jill mating stops the build-up of oestrogen. It is this act and not the birth of the litter that removes the ferret from her season. If you do not want a litter, you can remove the jill from her season by using a vasectomised hob ferret (hoblet). If a hoblet is not available, a jill jab is available from the vet that will have the same effect. Neutering of any animal is a guaranteed way of preventing any unwanted litters, fights between inmates and reducing the odour of the summertime hob.

Neutered hobs can be kept with each other and with jills for the full year without the usual play fighting.

The use of a vasectomised hob is becoming a popular way of removing the jill from her season. After a simple operation and a quarantine time of around six weeks, the hoblet can remove a lot of jills from their seasons. This is more cost-effective than using the jill jab from the vets. **SW**



The physical signs of a ferret in season are clear when handlers know what to look for

Where are the mink?

PEST CONTROL

Q We used to catch 15 to 20 mink a year, but now we catch one or two a year at most. Why do you think this is? There is still plenty for them to eat, and nothing appears to have changed with their habitat.

A Exactly the same thing has happened here. Ten to 15 years ago, we were regularly catching upwards of a dozen mink, which has now dropped off to virtually zero. Little has changed in the way of food supply or bankside vegetation.

My own unproven and unscientific theory is that it is directly linked to an increase in the otter population. As otters have become more common, mink numbers have declined.

Whether otters kill American mink or simply scare the hell out of them and make them move on and disrupt breeding patterns, I am not sure, but they are more than capable and are documented as frequently killing European mink on the Continent. It will be interesting to see where populations of both are in another 10 years from now. **LB**



The number of American mink seen in the UK may be affected by a rising otter population

How to age muntjac buck

STALKING

Q Is it possible to tell the age of a muntjac buck from its antlers?

A Estimating the age of a muntjac buck from its antler growth is complicated by the fact that muntjac breed all year round.

Bucks start to develop their pedicles at about five months and grow their antlers four or five months after that. Subsequently, they will synchronise the date at which their first antlers are cast to the following May or June, the period at which most bucks shed their antlers. Thus, a buck born in late spring

will grow his first antlers towards the end of the following winter and keep them right through to midsummer the following year, whereas one born in the winter may shed his first antlers at the age of only 14 months.

The first antlers have no coronets, while the second antlers have coronets but no clearly defined brow points.

A better way to age a buck you have shot is by removing and boiling out his tusks. Those of a young buck have wide, open roots, the walls of which are thin and brittle. From the age of three years, the root progressively closes and after five years, there will be only a pinprick left. **GD**



Determining the age of a shot muntjac buck from antler growth is tricky and a better method is to remove and boil out the tusks, because the roots gradually close over the course of about five years

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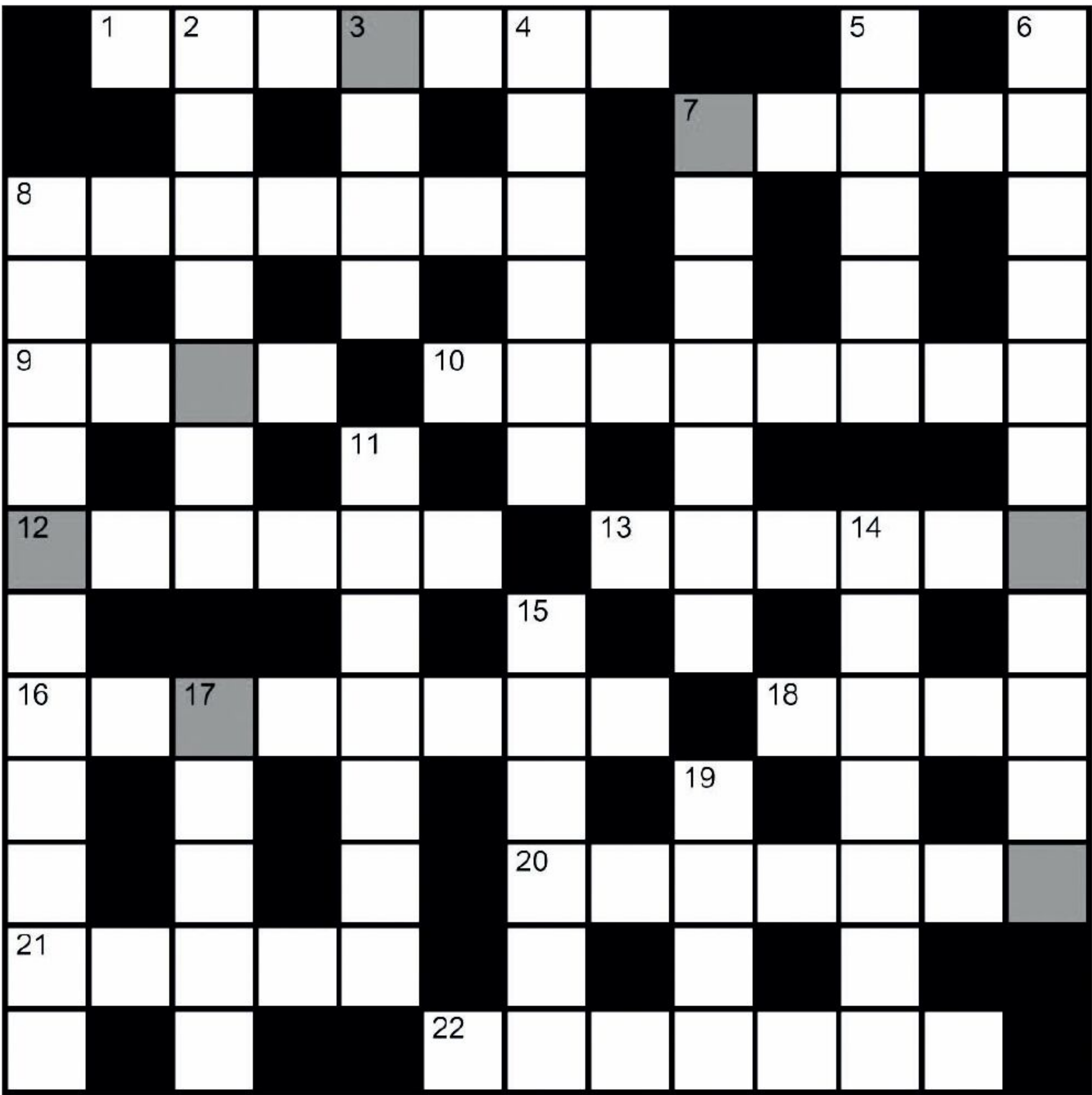
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Crossword / Compiled by Eric Linden / 1660



Across

- 1 These Hungarians have gone to the dogs! (7)
7 Linger behind to follow animal tracks (5)
8 The dog supplier mixes red beer (7)
9 A rare variety of gun sight? (4)
10 Netherlanders are up front about tree disease (5,3)
12 A shooting range that has got us covered (6)
13 Ragmen are curious about the pointer (6)
16 Verdant foliage on the outskirts of great scenery (8)
18 A blast of the horn produces an owlsh cry (4)
20 The pair of guns were in harmony (7)
21 See 3 down
22 An illustration of getting the pick of the pegs (7)

Down

- 2 Incur the wrath of the nation in Kerry Blue terrier country (7)
3 & 21 across The team have access to a type of trap (4-5)
4 Ventilate a firearm for the pest controller (6)
5 One is in the labyrinth for a crop (5)
6 A type of reticle that won't leave us in the dark (11)
7 Informally sets fire to night-vision equipment (7)
8 Stalked quarry are sounding dogged! (7,4)
11 Outcry erupting around top-notch rural parts (7)
14 A bird with a hormone disorder? (7)
15 Paint found on the cartridge component? (6)
17 Not occupied with being out of ammunition (5)
19 To cook hares on the street, we turn around (4)

Kindly supplied by



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Rules: Entries must be received by 17 April 2024 and correct answers will be added to our monthly prize draw. All usual conditions apply. April's winner will appear in the 1 May issue.



Solution 1658 / 27 March 2024

Across: 6. Intercepting 8. Scarves 9. Stoat 10. Eggs 11. T-shirt 14. Towers 16. Jill 19. Covey 20. Nettles 21. Seen retrieve

Down: 1. Linseed 2. Straight 3. Grove 4. Welsh springer 5. Filter 7. Gnat 12. Trialler 13. Flushes 15. Opener 17. Bogs 18. Storm

★ PRIZE WORD: RAVENS



Green woodpeckers are known to drum, but it is more common in parts of central Europe than the UK

Drumming woodpeckers

➡ BIRDLIFE

Q Do green woodpeckers ever drum?

A The answer is yes, but rarely. I encounter green woodpeckers frequently, seeing or hearing birds on a daily basis, but I have never heard one drumming, or even suspected one of doing so.

My research suggests that certain populations are more likely to drum than others. It seems that drumming is more frequent in parts of central Europe than it is here.

Drumming is a territorial display performed by almost all the true woodpeckers, of which there are more than 250 species around the world.

Each species has its own unique drum, varying in duration and length. The biggest of the European woodpeckers, the black, has a drum that sounds like bursts of machine-gun fire and is heard at a considerable range.

Apparently, green woodpeckers are not nearly as noisy, with a drum roll of about 12 taps in a second and a half, which is repeated four to eight times a minute. It's a sound I would be fascinated to hear. **DT**

TO CATCH A FISH

Czech Weapon

A mobile hackle can add life into a fly, making it more attractive to the fish, and the tungsten bead helps get the fly down to feeding fish quickly.

The Czech Weapon is a fly that works well during the early season for trout, fished either on its own or as a dropper fly. The copper bead with subtle rib can fool the most pressured of fish. The shape can imitate several nymphs and is a generic caddis pupa. **AS**



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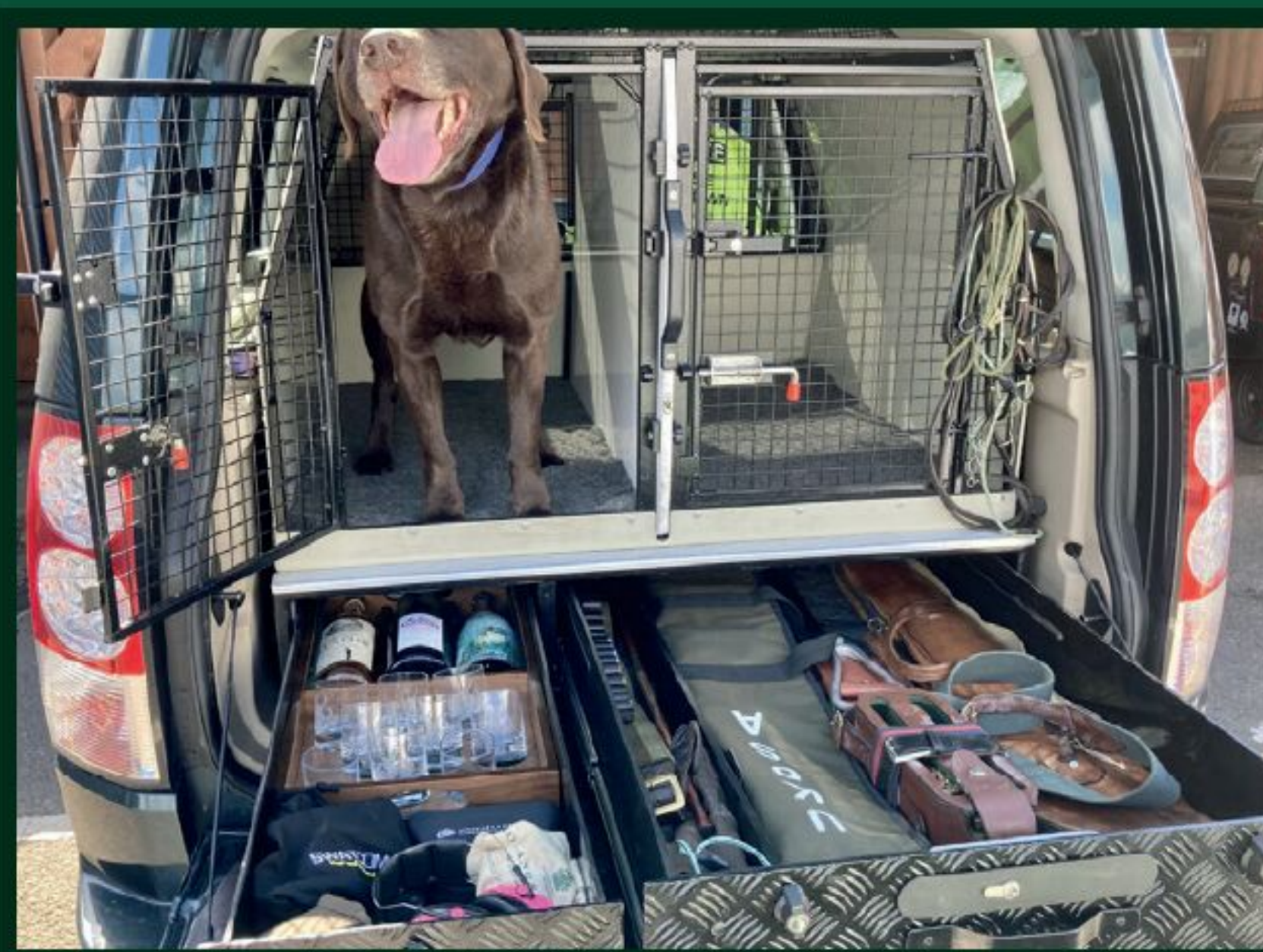
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The Shooting Times Almanac

13 APRIL 2024

APRIL MOON PHASE



Pink Moon, 24 April

The Pink Moon gets its name from the wildflowers that bloom in early spring. Common names in Europe also refer to spring with grass sprouting, birds laying



Sunrise 06:08



Sunset 19:54



Moonrise 08:17



Moonset 01:36

TIMES SHOWN FOR LONDON

eggs and people sowing seeds. The Celts had names such as Budding Moon, New Shoots Moon, Seed Moon and Growing Moon, while the Anglo-Saxons called it the Egg Moon.

THOUGHTS FROM THE FIELD

Sharing a lifetime of experience in the countryside

I read in *Shooting Times* that some of the German sailors in the late battle of the Falkland Islands were attacked by albatrosses and killed. An albatross is a more powerful bird than an eagle, or even a vulture, and I can well believe the tales you hear of danger from them. I shot a gannet once, breaking its wing, and after some trouble, got the bird on board the boat I was sculling in. This was an old-time Thames boat, and the place was a mile or more off

the sea coast, where such a boat was not safe in any jump of the water.

The gannet is, of course, small in comparison with an albatross, but the beak of the gannet is a formidable weapon and I was glad enough to get this creature over the side when it offered me battle. I made stems for my pipes out of the bones of its wings. It looks as if even the animal world is also fighting the German tyrants.

First published 1915

EDITOR'S PICKS: TOP-END BINOS



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10x42**

RRP £3,150
zeiss.co.uk



**Swarovski EL
10x42**

RRP £3,210
swarovskioptik.com



**Leica Noctivid
10x42**

RRP £2,420
leica-camera.com

THE WEEK IN NUMBERS

£89,259

The Wild Trout Trust Spring Auction closed on 24 March after raising almost £90,000. Among the 383 lots was a day's rough shooting with Gethin Jones (*Fowler's Jottings*). A total of £89,259 was announced with a few lots still to be sold. The funds will go towards conserving wild brown trout and their habitats.

92

An 84-year-old is celebrating 25 years of bird counting in the Cotswolds and has recorded 92 different species in that time. Arthur Ball started counting on a nine-mile circuit around Cleeve Common in 1999 and has walked almost 3,000 miles around the conservation area. Mr Ball's records include yellowhammers, linnets and stonechats. Sadly, his counts suggest small birds are in decline.

78%

A survey has found that dog attacks on livestock are the most frequently occurring rural crime. The survey, conducted by the National Sheep Association, revealed that 78% of police forces have reported a rise in attacks on sheep; 76% of respondents deal with at least monthly attacks, while 33% reported weekly attacks. Not one reported they had never had a report of livestock worrying.

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Gunshop guide

A pick of some of the best brick-and-mortar retailers for fieldsports



*Find out more
about these
retailers*



See our full
listings
via the QR
code

WEST YORKSHIRE

○ Kirklees Guns



**West Yorkshire based
Kirklees Guns has been
established over 70 years.
We learn more about
the business.**

Tell us a bit about the history of your business ?

Kirklees Guns initially opened as Shooters Supplies in the mid 50's. The shop has supplied firearms, ammunition, airguns & accessories ever since. We carry large quantities of stock in our cavernous below shop storage area. If we don't have what our customer needs in stock we will try our best to source the product.

Tell us about some of the changes you've noticed since the business started?

The firearms industry has seen many changes in this period...changes in licences, legislation, introduction of computerised records & products themselves to name but a few. The products sold by ourselves have also changed over time with the introduction of CO2 pistols, PCP air rifles & nightvision. Each of these being a game changer to the industry.

Who are the key people in the business?

The shop has Mark the proprietor at the helm & another three members of staff, we work well as a team & all bring different skills & personalities to the table.

Tell us about the company ethos

As a company we try hard to provide an efficient service at a fair price. One of the things that we do believe in is to make sure all enquiries are dealt with. Kirklees Guns has a diverse & loyal customer base & we are grateful to all our customers. Looking towards the future....Expect more of the same.



Tel: 01484 544600 • **Web:** kirklees-guns.co.uk
Email: info@kirklees-guns.co.uk

POWYS

● Wye Valley Guns



Wye Valley Guns is a family affair run by Team Wales & Team GB Shooter Annalise Evans and her Father Dorian (also a Team Wales Shooter). Situated just off the A470 between Brecon and Buith Wells, We offer a bespoke and personal service by combining our wealth of experience within the sport. Our shop is your one stop shop for shooting supplies, providing guns, ammunition, shooting accessories for Game & Clay Pigeon Shooting and also, just as importantly, a welcoming environment for everyone visiting our shop.

Tel: 01874 455470 • **Web:** wyevalleyguns.co.uk
Email: info@wyevalleyguns.co.uk

COUNTY LONDONDERRY

● Outdoor & Country Sports



Established for over 10 years, Outdoor and Country Sports is one of the leading firearms dealers in the North Coast of Northern Ireland. We stock a huge range of ammunition, clay targets and everything you need to keep your firearms in perfect order. Game, clay and rifle enthusiasts will all find a huge range of firearms and accessories along with an array of clothing for every season. Our staff are happy to help, whether you would like to start shooting or want to source your dream firearm.

Tel: 028 70320701 • **Web:** outdoorandcountrysports.co.uk
Email: keith@outdoorandcountrysports.co.uk

NORTH YORKSHIRE

● Coniston Shooting Ground



Situated on the superb 1400 acre Coniston Estate near Skipton in the heart of the stunning North Yorkshire Dales. Coniston Shooting Ground is run by James Ardron and a close knit team of experienced staff and highly qualified instructors. The outstanding log cabin clubhouse has a stunning log fire, deep sofas and large dining area offering visitors somewhere comfortable to eat, drink and relax. With a superb café offering home cooked food and a shop dedicated to guns and accessories, what more could you want.

Tel: 01756 748 586 • **Web:** conistonshootingground.co.uk
Email: info@conistonshootingground.co.uk

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

● Glenluce Gunroom



Lying just off the main A75 Carlise to Stranraer road, Glenluce Gunroom is a real treasure trove of a gunshop. Formed by Stewart Stirling around 25 years ago, the shop is situated at Barlockhart Works in Dumfries and Galloway. Boasting two floors, extending to around 3,000sq ft. The top floor, primarily allocated to shooting clothes, sits above a ground floor home to guns, rifles and accessories. Besides housing a fantastic variety of stock, as well as their own full time gunsmith, Glenluce Gunroom is also a great place to get sound advice from like-minded folk.

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Email: gunroom@mail.com

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SHOOTERS' JOURNAL

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MORE ON MACHETES
JFK murder: 60 years on
COURT DELAYS
What's in a phrase?

Shooters' Rights Association members do just about everything legal: shooting, from air soft to cannons, re-enacting & living history from cavemen to Ukraine so whatever you do: Shooting, Collecting, battle re-enactment, Living History, air soft, Archery, Hand thrown, Gun Trade, antiques, and whatever you do it with FAC firearms, shotguns, antiques, RFD, blank firers, de-ac, replica, airsoft, Bows, axes, spinning wheels etc SRA membership is for you. Periodic journals, £10 million PLI, legal helpline. £39.50 individual membership, Groups of three+ £25 each. Discounts for larger groups

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Sharpshooter



Trying to obtain a fair hearing when you are up against the state is an uphill struggle and if you can't afford a good lawyer, you are stuffed

Few *Shooting Times* readers will be eligible for legal aid, even though it is funded by ordinary taxpayers like us. And if you run up against the firearms licensing system, it wouldn't be applicable anyway.

Recently, BASC's Fighting Fund helped a certificate holder recover his costs from a police force that had wrongly revoked his certificate then failed to put matters right in a timely manner (*News*, 20 March). This was newsworthy precisely because it is so rare to be awarded costs against the police in such cases. Many believe that the horrendous delays in certificate grants and renewals are designed to reduce legal gun ownership. I think it is part of a wider problem in dealing with state officialdom. Either way, the result is much the same.

Various officials have been handed a captive customer base, whether it be firearms licensing, tax processing, driver testing, probate registration, or whatever. Many are providing a dismal level of service. Despite record numbers of staff, public sector productivity is down 7.5% since 2019. Yet taxes are about the highest in proportion to our income for 70 years.

It's not ultimately the individual firearms licensing teams that are to blame, so much as the highly remunerated chief constables who allocate resources and decide priorities. There is no real way we, the customers, can take those chief constables to task. They are operating a taxpayer-funded monopoly without true accountability.

Obstreperous

We are all supposed to have individual rights. The European Convention on Human Rights was drafted with major input from British lawyers after World War II. It was intended to impart some of the rights that we had enjoyed since the Magna Carta to less fortunate European states. It was codified in British law in the Human Rights Act 1998, under the same prime minister who took away our right to go foxhunting. That just shows you how the human rights blob regards obstreperous rural folk.

Over the years, the implementation of the convention has been twisted by well-paid, left-wing lawyers for their own commercial and ideological purposes. In the stampede for public loot, some ordinary,

decent citizens get trampled underfoot. In firearms licensing cases, if you cannot afford to pay the fees of a good lawyer, you are stuffed. All those fancy human rights safeguards simply don't apply to the likes of us. And this selectivity isn't restricted to firearms procedures.

Look at the public rights of way industry in England and Wales. Militant access groups can get public funding to register a public path through some poor sod's garden, based on arcane documents which nobody has seen for years. The same local authority that originally charged search fees to the homebuyer's solicitor turns out not have kept proper records.

Yet far from paying compensation, it will support the activists and register the path if it judges that public rights are merely "reasonably alleged". The afflicted homeowner may then appeal. But they will be up against the financial might of a public body — and they won't get their costs back even if they win. Sound familiar?

It's not only gun owners — it's any ordinary citizen who has the temerity to expect fair dealing from the self-serving organs of the state. 🐦

DOG BY KEITH REYNOLDS



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