

NEWS: IRISH DEER HUNTING LICENCES GO ONLINE ONLY

SHOOTING TIMES

12 JUNE 2024

& COUNTRY MAGAZINE

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SKINNER'S

BORN TO BE OUTDOORS

DOG OF THE WEEK



Nora

Two-year-old Nora thoroughly enjoyed her first full season picking-up on her local shoot in the Peak District, and she consistently shows that typical loving labrador temperament.

Owned and by photographed by Chloe Fletcher

12.06.24
Issue 6,465

SHOOTING TIMES

A little light work



Summer seems to have been a long time coming, but it has finally arrived so we have more daylight hours to enjoy out in the field.

For me, having more time to shoot after work tends to mean more evenings on the range setting up and testing new gear. But it also provides an excellent opportunity to introduce new people to the sport. Those with an emerging interest in shooting tend to be most eager to get out and give it a go when the weather is fine. Let's face it, that all-important first experience is likely to be far more positive if it's enjoyed on a warm summer's day than endured in a wintry squall.

Every so often, the opportunity to give someone their first taste of shooting sports crops up and my usual reply is "we'll have to do that when summer comes round". Pressures of work and family life can mean that promise gets pushed too far down the ever-growing list of things to do, but we should all make a real effort to nurture potential new recruits. Apart from protecting the future of our sport, it can also be thoroughly rewarding.

Mat Manning



Contact Ollie at ollie.harvey@fieldsportspress.com

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featured STORY



Contents 12 June 2024



This week's cover image was supplied by Shutterstock

22 Happy tales from the riverbank
The delights of fishing for trout in the quiet waters of the Cam **FEATURED STORY**

28 The height of a valid exercise
The best way to get an accurate picture of deer numbers is by helicopter

32 Kit for tackling crafty corvids
Crows are notoriously tricky, so getting close is the first challenge

38 The silence of the lambs
Foxes will take lambs if they're weak or away from the ewe, so get there first

42 Is this a wolf in sheep's clothing?
Benelli's Lupo rifle is a pleasure to behold and even better to shoot

46 On a wing – and a point
An excerpt from new book about hawking red grouse over a pointer

News & Opinion 06 News 10 BASC 12 Letters 36 Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust **Features** 22 Fly-fishing 28 Deer management 32 Airgunning 38 Foxing 42 Rifle test 46 Book excerpt 53 Gundog training kit **Regulars** 14 Gamekeeper 16 Stalking Diary 18 Country Diary 20 Sporting Life 48 Working dogs 50 Gundogs 54 Vintage Times 56 Cookery 58 Sporting Answers 61 Crossword 63 Almanac 66 Sharpshooter



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M425	£959.95 Inc. VAT	384×288,12µm	≤25mK	25mm f1.0	10.9°	800×600	>9.5h	1300m 
M619	£1,189.95 Inc. VAT	640×512,12µm	≤25mK	19mm f1.0	22.8°	800×600	>7.5h	1000m 
M625	£1,259.95 Inc. VAT	640×512,12µm	≤25mK	25mm f1.0	17.5°	800×600	>7.5h	1300m 

Companies have pointed out that a vital means of cutting emissions is losing out on essential funding



Restoring peatland helps cut damaging emissions

A leading climate change body does not recognise the important role restoration of our peatlands can play in offsetting greenhouse gases

Restoring poor-quality peatlands could cut Scotland's emissions by as much as decarbonising the country's entire housing stock. But, ironically, the most influential climate change body advising large corporations does not recognise peatland restoration as a legitimate means of offsetting greenhouse gas emissions.

A group of companies and charities has written to the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) to say this stance is holding back the flow of private finance. They accuse the organisation of constraining international efforts to restore peatlands and sending an "unscientific message to investors that peatland restoration is not a legitimate way to tackle the climate crisis".

SBTi has insisted it does encourage companies to invest in peatland restoration on top of cutting their emissions.

Waterlogged peatlands provide anaerobic environments that prevent dead plants from decomposing, locking carbon into the landscape. Damaged

“Maybe we should stop fighting nature – and work with it?”

peatlands that have been drained for agriculture or forestry can dry out, releasing greenhouse gases.

In 2020, the Scottish government pledged to restore 250,000 hectares of peatland by 2030, but has been slow to do so, with only 18,500 currently restored. It is felt that public funding alone will not be enough to protect the vast carbon stores locked

up in peatlands and that private finance is needed.

SBTi works with around 5,000 businesses globally, including Tesco, Kellogg's and the BBC, advising them on how to reduce their greenhouse gases, primarily through planting trees.

Eleanor Kay, senior policy adviser for agriculture and climate change at Scottish Land & Estates told *Shooting Times*: "Peatland restoration extends far beyond the usual focus on carbon sequestration. By restoring peat, we not only capture carbon but also significantly enhance natural flood management and support biodiversity. With the new Peatland Action assessment

criteria prioritising projects that incorporate private finance, it's essential to prevent potential investors from being deterred by conflicting information," she added.

"For Scotland to achieve its net-zero targets and adapt managed land to climate change, diverse actions are needed beyond tree planting. The Scottish government must provide strong leadership to meet the growing expectations placed on land managers and ensure successful, holistic environmental strategies."

Chief executive of the Moorland Association, Andrew Gilruth, said: "Perhaps we should stop fighting nature – and work with it? Since gamekeepers are already working in these amazing landscapes, it does not require a conservationist to turn up and tell them what to do." **FP**

In a reversal of the black grouse's fortune, its numbers have doubled in 2,000 hectares of Welsh moorland



Black grouse population growing on Welsh moor

A survey has counted more than twice the number of black grouse in 2024 than were recorded in 2023 across 2,000 hectares of moor in Denbighshire. Last year 40 birds were logged, but that number has risen to around 80 this time.

In a partnership that includes Denbighshire County Council, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB, farmers and Flintshire County Council, countryside rangers have worked to improve the habitat for black grouse

and to monitor them since 1997. They survey lek sites across 2,000 hectares of moorland. Lek sites are where the males gather during April and May to compete for a mate. They put on a courtship display, creating a deep bubbling noise to attract females.

Jack Parry of Clywdian Range AONB said: "It's great news that there have not been any further losses. However, the species is still in a fragile state."

Rough Shot Gethin Jones, who is based in the

area, said: "This is excellent news for black grouse, one of the most iconic species inhabiting our Welsh uplands. It's refreshing to see such success emanating from years of practical cooperation between local authorities, landowners and hands-on conservationists."

"We hope that policymakers in the Welsh government note what can be achieved through collaboration with those with local knowledge and practical wildlife management experience."

The King retains patronage of the British Deer Society

Following a comprehensive review of the patronages of HM the Late Queen, HM King Charles III is to remain as the figurehead of the British Deer Society (BDS).

At the time of her death in September 2022, Queen Elizabeth II was patron of 492 organisations. Of these, 376 are due to be retained by the King or other members of the royal family. The King, then the

Prince of Wales, became patron of the BDS in 1978 and has been a staunch supporter of BDS causes for nearly five decades.

Buckingham Palace said it will carry out another review to consider the patronages held throughout the 14 other commonwealth realms where King Charles III is head of state.

BDS chief executive David McAuley said: "We

are delighted and honoured to announce His Majesty King Charles III has retained the patronage of the British Deer Society.

"The continued support of the King will make a huge difference to our organisation's work, and we look forward to working closely with His Majesty as we move forward into an exciting time for the charity," he added.



Weekend X poll

What would you like to see more of in Shooting Times?

39% News and opinions

33% Seasonal outings

28% Advice and guidance

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To do this week



FOXING

Take full advantage of silage harvest for fox control. Newly cut hay and silage fields always draw in foxes and are well worth running a lamp over. If you think foxes are becoming lamp-shy, a thermal scope can work wonders — or simply settling yourself among some stacked bales and spending a quiet evening waiting can be equally effective.

➔ For more on foxing, see p38



CHECK

Lyme disease is a disabling bacterial condition spread by tick bites. The best defence is to prevent bites by wearing long clothing and using insect repellent. The next best is to spot and remove them with a tick removal tool. Finally, look out for the distinctive bullseye rash or flu-like symptoms following a bite and seek medical attention if you notice these signs. Check your dogs too.





Stalkers in the Irish Republic will no longer need to provide written landowner permissions

Now Irish deer licences go online to cut delays

Ireland brings in a new system to address delays but will it be labelled discriminatory after West Mercia Police attempted to do the same?

Deer hunting licences in the Republic of Ireland are to be streamlined by a new online platform developed by the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), which manages the country's nature conservation responsibilities. It aims to make it easier and faster for hunters to obtain their licences in time for the start of the season.

NPWS has made the application process for the deer hunting licence completely online through the Heritage Licensing Portal, which went live on Tuesday last week (4 June). Applications via post or email will be phased out.

Applicants will need to set up a user account on the NPWS Heritage Licensing Portal, uploading a passport-style photo and a firearms licence certificate or proof of firearm purchase (bit.ly/deerportal).

Earlier this year, West Mercia Police Force in England announced their firearms licensing process would be moved entirely

online and that printed shotgun and firearms applications would no longer be accepted.

BASC wrote to West Mercia to challenge the change, on the grounds it would have been discriminatory towards older certificate holders and those who didn't have access to the internet. West Mercia immediately backtracked and allowed paper applications to continue (News, 15 May).

Ireland, or the National Association of Regional Game Councils.

The NPWS no longer requires written landowner permissions. Instead, applicants must complete a declaration regarding land permission and compliance with Section 28 of the Wildlife Act.

Wicklow Mountains stalker Will O'Meara told *Shooting Times*: "I hope the new

“This new system should make it easier for visiting hunters to buy their deer licence”

The new licence system in Ireland will now require first-time hunters to pass a certificate of competence, which will be optional for renewing applicants. For those applying for a licence for the first time, the NPWS has mandated attendance of a deerstalking competency course run by either the Deer Alliance, Country Sports

online application and licence issuing will streamline the process and deliver licences to hunters in a simplified efficient manner.

“During the Covid pandemic there were significant delays. This new system should ensure no such delays occur and make it easier for visiting hunters to buy their licence.” **FP**

NGO recognises Sir Keir's keeping background

The National Gamekeepers' Organisation (NGO) has written to Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer to offer him honorary membership.

It has been widely reported over the past few weeks that Sir Keir's great-grandfather, Gustavus, worked as a gamekeeper at Marden Park Estate in Surrey. Sir Keir's father, grandfather and seven uncles were all keepers. He has played down this background but has spoken about the importance of the "togetherness of the countryside".

The NGO represents some 13,000 keepers, deer managers, wildlife rangers and riverkeepers, so with the general election so close, it



The Labour leader has strong familial links to gamekeeping

wanted to "to remind Labour about the importance of the rural vote" and emphasise Sir Keir's heritage.

ST contributor and stalker Chris Rogers said: "With [Sir Keir's] family background, it's an offer he should consider seriously. We need to be engaging

with all the politicians and parties for the benefit of the countryside, game, wildlife, and rural jobs. Traditional party stances on the countryside seem to be shifting and perhaps our own traditional views on these parties need to be reconsidered."

Syndicate that raised cash for kids' charity decides to close

A shooting syndicate in North Wales has decided to close after 24 years, despite raising more than £8,000 for charity in that time.

The Monday Club Syndicate, based in Bodelwyddan, was established in 2000 to enable local sportsmen and women to find good small-day shooting opportunities.

The syndicate also gave its members the chance to enjoy shoot days across the country, including Northumbria and Scotland, to help provide additional income to other rural communities.

The syndicate made donations to Children in Need each year by running sweepstakes on every shoot

day. Before the Covid crisis in 2020, the donations came to £3,640.

However, in the wake of the pandemic, the syndicate has decided to close and donate the remaining funds in the members' account to the charity. The additional donation amounted to £4,377, taking the total to £8,017.

Shoot captain Simon Kent said: "The Monday Club has always sought to give youngsters and those new to shooting an opportunity to experience game shooting in a cost-effective way. This is in addition to the opportunities of clay shooting and pest control the Monday Club undertook.

"This made supporting Children in Need an obvious choice for our charitable donation," he added.



The Monday Club syndicate raised thousands for Children in Need

NEWS IN BRIEF

New chairman for moorland group

Ice-cream tycoon James Lambert is the new chairman of the Moorland Association. Mr Lambert was elected unanimously by the board of directors at the AGM in May and succeeds Mark Cunliffe-Lister, who served as chair since 2020. Mr Lambert began working as a cattle breeder in north Yorkshire before investing in a local ice cream company and transforming it into a £1 billion business called Richmond Ice Cream. Moorland Association members manage around 860,000 acres of heather moorland and Mr Lambert praised their "tremendous contribution to the protection and conservation of one of the country's most precious landscapes".

'We're a country up for sale,' warns NFU

The head of the National Farmers' Union (NFU) has warned farming tenants are being uprooted to make way for large solar farms. Outgoing president Minette Batters said investors were able to buy up huge chunks of the rural landscape. "We are seeing horrific examples of some landowners taking back land from tenants to put into solar. We are country up for sale. We are selling off land to people who don't pay their taxes here. It has to change." She called for the next government to prioritise a new land strategy, so protections are given to traditional farming.



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Here's our manifesto for the election 2024

This is a pivotal moment for the future of shooting and we must all lobby our MPs via BASC's online campaign, urges Conor O'Gorman

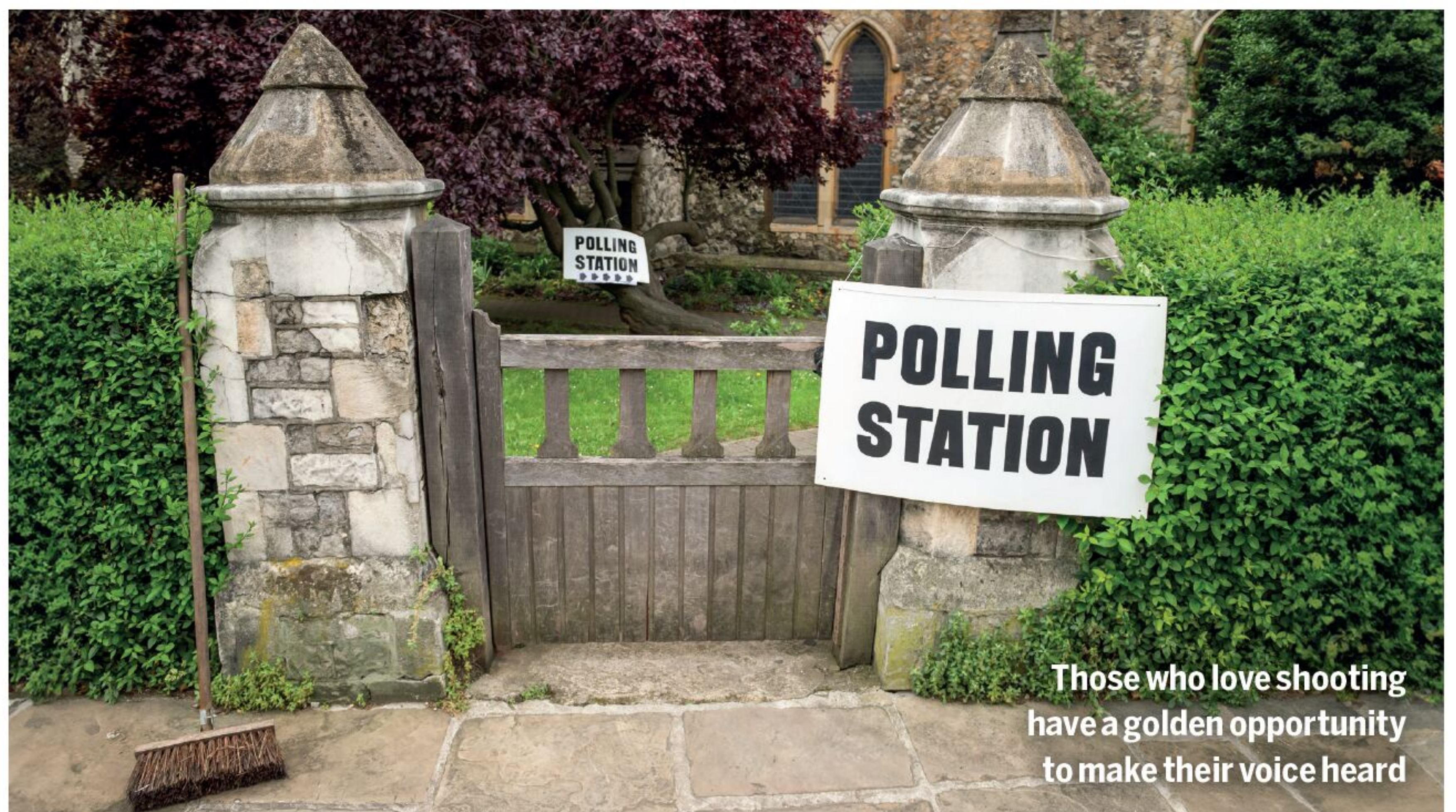
With the general election taking place earlier than expected, many key policy issues relevant to shooting and conservation now hang in the balance for the next government to determine. That includes decisions on the outcomes of recent consultations around the use of firearms and lead ammunition, as well as measures to improve firearms licensing, which involve the Home Office and the NHS.

None of these issues are easy nuts to crack but BASC is, and has always been, in for the long haul, to protect and promote shooting and conservation across the UK and overseas. That is not rhetoric, it's something I have seen first-hand working for BASC for 20 years. And I know that whatever happens next, BASC will continue to champion our collective cause across a vast diversity of shooting interests. It will seek out myriad supporters from among the latest tranche of 650 MPs, regardless of their political affiliation. BASC is an all-party organisation.

However, we really do need your help right now. BASC has launched an interactive online campaign on its website (basc.org.uk) to help people contact prospective MPs in their area and ask if they support BASC's election manifesto.

The BASC manifesto

- Sustainable shooting, which respects quarry species, seeks to conserve and improve the environment, avoids excessive consumption, complies with the law, improves the health and wellbeing of participants, as well as providing food and economic benefits to the wider community.
- Recognition by government that shooting is a force for good, delivering numerous environmental, economic and social benefits, and that it is a massive untapped resource for conservation and addressing the nature emergency.



Those who love shooting have a golden opportunity to make their voice heard

- A properly resourced firearms licensing system that fulfils its primary purpose of protecting public safety by being conducted efficiently and effectively.
- The recognition of the importance of shooting and conservation to rural economies during the close season, the humane management of species such as deer and agricultural pests, food production, rural heritage and culture, and social life across the country.
- A commitment by government to work with BASC to assist with the nature emergency by facilitating shooting's contribution to conservation and building participation in fieldsports.

You can use the template text from BASC's campaign for your emails or perhaps write your own personalised message, whether as an individual who shoots, or as someone who runs a shooting club or business. Whatever approach you take, please email any feedback you receive to politics@basc.org.uk — we will use that to update our webpages for those Parliamentary candidates who have confirmed their support for BASC's election manifesto.

The more feedback BASC receives from your interactions with candidate MPs across the UK, the more informed we all will all be, visiting BASC's website to check in on candidates as part of our own personal decision making on who to vote for.

In a recent interview, BASC's director of communications Christopher Graffius did not mince his words: "This election will be seen alongside of really big elections in our history, like 1910, 1945, 1997 and now 2024."

Perhaps this is not the time for us to continue to hide in the shadows, blaming our cynicism with politics. Instead, let's act now and show our collective voice as a shooting community that is proud and loud about the environmental, social and economic benefits that we deliver.

➔ Please visit the BASC website before 4 July to get involved. 🐦

🔗 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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SHOOTING TIMES[®]

ISSN: 0037-4164

& COUNTRY MAGAZINE

Fieldsports Press, Macnab House,
14 Belford Road, Edinburgh, EH4 3BL

**For editorial and
picture enquiries:**
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Shooting Times is the official weekly journal
of BASC. BASC, Marford Mill, Rossett LL12 0HL,
tel 01244 573000

We reserve the right to edit letters. Letters should be sent to:
The Editor, Shooting Times, Macnab House, 14 Belford Road,
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**FIELDSPORTS
PRESS**

SHOOTING TIMES 19 June

Pigeon shooting, picking
the right choke, BASC's
Value of Shooting report
and testing the HikMicro
Stellar thermal scope

... **AND MUCH MORE!**

Win!

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Bursary to encourage young stalkers

I read with interest your editorial about deer stalking and eating wild venison as shown on *Clarkson's Farm* (Contents, 22 May).

I also watched that episode and my feeling was, thank goodness he has finally got round to doing something about the abundant deer population on his farm. I stalk on three local farms and eat the results with my family, as well as sharing the meat with the farm owners and their families. We all enjoy eating the venison and are aware of the need to do something about the expanding population of deer that is negatively impacting the native woodlands.

As man has removed any natural predators of deer, such as wolves and bears, from the UK it seems the only way to keep the native and introduced species of deer in balance with nature is by eating them.

To this end I taught my son from the age of 12 to shoot and harvest prey animals in the UK. He started with rabbits and has recently — under my supervision — shot, prepared and eaten, along with the rest of his family, his first muntjac buck. A proud moment for a dad and his 14-year-old son.

To get my son to shoot safely and competently, he undertook marksmanship as his skill for Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Bronze Award. He was assessed by a military range instructor and was able to demonstrate competence with both a .17 Hornet and .308 Win to the satisfaction of the DofE assessors.

It seemed a natural progression from there to consider doing a Deer Stalking Certificate (DSC1) as a skill for the DofE Silver Award, which my son is currently undertaking. After some discussion with both the DofE Award scheme and the BDS, it has finally been agreed that this is now possible.

It seems the shooting community is very keen on educating the general population, and young people especially, about the need for deer management and woodland management to boost the UK green credentials and sustainable food production.

Using the popular DofE Awards as a vehicle to enable the education of the next generation on the benefits of game management, conservation and utilisation seemed an obvious step to me.

I was curious to get your thoughts on this idea. In

addition, given that words and statements of intent are easy to produce, I wondered if practical action to assist in the education of the young for the need of deer management, in the form of financial assistance, would be something the shooting community would support? A grant or bursary could go towards the cost of a DSC1 course, which is around £300 plus expenses.

Colin Dawson, by email

The Editor responds: We should be using all the opportunities available to us to encourage more youngsters into fieldsports and I agree that the DofE Awards are a perfect chance to introduce them to the basic skills. It is great that the BDS agrees as well (see the new column, Deer Matters, 5 June) and I am sure that the wider shooting community would support any funding that would help educate newcomers and novices.



Could funds be provided for young people to take a deer stalking course?

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.



HIDING UNDER A DESK?

I was interested to read the piece about the Police and Crime Commissioners election results (News, 22 May). Having answered the recent call to arms – appropriately – by Conor O’Gorman (*How will your PPC deal with licensing?*, 10 April), I duly tracked down

and wrote to my local PCC-elect. Thanks to Dr O’Gorman’s excellent tips on to find them, and using the letter template he provided, I informed the candidate of my concerns about the future of shooting. I’m sure you’ll be astonished to discover I did not receive any response at all. It may be, of course, that

my email never found its way to the candidate’s in-tray. But that doesn’t prevent the mental image I have of a senior police officer hiding under their desk with their hands over their ears, hoping these pesky shooting types would all just go away. I hope I’m wrong. **Alan Watson, London**



The BASC column included a helpful template of a letter to send to PCC candidates for the elections

A HOOP TO JUMP THROUGH

I must take issue with Alasdair Mitchell regarding his attack on elderly drivers (*Sharpshooter*, 15 May). For many elderly people, especially in rural areas, the ability to drive is very valuable. To attack them in order to deflect attention from the bureaucratic nonsense that is current firearm licensing is akin to those very few misguided individuals in the hunting community who, in order to defend hound sports in the face of a ban, attacked shooting sports.

When he says doctors cannot ban you from driving, they very nearly can. People are reported to the DVLA by their doctor, often for very minor health problems. As with the requirement for them to report individuals to the local firearms licensing department, this causes people to resist going to their doctor when they really should seek medical advice, possibly putting their lives at risk. I’ve written before criticising the need for applicants to get a certificate from their doctor, as it’s just one more hoop to jump

through to discourage firearms applicants. Until recently there was no need for this; you merely gave the police permission to approach your doctor if they considered it necessary, and this was a fairly recent imposition. The onus was on the police to waste their time and effort and not ours. It’s interesting that when medical checks were first proposed by the police or Home Office, GPs were opposed to the idea. They seemed to change their minds when they realised what a money-spinner it could be. **P A Blackman, by email**

“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

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Email: admin@doglost.co.uk



BILLY
Lurcher dog
Missing from Brinklow between Coventry and Rugby, Warwickshire since 21.04.24 Grey
DogLost ID: 191866



BELLE
Lurcher bitch
Missing near John Knox’s Pulpit, Kinross since 19.05.24 Blue (grey) DogLost ID: 192315



CHARLIE
Cocker spaniel dog
Missing from Watersfield/ Coldwaltham area, West Sussex since 03.04.24 Liver with white blaze on chest and docked tail DogLost ID: 191425



ELLA
Cocker spaniel bitch
Missing from Ripon area of North Yorkshire since 13.10.23 Gold and blonde with surgical scar back left leg DogLost ID: 191539



LEXI
Cocker spaniel bitch
Stolen from Chilcote south of Swadlincote, Leicestershire on 01.08.20 Black with small white goatee Leicestershire Police crime reference number: 20000414313 DogLost ID: 158923



MAXI
Fox terrier bitch
Missing from Ballon, Co Carlow, Ireland since 16.01.24 White and grey DogLost ID: 189938



TINKERBELL
Labrador retriever bitch
Stolen from near A38 between Willington and Burton upon Trent, Derbyshire on 23.05.18 Yellow Derbyshire Constabulary crime reference number: 18000239305 DogLost ID: 129523



NAME WITHHELD
Lakeland terrier bitch
Missing from Wensley near Leyburn, North Yorkshire, since 04.12.23 Red DogLost ID: 189596



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

Gamekeeper



The first pheasant chicks hatch, followed by the lapwings – but desperate action is needed to ensure they don't go under the roller

The last day of April was my first encounter with the first brood of this year's pheasant chicks. The hen briefly peered out from tall vegetation on the edge of ground being prepared for this year's wild bird food crops. Her brood, like unruly children, spilled out on to the freshly prepared ground, giving me a chance to see them. I estimated they only hatched that morning. As quickly as they appeared, the diligent hen soon called them back into the relative safety of the cover.

A deep sense of satisfaction always rolls over me when I see the first chicks,

“Words of division are seized upon and used to split and separate us”

an indication that all the hard work has been worth it. She's in the lap of the weather gods now; wild hen pheasants are a world away from their reared counterparts that vastly outnumber them.

In the 14 years of the Bywell game and conservation project, I've seen the stock of birds becoming increasingly accustomed to the climate and weather patterns. They often lay in some of the most unlikely seasons, and their naturalisation has given them the ability to respond to good management practices. They can therefore produce at least a couple of chicks in the most difficult of years.

I worry, though, that the changes in our weather patterns will create a more difficult period for all wild birds. We can only hope that management options will allow for manipulation of the habitat to facilitate and minimise impacts on vulnerable wildlife that changes to our climate may bring.

Lapwings on the estate seem to have fared well this year, despite some horrendous weather at times. Somehow the early chicks missed the worst of the downpours and a number of almost-fledged chicks are now mixing with second hatches of relatively juvenile birds.



Diverse habitat is benefiting lapwings and other ground-nesters, but their world is full of hazards

A poor autumn for agriculture restricted the sowing of autumn varieties of the corn mixes, granting the lapwings a greater diversity in the habitat they could choose for breeding.

The work we have conducted for 14 years now means we have a viable population of returning adults. This year they were spoilt for choice and, with less farming activity, all this combined to give the lapwings the best chance in years for breeding success.

Vulnerable

As ever a watchful eye was kept on farm activities to reduce a negative impact on wildlife. One day, when rollers were seen moving on to vulnerable land, a stance was made in defence of nesting lapwings. It got to the point when both Gilly and I were quite prepared, on one field, to lie down in front of the rollers to stop the operation. Luckily for us, my bleats of protest were heard and the tractors and rollers did not enter that particular field. Three days later the first

chicks hatched – without intervention they certainly would have perished.

Distance

I was a fisher before I became a shooter and fishing has always been a panacea for me; some of the most difficult times have been remedied by simply thinking about fishing. I find it difficult to read words written by fishers who seem to feel that distancing themselves from shooters will help. Charles Jardine recently wrote that “anglers have always felt apart from other areas of fieldsports, clinging on to our laudable conservation aims”.

Do we not all have laudable conservation aims? Surely words of division are seized upon by our opponents and used to split and separate us. We should not be frightened to self-police and we should be shouting from the rooftops about the great work that tens of thousands of individuals are doing in all the country sports on a daily basis to help protect and preserve vulnerable habitats and species. 🐦



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Chris Dalton is a professional stalker and a regular presenter on *The Shooting Show*



Stalking Diary



The sight of injured or dead animals by the roadside is never pleasant and it seems worse when it's the deer that stalkers have to manage



Distracted roe deer that wander by the roadside are vulnerable to vehicle strikes

I have spent a lot of time in the truck recently, driving back and forth across the border. During my latest trip, it stuck me just how many dead animals I saw by the roadside, the majority of which were badgers. I have no love for badgers — they are on a par with foxes as far as I am concerned — and where they exist in numbers there is a corresponding decrease in many other species such as hedgehogs and ground-nesting birds. That's before I even mention bovine tuberculosis and the devastation it causes to our farming communities.

Responsibility

Despite all that, I do not like to think of them being squashed. We should recognise that when a species is doing too well, and if that has a serious detrimental effect on others, action needs to be taken. With no natural predator, the responsibility falls to us, no matter how difficult or unpalatable it may be. However, getting our elected politicians to acknowledge that, with a few exceptions, seems to be impossible. I lost count of the numbers of squished things I saw as I headed north but it did include deer — all were roe apart from one muntjac.

It is a vulnerable time for roe, particularly the bucks and the youngsters that are getting pushed around by the bigger lads

— they can become distracted, which is dangerous, especially if you are wandering along the roadside verges. I was mulling this over as I returned home after attending The National Shooting Show in May. I was there on the Sunday, meeting some of the distributors I work with; what struck me was the buoyant mood around the place and the reports of brisk trade.

However, there was some disquiet among the dealers who are specifically

“I have no love for badgers – they are on par with foxes as far as I am concerned”

stalking-orientated. Most of them reported significantly lower levels of sales or interest when compared with previous years; they all put it down to The Stalking Show, held as it is a month earlier. That said, I really enjoyed my day and met up with a lot of very happy punters who were having a great time and the sun was shining, which is always a bonus.

After a few days away I am always up and away early with Zosia, so Monday morning saw me sat in the hedge bottom glassing the boundary of a meadow close to Garryloop. The field had been mown for silage over the weekend and the freshly cut grass is a magnet for foxes. I waited

for an hour with no fox showing, but I was entertained by a lovely six-point roebuck who was teasing a young doe for most of that time. I called it a morning and quietly backed off, leaving them undisturbed. To be honest they were so wrapped up in whatever game they were playing they would not have noticed me had I walked off in full view.

I was driving out of the farm when my phone rang, a strange occurrence at

that hour, and it usually means there is a problem. Sure enough, one of the timber-harvesting drivers on his way to work had seen an injured roebuck by the little railway bridge; he thought it was still alive.

I drove up and it was another six-point buck with his pelvic area and rear leg all smashed. He was alive, but only just. He had obviously been clipped by a vehicle. I despatched him swiftly, hoping he had not been lying suffering in that condition for too long. Such a waste. 🐾

🔗 Chris Dalton is the founder of South Ayrshire Stalking. Visit ayrstalk.co.uk



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Patrick Laurie

Country Diary

Predator control is an important part of the conservation puzzle and the shooting community needs to explain why to the general public

Predator control means different things to different people. Systematic, structured suppression of foxes and crows by professional gamekeepers can be extremely positive for all kinds of wildlife — in fact, there's almost no replacement for it. Even when conservation charities hire "predator management specialists", the outcome usually falls far short of what you'd expect from a keeper. But beneath the gold standard, all sorts of predator control are delivered by enthusiastic amateurs. Some of this is really good, but much of it is patchy and disorganised.

You could say that if any fox is shot, it's all to the good — and perhaps this was true in the days when foxes were extremely scarce and you only had to kill one or two in the course of a year in order to make a difference. But nowadays, the number of foxes seems to have skyrocketed — and one or two dead ones make no difference whatsoever to the success of rare or endangered birds like curlew or lapwings.

Barmy

Random shooting of foxes in July and August is likely to provide almost zero conservation benefit. And unless it's linked to a widespread and carefully planned attempt to reduce fox numbers across a wide area, this kind of shooting is neither here nor there. I've even heard that some people don't shoot foxes during the breeding season so they can be sure of more foxes to shoot in the autumn and winter. Having spent 15 years in wader conservation, this approach seems barmy. If you can justify the sport by arguing that it's not doing any harm to fox populations, it's equally fair to say that it's not doing any good for conservation either.

As biodiversity issues rise up the agenda, it's increasingly clear that predator control is an indispensable piece of the conservation puzzle in many parts of the country. The shooting community has known this for years but, as many people slowly come round to the idea, they're still finding it hard to make their peace with fox control because it all seems like a bit of fun — as if the primary purpose of taking a life



Fox numbers are controlled for an array of reasons, including conservation, but never just for fun

is simply for excitement. Shooting people might understand this differently, but it's logical that newcomers would be confused.

None of this should sound like a wagging finger or a criticism of people who shoot foxes recreationally. I have done an awful lot of it and I'd be a hypocrite if I made out that it shouldn't be allowed — but it does highlight a strange gap in the law that allows foxes to be killed with almost no legislative oversight whatsoever.

The justification for this extremely permissive approach to fox control is that

“It's not enough to say we shoot foxes simply ‘because they're bad’”

farmers and shooters have effectively said “we'll handle this”. But rising numbers of foxes in the countryside and a consequent decline in rare and endangered birds seems to suggest that, away from areas of proper gamekeeping, farmers and shooters are not on top of this problem.

It's therefore only logical for the general public to ask why this is the case. Looking back to the furore over the review

of general licences a few years ago, the whole business fell into chaos because a campaign group suggested that many birds, such as crows and pigeons, were being shot “for no clear reason”.

The result is that shooters are now required to demonstrate a clear and straightforward rationale for their actions. We might find that tiresome, but it's a useful paper trail for the general public who may not understand why certain activities are undertaken in the countryside. And it's a useful thought exercise to apply the same question to the control of foxes.

As a community, we have to be tighter and clearer on many of our activities, and it may not be good enough to say that we shoot foxes simply “because they're bad”. There are hundreds of excellent reasons why it's important to control fox numbers — and if I'm being deliberately controversial here, perhaps it helps to focus the mind and think clearly about our objectives. The exercise might also prepare us for a debate that may soon be coming our way. 🦉

🦉 Patrick Laurie manages a programme to promote farming and conservation, with a particular focus on wading birds and black grouse, and runs a farm in Galloway.

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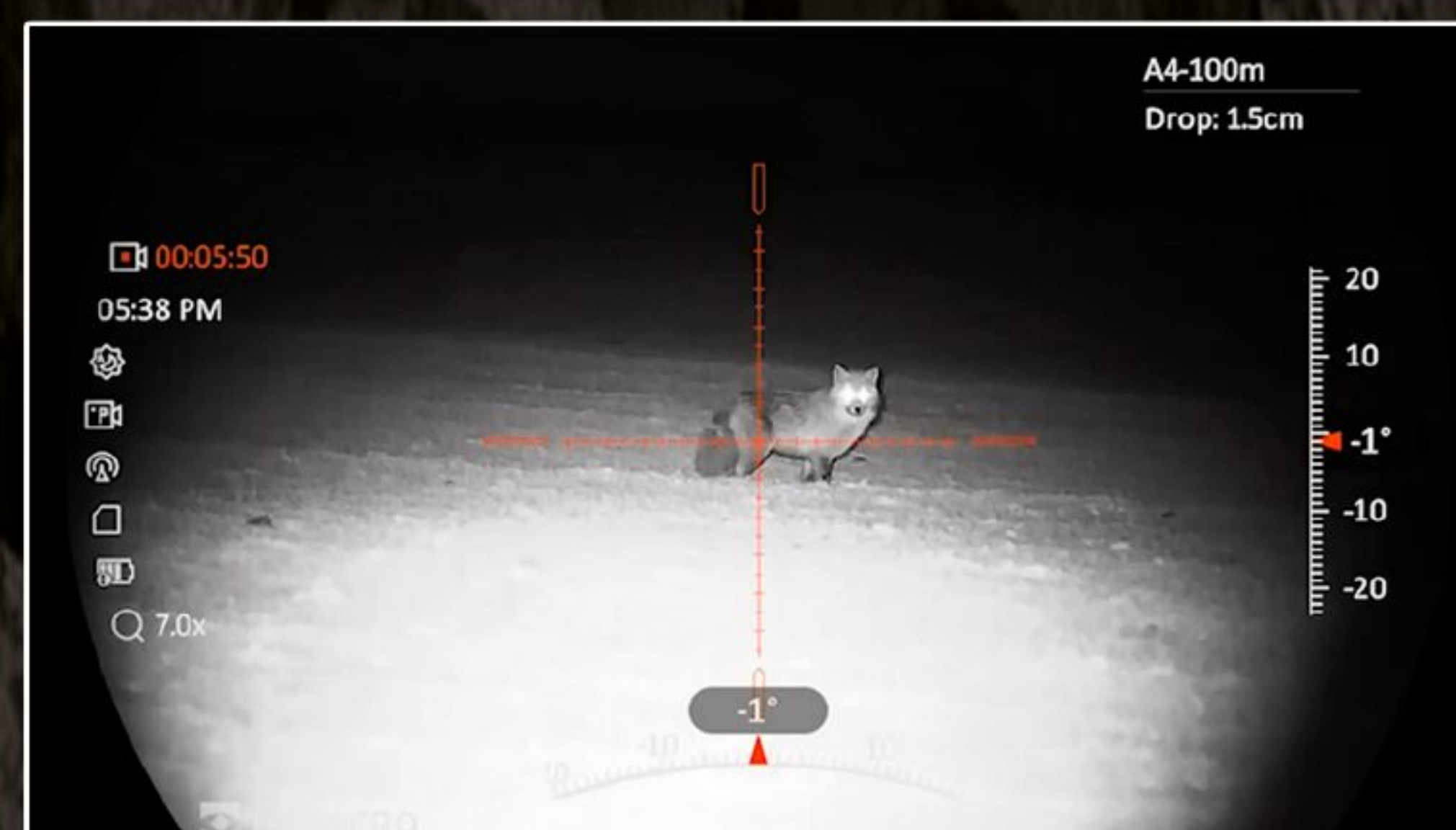
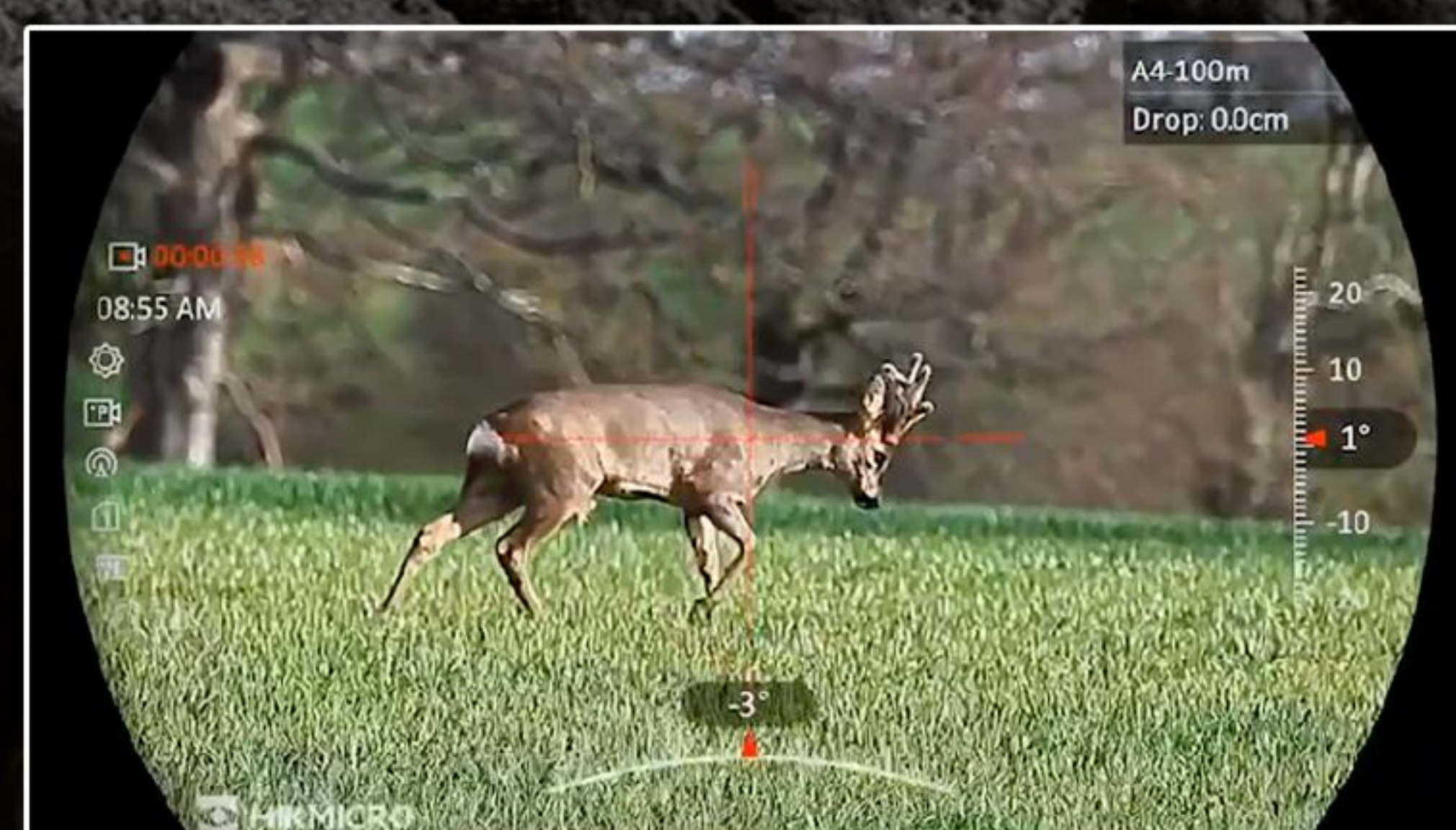


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Sporting Life

Keepers don't need personal trainers to stay fit, but their time is at a premium

As far as I'm aware, none of my gamekeeping friends have ever felt the need to visit a gym. Lifting and carrying sacks of gamebird feed provides a daily workout that helps keep their core muscles as strong as would any machines to be found down at the local sports centre. And the physical exertion required to build release pens or replace rotten posts with the aid of a heavy double-handled post rammer undoubtedly assists in developing a six-pack stomach, of which actor Chris Hemsworth in the film *Thor: Ragnarok* would be proud.

Out on the grouse moors there's often some heavy lifting to be done around the stone constructed butts, after sheep have used them as convenient rubbing posts and shelter over the winter months. Between October and April, keeping the necessary heather burns under control with the aid of long-handled fire beaters can also involve a degree of strenuous activity. Added to which, the general inaccessibility of some parts of the moor means the only way to get there is by shanks's pony — isotonic training of the most fundamental kind.

And what of riverkeepers? Theirs might seem a sedentary life spent ambling along the bankside, giving advice as to the best type of flies to use and indulging in general chitchat with the fisherfolk. Behind the scenes, however, there are sluiceways to maintain, banks to be repaired and occasional bouts of tree surgery to be considered. Periodic weed cutting, traditionally with chain scythes — a series of scythe blades linked together with a rope at each end for pulling — is, by anyone's standards, a workout comparable to any exercise set by a personal trainer.

Panther-lean

So given the general fitness required for the job, you might possibly ask the (hypothetical) question, why it is that not all of today's keepers are panther-lean? Especially in comparison with those depicted in shooting-related photos of several decades ago who — even though the formality of jacket, shirt and tie and breeches of their everyday workwear might mask their physique — generally appear to be fit and trim.

Of course, without modern aids and technology, their work was even more physically demanding than that of their modern-day counterparts. Not only that, the option of transport was virtually non-existent and, in most instances, limited to walking, the use of a bicycle, possibly a cob-type horse — usually the prerogative

some kind of ATV has, of necessity, mostly taken the place of hand-feeding for purely time-driven reasons.

Only a fool would choose not to take advantage of any aids, mechanical or otherwise, available. But their use — plus the requirement of time management — has certainly lessened the opportunities

“There's enough physical graft to negate any need for keepers to visit the gym”

of the headkeeper — or the occasional use of a pony and cart borrowed from the farm when it was time to take the pheasant poults to the woodland rides.

Times change. Quad bikes and other all-terrain vehicles make the job easier and, dare we say it, perhaps some keepers a little lazy. That there is more ground to be covered by an individual than there was in the days when estate owners employed copious amounts of beatkeepers is a fact — and one that needs to be taken into account when considering the day-to-day duties. As an example, spin-feeding from

for a keeper to quietly walk their ground and observe at close hand the presence of predators, tracks (animal or human), a flock of fur caught on the lower strand of a barbed wire fence or to simply enjoy interesting flora and fauna. All of these might very easily be missed from the seat of a vehicle.

All that said, there's undoubtedly enough physical graft remaining in a keeper's everyday life to negate any need for them to visit their local gym — and all without the cost of an expensive annual membership fee. 🐾



Gamekeepers now rely heavily on ATVs to cover vast tracts of land during their long working day

🐾 **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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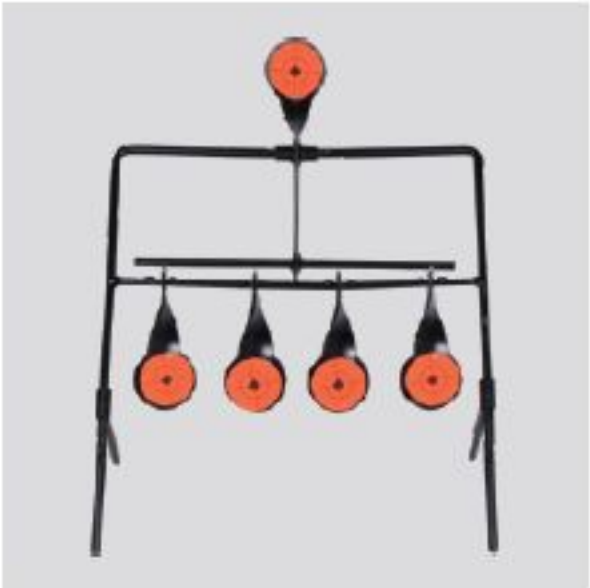
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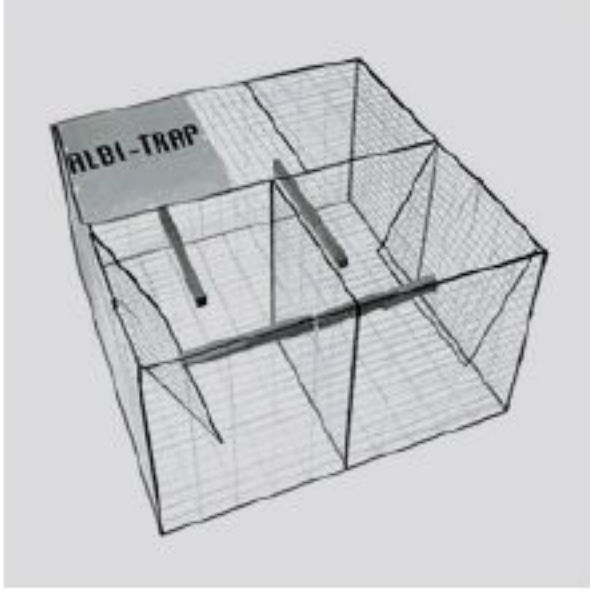
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A Cam-do attitude

The time you have to fish is not always the best time to fish, but sometimes the stars align and the trout rise to the fly

WRITTEN BY GEOFF GARROD ♦ PHOTOGRAPHED BY RICHARD FAULKES

Unlike many rivers, the Cam seems to fish best when there has been a decent amount of rain, after which it runs gin-clear



Is there anything more calming for the soul than standing on a riverbank on a warm late-spring evening?



The old cane rod, bought at auction for £60, seems perfectly paired with a Hardy Sovereign reel

I'm an avid and addicted pigeon shooter. That's my passion and I'm a very lucky man because it's also part of my job as a gamekeeper. Vermin control is one of the many areas I'm in charge of on the estate where I work. This covers protecting the pheasants and partridges we release, and helping the farm to protect its crops.

It is my primary passion but I also enjoy the occasional bit of fly-fishing on the river Cam, which we are fortunate to have running through the shoot land nearby. It contains some fantastic, rarely disturbed brown trout. About one-and-a-half miles of the river is infrequently fished and hidden away, so we keep it exclusively for the estate. There are no fishing clubs on this stretch and it's only the land agent and me who wet a line when conditions are right.

If you're expecting some detailed information about how to fly-fish for trout, you're going to be disappointed. I'm not an expert. But I do find my few days out with the rod rather than my gun extremely relaxing. You can't beat a late spring evening for a couple of hours fishing. It is a slower-paced

sport than pigeon shooting. Standing by a river is one of those things that helps to destress and calm the soul – it's similar to looking into a fire on a winter's night – until you spot a fish rise or there's a tug on your line.

Catching a fish is the main aim of a trip to the river, but there are many species of flora and fauna you see on the riverbank that make even a fish-less evening enjoyable.

I probably only go out with my fly-rod three or four times a year, but I used to fish more often with friends on the reservoirs or occasionally, if I was very lucky, I'd get a call to fish for salmon on some of the rivers in Scotland. This was a fair few years ago when the salmon were more plentiful and I did have some success, making great memories along the way.

Timing

The more salmon fishing I did, though, the more I realised that timing and the weather is everything if you want to catch one. I was lucky enough to have friends knowledgeable enough and who lived close to the rivers who knew exactly when the fish were running.

Some of the calls were very last-minute, but you knew you were in with a chance if you could get away to make the most of the local knowledge.

Deeper stretches

In a funny way, timing is very important with the Cam too. It's a varied stretch of river on the estate and can be slow-flowing in the deeper parts. With warm weather the water colours up with sediment from the riverbed. What you really need is a good amount of rain, the opposite of what you want for many rivers.

A good heavy shower seems to settle the particles floating in the water column and, for a few days, the river will run gin-clear. Heavy rain usually has the very opposite effect on many other rivers, turning them chocolate brown – but you'll just have to trust me when I tell you that is not the case here.

“There had to be a fish lying under the cover in the water”

It was a calm and slightly muggy evening when I set off to the river at about 6pm, and there had been good sharp showers of rain in the morning. It only takes a couple of minutes to walk down to one of my favourite spots where there's a long, slow-flowing glide that holds some of the larger fish. I thought I'd start there and see if anything would show itself.

You rarely see rises, but you can often see the bow waves or water disturbance of fish moving on still evenings. It had been a couple of days since I last took a look at the river ➡



Geoff chooses a Hare's Ear, which he casts (left) and allows to sink a little in the water

Fly-fishing

and it looked like I may have been a day early for the best of the fishing. The water had cleared significantly, though it wasn't as clear as it can be, but the level hadn't risen, so it was definitely fishable. I couldn't fish the following day so it was now or never.

I like to fish with a lovely cane rod I bought at an auction about 20 years ago for £60, accompanied by a Hardy Sovereign reel. They add a little to the occasion and I love them as pieces of equipment. The rod is heavy compared with modern ones, but I only fish for a couple of hours at a time and I never need to cast very far on such a small river. So the pairing feels perfect for the job and simply puts a smile on my face.

The river seemed very quiet when I had set up my rod and tied on a size 12 Hare's Ear fly. I decided to have a few exploratory casts into a couple of likely spots, but my first catch of the evening was a lovely, fully leafed tree as usual. I had no joy on my favourite stretch, but I didn't let that put me off because I knew the fish wouldn't



The first fish doesn't want to play but the second is more obliging and neatly landed

gravel bank and into a bend that has been scoured out by the current and is pretty deep.

A few metres after the river deepens, an ivy-covered hawthorn tree had half fallen over and there had to be a fish lying under the cover in the deep water. I usually fish streamers

“It's always exciting to see the movement in the water and it gets the heart pumping”

really switch on until a little later, up until last light. I decided to move upriver and return to this spot later.

Further upstream, the river narrows and becomes more wooded, fast-flowing and overgrown with alder and yew trees. But it's also great habitat for fish with plenty of large dead wood in the river. There's one bend that has been a lucky spot for me in the past and I thought I'd try it. The river flows over a shallow

or weighted nymphs, which I swing on the current or retrieve with a few small tugs and twitches if the flow of the water is too slow.

I cast my second Hare's Ear fly to the far bank and let it sink and swing under the hawthorn. It wasn't long before I felt the anticipated tug on the line and I was into my first fish of the evening. It wasn't a monster, but was a hard-fighting 10in, perfectly marked brown trout.



Like the first, the second trout is around 10in with perfect fins

On another of the deep bends upstream, I had a few follows and I could see a fish swirling at my fly as it slipped through the water. It decided against attaching itself, but it's always exciting to see the movement and it gets the heart pumping. A second fish was more obliging, though, and I landed a similar-sized, perfectly finned little trout from under an overhanging yew close to the bank.

I thought it would be a good idea to head back to the slower-flowing, deeper stretch because it looked like the fish were more active now the light was begging to fade. Back at the deeper glide, the water surface was showing signs of movement beneath. You could tell that fish were moving around, as the surface of the water was glass-like in the windless conditions so any movement was easy to spot.

Electrofishing

This stretch of river is deeper because there is a sluiceway downstream to control the flow in front of the house and for flood control. The river is stocked downstream, but the fish can't get up past the sluiceway, so all those above the gate are definitely wild. I've never seen any other species and the river was electrofished a few years ago, which confirmed that only trout seem to live here.

There are some beauties lurking below in the depths. My personal best fish was about 4lb 8oz and I've had glimpses of bigger specimens. Below me and under yet another tree, quite close into the bank, I spotted movement. It was about 8pm at this point but still warm and humid. I cast my fly out into the centre of the river and let it swing back to the disturbed water below. Nothing. Not even a nip on the fly or a swirl.

I lengthened my line and cast again... Bump! A fish took the fly and proceeded to chase about the pool. It took a minute or two to get it under control and then to the net. It was a decent 15in trout. I know there are bigger fish in this stretch of river, but this one made the trip worthwhile.

The evening finished there with three hard-fighting fish to the net – two 10in to 12in and one about 15in. We're very lucky to have this gem of a river so close and with so little fishing pressure put upon it. I'll keep my eye on the forecast and hope to have another evening out soon. 🐟

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Deer management

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Felix Petit joins a team in a helicopter — one of two — for a Highland deer count

A view to a cull

As deer management in Scotland causes ever more controversy, head counts are vital to get an accurate picture of the problem

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY FELIX PETIT

Since October 2023 there have no longer been close seasons for any male deer in Scotland. New government legislation proposals for deer management nature restoration orders (DMNROs) could amount to state-mandated culls on private land, if appropriate density targets are perceived not to have been met (*News*, 5 June). A proposed extension to the hind culling season continues to divide opinion and has ensured these issues are never far from the headlines.

Although the deer management and wildlife sector hosts a broad church of opinions on what the best strategy is for managing deer impact, few disagree that attempting to quantify deer population and distribution in Scotland is essential. Without a detailed picture of deer

numbers and their effects on nature conservation, future management risks being ineffective or overzealous.

With this in mind, a superb team at NatureScot work with the 47 deer management groups that lie to the north of the Highland Boundary Fault Line to provide the numerical resolution necessary for informed policymaking. NatureScot conducts its deer counts in a number of ways — but one of the most effective is by helicopter. I made a request to NatureScot to tag along on one of these counts to see for myself how they were performed.

It responded immediately and generously invited me along to help record on a count of the East Loch Ericht Deer Management Group (ELEDMG), which covers a triangular 35,800 hectares bounded by the A9 ➞

Deer management

to the east, Loch Rannoch to the south and Loch Erich to the north-west.

NatureScot wildlife management officer Jimmy was heading up this count. He told me to meet him and the rest of the team at PDG Aviation Services near Inverness airport early on a late April morning. I arrived a little ahead of time and gave Jimmy a call to check I was in the right place.

A stalker from the estate is picked up on-site to assist as a spotter and help confirm estate boundaries.

Feeling a bit like an astronaut – or at the very least an extra on *Top Gun* – I followed the others out across the helipad. Lucy, our pilot, gave me a safety briefing and Jimmy handed me a headset. Today, we were using two helicopters to complete the count

“Adopting a blanket limit across Scotland could be seen as reductive and unnuanced”

He confirmed that I was and asked me if I had my passport. My heart sank; I had forgotten this key document.

This was galling because I had driven more than 600 miles to make this count and, like a total lemon, I had forgotten the only thing that I absolutely needed. Jimmy let me stew for 10 seconds, then started chuckling. Phew, we were still on.

Shortly after this reprieve I met the rest of the team for the day, a selection of stalkers and wildlife officers. Next, I was given a summary of how the day would run. Rather than being a dead weight on the outing, I was to be helping record the groups of deer. During a count, the flight track is plotted digitally, allowing the survey area to be logged. This reduces the risk of any double counting.

When a group of deer is spotted, it is given a unique GPS point on the map, which correlates to a group and image number. My responsibility was to note this down. The camera operator sits by an open window of the helicopter, photographing the deer to be precisely counted later.

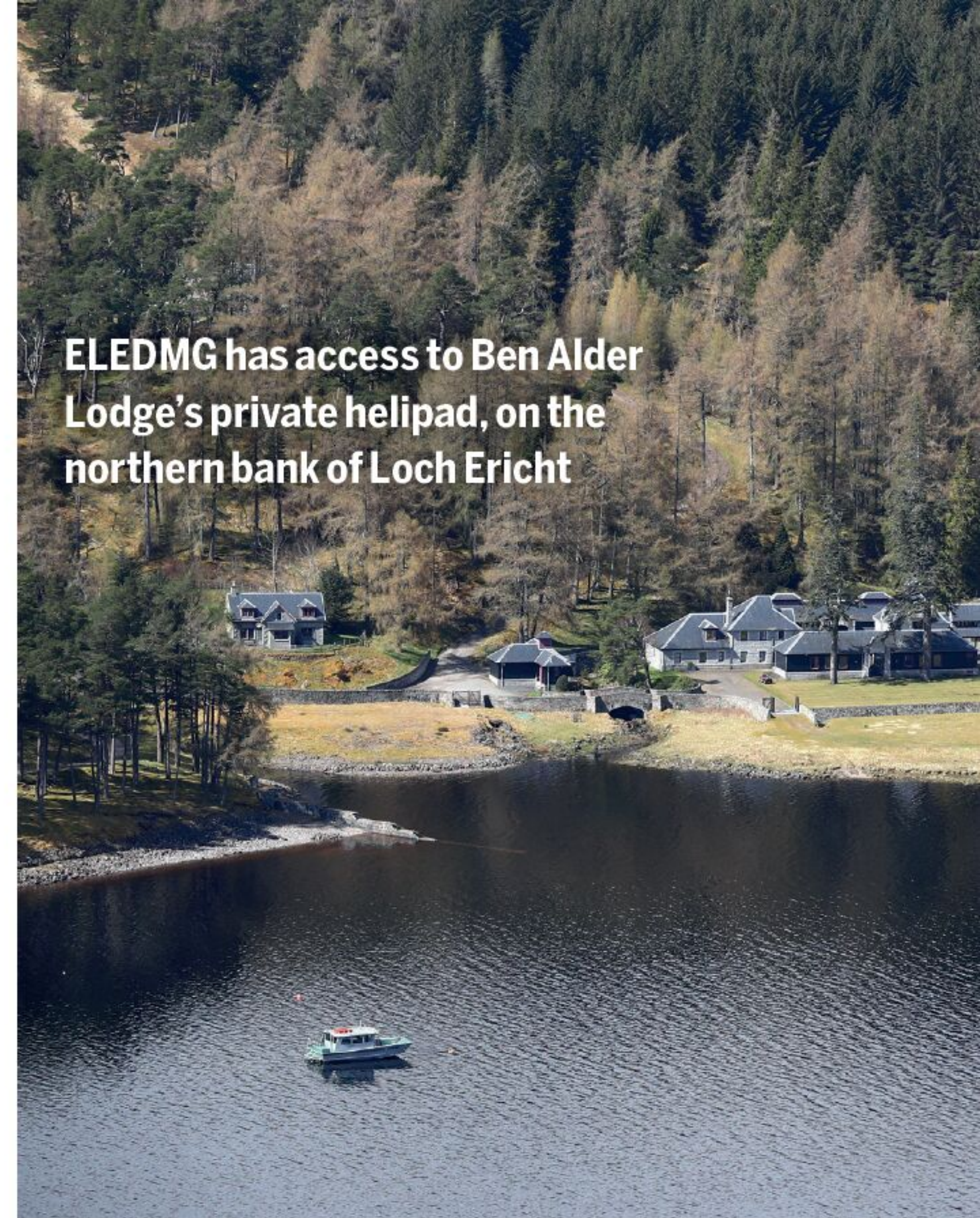
and we took off one after the other, heading south and flying at an altitude of little over 500ft. We crossed the river Findhorn and gained height to give a windfarm a high berth. This was beyond thrilling. I stared back at the Moray Firth, trying to spot the battlefield of Culloden and watching the sluggish passage of traffic along the tarmac ribbon of the A9.

Decades of muirburn

Twenty minutes later we passed over Dalwhinnie and put down at the eastern end of Loch Garry at Dalnaspidal. Here, we had a quick briefing on the areas we were going to fly over, and each helicopter picked up a stalker from ELEDMG. The sun was shining and a pair of oystercatchers scuttled around the field we'd landed in. Sporadic calls of “go-back go-back go-back” echoed from the patchwork heather hills that bore the marks of decades of muirburn. Up we went again and the best was yet to come.

Chris, our photographer, had the end of his long lens poking out of the

ELEDMG has access to Ben Alder Lodge's private helipad, on the northern bank of Loch Erich



Pictures of herds are taken from the helicopter to be examined later for a more accurate count



window into the crisp mountain air, while Jimmy directed Lucy which tree lines to follow and which corries to explore. Nick, a giant, bearded archetype of a Highland keeper who'd joined us, motioned to where the deer were usually to be found. I had paper and pen in hand to record the image and group numbers that were shouted out to me.

As I dealt with some strange internal sensations brought on by Lucy's vigorous but precise flying, I slowly got the hang of the notation. The others were a well-oiled unit and we quickly got into a rhythm.

The process was extraordinary. All five of us would be scanning the mountains and moorland for movement. When someone called out that they'd identified a group, Lucy would spin on the spot and

The team in the helicopter all scan the landscape below for signs of deer





Lucy the pilot flies over the 35,800 hectares of land in search of deer



Above: **Kitted up, the team heads for the waiting helicopter.** Top: **plotting their course of action**

drift round to line up the left-hand side of the helicopter, out of which the long lens of the camera was wielded.

If the group of deer in our sights was too disparate, like an airborne collie we would circle round to gather them into a tighter herd to photograph them as one and reduce the chance of an inaccurate count.

Staggering vistas

Methodically, Jimmy directed us over our allotted area, sweeping up herd after herd. Despite the time of year there was still snow on the high tops and icy tendrils fringing the mountain tarns. After three hours of stomach-churning wonder, tightly banked turns and staggering vistas, we returned to Dalnaspidal for a quick sandwich, a refuel and a change of stalker.

Once again airborne, we set off across the glorious scenery. We swept down the precipitous southern shores of Loch Ericht, passing over the stunning Ben Alder Lodge, which clings to the loch's northern coast. The lodge's private helipad, complete with subterranean hanger, reminded me of Tracy Island from *Thunderbirds*. Ruairidh, the new stalker we had brought onboard, pointed out a disused eyrie high on a cliff next to a tumbling cascade of water whose spray was caught by the wind.

Shortly after, we diverted to avoid disturbing a circling white-tailed eagle; soon after that, we saw a golden eagle from distance.

Despite the onset of spring we were ambushed by a snowstorm. At one point Lucy turned perpendicular to the wind and the cockpit was filled

Deer management

with a maelstrom of snowflakes blowing in through the open window. The snow dramatically reduced the visibility, meaning the camera was unable to pick out individual deer clearly, so we decided to put down and let the weather pass.

We landed at a desolate spot on the shore by Corrievarkie Lodge, which must be one of the loneliest habitations in the British Isles – over an hour to the nearest post office and more than an hour and a half by car to the closest supermarket.

Purpose

Eventually, the cloud lifted and we got on with the rest of the count. During our final passes we disturbed a mountain hare, still brilliantly white despite the season. We investigated a few final valleys, including the wonderfully named Corriesporran, then headed back to drop off Ruairidh. The day had been fascinating but I tried not to be entirely swept up in the magic of the experience and lose sight of the purpose of these counts.

In 2020 the Deer Working Group recommended that NatureScot adopt 10 red deer per square kilometre as an upper benchmark for acceptable densities over large areas of the Highlands. While a limit for red deer in the Highlands may be beneficial as a measure of progress, adopting a blanket density limit across Scotland could be seen as reductive and unnuanced, as the impacts from deer occur at different densities throughout the country depending on habitat, location and time of year.

Despite the limitations of counting methods like this – and their focus primarily on red deer in upland environments – the counts provide important data to try to gauge the scale of local populations. This in turn allows managers to compare densities and the impact on biodiversity of different red deer numbers across a variety of habitats.

Deer counting is a complex business and methods for quantifying populations of other species of deer in lowland and forest environments still leave much room for inaccuracy. Although NatureScot's helicopter counts should not define deer management policy alone, it is a fantastic data source that should continue to be fed into landscape-scale nature restoration plans. 🦌

Play corvids at their own sneaky game

Mat Manning shares some of his top kit choices for targeting the notoriously stealthy crow clan with a hide and decoy tactics

Although much of my corvid control is done with shotguns, there are times when an air rifle is a better choice. While some shooters regard airguns' comparatively modest power as a disadvantage, there are plenty of scenarios in which it can be a real asset.

Quiet, precise and very discreet, modern airguns offer a stealthy option for controlling crows, rooks and jackdaws in places where you wouldn't dream of using a gun with more grunt. Around the farmyard and other places, where you will be shooting in close proximity to buildings or livestock, an air rifle is about the only realistic option.

Over recent weeks, I have been doing a lot of pest control on a farm where corvids were swooping in to

raid cattle feed. My airgun approach enabled me to pick off the birds from an inconspicuous hide and was so quiet that the cows hardly even noticed I was there.

On another occasion, I had to deal with crows and rooks that had descended on a freshly drilled field. There is no denying that a noisy approach with a shotgun would have pushed the birds away, but it

“A discreet hide and decoys can steer birds within striking distance”

wasn't an option because the field in question was wedged between houses and pony paddocks.

By setting up a discreet hide and using decoys to steer incoming birds within striking distance, I made good tallies on two consecutive days before the remainder of the flock decided the field was not a safe place to frequent and moved on elsewhere.

All the members of the corvid family are notoriously artful and results are certainly better if you employ a considered approach and the right kit. This roundup features some of the tried and tested items that have earned a regular place in my crow control lineup over the past year or so. 🐦

Left: **Any dead birds can be added to your decoy pattern to make it look more natural**



The Hawke Sidewinder is an excellent telescopic sight without a massive price tag

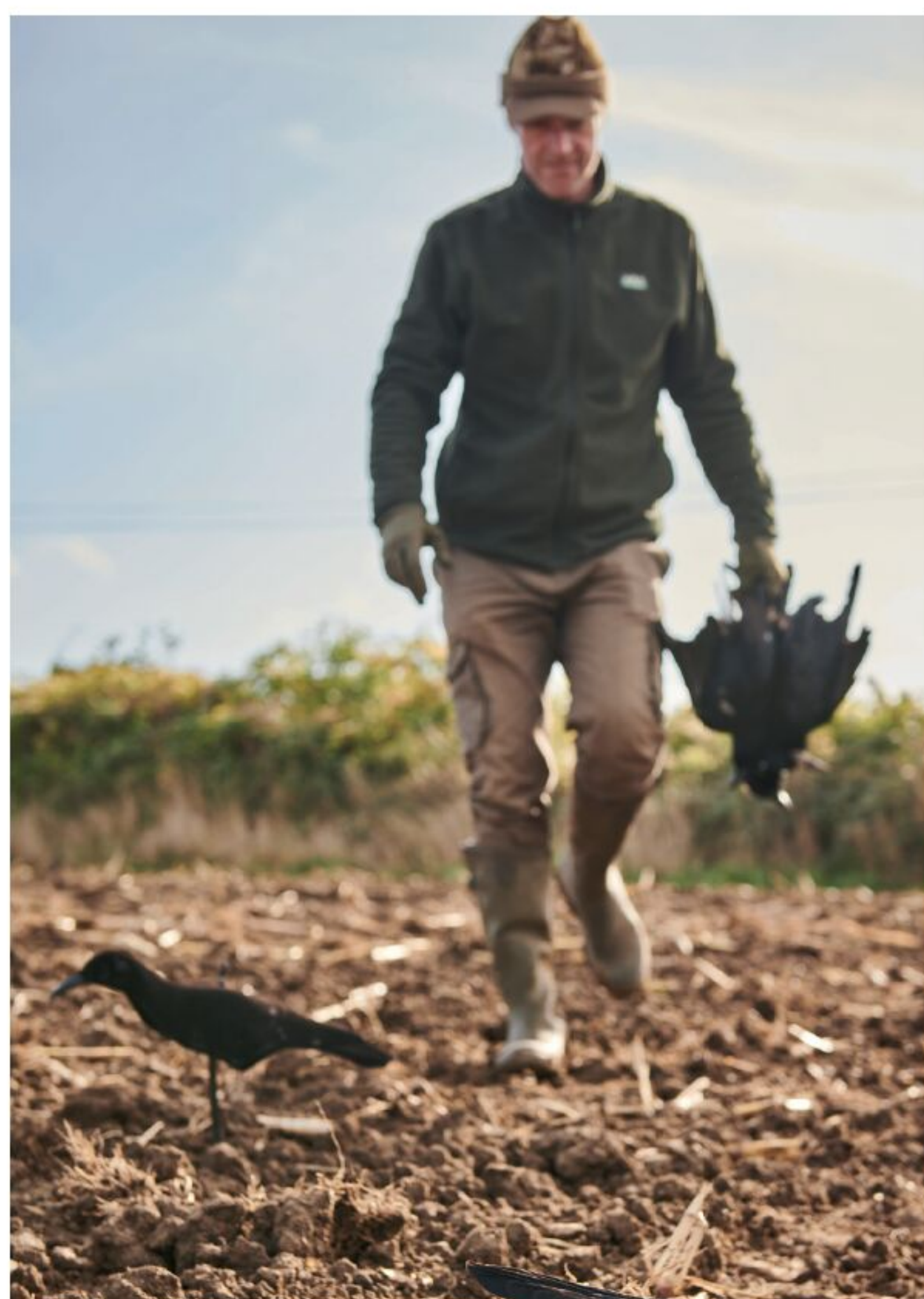


BRK (BROCK) GHOST

Crows don't make many mistakes, which means they rarely offer close shots. A sub-12ft/lb airgun has the potential to deliver clean kills out to 40m or more, but they don't all have the accuracy to do it consistently. This one does, and its recoilless firing cycle makes precise pellet placement about as straightforward as it can be.

The BRK Ghost shares many features of the acclaimed Daystate Delta Wolf and Alpha Wolf air rifles, but without the complication of their electronic internals. Being of bullpup configuration, it is also compact, which makes it a great choice for shooting in the confines of a hide.

The Compact model is just 655mm long, weighs 3.1kg and can deliver hundreds of shots from a single charge, thanks to





HAWKE SIDEWINDER 30 SF 4.5-14X44

It takes a decent optic to get the most from a high-quality air rifle, and the Hawke Sidewinder 30 SF is a very good telescopic sight at a price that is within the reach of most serious shooters.

A 30mm tube, quality crown glass and Hawke's 18-layer lens-coating process ensure good light transmission and a sight picture that remains crisp right to the edges. Waterproof, fogproof and shockproof rated for all calibres, this scope has been made to stand up to proper field use and the 4.5-14x zoom range will cover most airgun pest control scenarios.

Exposed locking windage and elevation turrets pull up to make tool-free adjustments with distinct clicks,

each one amounting to 1/10 MRAD. The full adjustment range is 28 MRAD and the elevation turret features a witness window so you can see which rotation it's on when you are making larger adjustments.

This second focal plane model features Hawke's 10x half-mil reticle, which has accurate half-mil spacings on 10x magnification and offers plenty of aiming points without looking cluttered. The central element can be illuminated red in six levels of brightness via the outer dial on the left turret — useful when drawing a bead on a black target. The inner dial adjusts parallax right to 10 yards.

- Price RRP: £469
- Contact hawkeoptics.com



Brocock's compact Ghost airgun is ideal for shooting from a hide

its generous air tank options. This cutting-edge air rifle has a 20-stage power adjustment dial for fine-tuning and FAC models have the potential to churn out muzzle energy in excess of 100ft/lb.

Robustly constructed, the Ghost still provides a refined shooting experience. Its recoilless firing cycle features a Huma regulator for superior consistency, which combines with an adjustable two-stage trigger and excellent barrel to deliver remarkable accuracy.

Other features of the Ghost include a slick and dependable sidelever-operated, magazine-fed cocking and loading mechanism for rapid follow-up shots and a quick-change barrel system with multiple length and calibre options.

- Price From £1,550
- Contact brocock.co.uk

“As well as being a great innovator, Masood Movahed is a stickler for excellent design”

SIGMA M4 SOUND MODERATOR

A good suppressor can make FAC-rated airguns extremely quiet and sub-12 models almost silent. This offering from Eagle Vision isn't the cheapest option when it comes to sound moderators for airguns, but it is one of the most effective.

Designed to quickly screw on to the 0.5in UNF thread found on the muzzle of most airguns, the Sigma M4 is 174mm long, has a 41mm outside diameter and weighs 240g. Its real standout feature is a set of interchangeable calibre-specific liners that can quickly be swapped out without opening up the main body.

The Sigma M4 comes with .177, .22 and .25 liners, and can be used without a liner for .30 and .35 calibre

airguns. Also supplied are a tool for liner removal, O-ring grease, soft bag and storage case.

Matching the moderator's bore to the airgun's calibre improves sound suppression, which is further enhanced on this model by optimised venting and a secondary tube that is wrapped in ballistic felt and fine stainless steel mesh.

As well as being a great innovator, Masood Movahed at Eagle Vision is a stickler for excellent design and fabrication. As a consequence, the Sigma M4 is constructed to very fine tolerances and looks great.

- Price £168
- Contact eaglevisioncam.com



A standout feature of the Sigma M4 is that it has interchangeable calibre liners

SNIPER HIDE POLES

You can hang a hide net from virtually anything — from fence posts to cut hazel sticks — but a purpose-made set of poles will make the task quicker and easier. I have been using Sniper hide poles for three or four years and I have yet to find anything better.

Nick Tait is best known as the man behind Flightline animated pigeon decoys. He also produces these super-tough hide poles, which come with a lifetime guarantee and feature his trademark rugged build quality. There are lighter, cheaper hide poles on the market, but Nick's Sniper design is virtually indestructible and will still be going strong long after the rest have snapped or rusted away.

One of my favourite features of Sniper hide poles is their goalpost-type footplate, which enables you to push plenty of weight on to the spikes when setting up on hard ground. Finished in an unobtrusive green, these poles are height-adjustable, and the adjustment screw is attached with a cord so you can't lose it if it screws all the way out.

Sniper hide poles also feature a neat little spur that hitches to the bottom of your hide net to keep it under tension and prevent it from flapping conspicuously in the wind.

- Price £100 (set of four)
- Contact flightlinedecoys.co.uk



There's no problem getting the Sniper poles into the ground, however hard, and the neat little spur holds everything in place so flapping hide nets won't give away your position



Mat starts with between six and a dozen shell decoys, adding shot birds to them as the session continues



Once you've dressed the Camo Systems netting in topical vegetation, you'll be all but invisible

CAMO SYSTEMS REALTREE NETTING

Corvids have a talent for spotting and shunning anything out of the ordinary, so your hide really needs to be up to scratch if you're going to catch them out. Camo Systems Realtree netting makes a great basis for a good hide and, being lighter than many of the alternatives, won't bog you down if you have a long walk ahead of you.

Measuring 3m by 2.2m, this scrim net is large enough to create a decent-sized blind yet can be scrunched up so it takes up minimal space in your backpack. Made from modern ripstop material, it dries out very quickly, so doesn't become heavy after rain and won't rot if you forget to air it out when you get home.

This hi-tech scrim remains supple in the cold and can easily be cut with a knife to open up windows to shoot through.

The Realtree leaf print finish and 3D texture make this hide net inconspicuous from the get-go, and its matt finish prevents it from shimmering in bright sunlight — unlike some of the cheaper versions. Stealth can be further boosted by dressing the netting with vegetation, and weeds such as docks, nettles and cow parsley can easily be woven into the slits in this netting.

- Price from £39.95
- Contact bisley-uk.com

“The matt finish prevents this hide net from shimmering in bright sunlight”



FLOCKED CROW SHELL DECOY



The shell decoys might look pretty basic but their profile is very convincing when seen from above and the flocked finish means they don't glint



The clever little peg attached to the back of the decoys contains a spring that makes them bob up and down in an incredibly lifelike fashion

Crows, rooks and jackdaws will all respond to decoys. Placed in the right place, a few imitation birds can help to convince cautious corvids that it's safe to return to their feeding grounds, and shell decoys are one of my favourite options.

These decoys are stackable so, as well as being light, they also take up very little space in your backpack. They may appear quite basic in appearance, but their profile looks very convincing when viewed from above and the flocked finish looks especially realistic, while also preventing them from glinting in the sun.

Movement is a key factor when it comes to persuading curious corvids to drop in for a closer look. These decoys have a very lifelike motion imparted by a sprung peg which makes them bob up and down in the wind, and it only takes the slightest breeze to get them nodding.

I usually set up between six and a dozen shell decoys at the start of the session, then add dead birds to the pattern as I shoot them. The movement of the artificials grabs the attention of passing birds and the addition of the real thing makes the arrangement look even more convincing to incomers.

- Price £5.95
- Contact jackpykeshop.co.uk



KEEPING WELL

It wasn't so long ago that gamekeepers who were unfit to work through injury or ill health had very few options, says Helen Benson

The Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust (GWT) was launched in 1992 to continue the work of other dedicated benevolent associations over the past two centuries. Looking after the gamekeeping fraternity has a fascinating history, with acts of benevolence from wealthy landowners who recognised a need for assistance. Their concerns led to various organisations supporting gamekeeping families mainly in ill health, disability or death, often due to altercations with poachers.

Other landowners or employers were not so generous, for various reasons, especially where keepers moved from job to job or there was a disagreement. World wars, depressions and economic pressures also took their toll on the ability to support employees on rural estates.

Organised gangs

There are numerous examples of court cases and historical anecdotes around violent altercations with poachers. These were not necessarily desperate men with a starving family at home, but often organised gangs, imposing significant risk for gamekeepers in their game protection duties. Although there is evidence that keepers were long-living in

general, the need for hard physical labour in all weathers often took its toll on health over the years. There was no alternative help if family could not assist and employers did not step in, except the miserable and draconian workhouses, which separated families and in death buried them in communal graves.

Prior to independent schemes and national support, gamekeepers and their families were dependent on affluent landowners. Some were known to have paid discretionary pensions, and even a sick-pay scheme and free medical care in occasional instances. There are also examples of almshouses specifically built for estate workers throughout the UK and they continue to provide affordable housing in rural communities.

But not all employers were generous in their attitude towards those who could not continue to work in redundancy or retirement.

BASC) in 1975 and was administered by the GWCT from 1989.

Workhouses

National support for everyone began with the introduction of the state pension in 1909. The National Health Service (NHS) was instituted in 1948, prior to which patients were required to pay for their care. It is rather shocking that workhouses existed until 1930 – though the last one didn't close until 1948 – but, given a lack of any other assistance, at least they provided housing and sustenance for those unable to provide for themselves.

The Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust began with a partnership between BASC and GWCT in 1992. Sir Joseph Nickerson left a generous donation and respected headkeeper Don Ford, one of the founding trustees, was also closely involved in the Gamekeepers' Benevolent Fund. The structure of

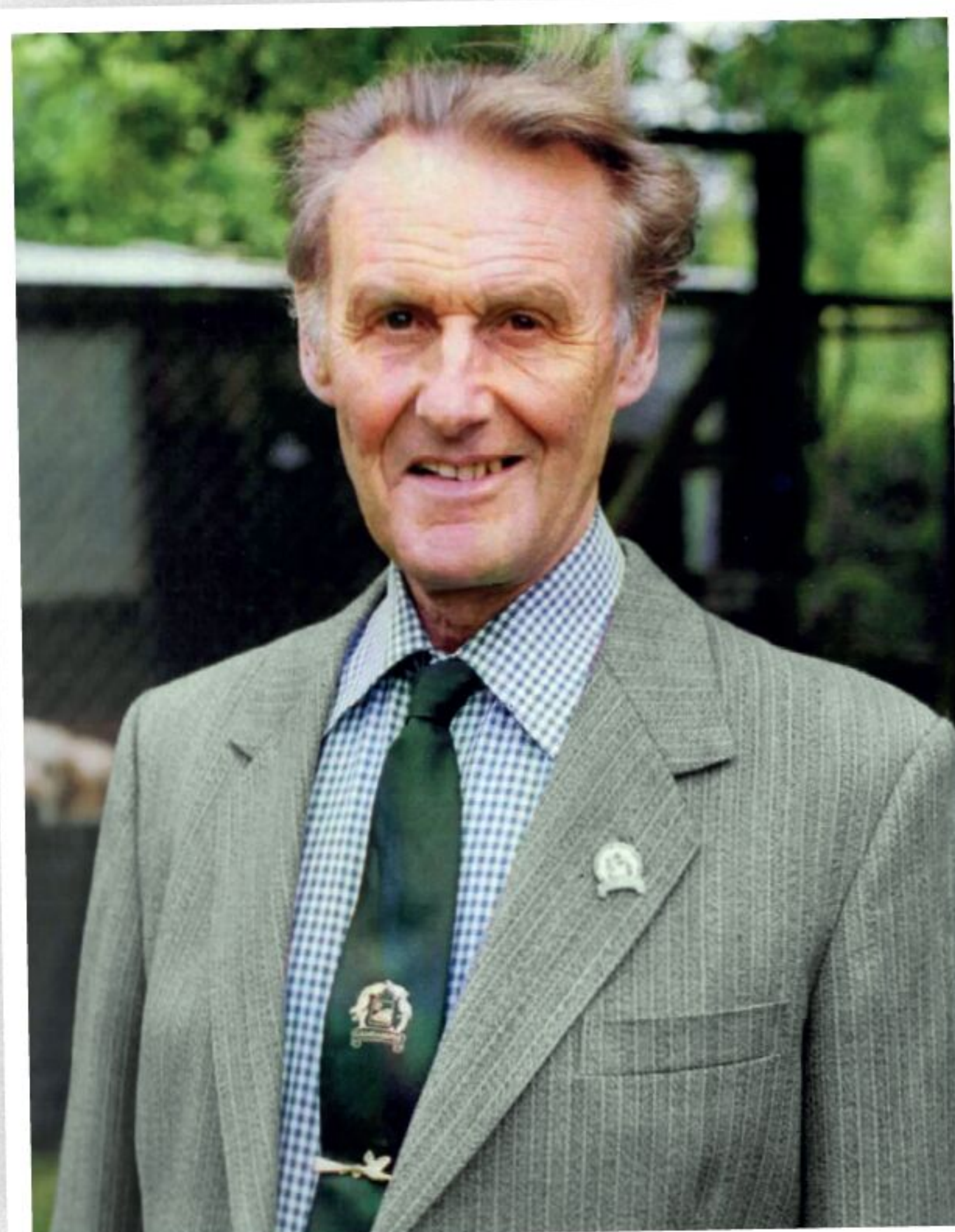
“The need for hard physical labour in all weathers often took its toll on health”

This prompted action to assist the profession. The Keepers' Benefit Society was the first example. Set up in 1886 and running until 1969, it focused on a membership scheme to provide a pension. From 1900, the Gamekeepers' Association also required a subscription but provided assistance for burial and discretionary grants for deserving widows, as well as a voluntary life and accident insurance scheme.

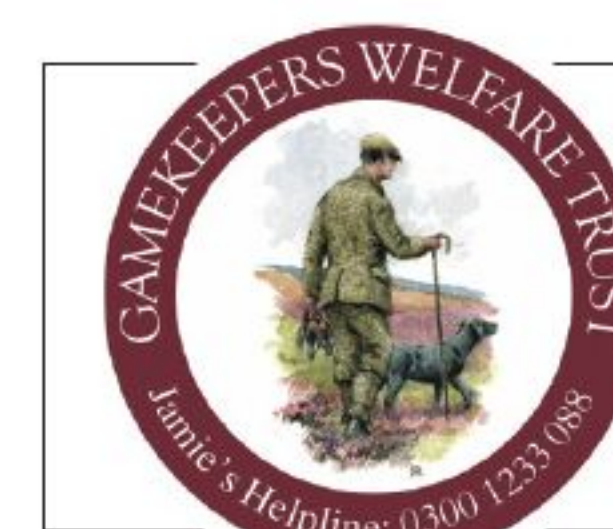
The Gamekeepers Benevolent Fund was operated by the association to provide financial assistance in sickness and redundancy, but also a grant towards court costs around poaching cases. The fund became independent after the Gamekeepers' Association merged with WAGBI (now

GWT is significantly different because membership or subscription is not a requirement for help. However, aims and objectives are directly in line with earlier organisations: to assist those dependent on gamekeeping for their living during working lives, whether in ill health, infirm, retired or financially insecure. An additional remit is to support young people who wish to make gamekeeping their career and could not attend college without assistance.

Thus firm foundations were laid on which the Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust thrives today, supporting gamekeepers, stalkers, gillies, allied professions and their families throughout the UK. 🐾



Don Ford was one of the founding trustees of the GWT, which was formed as a partnership between BASC and the GWCT in 1992



Find out more at gamekeeperswelfaretrust.com

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Crime scene investigation

Mark Ripley turns detective in an attempt to target the culprit making a meal of the local lamb population



For the third time that week a lamb had been killed. All three had been a week old and healthy, out with the ewes in the field at the foot of the steep slope down into the valley.

The first attack came early in the week with two lambs killed; the first was untouched apart from bite marks around the neck. The second, again killed by bites to the neck, had then been half-eaten from the rear end.

A day passed without any trouble but the following morning revealed a third dead lamb, again killed by bites to the neck and half-eaten in the same way.

That night I was out early, at least an hour before dark. I chose to place myself on the rise in the middle of the field, which gave me a view of most of the large field and the side of the

valley from which I suspected a fox might approach.

There are few foxes on this ground, and more often than not sitting out like this will prove fruitless. I also couldn't help but wonder if a badger may have played a part in these attacks, based on the fact that the lambs had been eaten from the rear.

Delicacy

More often than not, foxes will eat the head of a lamb first, seeming to find this a delicacy, whereas a badger will generally eat the soft rear end and guts, tending to roll back the skin to get at them.

With far more badgers in the area, I felt there was a good chance that both a fox and a badger had played a role in one or more of these kills. Although badgers are quite capable

of doing so, it's quite rare for them to actually kill lambs, but they will happily Hoover up a dead or dying one given the chance. They will also quite unashamedly mug a fox of his dinner. So although the signs were a little mixed, I was fairly confident that a fox was most likely responsible, at least for the actual kills.

The light faded without incident and I enjoyed the last of the sun's warmth, watching the young lambs playing in the lush spring grass. With the darkness came a chill and I was glad of the flask of coffee and pork pie I'd brought with me.

Several badgers passed through the field, yet took no notice of the lambs lying in the grass, some several yards away from their mothers.

Four hours passed before I spotted a fox among the ewes. I didn't see



Like livestock, gamebirds offer an easy meal for an opportunistic fox, especially when they leave the safety of their pens



A lamb eaten from the back end may point to a badger, but that doesn't mean a fox didn't do the actual killing

it approach the field; it was just suddenly there in the way that only a fox seems able to do.

I watched through the thermal as it made its way between the ewes, eyes intently inspecting each one and her offspring. As the fox drew a little too close to a pair of twins, the ewe took to her feet, calling them before trotting in close to her young and showing the fox that, should it come any closer, she would protect them.

Unsettled, the fox moved to the edge of the field close to the bank and clear of the livestock. I edged forward. I had to be careful not to disturb the ewes in front of me in case they moved towards the fox and pushed it further away. I also didn't want to separate any lambs from the protection of their mothers and leave them vulnerable.

I closed carefully to around 160 yards to get a clear shot, and by the

clear away the dead or disturb the area, leaving you second-guessing exactly what might have taken place, or what the guilty party might be.

Free meal

Lambs will often die of natural causes. Sheep in general, from the moment they are born, seem to try to kill themselves in the most imaginative ways possible, as will be confirmed by any sheep farmer – especially when born out in the open. Foxes and badgers can often be blamed for the death of the animal when they may simply be taking advantage of the free meal supplied by Mother Nature's hand. A regular spate of kills, however, is a different story and would certainly indicate a serial predator at work.

Determining exactly what has killed a lamb might not be quite so

“From the moment they're born, sheep try to kill themselves in imaginative ways”

time I was down on the bipod the fox had moved out to 175 yards. I gave a soft “Oi” to stop it, it paused to look back over its shoulder and I squeezed the trigger, dropping it perfectly with a bullet from the .223 through the chest.

Since that evening no further kills have taken place, so I'm confident this was the fox that was responsible for killing the lambs.

The discovery of a dead lamb, pheasant or poultry can resemble a crime scene, with a wealth of information that can be gathered if the opportunity is given to you. However, more often than not a farmer or poultry owner will quickly

simple and the work of a fox, badger or dog could look quite similar. Based on what is present in the area, you can often conclude with some certainty the most likely identity of the culprit.

If a kill is close to a footpath and there other livestock are injured, with less direct attacks to the neck, then you could look towards a dog as a likely suspect. Peeling back the skin around the area of the bites will help get an idea of the size of the teeth and their distance apart – all valuable clues in determining what has inflicted the damage.

Lambs are most susceptible to attack when they are apart from the ewe for any reason, such as ➡



Sitting out after dark is a good way of ambushing the lamb killer, and a .223 will do the job nicely

Foxing

accidental separation or if the ewe is a poor mother and has not stayed close by.

A fox, hunting mostly at night, upon finding a vulnerable lamb lying in the grass will grab it by the head or neck and quickly kill it.

A less experienced lamb killer might well circle a lamb and close in to initially nip at it until its confidence grows. Then it becomes more vicious with its attacks and finally kills the animal. I have also seen a fox carry or drag a victim off to kill it somewhere that it feels is safer to do the deed.

Hoovered up

Gamebirds are another ready food source for pretty much any fox, and no doubt a reasonable number are hoovered up on leaving the pen before they have the chance to wise up to the ways of predators. Often little will be found in terms of remains other than a pile of feathers, and a keeper may well be unaware of how many birds are being lost if he fails to spot these signs.

Birds of prey will also kill pheasants, so look carefully at the feathers found for signs of a fox. Larger wing feathers bitten through, as opposed to being individually plucked from the bird, are a good sign of fox predation and there may well even be traces of saliva present.

A fox will also often take the bird away from the area in which it was caught. This is usually to an open area where it can devour its catch while having a good view around for approaching danger, or to properly



Ewes that are poor mothers may not stay close by their lambs, leaving them vulnerable to attack

despatch it before carrying it off to an earth when feeding cubs.

One of the worst encounters a fox can have with man is where poultry is involved, and many a poultry keeper will be all too aware of the damage a fox can do. With a pen full of panicking, fluttering birds, a fox will invariably go into a killing frenzy

“Often little will be found in terms of remains other than a pile of feathers”

and the number of birds killed can be immense.

In this scenario, although nothing will bring the dead birds back, the best thing that can be done is first to search all around the area for any birds that may have escaped the carnage and taken shelter outside

the enclosure. It’s also essential to ascertain how the fox gained entry to the hen house or coop to prevent the same thing happening again. Footprints, traces of fur caught in fencing or any disturbed fencing are all things to look for.

Multiple kills

Leaving as much of the crime scene untouched as possible can be your best chance of shooting the guilty fox. When a fox has made multiple kills in this way, the chances are it will return the next night, thinking its kills will still be where it left them. This will give you the chance of a shot, with the knowledge that this is highly likely to be the animal responsible.

It’s also worth investigating any trails of feathers that could well give a good indication of where the fox might approach from, as well as the possibility of finding a live bird or, indeed, cached dead birds that the predator may return for. 🦊



Foxes do tend to return to the scene of their kills, hoping for another opportunity and giving you a chance to identify the culprit

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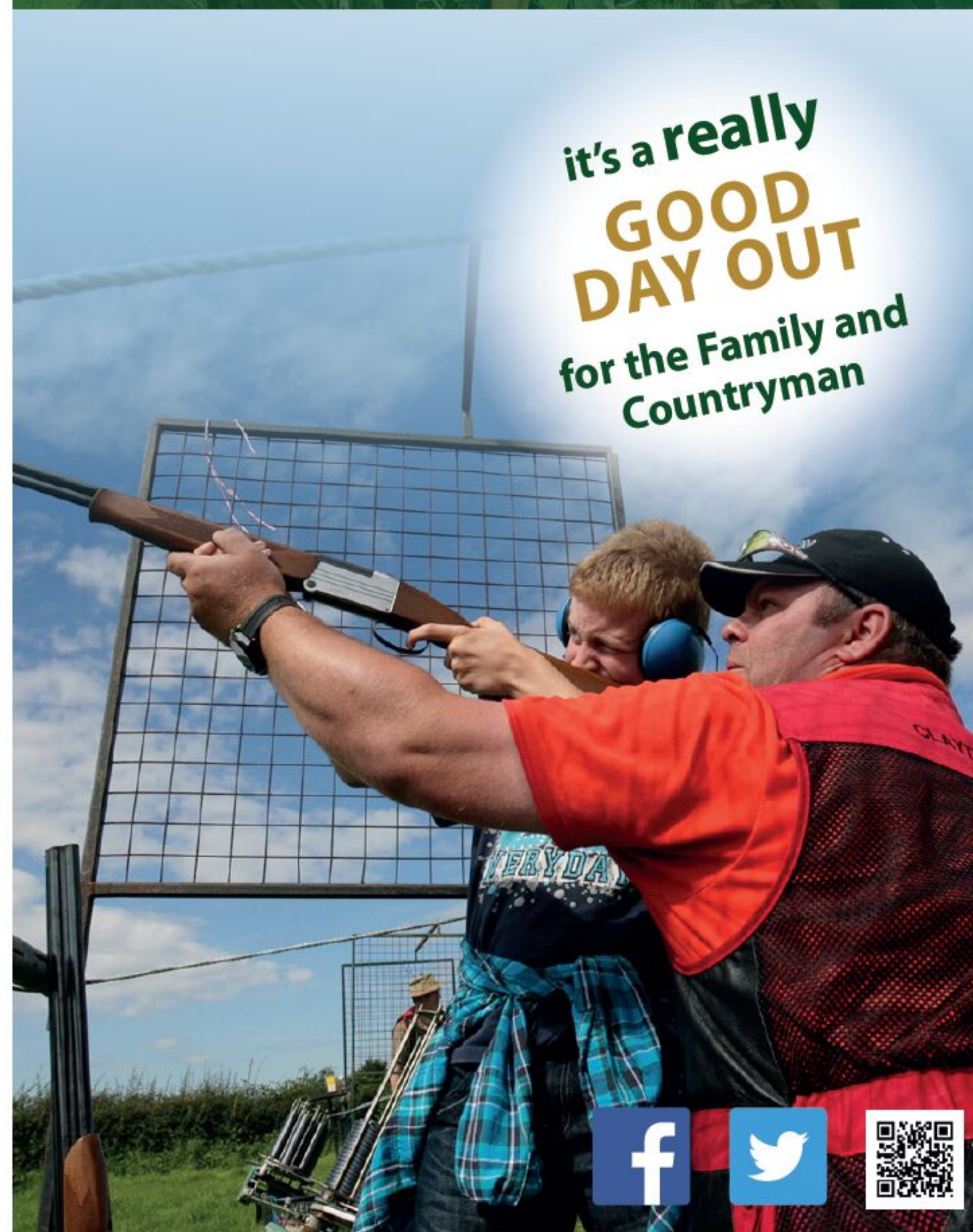
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RIFLE TEST

Benelli Lupo walnut stock £1,750

A radical redesign, enhanced by quality walnut and dollops of Benelli flair, makes the Lupo stand out in a crowded market, says Bruce Potts

The impressive walnut of the stock attaches directly to the action chassis, allowing the user to alter the cast

The long, raked grip of the whole stock feels intuitive and natural to handle, which adds to the Lupo's appeal

The heavily doglegged bolt and slick three-lug low-lift system is a triumph, says Bruce, because it's very smooth and comfortable to use

OUR VERDICT

Lupo, meaning wolf in Italian, is certainly an appropriate title for this rifle, which features radical masculine styling, coupled with smooth, intelligent technology. Benelli doesn't mind making bold decisions when it comes to firearms design and, on initial assessment, the Lupo conforms to those traditions of innovation. Benelli's daring aesthetics encompass a well-thought-out and beautifully handling bolt-action rifle.

The Lupo doesn't look too dissimilar from a standard blued steel/

walnut stocked rifle, but on closer inspection, every part – from the two-piece enhanced wood finish to the aggressively raked profiling – has been redesigned. The aluminium receiver holds the steel barrelled action, displaying excellent bedding characteristics, and the magazine contributes to the distinctive visuals of the action sides.

NEED TO KNOW

- ▶ Manufacturer Benelli
- ▶ Model Lupo walnut
- ▶ Type bolt-action
- ▶ Barrel length 22in
- ▶ Overall Length 42.25in
 - ▶ Calibre .308 Win on test
 - ▶ Stock Two-piece walnut, oil finish
 - ▶ Weight 3.2 kg
 - ▶ Trigger Single stage
 - ▶ Magazine Five-shot polymer
 - ▶ Price £1,750
 - ▶ Contact GMK 01489 579999

Inset: **Bruce** finds the Lupo is no burden as it spends much of the time resting on sticks while he searches the fields and margins for a suitable beast



Reverse dimple chequering covers as far as the fore-end tip and extends to the front of the pistol grip



Typical Benelli: the angular and large trigger-guard holds a crisp single-stage trigger and there is a very comfortable pistol grip

The Crio free-floating barrel is 22in — on the test model — and features a metric 14mm/1 muzzle thread, tested to produce sub-MOA accuracy at 100 yards

The bolt handle is odd-looking but super-slick. The low lift manoeuvring of the handle is lightning-fast and Benelli's patented B.E.S.T ultra-hard-wearing surfaces ensure the Lupo looks regal but is able to tackle all that is thrown at it. It's priced at £1,750 and I prefer this model over the synthetic stocked version.



RIFLE TEST

IN DEPTH

Although the walnut stock weighs almost the same as its synthetic counterpart — 3.2kg versus 3.18kg — the walnut seems to produce a more balanced rifle than the synthetic. The enhanced walnut figuring, seen on many shotguns these days, looks expensive but uses excellent value, yet strong tightly grained walnut. The two-piece stock design is versatile and works well for the left- or right-handed shooter.

The wood for the stock attaches directly to the action chassis, which allows the user to alter the cast. The inclusion of spacers also allows you to adjust the pull between 13.75in and 15in. The Progressive Comfort Recoil pad system provides terrific softening services and really takes the bite out of the .308 Win on test.

The raised Monte Carlo-style comb with dual cheekpieces, combined with twin palm swells, assist in building a solid firing platform. The pistol grip, like the fore-end, is embossed with reversed dimple chequering. This covers as far as the fore-end tip. With its long, raked grip, the whole stock feels intuitive and natural to handle, contributing further to the Lupo's appeal.

The action is anything but traditional. The lower half is made from lightweight, anodised aluminium with a pewter-grey finish. It houses a five-shot fully polymer magazine with its own release catch.

The large, angular trigger-guard allows easy access to the single-stage plastic trigger-blade, which broke very crisply at 2lb and 1.4oz on the test model.

The steel part of the action is bedded to the chassis, which gives the rifle a rounded profile, to which the single-piece, aluminium Picatinny scope rail is attached.

CONCLUSION

I applaud the quirky and unique style that Benelli often seems to bring to its designs. Again, and again, Benelli produces guns that work perfectly, look glorious but with a hint of the unusual, and like this Lupo, offer immense value. It dares to be different and it pays off.

FIELD TEST

GMK had fitted a Burris Six Xe scope but, despite it being threaded, I actually shot without a moderator for a change.

I found the best ammunition on test to be the Sako Gamehead 123-gr bullets at 2,922fps for 2,332ft/lb, which punched neat little 0.75in clusters at 100 yards. The new Hornady 125-gr lead-free options also shot sub-MOA at 0.95in, which is great, at 2,930fps for 2,383ft/lb.

Upping the weight to the traditional 150-gr .308 Win offerings, there wasn't much difference accuracy-wise between the Hornady SST — producing 2,954fps/2,907ft/lb, 1in groups at 100 yards — or the Federal Power-Shok bullets at 2,769fps for 2,554ft/lb. Those SST are quick. I shot some heavier 168-gr Barnes TTSX, achieving 2,674fps for 2,668ft/lb and groups at around 1.25in.

Recoil on all was quite mild for a .308 Win, which I put down to stock design.

I forgot to fit a sling, but the Lupo was no burden to carry and most of the roe stalk was spent in the hedgerow with it resting on the sticks while I glassed the open grassy fields and margins.

A recently frayed sapling on the edge of the big 100-acre wood was an encouraging sign of roebuck activity. Silently threading my way down through the trees, I was soon faced with a button buck and doe feeding across me. The Lupo went into my shoulder smoothly and I eased off the safety without issue. I was ready but then another doe obscured my view, and we began to play find-a-safe-shot through the wood.

My patience paid off when a nice buck brought up the rear of the little group below me on a gentle ridge line. I squared the Burris reticle to pass through his top lung and heart and the 123-gr Gameheads dropped him instantly.

The bolt styling also features a dollop of Benelli flair. It has an elliptical triple lug bolt head for a low 60-degree bolt lift, a scalloped body for weight reduction, polymer bolt shroud and a red cocking indicator. The eye-catching bolt handle is a delight to operate.

The safety catch is tang mounted so that, when engaged, it can be passed by a small side lever, which lets the bolt lift but remains safe. The Crio free-floating barrel is 22in with a Sporter profile. It features a metric 14mm/1 muzzle thread and is tested to produce sub-MOA accuracy at 100 yards.

I am an unashamed fan of Benelli's BE.S.T finish. It looks like high-grade bluing but resists corrosion and scratching.



A nice buck presents an opportunity and drops to a solid heart and lung shot from the Lupo

18

/20

Accuracy

Dependable with both lead and lead-free factory loads.

19

/20

Handling

Looks quirky but handles well and affords a rock-steady firing position.

18

/20

Trigger

The single-stage trigger broke cleanly: all you need on a hunting rifle.

18

/20

Stock

Bruce likes this walnut version both visually and for its superb tactility.

18

/20

Value

If you like something a bit different without compromise the Lupo is for you.

91

/100

Overall Score

Regal looks, great handling and a realistic price: it ticks all the boxes.

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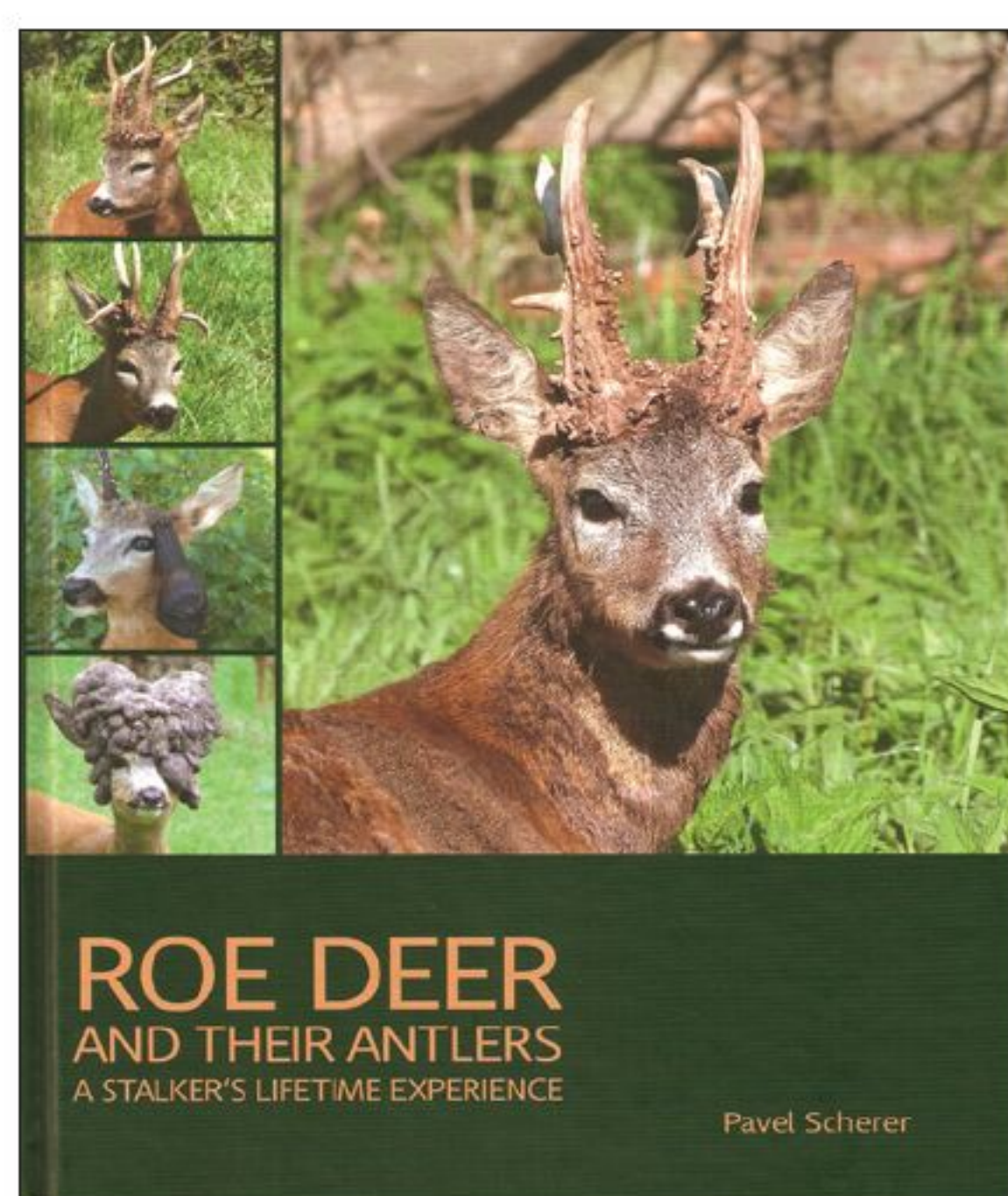


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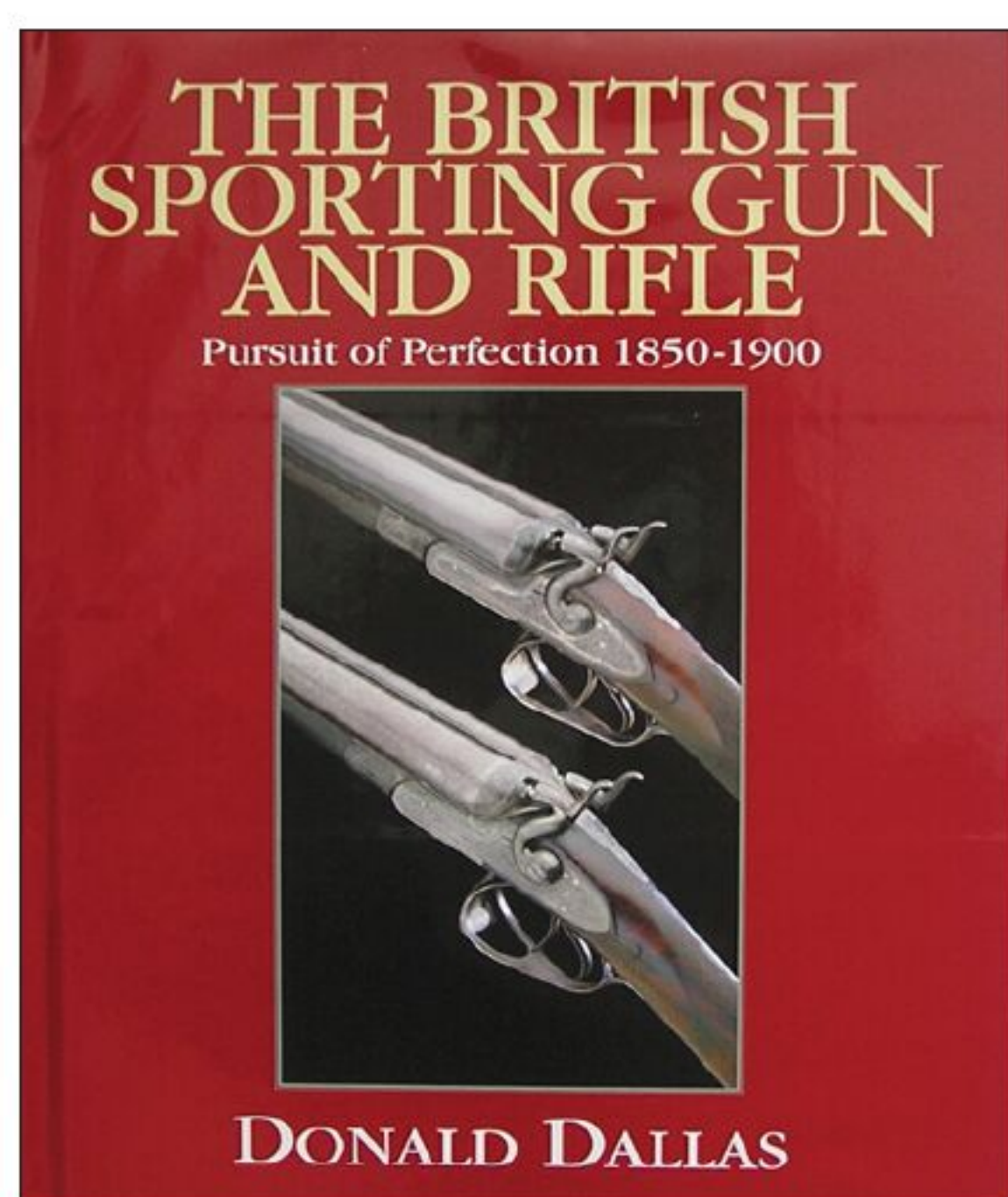
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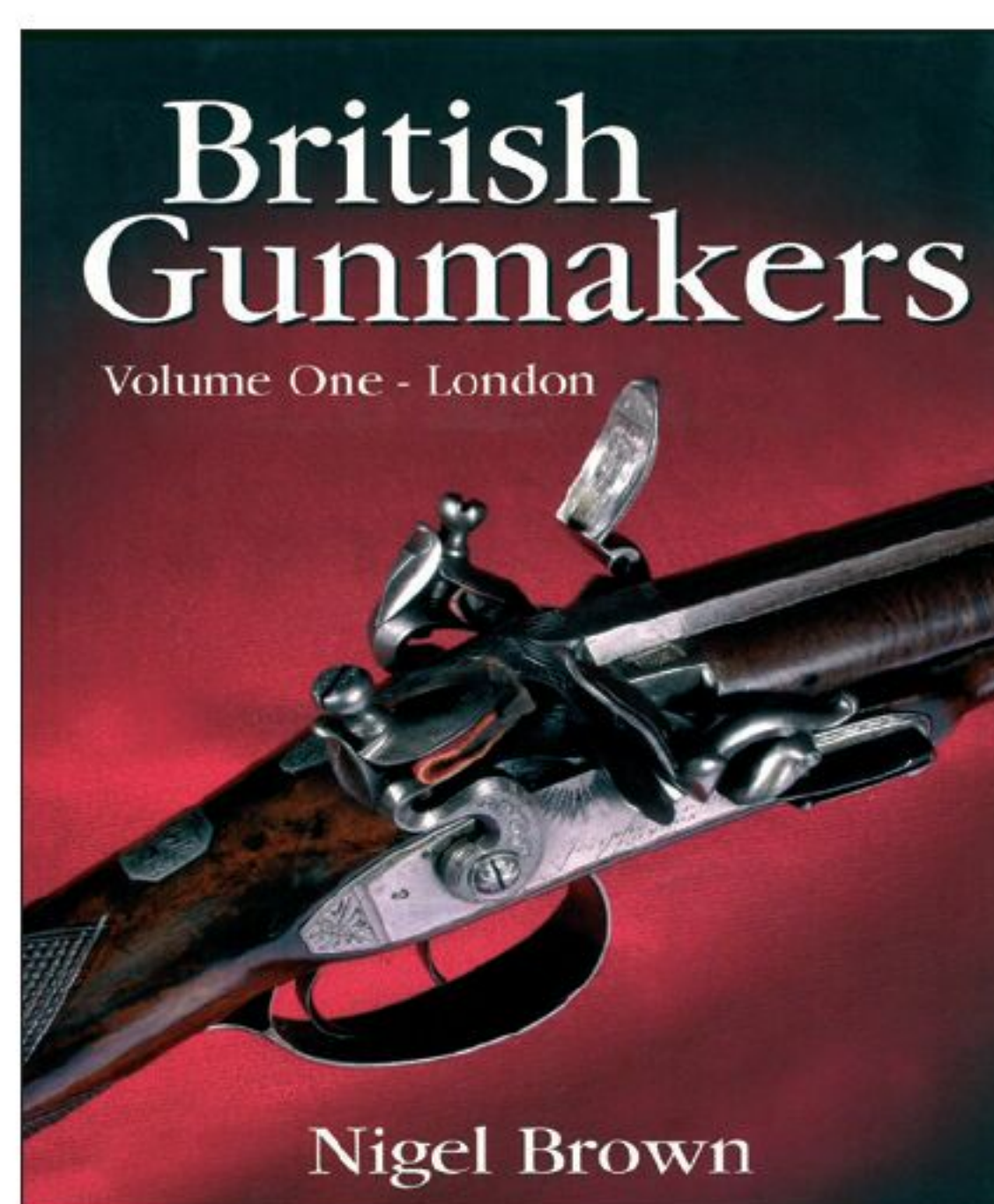
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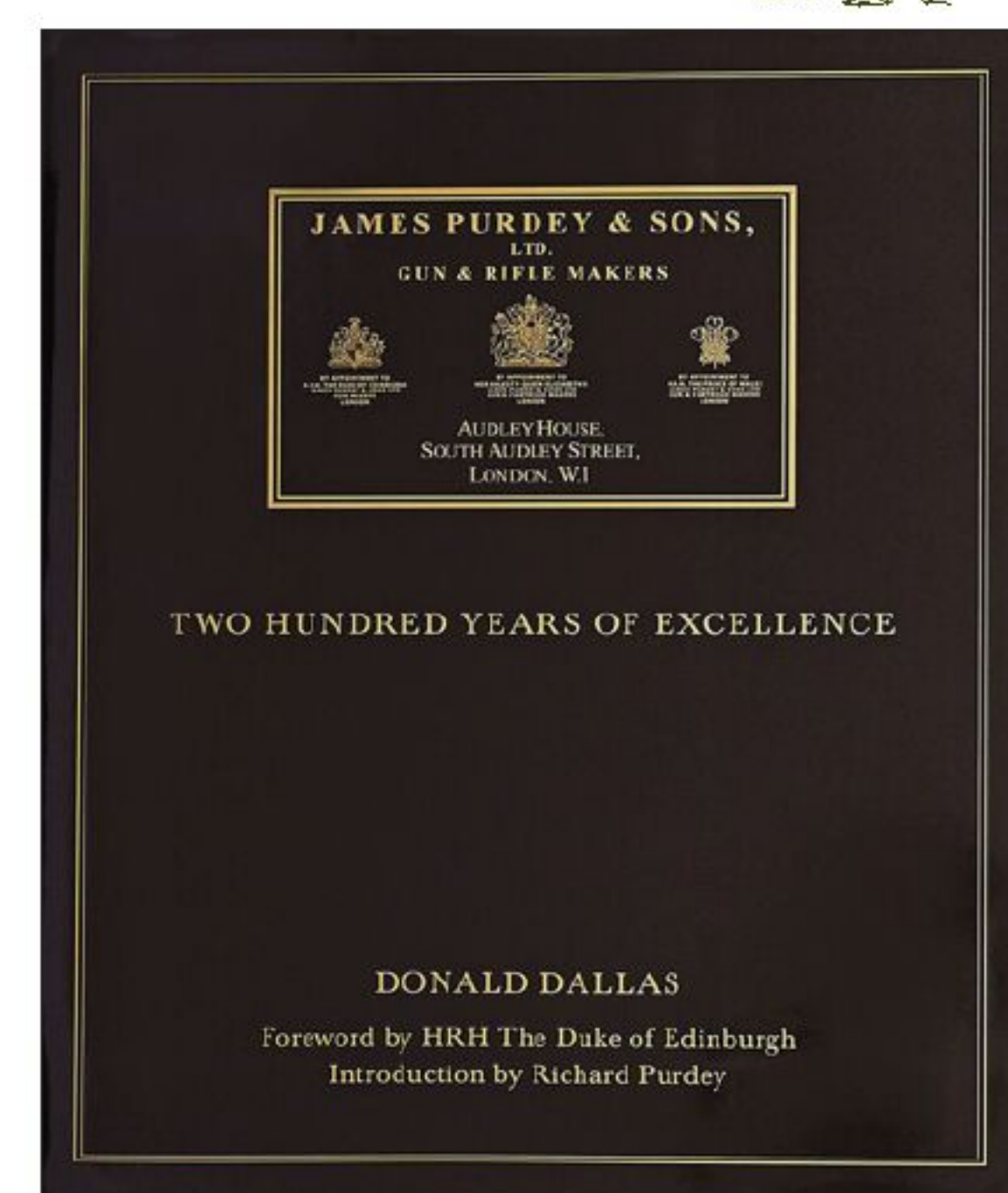
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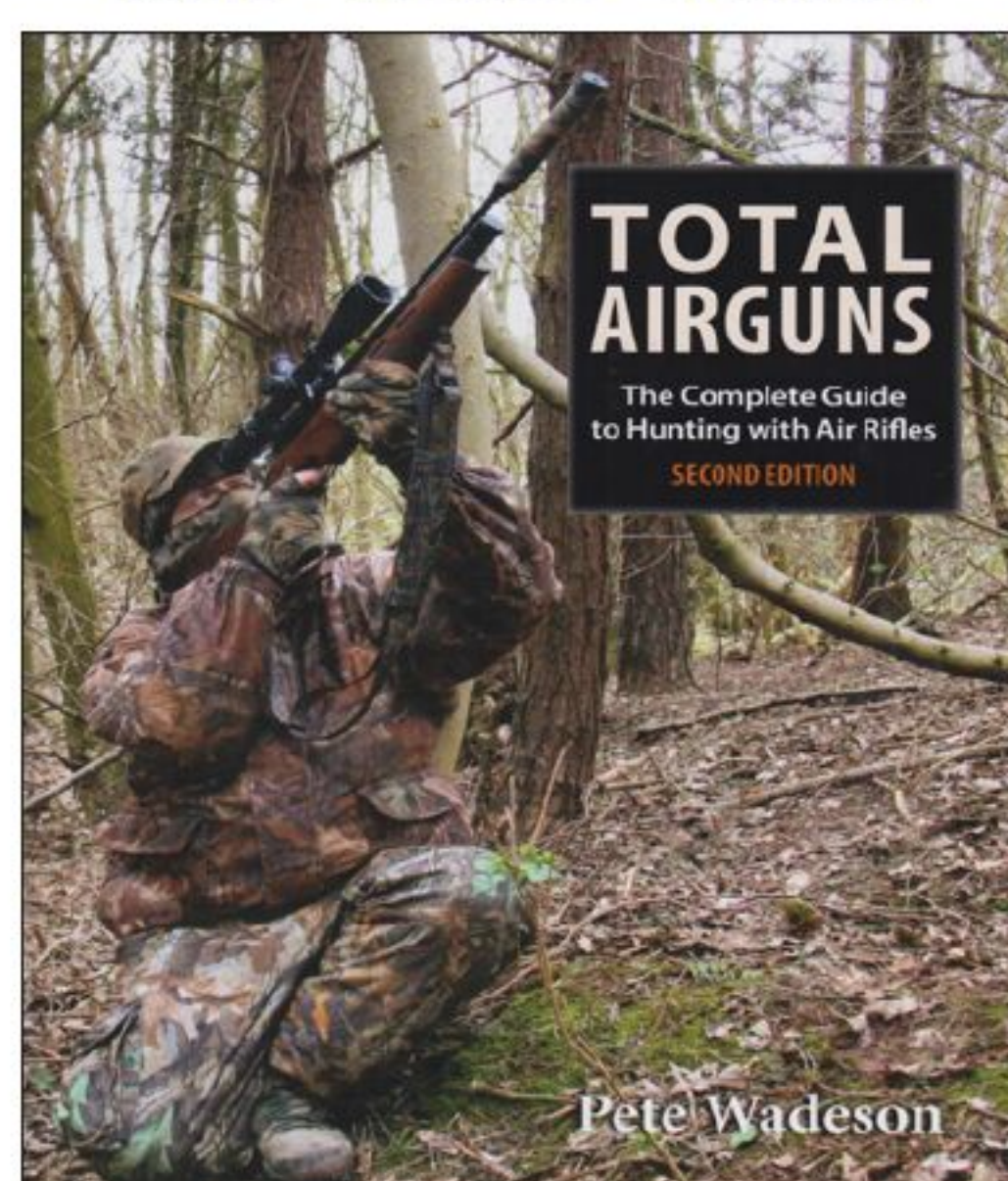
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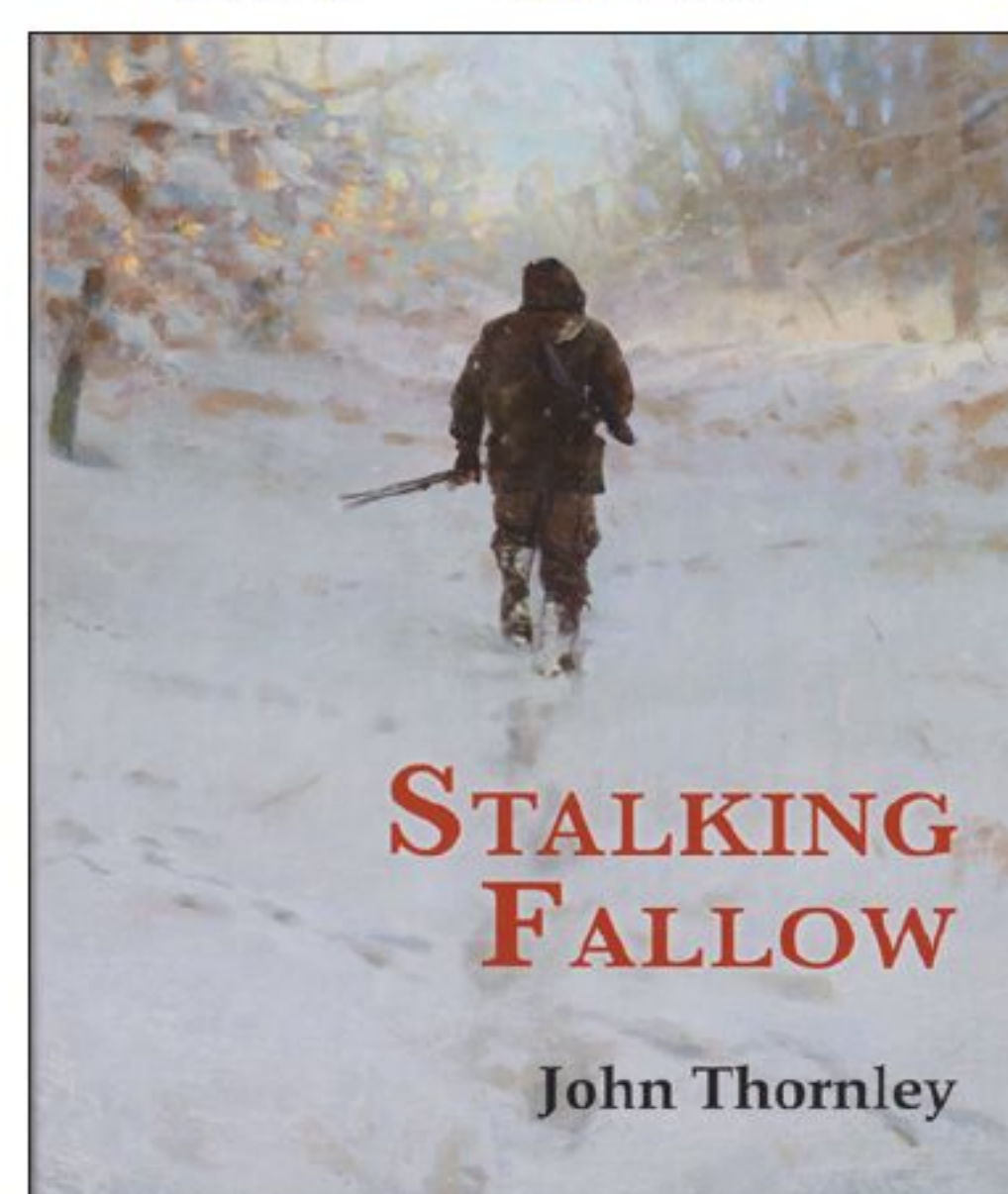
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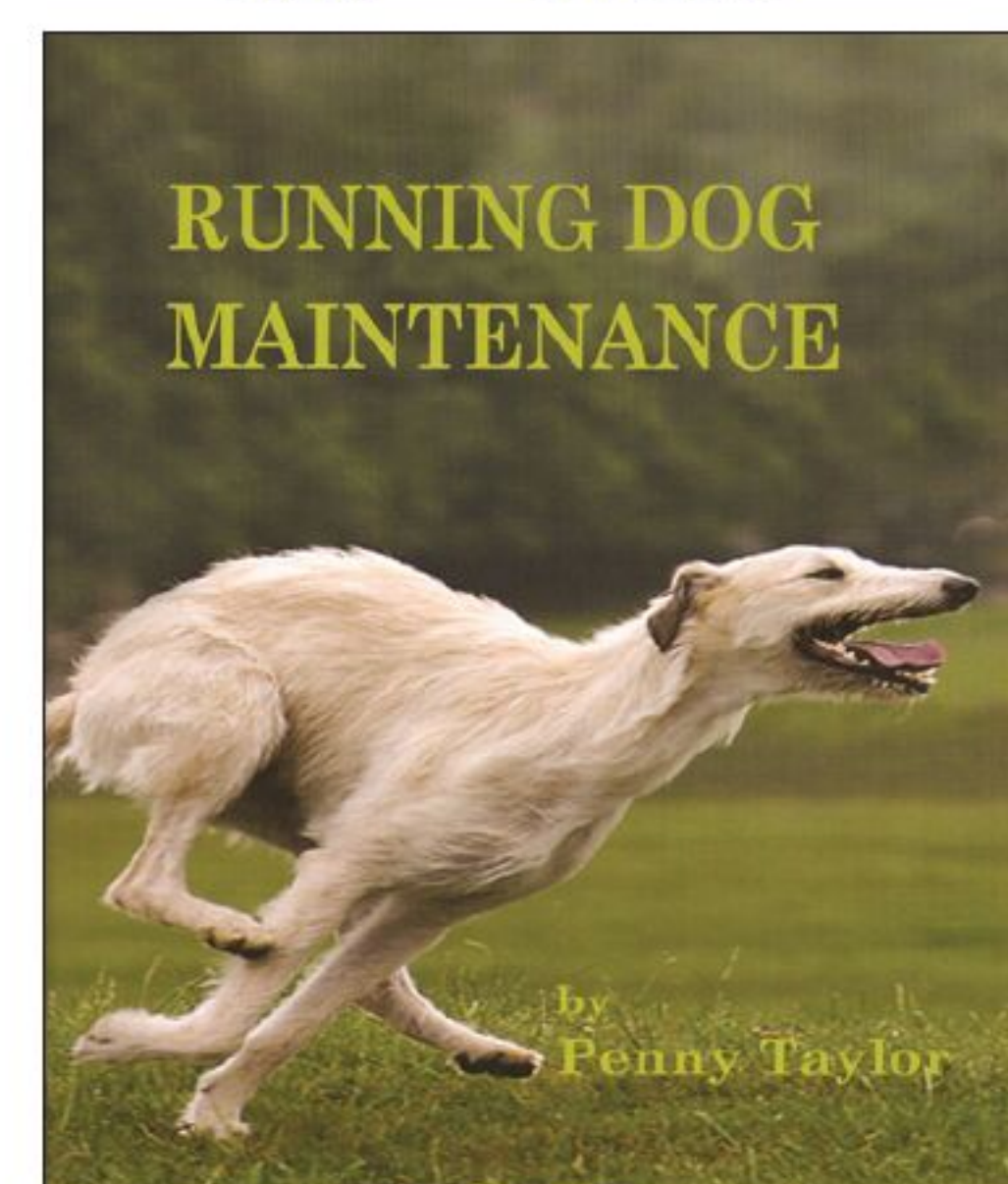
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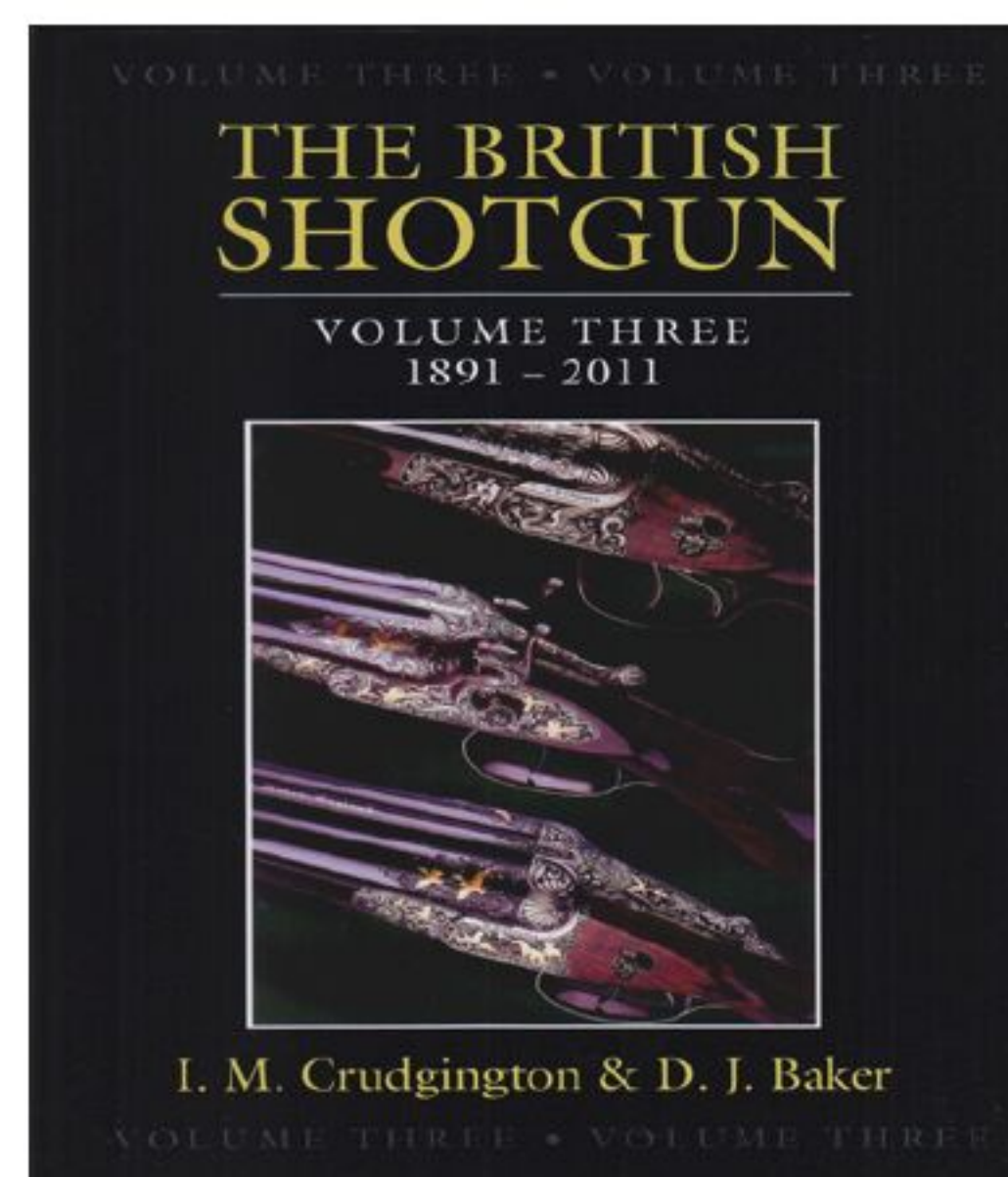
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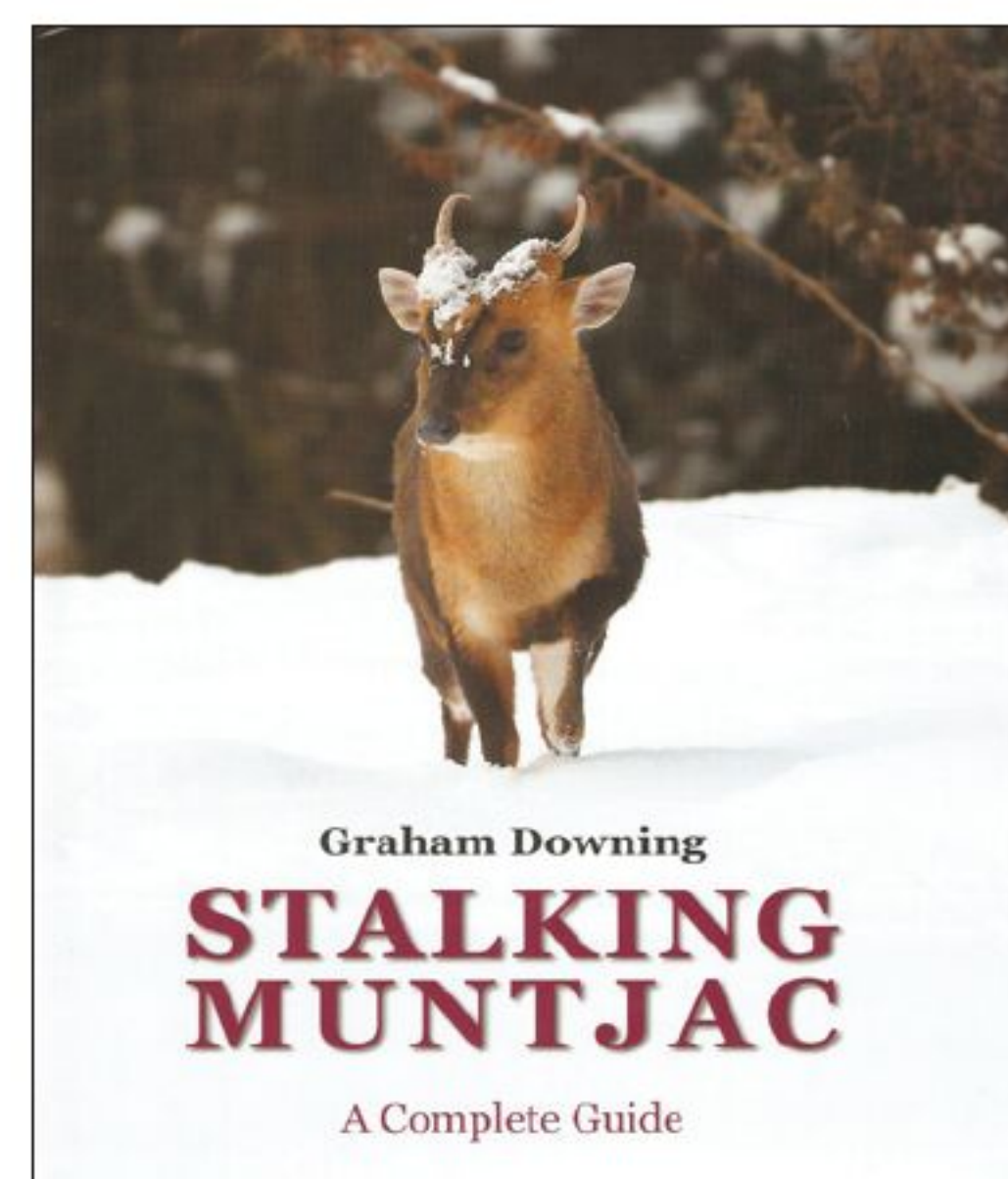
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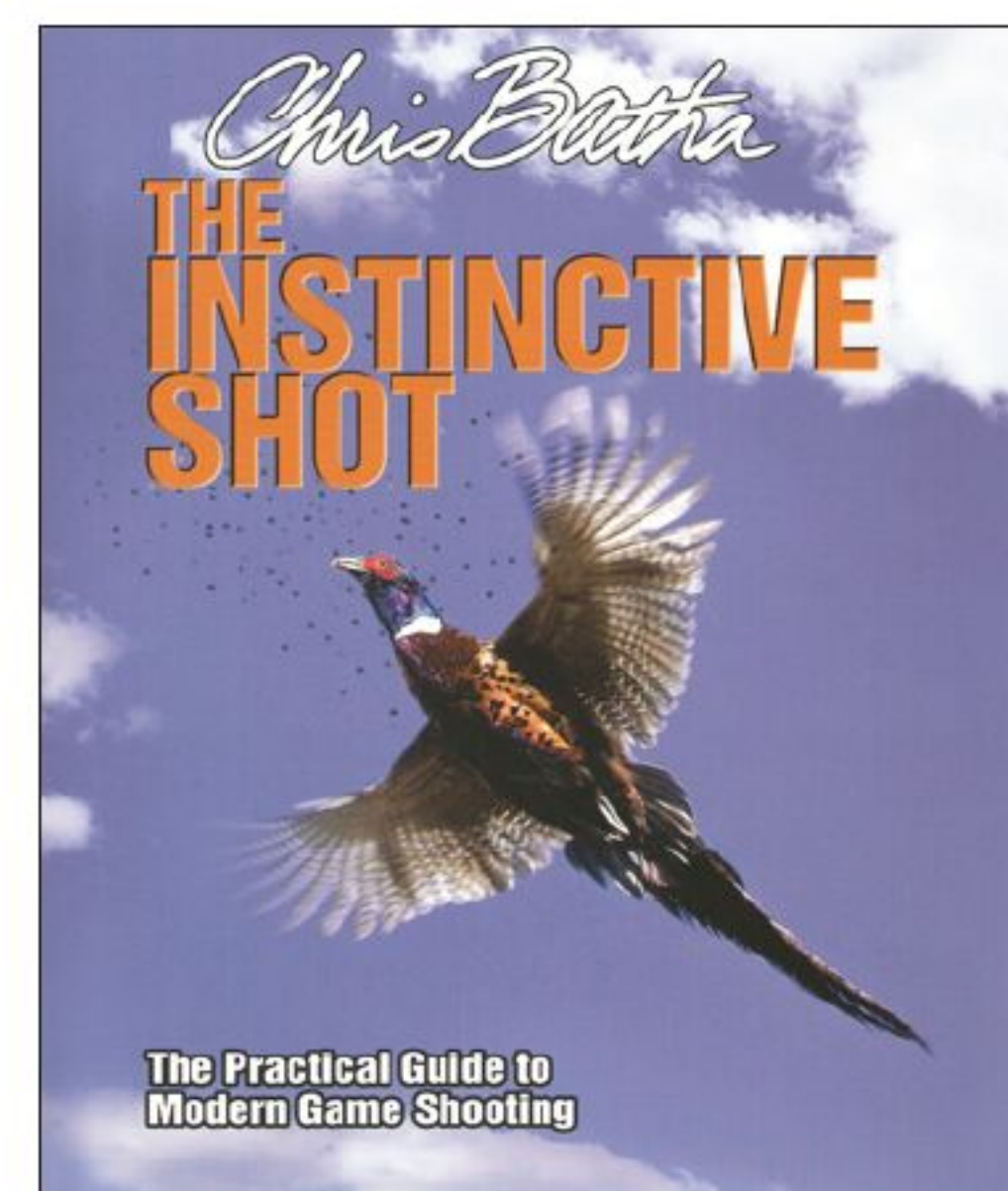
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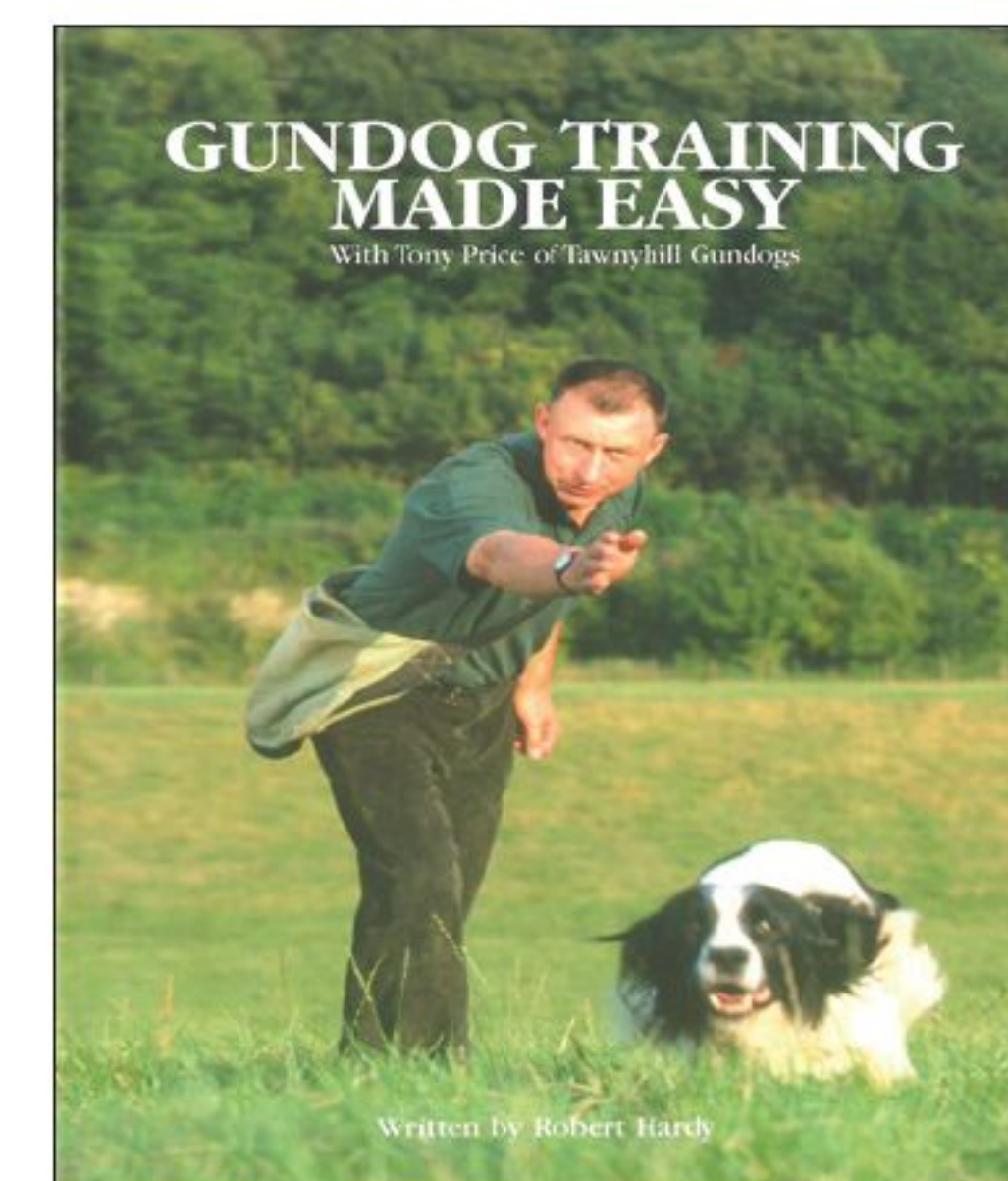
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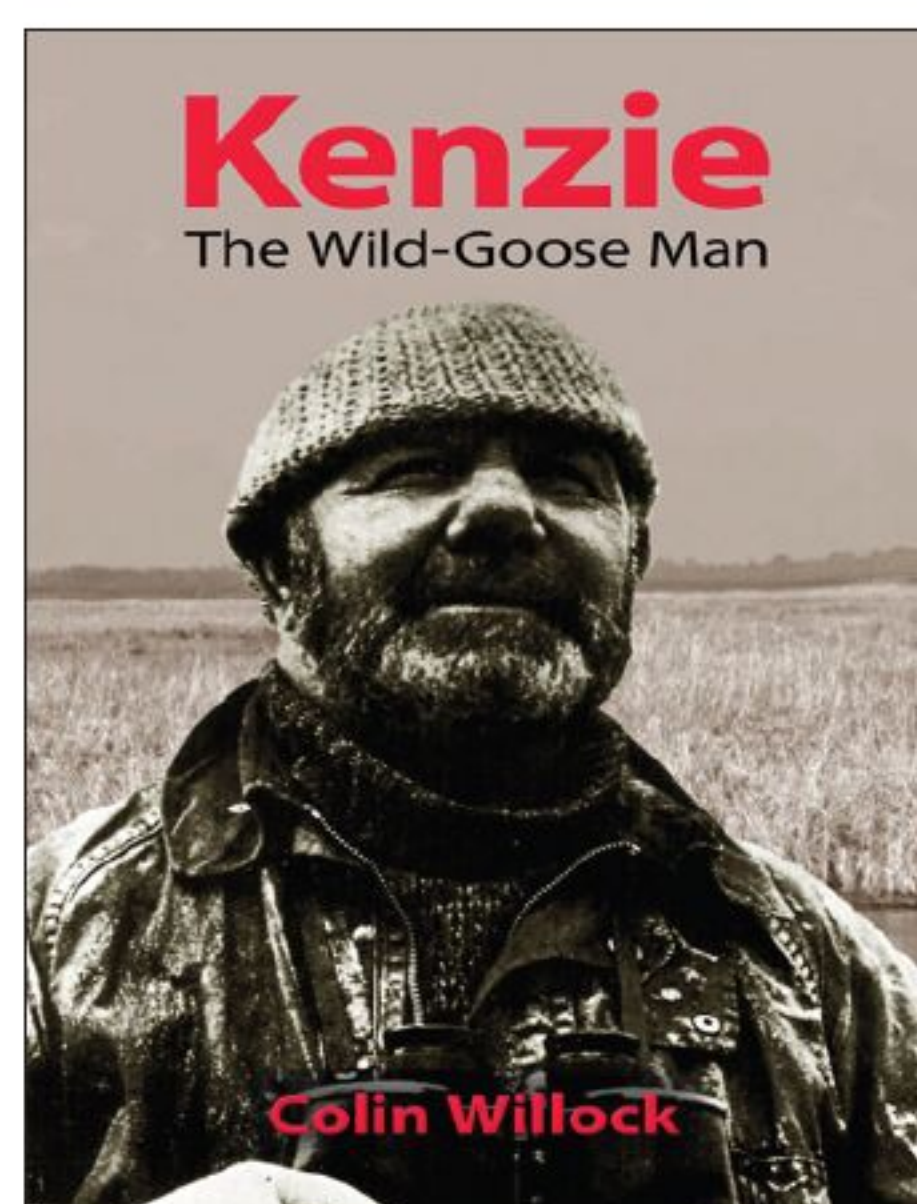
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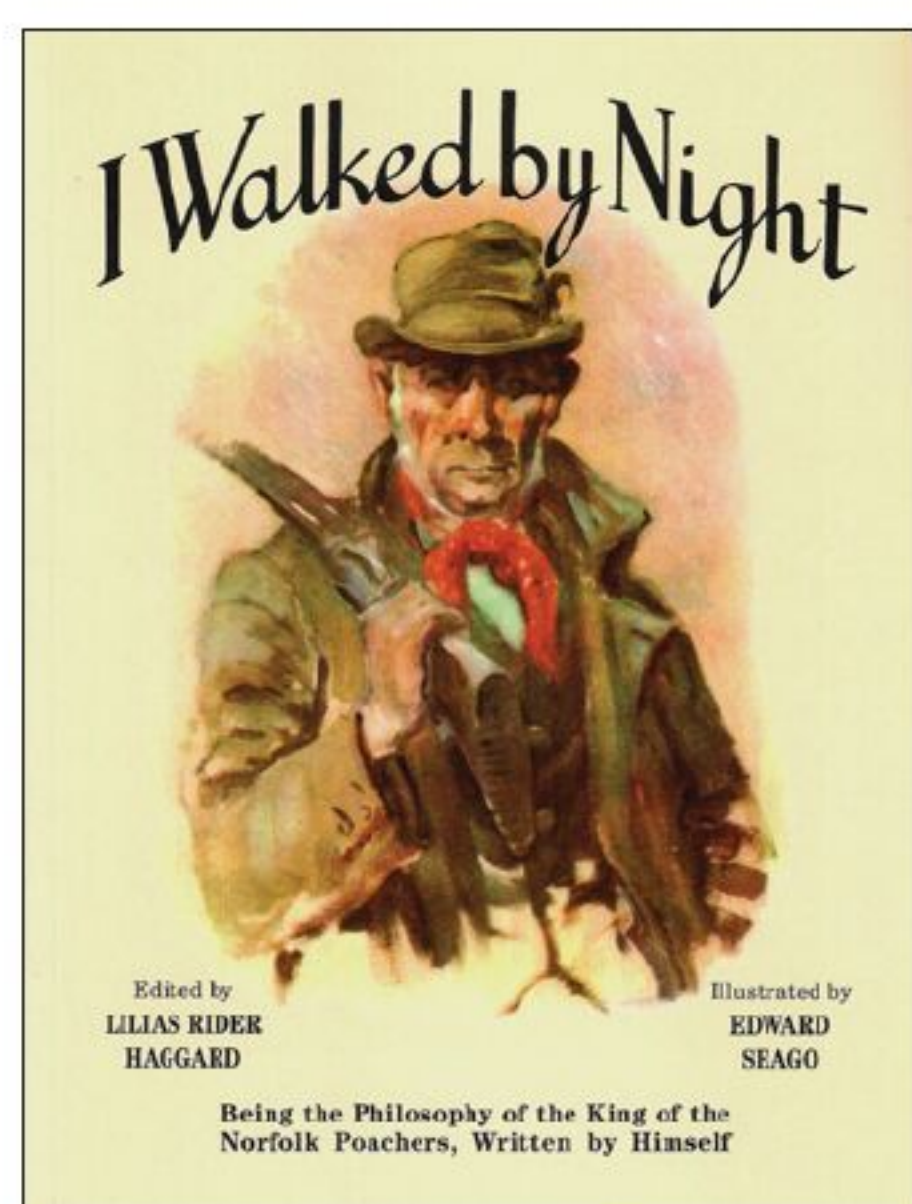
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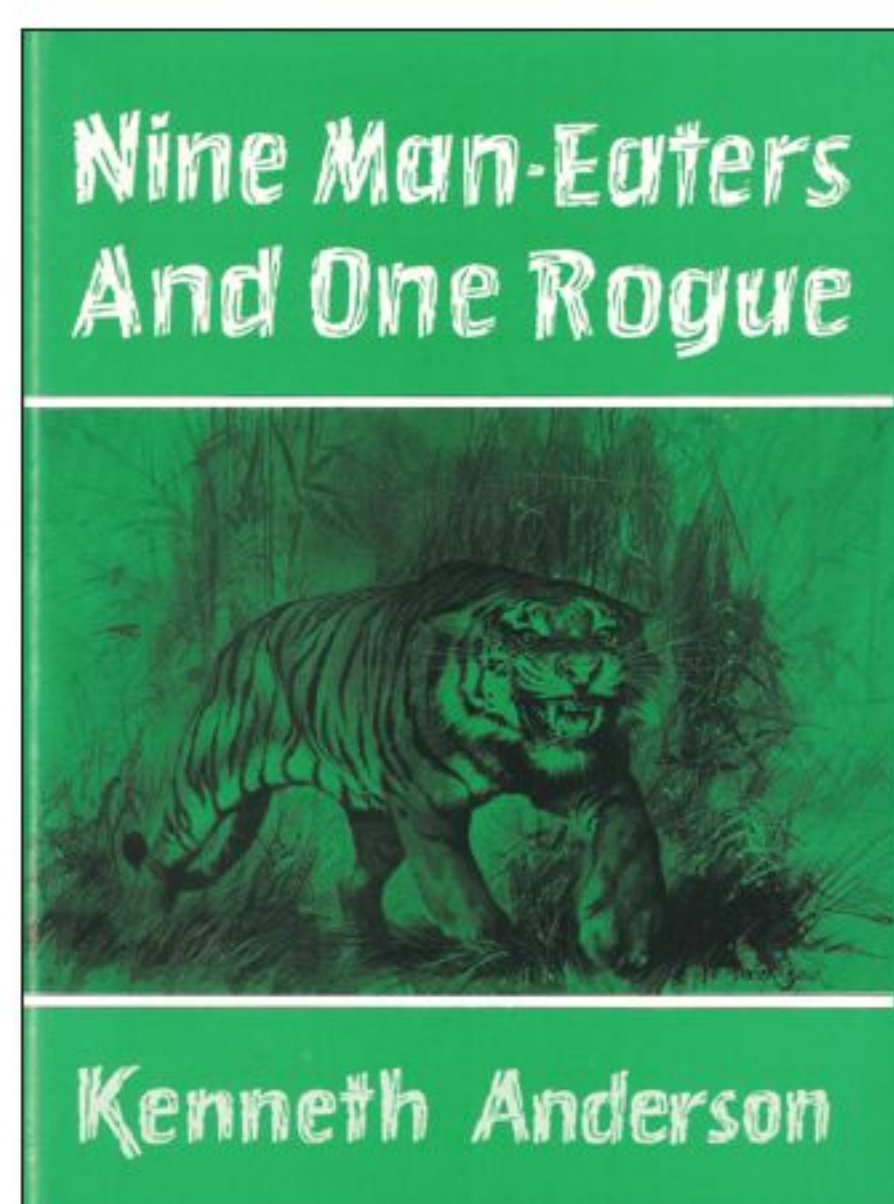
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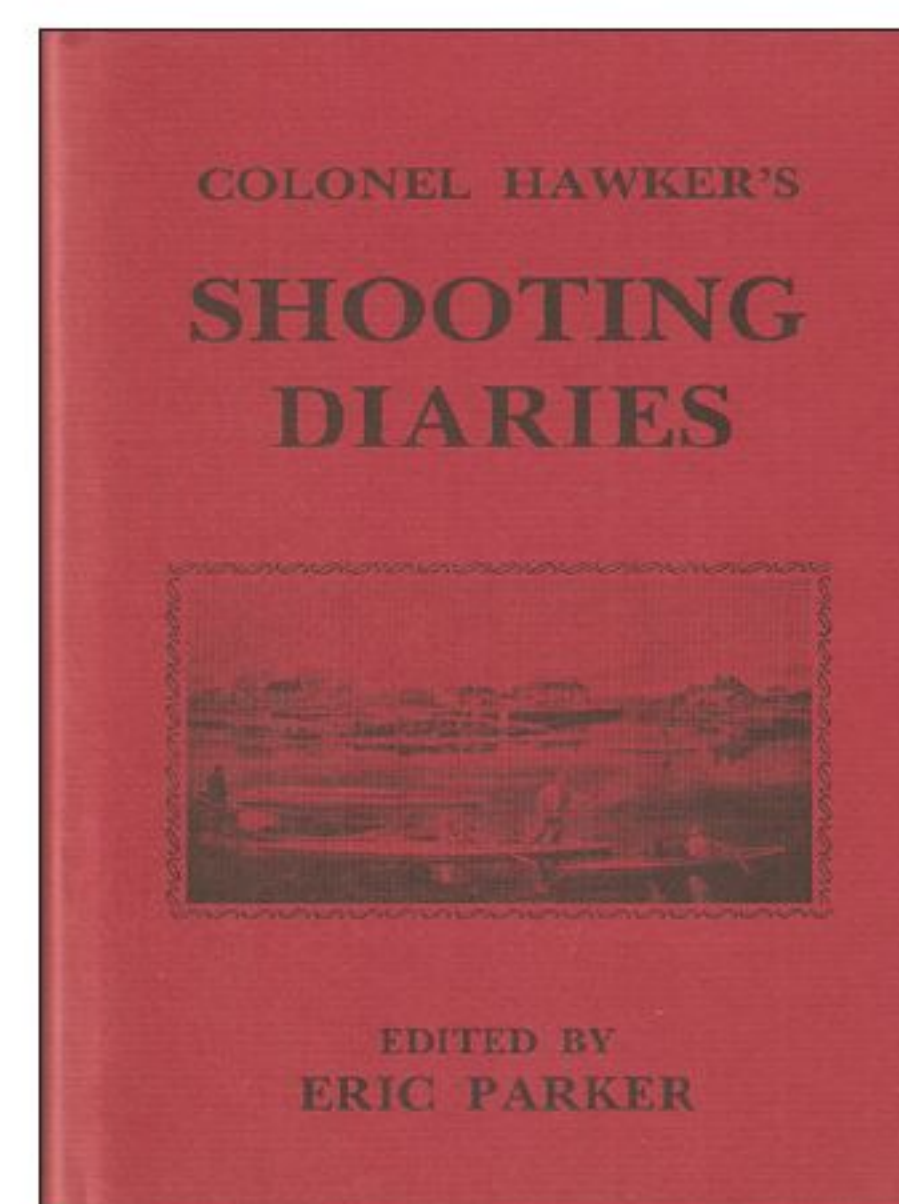
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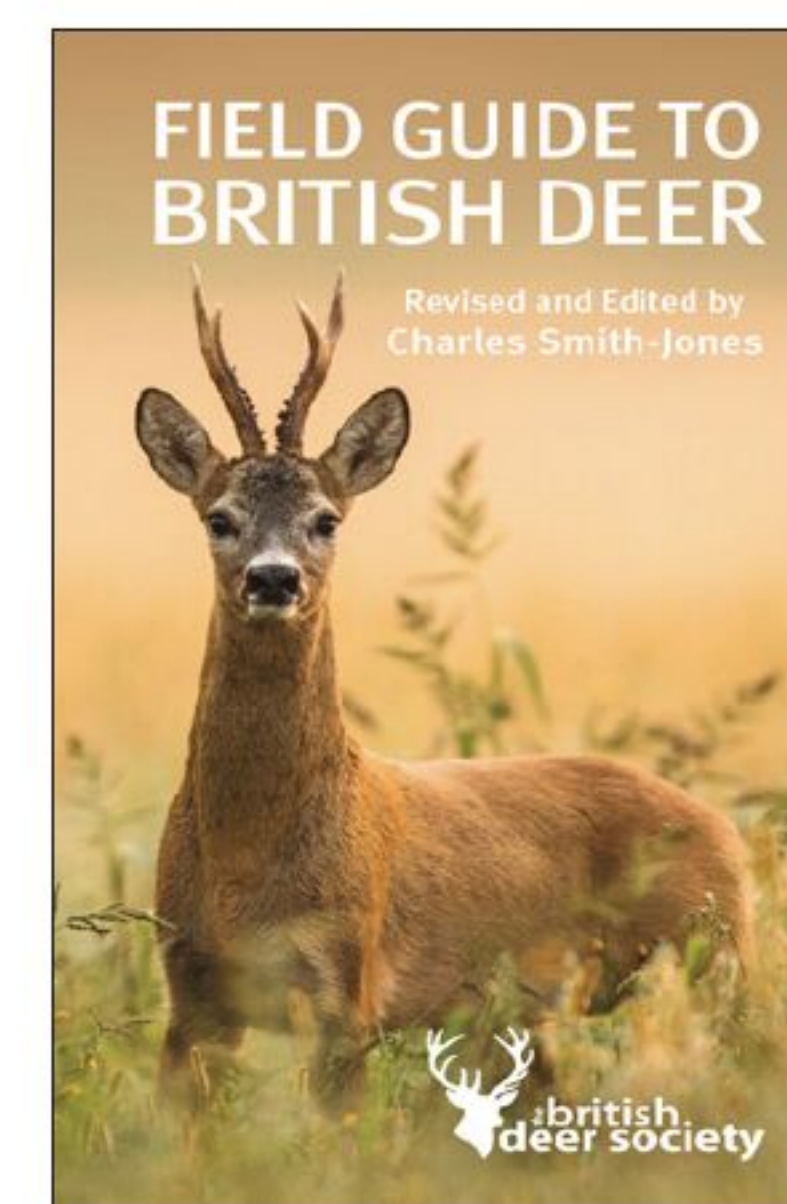
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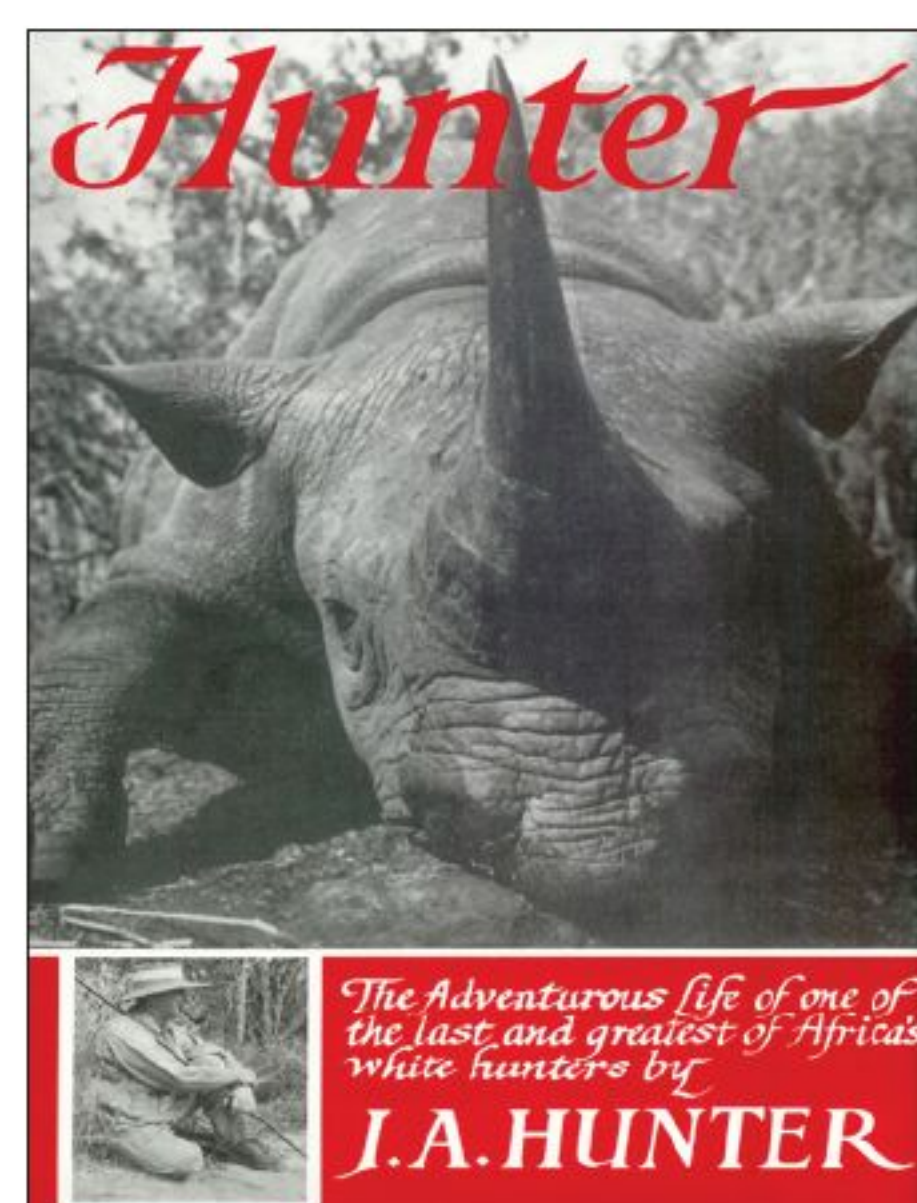
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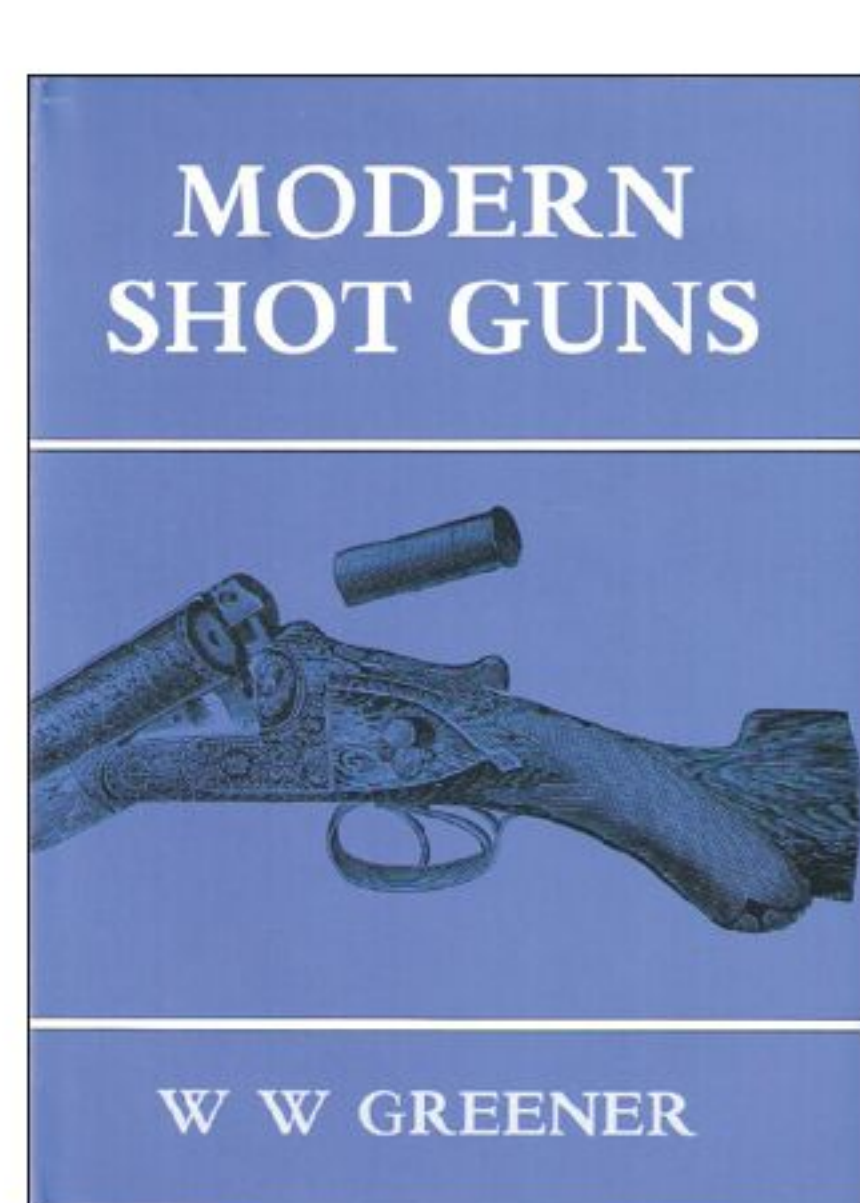
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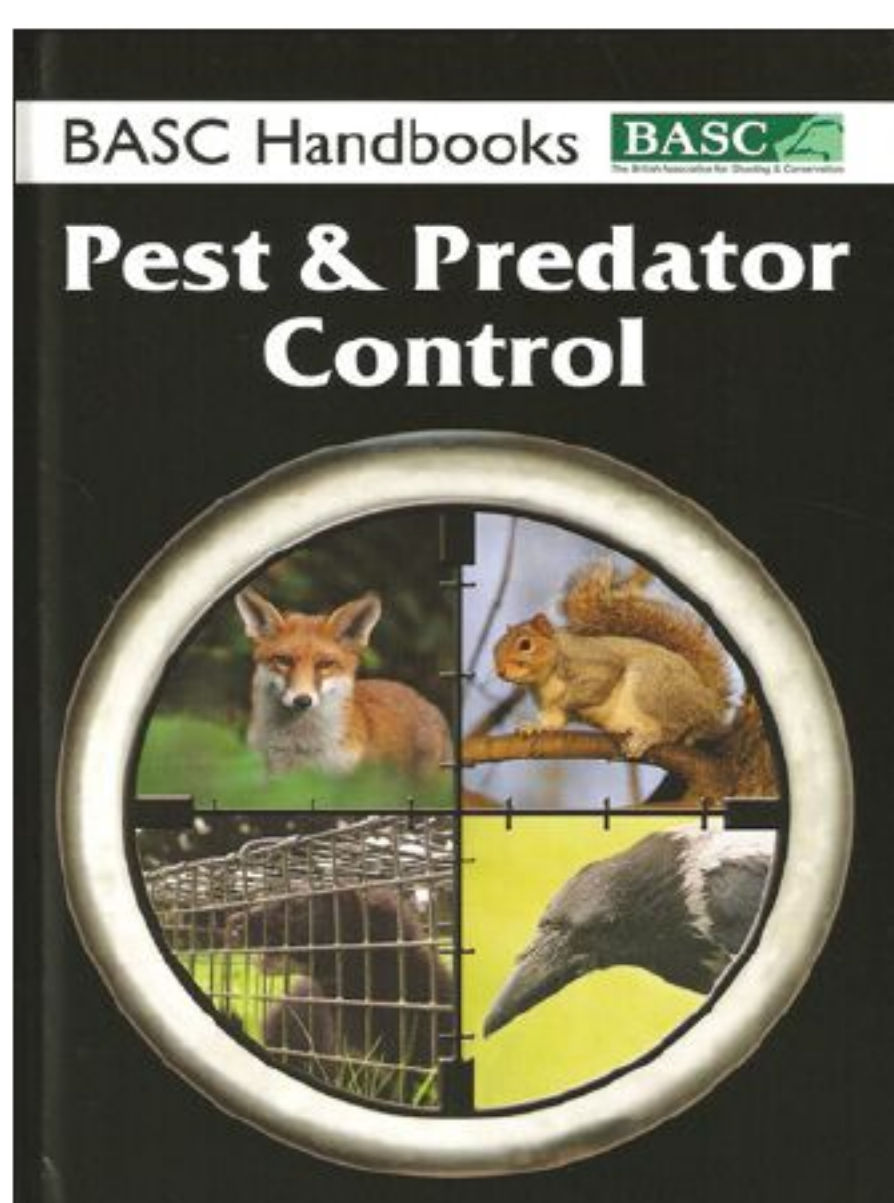
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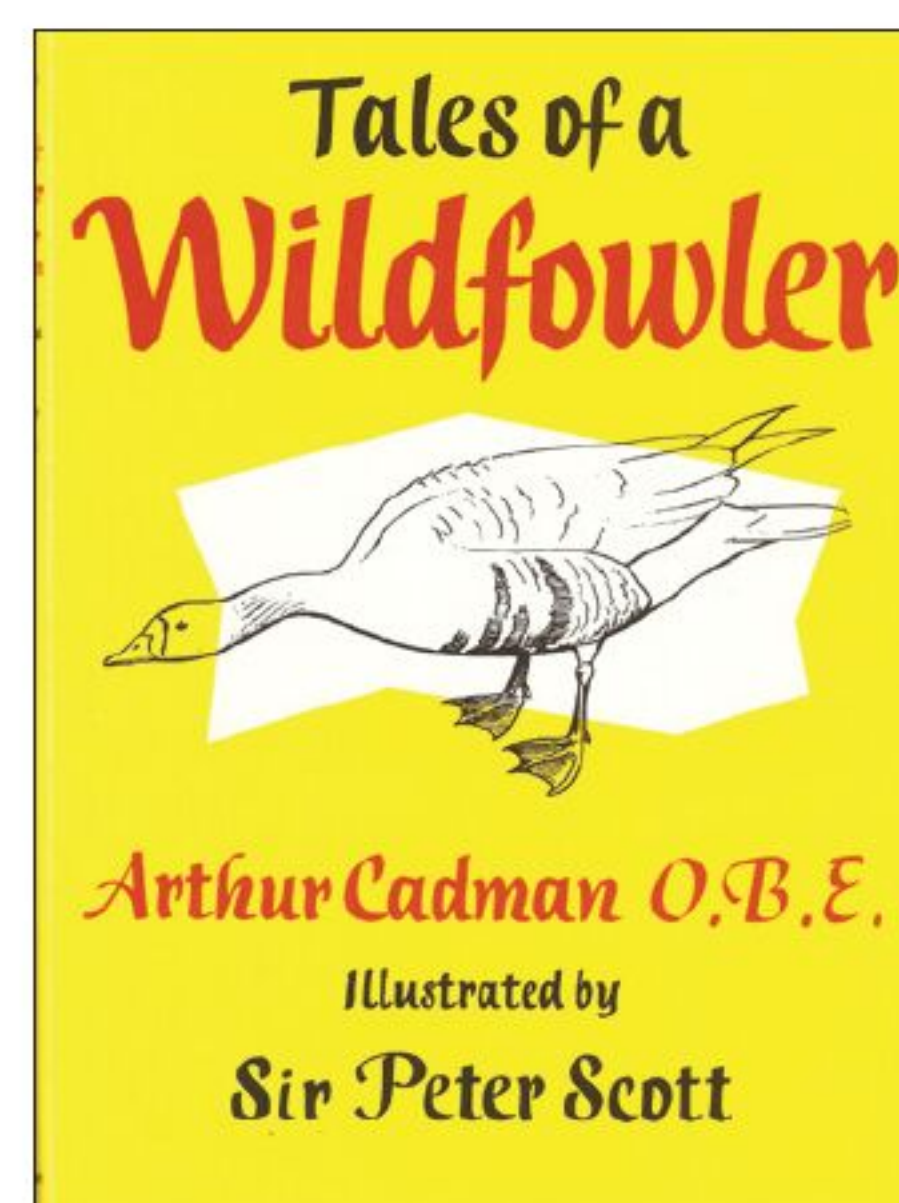
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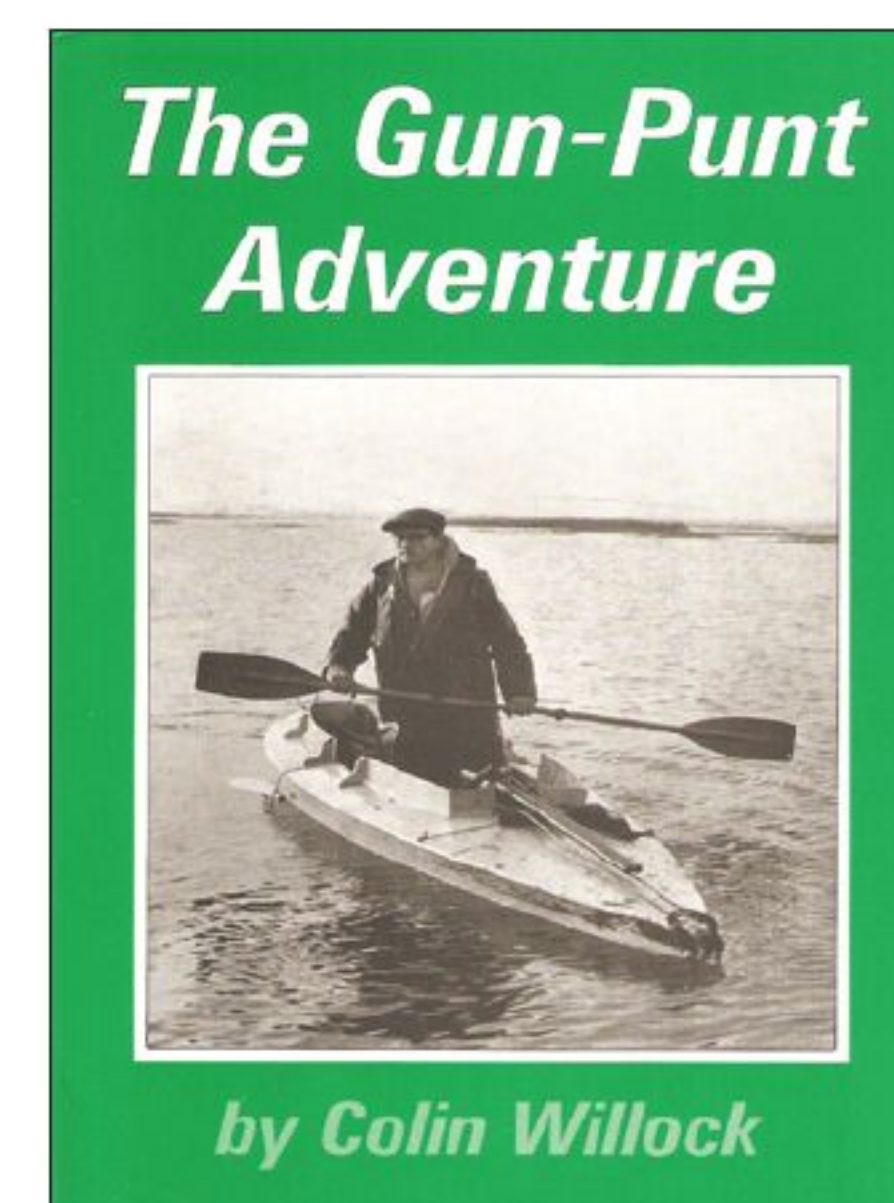
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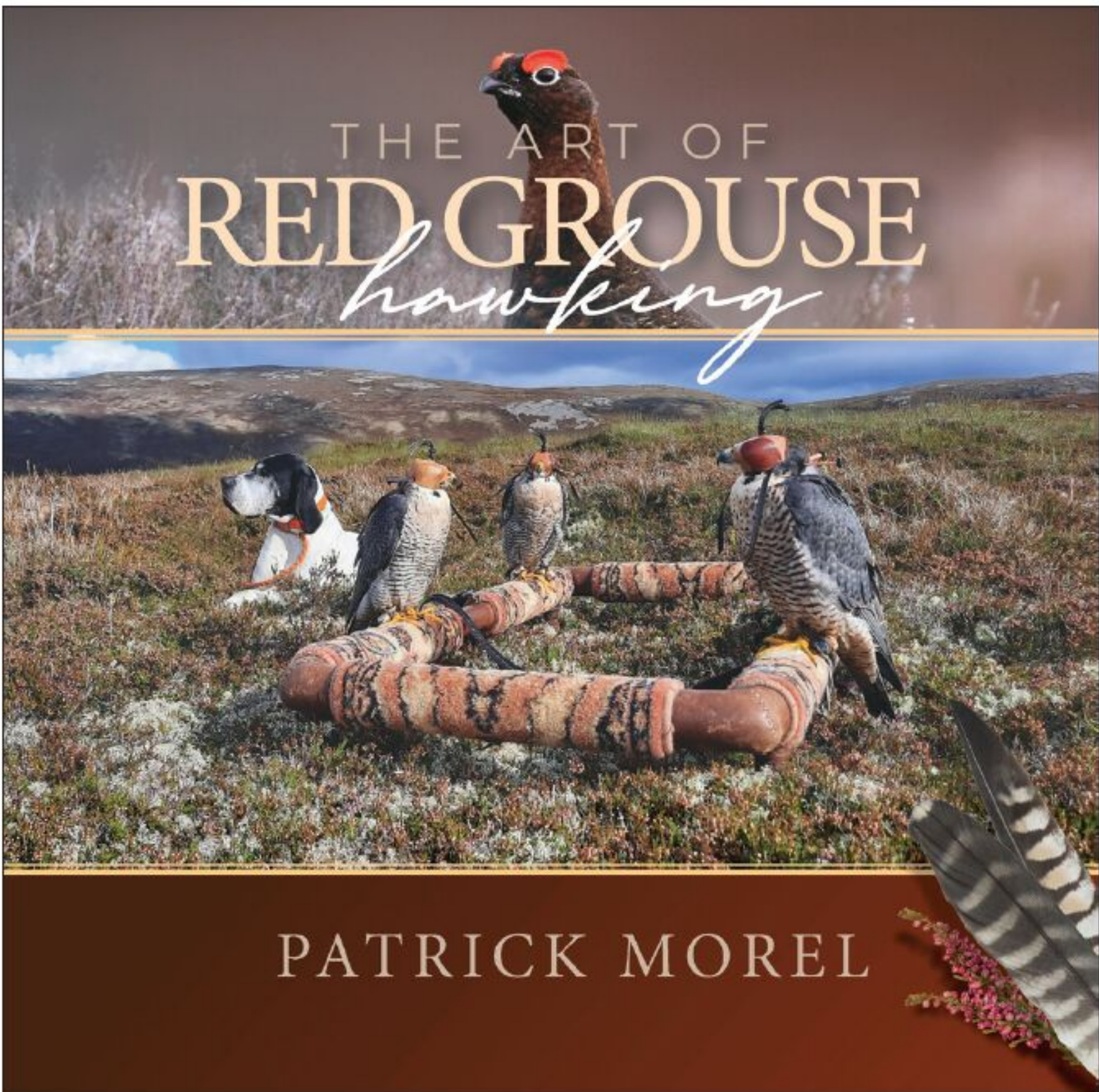


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The Art of Red Grouse Hawking

BOOKSHELF

PATRICK MOREL

A renowned falconer describes in fascinating detail a day spent on the hill for the ‘grand quest’ of hawking red grouse over a pointer

Today I am flying alone on the hill located in front of the place where John Thornton put his encampment and flew 220 years ago [in *North and South*]. Flying two falcons and a dog is a lot for a solo falconer. I leave one hawk in the car and make the descent towards the river Dulnain at the foot of Cnoc Fraing (French hill in Gaelic), whose peak stands at 745m.

The wind, moderate to strong, is blowing ideally on to the mountain’s flank: perfect conditions for a falcon to climb on the breeze. The whole of the slope down to the river is in good wind. Attila, a five-year-old pointer, is unleashed and our hunt begins.

He has only one ambition: to find game and mark it with a firm point.

After some minutes of enthusiastic questing, Attila comes to an abrupt stop. Jeronimo, a twice-intermewed pealei tiercel, is unhooded, comfortably facing into the wind. He monitors the dog, gauges the territory, rouses and takes off.

He seems motivated, pumping powerfully into his climb and is soon over 300m. Arriving at his first pitch, helped by the breeze, it is enough to allow him, riding the wind, to

mount like a helicopter. Soon he is no more than a tiny speck of dust in the sky. He starts waiting on over the dog, positioning himself far ahead and very high, above the clouds. I gently move towards Attila to flush; check the tiercel's pitch and position, ensuring the flush will be into the wind. A hare runs away... respected by the dog, who is accustomed to ignore such temptations.

Never mind. Jeronimo is left on the wing and Attila sent off again. His questing is broad and intelligent, marrying the contours of the terrain. Attila has a short nose but compensates for this defect by excellent obedience to hand signals and eye contact, looking back to see what is required of him. He covers a large part of the slope as I zigzag down it. The slope is long, almost 2km, and the height difference from top to bottom significant – some 400m to 500m – but, today, there is not a bird to be found.



Arriving at the river, I head back uphill, working a central strip of ground. The climb is steep and breath is short. Jeronimo is still above, beautifully placed and poised to fall like a teardrop of lead. Attila must quarter the ground working downwind. Arriving at the top of the hill, he finally freezes on point. I approach him unhurriedly – I'd be unable to run in any case. A last glance in the air – the falcon has disappeared: moment of concern. The receiver is out of the bag and the signal checked.

Jeronimo is still here... I sit, take the binoculars and begin to search the sky. After a few minutes, I discover the tiercel, perfectly centred, far enough forward in relation to us and very high, directly above me, in the middle of the clouds into which he disappears at times.



I approach the dog, keeping my head in the air to avoid losing sight of the falcon – a perilous exercise in this terrain full of holes and ditches. Two grouse burst up at my feet cackling, or rather laughing. The attack is devastating and the stoop seemingly endless. The grouse plunges towards the river below, flying flush to the

ground and hugging its contours. A split second before contact is made, the grouse bails into a ditch and the falcon rebounds like a ball, remounting as high as he was during his attack.

Attila runs under the flight, continuing to pursue the grouse; he is quickly on point again. The bird's new flight provokes a superb teardrop stoop but ends, again, with it dropping into a hole at the last moment. These old grouse are fiendishly cunning and perfectly familiar with their territory. Harassed daily by eagles, harriers and wild peregrines, they know all possible refuges.

Jeronimo regains his pitch and is difficult to see despite the clear sky dotted with small fleecy clouds. I reassure myself by testing the receiver. A shot of the binoculars and we are ready for a third service. This time, the grouse is struck but falls near a large peat hole filled with water. Its banks are mined with holes and galleries and the grouse finds refuge in one of them. It proves impossible to find, despite the dog's desire to be transformed into a terrier.

After a few minutes, I give up and Attila is sent off to resume his quest. We are at the bottom of the slope and I must go back up. It is with somewhat leaden feet that I relaunch my assault on the hill. Jeronimo has not lost his morale, but maintains his pitch at the limit of sight. Attila is also still in great shape and works back up the slope downwind. The falconer suffers much more and is short of breath. The climb is hard. I glance at my watch; it is 4.30pm. The falcon has been on the wing for an hour and a half.

This time, I'm getting closer to the foot of the hill. Jeronimo is left to glide to the flank of the mountain, where he relies on the slope lift to suck him upwards. In a few minutes, he disappears. I check the receiver: he still flies above me, somewhere in the clouds, but is completely invisible. The quest is long and grouse are scarce this year. Breeding has been bad and the seldom-encountered birds are old ones or pairs without young.



Attila snaps around into a superb point and locks on to a brace of grouse. I approach him slowly, since time is not a priority today. I let the

dog rest: he has run for miles. Yet again, I need the binoculars, only locating the hawk after a meticulous search. He is right over us, a few hundred metres ahead, hanging above as if by a thread.

I sit and watch him at leisure: time to regain my breath and enjoy this moment of intense emotion, fascinated, as always, by the invisible link which connects the man with the bird. On command, Attila springs smoothly forward like a cat to flush a small covey of grouse that spin straight down the slope.

The tiercel instantly begins his attack and falls, like lead, in a magnificent teardrop – I lose sight of him for several seconds. I have fun counting the seconds: 20, 21, 22... before he joins the grouse that have travelled several hundred metres.

This time, the strike is fatal, terminating in a cloud of feathers. The grouse, a feathered mass with closed wings, is struck down like a shot bird, falling far below. It is with a lighter heart that I descend the slope once again. Jeronimo sits enthroned on a very dark old cock. He appears drunk, with slit-like eyes, and has broken the grouse's cervical vertebrae but remains frozen, dulled by his flight, sitting immobile and holding his prey with one foot. Long minutes pass before he begins plucking. I sit beside him; the flight has lasted nearly three hours. 🦅



About the author

Patrick Morel is renowned worldwide as a master falconer and expert on grande quête

(great quest) pointing dogs. In this book, he shares his experience of a half-century of grouse hawking. Far more than just hunting with a training hawk, this combination of a high-flying falcon "waiting on" a dog rigid on point and the beautiful moorland landscapes merges to mould an emotional and spiritual experience; grouse hawking is the ultimate form of falconry.

➔ **The Art of Red Grouse Hawking**
by Patrick Morel
published by Coch-y-Bonddu Books,
May 2024, price £100
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Working Dogs



Why informal summer training is a cracking way for dogs and their handlers to keep themselves fit

I am always conscious at this time of year that working dogs are largely without task. For this reason, I grab any opportunity to keep them fit and obedient with both hands. Recently, I was checking the sheep on one of the nature reserves. This is Meg the border collie's domain. That day, a light touch was required as we found a solitary Shetland with two new lambs. The ewe appeared to have a larger than average udder and I was concerned that she might be suffering from a touch of mastitis.

I called Meg to come by and she set off to circle the ewe's left flank, subsequently moving in behind her. The ewe was protective of her lambs, staying close to them and not running off. This meant that the woolly triumvirate only made it a few feet into thick nettles, so she was easy to catch. Often a dog will crystallise the mothering instinct in a freshly lambed ewe. Thankfully the ewe in question didn't have mastitis and the only issue seemed to be that she was producing a huge volume of milk. Meg's job is never done and she remains fit all year round.

Exercise regime

The nature reserve that Meg and I had been working on forms a long narrow strip along the banks of the river Hull. The shape of the reserve means I often walk it from one end to the other then take a shortcut back to the car along a bridleway. When I walk the route I try to take two or three of the gundogs with me as part of their exercise regime. It also provides valuable time and space to train.

“Scurries can be great fun; if a dog fails in front of a crowd, it means nothing”

One section of the river, with handily profiled banks, is easily accessible and thus great for water work. The livestock, particularly in spring when there are tiny lambs, offer a fantastic opportunity for stock training the young dogs. Once out of the reserve on the bridleway, they all have the chance to have a good leg stretch, a decent spell of free running and a swim



Tarka quickly grasps the concept of the scurry at a local charity clay shoot

in the land drain that runs alongside. My dogs are mostly under very strict control, so it is nice to give them a little freedom every now and then.

Another chance to give them a bit of informal training arose while helping with a charity clay shoot. The event was in aid of Hey Kids, which supports families affected by type 1 diabetes, and in memory of an old friend. One of the activities was a gundog scurry, where dogs have to make

a retrieve over a series of straw bales as quickly as possible.

I thought my lab might be quite good at this, but it was actually Tarka, the 11-month-old Chesapeake Bay puppy, who proved to be a bit of a star. Tarka has never trained for anything like this but seemed to grasp the concept of what was going on really quickly and certainly didn't show me up. Raven, on

the other hand, heard gunshots in the trees and thought it was a much more interesting prospect, so sped off to investigate.

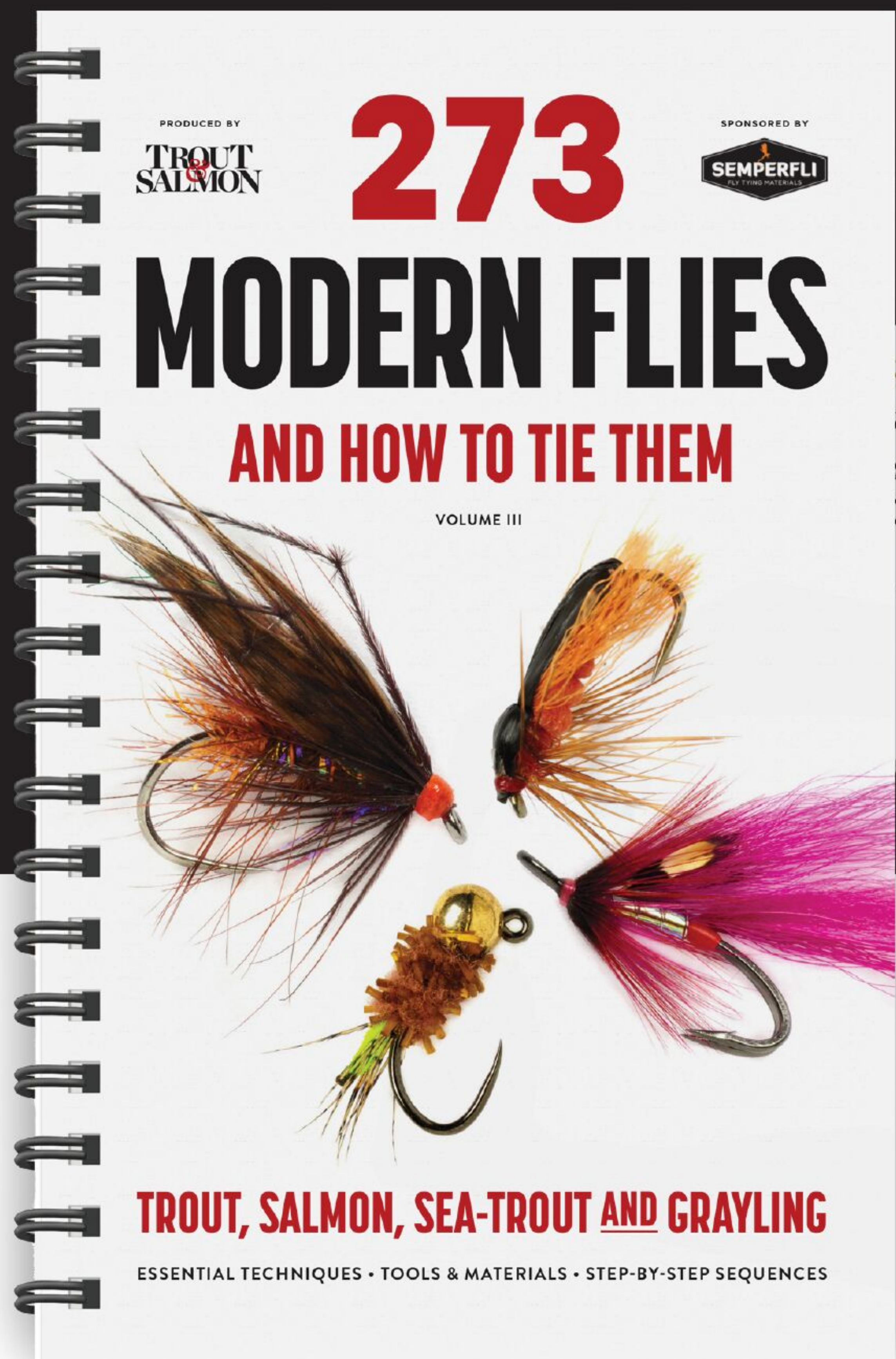
Scurries can be great fun and an interesting addition to training, but should never be taken too seriously. If your dog fails in front of a crowd, it means nothing. These situations, with reams of unusual distractions, are not a true reflection of your dog's ability in the field. I once had a springer who veered off from the line of a blind retrieve, pushed the lid off the organiser's stacker box, picked out a dummy and brought it back.

Was this a fail? I'd say it was actually a terrific demonstration of intelligence. My advice is just go out and have fun. 🐾

🔗 Matthew Arnold carries out conservation and pest control contracts in Yorkshire and looks after a small mixed shoot and seven miles of chalkstream. His passions are working dogs, native gamebirds and river restoration.

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Not just a pretty face...

Breeders have free rein to work towards the characteristics they desire, but aesthetics and working ability are crucial, says Ryan Kay



FOR WORKING

gundogs there is no breed standard. That is, for each breed there is no requisite size or shape, weight or form; nothing to define it as a particular breed. From what I've encountered over the years, some dogs bear only a vague resemblance to a particular breed, yet can still be classed as such.

In our training paddocks at FarlaVale, we've seen labradors that look closer to greyhounds and cockers that look like Lancashire heblers. This is because the working gundog world has a completely different set of requirements from the show world. The main emphasis and necessity are, quite simply, that the dog must work. I dare say that if someone turned up on a shoot with a dog that resembled no known breed, yet it worked and performed better than any other dog there that day, it would be embraced and welcomed to the shooting field for evermore.

In fact, for this imaginary new addition to gain popularity even further, and for the demand of its offspring to go through the roof, simply make it aesthetically pleasing and we might all want one. I would even go as far as to say that providing it looked appealing with regards to its

size and shape, and if it was available in an array of attractive colours, for some owners the temperament wouldn't even be a priority.

It's true; aesthetics play a huge part in our decision-making when it comes to choosing a gundog. It's our human nature. I'll never forget the guy who once turned up here for a lesson many years ago, stating the only reason he had a weimaraner was because his

girlfriend said it would match their wallpaper. He was, if nothing else, at least honest.

The pointers and setters, and many of the HPRs, appear to have the best of both worlds, because a lot of these breeds compete both in the show ring and the field. It's known as duality. The working labs, springers and cockers are, however, worlds apart from their show-type counterparts. The working cocker is genetically closer to the working springer than it is to a show cocker.

Because of these two highly regarded essentials of working ability and aesthetics, gundog enthusiasts can, to some extent, breed as they wish, based on their own ideal and no one else's. There is no need to breed towards a constricting standard of uniformity as there is in the show scene. For these reasons, working cockers, for example, seem to vary greatly in dimension and stature.

We frequently see cockers of all shapes and sizes coming along for lessons; small and wispy to large and lanky, despite being confirmed as cockers on their pedigree. It's often hard to see much resemblance between any of them. Some of the differences can't even be blamed on suspected introductions of springers



The disparity in size of any given working breed can be huge, especially with spaniels

into their lines, not according to their pedigrees at least.

Many of the size disparities are unexplainable. We have a stunning cocker named Biscuit. He is a sizeable fellow in stature. Complete and upstanding, he is a pure hunting dog of considerable force. As we bred him, I can tell you that his sire is perhaps one of the smallest cocker stud dogs in the country – a small and compact merry cocker from a long line of small and compact merry cockers. The small genes have been cemented within those lines by selective breeding for such pleasing neatness and uniformity. This has been the breeder's own standard, if you like, and they've aimed for it over many years of breeding.

Of course, genes come from both parents. While Biscuit's dam is a slightly more sizeable bitch herself, she is nothing like Biscuit. Experience tells me that just because Biscuit is a more generously built sort, it doesn't mean he will necessarily pass on his size to all his offspring. This has been confirmed several times over, as we've helped train several of his puppies up to adulthood.

These sons and daughters of Biscuit have finished more in line with the size of his diminutive sire, despite being out of quite large bitches themselves. To cement size and shape, we would need to breed closer, which is exactly what the breeder of Biscuit's sire has done over some considerable time.

Conformation

Staying with spaniels, I've seen cockers from 7kg up to 27kg, and at FarlaVale we own cockers ranging from 9kg up to 16kg. The size of a cocker doesn't necessarily matter too much, but the stature does, because I personally like to see substance. By substance, I mean sturdy, strong and complete looking, with good conformation and of solid bone. My reason for this requirement of substance is down to the demanding terrain and cover many of us ask our spaniels to hunt across.

There must be power in a dog; power so it can push through and work against tough vegetation when hunting, but also power that will enable it to deliver a large cock pheasant through such cover when retrieving. Also, a body that is built with power will surely be able to ➔

RYAN'S VIEWPOINT

TO CRATE OR NOT TO CRATE?

Crates are effective training tools for your new arrivals

This is a contentious but important subject. The excitement of bringing a new puppy into the home can cause a little more fuss than you were perhaps hoping for, and a crate, positively introduced, can be a useful aid that helps bring a little calm to the situation.

Everyone wants to get their hands on the new addition as the puppy is welcomed into the family, and the picture of a dog mingling and knocking around

Puppies can sleep for huge chunks of the day, so a crate can provide a safe place for them to rest. One of the great advantages of a crate is that you're creating avoidance, which is one of the most important parts of training. If a young pup is left to wander around the home from the start, with no safe place that contains them and we're simply getting on with our daily lives, we're sometimes forced to interact with them in a way that is less than ideal.

“The crate doesn't have to be forever and eventually it can be phased out”

the home is probably the ideal scenario envisaged by all. But a puppy needs some guidance, and interactions really need to be a bit more considered.

Outside the crate, your puppy is learning but, rather like a child in sweetshop, they're unlikely to regulate themselves. Actions like “zoomies” can become the norm – it might count as exercise but should really be more measured and supervised.

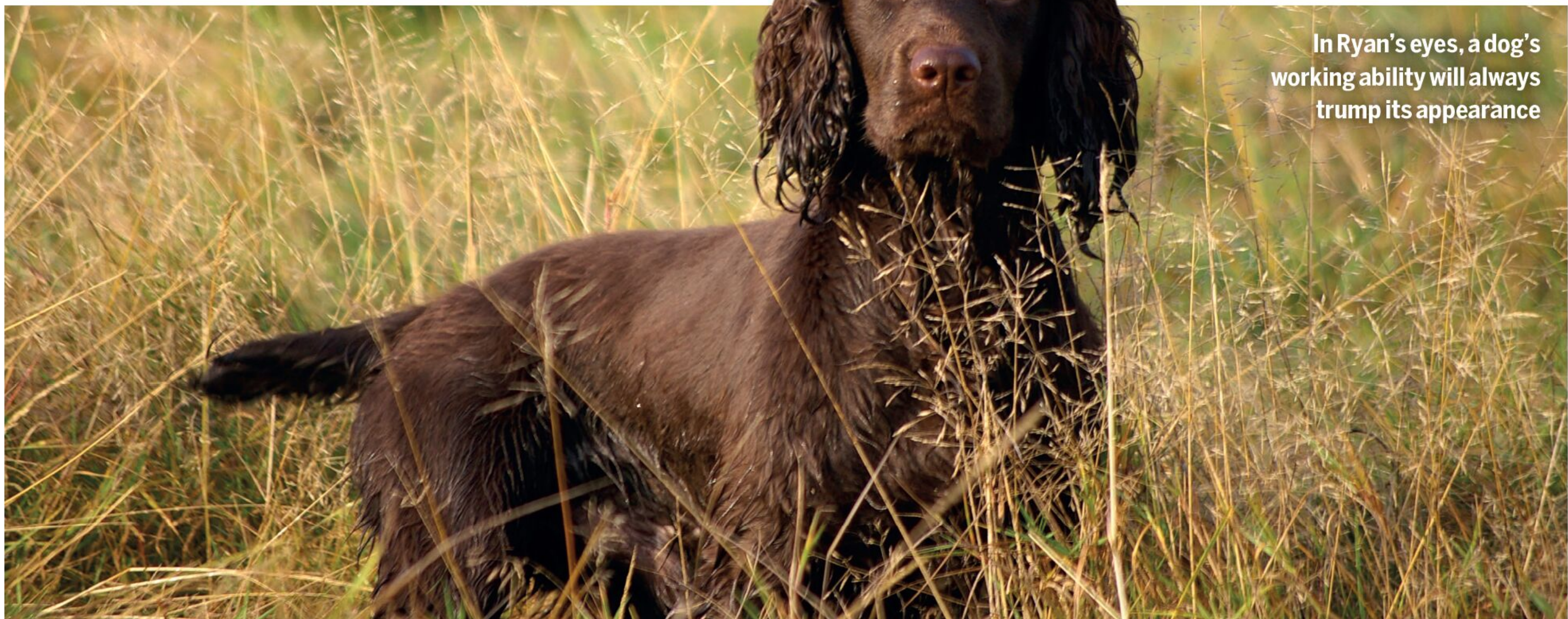
For example, we may reach out and remove things from their mouth that they're not allowed, or react sharply to other potential hazards that weren't spotted earlier.

Remember, the crate doesn't have to be forever and eventually it can be phased out altogether. But to start with, think of it as a useful training tool and a nice little sanctuary for the dog with a big window of the world.

You can email Ryan at ryankay@farlavale.co.uk



The crate is a place where puppies or older dogs can go to get some peace and quiet, to calm them down when they are getting excited and get them used to their place within the family



In Ryan's eyes, a dog's working ability will always trump its appearance

handle and look after itself better with less risk of injury.

So whether a dog is 7kg or 27kg doesn't bother me, nor does it matter whether it's small with substance or large with substance. But where size does matter is down to the cover and expanse of ground. I know of some moorland keepers who like to breed their cocker spaniels towards the larger end of the scale because that more sizeable dog means they are far better suited to take on the taller and thicker heather.

Why not buy a springer, you might ask. Aside the notable differences in character and hunting style, it then comes back to the other influencing factor – that of aesthetics – and there is a greater variety of colours available in cockers.

Beating line

In the 1980s, my father owned labradors that looked very different from those I see today. His labradors were quite different from many others seen at the time too, because his were

much smaller – small and compact. He liked them that size because they were used to seeing more action in the beating line than on the peg.

I remember as a youngster working them on local shoots. They often behaved in a spaniel-like manner

“He only had a weimaraner because his girlfriend said it matched the wallpaper”

as they hunted along with their body low to the ground in order to take on brambles and other tough cover.

Looking back, I don't think I've seen labradors take on cover like them since. But that was my father's ideal lab, and he bred accordingly. He liked these solid labs that would work in the beating line yet would have the capabilities to heel better

than a spaniel when required, a dog he didn't have to constantly remind where “heel” was.

I imagine that those labradors of

my father's weighed between 20kg and 25kg. I see labradors here at FarlaVale that are probably anywhere between 20kg and 40kg, but the greatest variant is often the shape, with long-legged, finely built types quite common.

When all's said and done, I do rather like the fact that there are such variables within the popular working gundog breeds. Those size differences provide us with more options when it comes to breeding, as well as when it comes to the environment in which they will be eventually be worked.

Many of us have a picture that we breed towards. Aside from the responsibilities all breeders have to health-test our dogs, and the desire for them to have good temperaments, two main factors will prevail: those of working ability and looks. It seems we can never get away from the in-built human nature to want what is most visually satisfying. If you like how it works, you may as well enjoy how it looks, too. That is pleasing to the eye on both counts.

Given the choice, though, I have faith that making breeding decisions based on working ability will always come ahead of beauty. 🐾

🔗 Ryan Kay is a keen trialler, a Kennel Club Accredited Instructor for Working Gundogs. He and his wife Alison run FarlaVale Gundogs in North Yorkshire. farlavale.co.uk



Damson, Ryan's biggest working cocker, at 16 kgs, eventually produced his smallest, at 9kgs

Dog training for dummies

Whatever stage in their training your dog has reached, one (or more) of these great dummies will add fun and realism to your programme

It can often be impractical, messy or smelly to train your dog with real game. And many dogs may take some convincing that they want strange-smelling feathers or fur in their mouth to start with. So to get dogs retrieving consistently, practice with a dummy from an early age is essential. This selection offers something for every size and age of dog, and even something for the initially reticent would-be retriever. 🐾



**Mystique Rabbit
dog dummy**

RRP £25
muntjactrading.com

The unique filling and durable material help the dog easily grab and hold the dummy. An integral throwing rope enables users to effectively throw the dummy, which can be scented for added realism. It's available in small (700g) and large (1,300g) sizes, with or without a fur cover. It is advised to build the dog's confidence with the smaller dummy before moving on to the larger one.



**Flight Mallard Dead Bird
Pro dummy**

RRP £39.95
sportingsaint.co.uk

Part of the Sporting Saint Flight range, the Mallard Pro includes large wings, a short tail, swinging head, realistic feet and beak — all of which make it one of the most lifelike dummies on the market. Weighing approximately 700g, it is buoyant in water and has an attached throwing chord. Sporting Saint says this dummy accurately simulates picking up a shot bird.



**Original Clone
woodpigeon
dummy bundle**

RRP £45
dogandfield.co.uk

All of Dog & Field's latest launcher dummy range feature high-definition photographic canvas print from real gamebird feather patterns. The feathered marking on the dummies allows your dog to practise recognition for the types of gamebirds they may be retrieving in the field. The range fits all dummy launchers and has been designed to reduce recoil while maintaining distance. The Clone Woodpigeon product bundle includes: 1lb pigeon dummy, ½lb pigeon dummy, pigeon dummy ball and pigeon dead bird dummy.



**Firedog Line
training dummy**

RRP £7.99
gundoggear.co.uk

Used by England IGL retriever captain David Latham, this dummy offers excellent value and durability. The bottom of the dummy is navy blue — a colour dogs pick out easily — with a high-contrast white upper half, giving the dog something to focus on. It is available in a 500g size or a 250g offering, which is perfect for puppy training right from the off. Entirely made of sturdy canvas, this dummy can also be used in water.



**Field & Fireside
Reluctant Retriever
dummy**

RRP £11.99
fieldandfireside.co.uk

The Field & Fireside Reluctant Retriever is a canvas training aid with a waterproof inner filled with wood shavings. Aimed at dogs that need some encouragement to pick up a dummy, the Reluctant Retriever has the look and feel of a traditional canvas dummy but features a small pocket large enough to fit small treats, closing with a Velcro fastening. The dummy weighs only 120g, so it is compatible with dogs of any size.



Battle for the foreshore

Wildfowlers and gamekeepers once regarded each other with great suspicion but both are learning tact and tolerance. *Tower-Bird* rejoices

It was only recently, when John Anderton – honorary secretary of the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland (WAGBI) – made a tour of a number of southern fowling clubs in Hampshire and West Sussex, that it began to dawn on me that up to comparatively recent years, the relationship between fowlers and keepers had been rather like that of two strange dogs attempting to size each other up; tails stiff, hackles a little raised.

Now it occurred to me that the preliminaries were over and that suspicion had been laid. Furthermore, I realised that, quietly, fowlers and keepers have been slowly coming together over common interests. And as more and more game interests – such as game preservation societies, rough shooting clubs, woodpigeon clubs and so on – become affiliated to WAGBI, the common bond between fowlers and keepers is bound to strengthen.

From the time the Wild Birds Protection Act 1954 came into existence and WAGBI started to grow and to flex its muscles, all was not well everywhere between the growing numbers of wildfowlers and keepers whose ground lay just inside the sea wall or where manorial rights existed on the foreshore. There was not that rabid animosity such as existed between fowler and birdwatcher, but something less tangible.

Hitherto, in some areas, there had always been what I will term a “professional rivalry” between them. There were foreshores that the keepers believed were owned by their employers and on which their pheasants often wandered among the tall reeds or spartina grass. The fowlers, in some cases, either shot here because they doubted the manorial claims, or because previous owners had allowed them or their fathers to flight there.

Now, with fowling clubs forming all along the coastline, the local fowler was joined by members from inland who also wandered on to foreshores

where the keepers believed they had no right to wander. In some instances, the odd fowlers who shot certain bits of foreshore had been “accepted” by the keepers; now, with strangers also taking up stands at dawn and dusk, the keepers became resentful and started to turn away all comers.

Among the rushes

Though perhaps I should not say so, I twice ran into incidents when shooting a foreshore and an inland marsh where we had always shot without interference, and where the keepers now began to get active against intruders. In the first case.



“WAGBI’s John Anderton devoted a good space to a lengthy appreciation of the work of keepers”

as I sat among the rushes at dusk, I saw a figure coming fast and straight towards me. I froze into the mud and a keeper strode hurriedly within a few feet of me, his attention on the heads of two more gunners showing further down the estuary. He had almost reached them when a teal came over me, which I shot.

In the second instance, in the gathering dusk, I saw a figure coming towards me with a dog. I sought cover in the only available spot – with my dog Don behind me – a few feet up a drainpipe, where I squatted in almost claustrophobia. I saw the legs of the keeper pass, then the face of the dog looking into the drain. I held Don by the throat to prevent him growling, and kept very, very still. For some 15 seconds the dog seemed to glare up the pipe, then followed its master.

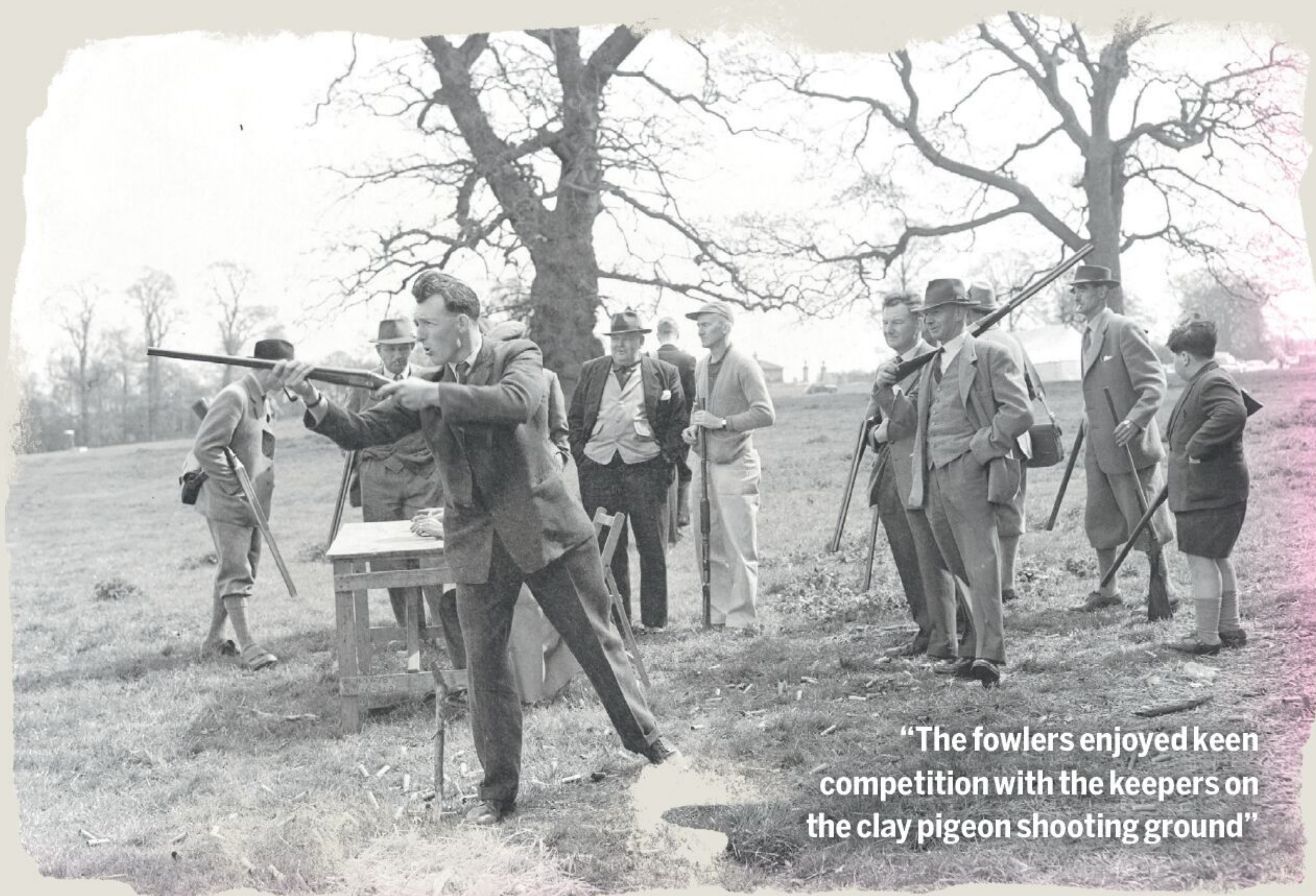
They were not half a mile off when I shot a shoveler. Such cases were common everywhere and were not regarded as poaching by the fowler.

“The majority of fowlers are recognised as good sportsmen who uphold the law”

Recently, a gamekeepers’ association was formed in this part of the world and issued a challenge to a clay pigeon shooting match to one of the local fowling clubs. The meeting was a great success and the following remark by one of the keepers to his friend was overheard: “What a nice lot of fellows these wildfowlers are; I’ve only heard about them before, but they’re a grand lot.”

Rearing ducks

A week later, when I attended a gathering of members of three fowling clubs – Pagham, Chichester Harbour and Langston Harbour – and John Anderton addressed them and told them all about WAGBI, I was pleased to see that a number of keepers were present. Two of them were rearing a considerable number of ducks for the Chichester WA and others were there to arrange future clay pigeon shoots, to say nothing of real pigeon shoots, vermin drives and so on.



“The fowlers enjoyed keen competition with the keepers on the clay pigeon shooting ground”

I was also surprised and delighted when John, towards the end of his address, devoted a good space to a lengthy appreciation of the work of gamekeepers. He said they were the finest body of men he knew; the hardest working and most appreciative of conservation. He added that the true bird sanctuaries throughout the country were those estates preserved for game on which wildlife prospered and birdlife and birdsong were immense factors. This was simply because their enemies, the predators, were properly controlled.

Here we have, after only a few years, another change of scenes – the fowlers enjoying keen competition with the keepers on the clay ground; sharing an interest in duck rearing and vermin destruction; yarning and drinking together and feeling they share the common bond of furthering the interests of sport and conservation. For most surely it is these two bodies



“In some areas, there had always been a rivalry between fowlers and gamekeepers”

that will ensure wildlife in this country will get a fair deal and every means of remaining anything but in danger of becoming rare.

Chronic fool

There is no doubt about it. From all parts of the country where there are fowling clubs, members are becoming more and more friendly with keepers, foresters, pests officers and birdwatchers – to the benefit of all concerned. There will, of course, always be the occasional black sheep or chronic fool, likely to jeopardise the good name of a club, but now the great majority of fowlers are recognised as good sportsmen who uphold the law.

Not so long since, almost every man or youth who committed a crime against sport and the law was dubbed “one of those fowling fellows”. With clubs well organised, and even lone-wolf fowlers upholding the good name of the sport and proud of its traditions, we shall hear less and less of minor troubles between fowlers and keepers.

The one great worry is the gun-straining, irresponsible gunner who shoots at everything alive at up to 200 yards. He is the ignorant menace of shore and inland marsh. If he cannot be “educated”, he should be chucked out of his club and prosecuted for any show of defiance to the law. WAGBI has this trouble to deal with and no doubt will succeed eventually in a difficult mission – with the cooperation of keepers. 🐦

➔ This article was first published in the 6 June 1961 issue of Shooting Times.



Game Cookery

Trout

The fish finger sandwich is a kitchen classic in all its guises, but Tim Maddams is taking it to another level with top-notch trout croquettes

There are undoubtedly finer things in life than a fish finger sandwich, but few are more comforting. You can always reach for the frozen Captain's Table version to pop betwixt two gleaming slices of the maternal pride and be done with it, but variety is the spice of life and, anyway, what's wrong with a bit of trout?

I know I will be accused of making it too posh, with too many ingredients, but my

version of the classic hot sandwich is worth the effort and provides an ideal excuse to nip off to fish for trout for a few hours.

Misty loch

I would like to conjure up a misty hill loch, with canny wild brownies sipping at early-season insect life as I creep stealthily round the loch, carefully scouting the margins for a tasty specimen to test my fly-fishing mettle. Alas, the truth is that I used a

couple of fillets of rainbow trout that were in the freezer. I wouldn't want you to think I was living some kind of idyllic life up here in Moray.

This recipe is probably better suited to a lardy rainbow than a sleek assassin of a wild brownie. Rather than breadcrumbing the slivers of boned flesh, I have made a croquette mixture with the fish, chilled it, cut it into fingers then breadcrumbed it, which allows me to add more flavours. 🐟

Ingredients

FOR THE CROQUETTES

- 🍷 250G TROUT FILLET
- 🍷 500G MILK
- 🍷 A FRESH BAY LEAF
- 🍷 SALT AND PEPPER
- 🍷 1 LARGE CLOVE OF GARLIC
- 🍷 1 SMALL SHALLOT
- 🍷 75G BUTTER
- 🍷 75G FLOUR
- 🍷 FRESH THYME, PARSLEY, CHIVES AND A LITTLE TARRAGON
- 🍷 FLOUR, BEATEN EGG AND BREADCRUMBS, FOR COATING THE FISH FINGERS
- 🍷 300ML LIGHT COOKING OIL, TO DEEP-FRY THE FISH FINGERS

FOR THE TARTAR SAUCE

- 🍷 2 TBSP MAYONNAISE
- 🍷 1 TSP CHOPPED PARSLEY
- 🍷 1 TSP CHOPPED SHALLOT
- 🍷 1 TSP CHOPPED CAPERS
- 🍷 1 TSP CHOPPED GHERKIN
- 🍷 1 CHOPPED ANCHOVY (OPTIONAL)
- 🍷 A LITTLE LEMON JUICE, CAYENNE, PEPPER AND SALT

TROUT CROQUETTE FISH FINGER SANDWICH WITH TARTAR SAUCE

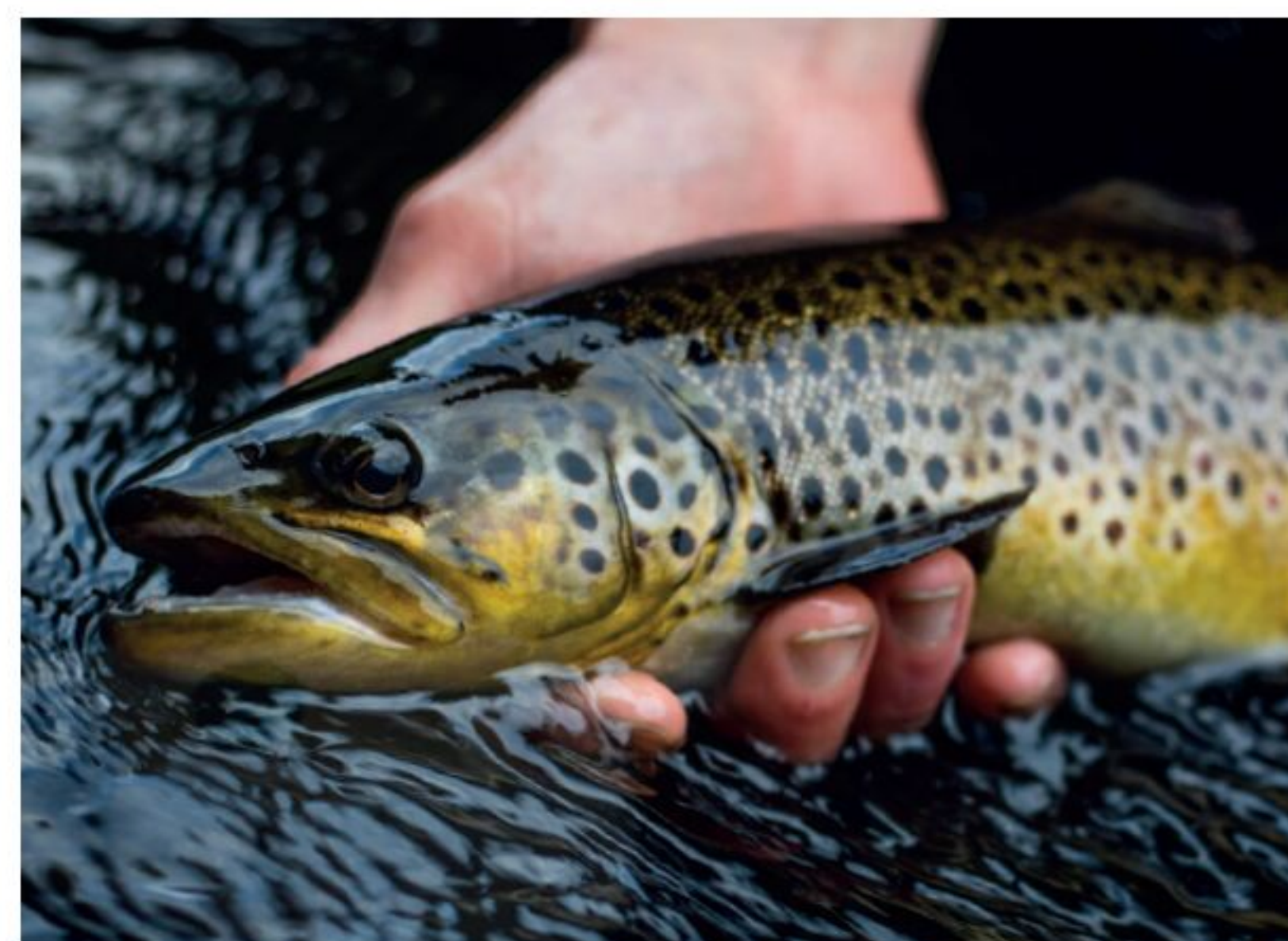
THE METHOD

Serves 2

1 Poach the trout in the milk with the bay leaf and some salt and pepper. Strain off the milk and allow the trout to cool enough to handle. Flake the fish a little and set aside.

2 Finely chop the garlic and the shallot and sweat it in the butter with some salt and pepper. Add the flour and make a roux – the thick paste of flour and butter that is the base of many white sauces. Slowly add the milk, over the heat, stirring all the time to make a thick and smooth white sauce. Season, then add the fish and the chopped parsley, chives and tarragon, before scraping the thick paste into a tub. Ideally, the mixture should be about as thick as a thumb on the bottom of the tub. Place the tub in the fridge to chill – without a lid or it will end up wet with condensation.

3 Once it is set and thoroughly firm, remove the mixture from the tub by turning it over and gently encouraging it out on to a floured surface. Cut into large fish finger pieces then go through the flour, egg and breadcrumbs routine. Set them aside and heat some frying oil in a pan ready to deep fry them. Set up a warmed



dish, with kitchen roll inside, to drain them once cooked.

4 To make the tartar sauce, simply mix together all the ingredients and season.

5 Fry the fish fingers in hot oil – heated to around 180°C – and set aside to drain once they are golden brown and piping hot.

6 Take two slices of handcrafted bread (or any bread you like) and spread one slice with butter and the other with tartar sauce. Add lettuce and tomatoes if desired. Sprinkle the cooked trout fish fingers with salt and place these in the sandwich. Apply the buttered slice on the top. I like to wrap sandwiches like this in parchment before cutting and serving, as it looks neat and keeps them together well. But that is probably a bit too fatty for most occasions.

The experts

THE ULTIMATE SHOOTING QUIZ TEAM



➡ BILL HARRIMAN

BASC's head of firearms and global authority on guns



➡ MAT MANNING

Airgunner and journalist from the West Country



➡ DIGGORY HADOKE

Vintage gun expert, firearms dealer, author and journalist



➡ BRUCE POTTS

Shooting Times rifle reviewer and stalker



➡ MIKE SWAN

Conservation expert and head of education for the GWCT



➡ DAVID TOMLINSON

Highly regarded writer and ornithologist



➡ LIAM BELL

Shropshire gamekeeper, keen wildfowler and amateur naturalist



➡ GRAHAM DOWNING

Shooting consultant and sporting author



➡ TONY BUCKWELL

Veterinary surgeon with a special interest in Gundogs



➡ TOM PAYNE

Professional shooting instructor and avid pigeon shooter



➡ 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

Is this illegal possession?

➡ FIREARMS LAW

Q I have a shotgun licence and shoot clays at a ground. Sometimes my wife comes with me and shoots too. She doesn't have a licence but the ground has an exemption for people without licences. One day on the way home, I had to stop at a service area. As my wife stayed in the car with the gun while I went inside, it occurred to me that she might be considered to be in unlawful possession of my gun while I was away. How would I stand in law if this ever became an issue?

A By the black letter of the law, your wife would be in illegal possession. However, there are cases that have been developed to mitigate against the worst excesses of the literal interpretation of the Firearms Act 1968. The case of

Sullivan vs Earl of Caithness establishes the concept of the "barest custody of a firearm". Whether your situation would come under that would be a matter for the courts to interpret. Each case will turn on its facts.

There are wider considerations here too. First, the likelihood of this coming to police attention is infinitesimal. Then there is the matter of whether a prosecution would be in the public interest, which I doubt. It is surely preferable to leave a shotgun momentarily in the care of an adult rather than leave it in an unattended vehicle, though that would be legal.

If you want to be bombproof, ask your wife to come with you into the services. Equally, you could ask her to wait outside the locked car, though that would scarcely be reasonable, especially in inclement weather. Alternatively, you could use the ground's facilities before leaving. **BH**

Could my jill be pregnant?

➡ FERRETING

Q I bought my first ever ferret from the local livestock market. She's a cracker, but in the past two weeks she has put on a lot of weight and someone has commented that she looks pregnant. Do you think this might be the case? Would pregnant ferrets be sold at market?

A I know many people who have bought ferrets from markets. The higher percentage of them soon realise when they get their new purchases home that the innocent-looking ferret in the cage was anything but. Once their full bellies have worn off and they have to be removed from the carrying box. Unfortunately, your conundrum has only two answers. Your new ferret

is either pregnant or is experiencing a false or phantom pregnancy. Call me cynical, but I doubt if someone was going to sell a ferret that they would take it out of season first. I would imagine that this jill was living with a hob and was mated prior to selling. Either way, you must prepare yourself for the arrival of kits or the end of this phantom pregnancy.

The ferret's gestation period is 42 to 44 days and this is usually pretty accurate. At a guess, as she is showing, I would imagine you have two weeks to go. Ensure she has a nice quiet bedding area, plenty of good food and water, and wait.

If this is a phantom pregnancy she will make a nest but no young will appear. This is more common than many people think. What happens to mine is they mother the other ferrets, but as your jill is on her own this won't be the case for you. **SW**



The ferret's gestation period is 42 to 44 days

Measuring a repaired roe head

STALKING

Q Is it possible to have a repaired buck head measured? I have a roe trophy whose skull was badly damaged some years ago when an overenthusiastic terrier chewed it. My father salvaged the antlers and had them fixed on to a replacement skull. Recently, a friend commented that it was a worthy trophy and that I should have it measured. Would this still be possible?

A It wouldn't be possible to evaluate your trophy under the CIC rules of measurement. The reasons for this are two-fold.

First, replacing the skull and reattaching the antlers will have altered the weight, which is a critical parameter under the CIC formula.

Secondly, the span measurement could no longer be taken because the separate antlers will be likely to have been reset at a different angle. The same would hold true for the span credit if, say, only one antler had come off the original skull and was reattached.

There are other measuring options that could be applied. The obvious one in the UK would be the Rowland Ward method, which relies on taking the length of the longest antler as the key measurement, and if it met the criteria the head would then be eligible for inclusion in a future edition of *Rowland Ward's Records of Big Game*. **IW**

Beware grass awns, they can cause serious trouble

VETERINARY CARE

Q How can I protect my dog from the dangers of grass seeds?

A Grass awns – the spiky seeds found in long grass during the summer months – can easily slide down the ear canal. Because they have long, backward-projecting “hairs” attached to the seed case, they aren't easy to remove. Furthermore, grass seeds are sharply pointed and can penetrate skin, the lining of the ear canal and even the ear drum.

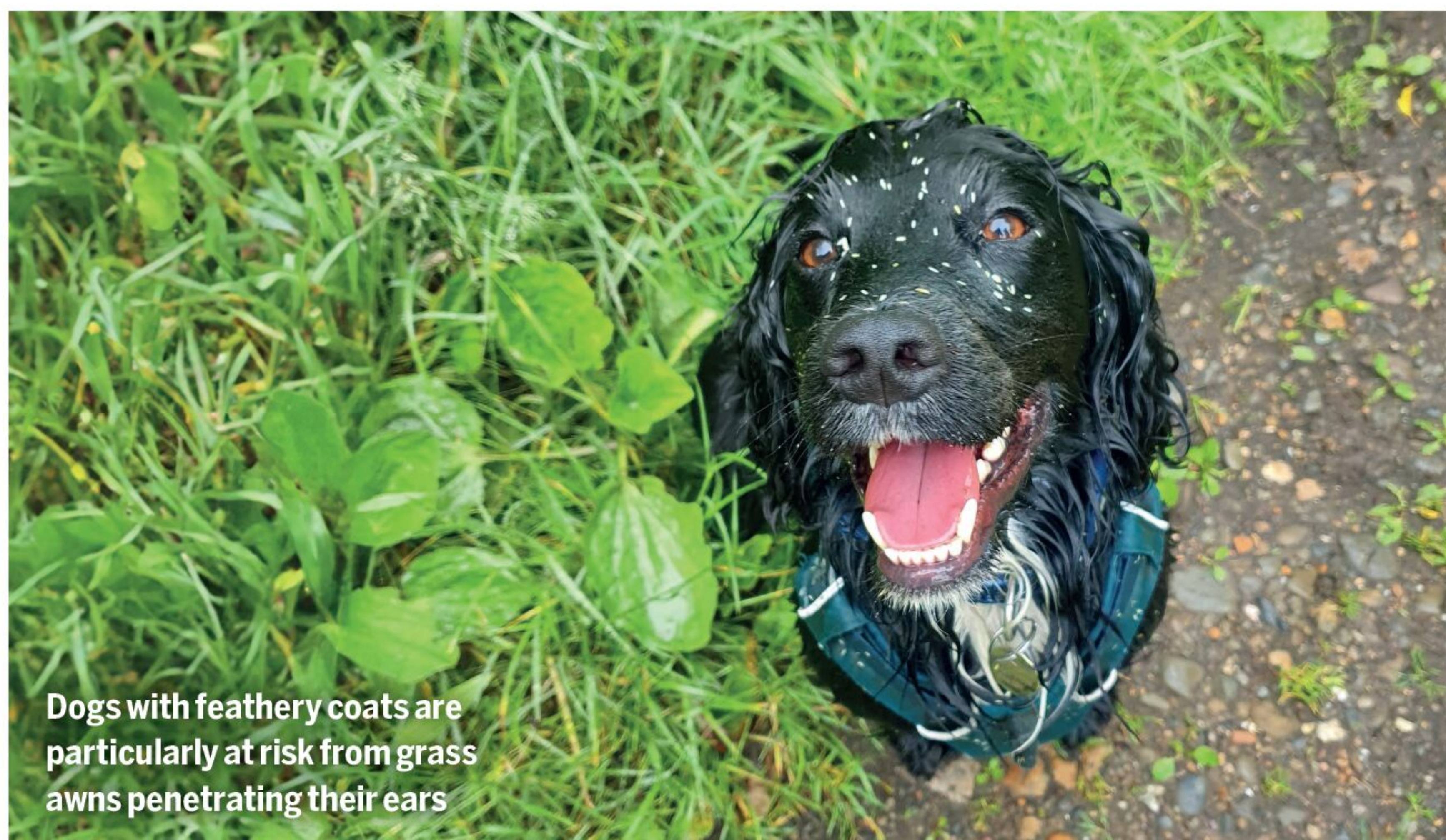
They can cause intense irritation, often making the dog to start shaking its head in distress. Once the seeds descend into the ear canal, they are hard to extract without suitable equipment. If the ear is left untreated, chronic infection can become established, so do seek veterinary attention, particularly if your dog becomes distressed by the irritation.

But grass awns don't only penetrate dogs' ears. They can just as commonly

penetrate between the toes, can irritate the eyes and become lodged behind the third eyelid, where they can damage the cornea (the transparent front of the eyeball).

All dogs can be affected by grass seeds but they tend to be particularly problematic for those that have feathery coats and enjoy running through long grass. To help prevent problems from grass awns, avoid exercising your dog on meadow-type grasses during the summer months and stick to walks on short grass, pathways and in forested areas. Keep the hair around the dog's ears and paws short to minimise the risk of grass seeds sticking and burrowing into the skin.

Always inspect your dog after a walk, and if you notice a grass seed in its coat or on the surface of its skin, remove it straight away. If you spot a seed that has started penetrating into the skin, or if your dog is licking or chewing at a sore place, or you suspect your pet might have a seed in its eyes or ears, contact your vet straight away. **TB**



Dogs with feathery coats are particularly at risk from grass awns penetrating their ears

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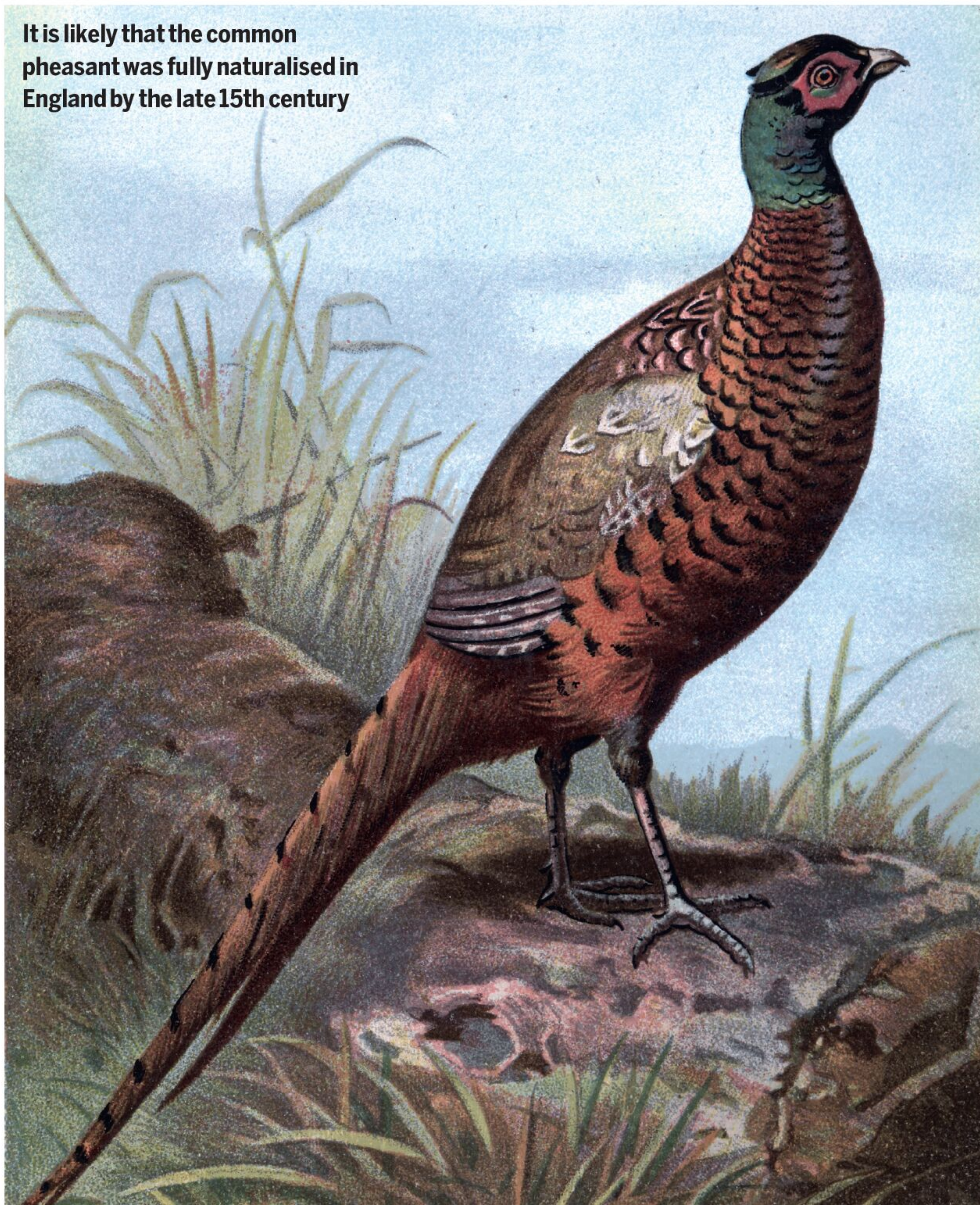
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It is likely that the common pheasant was fully naturalised in England by the late 15th century



A beginner's guide to pheasants in Britain

WILD BIRDS

Q When was the pheasant first introduced to Britain, and when did it become established here in the wild?

A Pheasant bones have been found among Roman remains. However, whether the birds were captive or feral is impossible to say. The first documentary evidence for the pheasant in Britain occurs in details of rations specified in 1058 to 1059 by the Earl of East Anglia and Wessex for the Canons' household at the monastery of Waltham Abbey, where one pheasant was held to provide as much food as a dozen blackbirds. References to pheasants increase from the 12th century.

The species is mentioned in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*,

in about 1377, while the feast at the enthronement of the Archbishop of York in 1464 involved 200 "fessautes". A reference to gamekeeping, or at least game rearing, occurs in the accounts of Henry VIII, where, in 1532, provision was made for the salary of a "fesaunt breder" at Eltham Palace in Kent. Likewise, in 1607, the estate accounts of the Kytsons at Hengrave, Suffolk, allow for the provision of feed wheat for pheasants.

It is likely that the common pheasant was fully naturalised in England by the late 15th century, when it received legal protection. By that time it was probably established as far north as Northumberland, where it is referred to in the ballad of *The Battle of Otterburn*, presumably as a sporting quarry of the falconer, in the lines: "The Fawkon and the Fesaunt both among the holtes on hee." **GD**

Getting close to corvids

AIRGUNNING

Q A farmer has given me permission to shoot for crop protection on his ground but, frustratingly, the field where the birds tend to cause most damage is very close to houses. I am planning to use my airgun to keep disturbance to a minimum. Should I use the same tactics as I would when decoying with a shotgun?

A Decoying pigeons and corvids to get them within striking distance of an air rifle requires very similar tactics as you would use with a shotgun. The big difference is that you need to get birds to land so they present you with a static target.

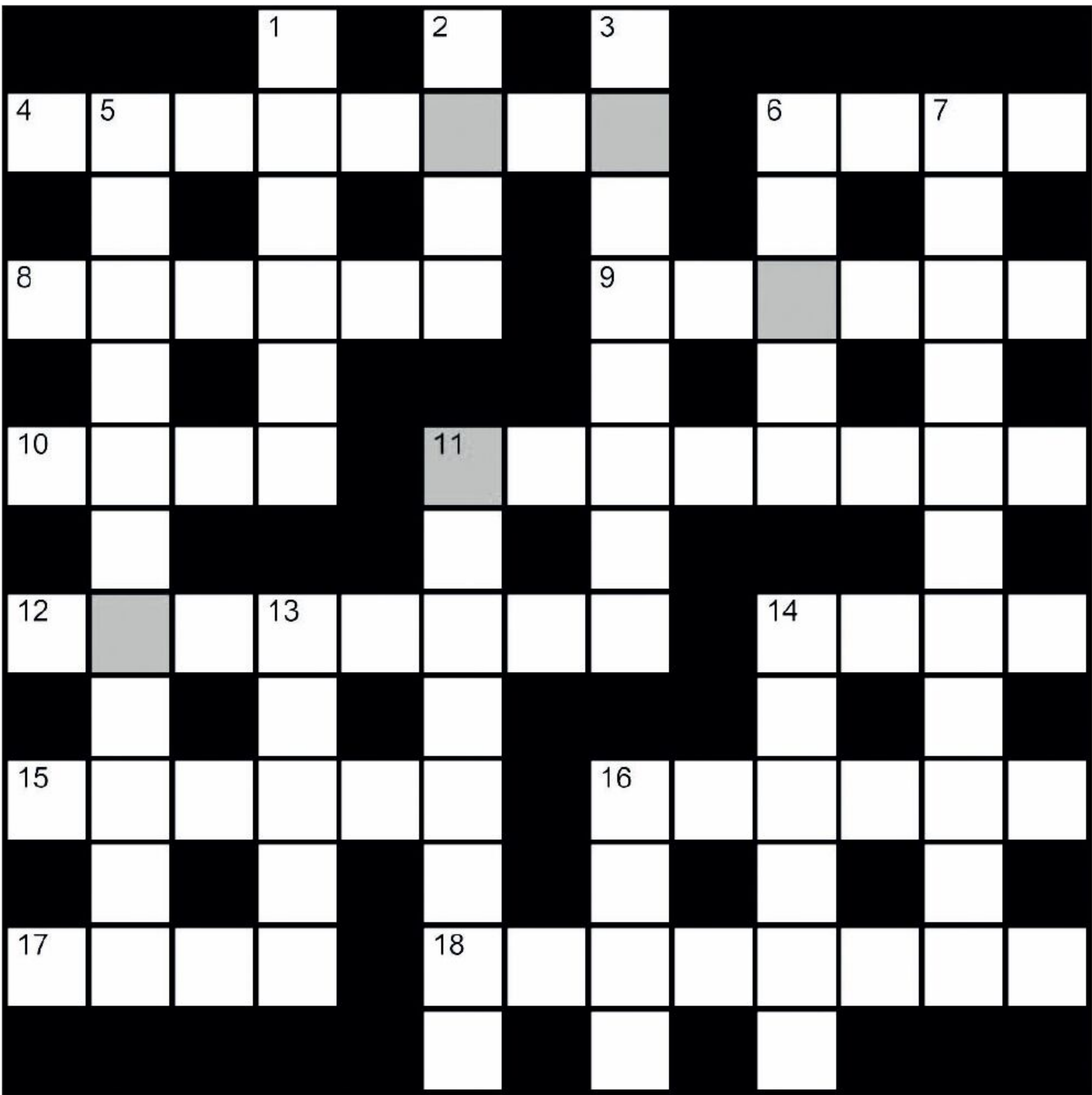
One way to achieve this is to use a very open decoy pattern, so birds feel confident enough to land within it, but there is a better solution, and that is to make use of a sitty tree.

Place your decoys close to a prominent tree along a flightline and birds can usually be persuaded to pitch in its boughs. This is particularly effective when targeting corvids, which like to survey the scene before swooping down. Make sure your hide is within range of the sitty tree and positioned at an angle that keeps shots away from the houses. **MM**



Corvids are very territorial and will be lured by a decoy close to a sitty tree so you can get a shot

Crossword / Compiled by Eric Linden / 1669



Across

- 4 A spaniel that's coming on in leaps and bounds (8)
6 Small incision on the rabbit's tail (4)
8 Wooden posts used in gundog competitions? (6)
9 Game fair exhibitor stalls with spectator facilities? (6)
10 He's the man who gives guns a non-gloss finish (4)
11 Cooks a stew around the west — labradors in water are born naturals (8)
12 Captive animals are pulling a Houdini act due to defective cage pins (8)
14 Hear about a game creature (4)
15 Go on, around a road, like the setter (6)
16 Clay target seen on both sides of a bathroom statue? (6)
17 Celebrity giving shape to shotgun cartridge crimps (4)
18 Westley's gun firm is revealed while we're involved in categoric hardship (8)

Down

- 1 A hand-out from the traffic warden is a must-have for game fair entry! (6)
2 Those waiting to hatch, sold by the dozen? (4)
3 There's room to change when preparing game meat (8)
5 For dogs with international aspirations, it was their favourite ID (3,8)
6 A large group of insects from the south aren't too hot (5)
7 The location of warrens according to the London transport network (11)
11 Decoying equipment for bowlers? (8)
13 Tree seen in rural Derbyshire (5)
14 Headwear article on a Turkish gunmaker (6)
16 Does the male rabbit get a shot? (4)

Kindly supplied by



Please email the solution with the crossword number in the subject line and giving your name, address and mystery word answer to:
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Solution 1667 / 29 May 2024

Across: 7. Scottish 8. Hose 9. Nights 10. Rounds 12. Welly 14. Sawdust 16. Stewing 17. Brook 19. Albino 20. Canvas 22. Maid 23. Spaniels
Down: 1. Accidental 2. Etch 3. First 4. Thermal 5. Shoulder 6. Pegs 11. Disposable 13. Lowbirds 15. Endorse 18. Ocean 19. Aims 21. Nail
★ **PRIZE WORD: TERRAIN**

A small-species deer round

AMMUNITION

Q Is the .300 Blackout round any good for small species of deer in England?

A The .300 AAC Blackout round is really a new incarnation of the older .300 Whisper round, famed for its subsonic velocity and therefore quiet report. When loaded supersonically it makes a good shorter-range deer round. It is originally based on a .221 Fireball case, itself a shortened .223 Rem cartridge. As such the neck was expanded to .30 calibre and it can handle bullet weights from 90-gr to 130-gr supersonically. For small deer such as muntjac and Chinese water deer, it easily meets the legal requirements but is not legal in England and Wales for roe.



The .300 AAC Blackout round easily meets legal requirements for the smaller muntjac and Chinese water deer

A 110-gr bullet produces a velocity of 2,275fps for 1,265ft/lb energy, while a 125-gr bullet will be hovering around the 2,150fps and 1,283ft/lb range. Due to its small powder capacity, it is easily sound moderated, making it quiet with little recoil. Factory ammo is sparse, but accurate loads in this cartridge are out there. **BP**

Wetting the eggs

GAMEKEEPING

Q I remember my father “wetting” the eggs under our broody hens in a bucket but for the life of me I cannot remember why. Do you have any idea why he might have done it, and does anyone still do it these days?

A I remember doing the same when I was a lad before candling boxes and candling lamps became more common. We used to put the eggs in a bucket of lukewarm water for a few minutes to see which ones floated and

wobbled — and therefore had chicks in them — and which ones sunk to the bottom or failed to move. The ones that sunk and didn't move were either clear or infertile eggs, or chicks that had died before hatching. The eggs that weren't going to hatch were taken away to give the hen more room and because we didn't want them cracking and soiling the nest. It was, and still is, a fascinating thing to do, and in the case of broody hens is easier and quicker than carrying the eggs to a shed with electricity, to put them under a candling lamp. **LB**

CLAY SHOOTER

COMPLETE GUIDE 2024

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Clay Shooter

COMPLETE GUIDE 2024

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FIX THAT FLINCH Top tips to avoid and cure this common problem

FROM ZERO TO HERO: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO SHOOT LIKE A PRO

TECHNIQUE • TARGETS • DISCIPLINES

TESTED BERETTA 694 PRO • RIZZINI VENUS SPORTER • WINCHESTER DIAMOND GRADE • ZOLL XL EVO PURDEY SPORTER • BROWNING B725 ULTRA XS PRO • GUERINI INVICTUS V ALL SPORT

Well-adjusted

Benji McFarlane tries the Beretta 694 Pro with its adjustable stock for size.

The Beretta 694 Pro is a 12-gauge shotgun with a 28-inch barrel and a 13.5-inch chamber. It features a 10-degree drop and a 1.5-degree cant. The stock is adjustable for length of pull and drop, and the forend is adjustable for cant and drop. The shotgun is available in three configurations: the standard 694 Pro, the 694 Pro with a 20-gauge barrel, and the 694 Pro with a 28-gauge barrel. The 694 Pro is a very good shotgun, and it is a great choice for anyone looking for a 12-gauge shotgun with an adjustable stock.

CONQUEROR OF TARGETS

Benji McFarlane runs his rule over the Caesar Guerini Invictus V All Sport and debats in what she finds, consigning previous bad experiences to history.

The Caesar Guerini Invictus V All Sport is a 12-gauge shotgun with a 28-inch barrel and a 13.5-inch chamber. It features a 10-degree drop and a 1.5-degree cant. The shotgun is available in three configurations: the standard Invictus V All Sport, the Invictus V All Sport with a 20-gauge barrel, and the Invictus V All Sport with a 28-gauge barrel. The Invictus V All Sport is a very good shotgun, and it is a great choice for anyone looking for a 12-gauge shotgun with a 28-inch barrel.

Clay disciplines demystified

James F. Clancy breaks down some of the UK's most popular clay disciplines.

The UK's most popular clay disciplines are the 10-bird trap, the 10-bird skeet, and the 10-bird double trap. The 10-bird trap is a discipline where the shooter is positioned in a fixed position and shoots at 10 birds that are launched from a fixed position. The 10-bird skeet is a discipline where the shooter is positioned in a fixed position and shoots at 10 birds that are launched from a fixed position. The 10-bird double trap is a discipline where the shooter is positioned in a fixed position and shoots at 10 birds that are launched from a fixed position.

Whether you are a complete beginner to clay shooting or a seasoned shot, our 2024 comprehensive guide will help you take your sport to the next level. Our team of experts cover everything from footwork to flinching, plus there's a chance to win a fantastic pair of CENS ProFlex ear plugs, worth £899!

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- What's on in 2024



- Overview of the clay shooting disciplines – and how to master them!
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The Shooting Times Almanac

15 JUNE 2024

JUNE MOON PHASE



6th



14th



22nd



28th



Sunrise 04:42



Sunset 21:19



Moonrise 14:16



Moonset 01:35

TIMES SHOWN FOR LONDON

Strawberry Moon, 22 June

June's full moon is named after the wild strawberries that ripen this month. Celtic names include the Horse Moon, while English names include the Flower Moon

and the Planting Moon. Some sources quote the Mead Moon as the Anglo-Saxon name because this was the time for mowing the meads, or meadows.

THOUGHTS FROM THE FIELD

Sharing a lifetime of experience in the countryside

Warm evenings spent waiting for rabbits to creep out at sunset have made for some of my fondest shooting memories.

Once, I was with my uncle, sitting in the shade of a large oak close to a busy rabbit warren. After a short wait, I found myself lining up on an unsuspecting bunny. I placed the bead over its head and squeezed the trigger. The rabbit was in the dead centre of the cloud of dry dirt kicked up by the little .410's shot pattern and it rolled over with hardly a kick.

I handed my uncle the gun and retrieved my prize and, upon reaching the spot where my bunny had dropped, was greeted by two dead rabbits. I promptly yelled "I got two!" before proudly trotting back.

My uncle was laughing uncontrollably, although the reason only became apparent when I turned the rabbits around for closer inspection. One was plump and warm; the other was flat and cold, devoid of fur and dotted with maggots. It had clearly been dead for a long time. **Mat Manning**

EDITOR'S PICKS: PIGEON DECOYS



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THE WEEK IN NUMBERS

SIX

Fly-tippers could face up to six penalty points on their driving licences, under new proposals by the Conservatives ahead of the general election on 4 July.

The pledge, which will be included in the party's election manifesto, is designed to deter low-level offenders, while more serious repeat offences already face large fines and potential prison sentences.

£3,000

The South Devon Hunt has held numerous successful fundraising events over the course of the past year, raising more than £3,000 for various charities. The hunt, based near Newton Abbot, recently presented cheques to the Farming Community Network and Devon Air Ambulance Trust during the Devon County Show in May. The Countryside Alliance added that registered hunts have donated in excess of £460,000 to different charities over the past year.

9.37°C

Britain has enjoyed the warmest spring on record — although it was also the sixth wettest. The average temperature of 9.37°C beat the previous record of 9.12°C in 2017, but the country also received 11.9in (302.3mm) of rainfall, making it the wettest spring since 1986. Last month had an average temperature of 13.1°C — boosted by warmer weather in Scotland — making it the warmest May on record.

SHOOTING TIMES & COUNTRY MAGAZINE, ISSN 0037-4164, is published weekly, incorporating Shooting Magazine, Shooting Life, British Sportsman, The Angler's News & Sea Fisher's Journal, Field Sport and Sporting Rifle, by Fieldsports Press, MacNab House, 14 Belford Road, Edinburgh, EH4 3BL, United Kingdom. © 2024 Fieldsports Press. Printed by MRC Print Limited. Distributed by Seymour Distribution, East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT; 0207 396 8000; seymour.co.uk. We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. All contents © 2024 Fieldsports Press or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Fieldsports Press (company number 10204110) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Epsilon House, Enterprise Road, Southampton Science Park, Southampton, SO16 7NS, UK. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Fieldsports Press cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein. If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Fieldsports Press and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Fieldsports Press nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions. Subscription rates for 52 issues: UK — £131.99. Subscription records are maintained at Esco, Trinity House, Sculpins Lane, Wethersfield, Baintree, Essex, CM7 4AY, United Kingdom. MRC Print Ltd is acting as our mailing agent. All prices include postage and packing. Enquiries and subscription orders: subscriptions@fieldsportspress.com; 01371 851890

Gunshop guide

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



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about these
retailers*



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listings
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COUNTY LONDONDERRY

• **Outdoor & Country Sports**



Keith Creelman from Outdoor & Country Sports talks to us about the business

Tell us a bit about the history of your business ?

We were established just over 15 years ago. I had taken redundancy from a previous management job, but my background had always been fishing and shooting. The previous owner of the premises came to an agreement where I took it on initially as a fishing tackle shop, then later built on the gunroom.



particularly memorable for me. My shooting history was established by a relationship with my Dad, and it felt like we were continuing that into the next generation.

What are the key brands / products that you work with?

Essentially, we sell everything. From the bottom of the range to the very top, we can provide guns from £50 to several thousand pounds. Brands include Blaser, Beretta, Browning, Miroku, Rizzini as well as some of the lesser-known names. We also keep a massive selection of Shotguns.

What has been your most memorable moment in the industry?

There was a period when my son came on board the business, which is

What can customers look forward to from your business over the next twelve months?

We have been passed, in principle, to extend our gunroom – which essentially will become a walk-in facility. People can then come in and view guns, lift them and get that more personal contact with them.

Tell us about the company ethos

We love contact with people. They'll come in and be made a drink and we'll chat about what they've been up to in their fishing and shooting life. We've built great relationships that way.

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

POWYS

• **Wye Valley Guns**

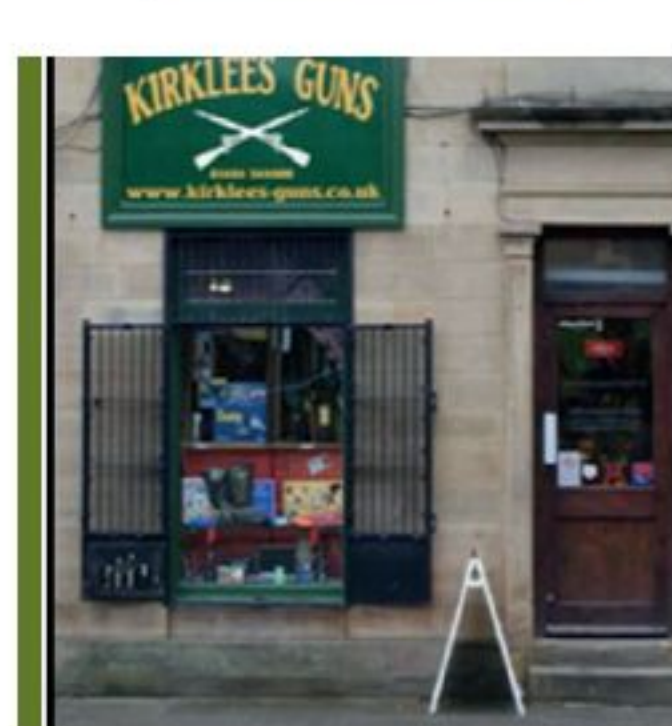


Wye Valley Guns is a family affair run by Team Wales & Team GB Shooter Annalise Evans and her Father Dorian (also a Team Wales Shooter). Situated just off the A470 between Brecon and Buith Wells, We offer a bespoke and personal service by combining our wealth of experience within the sport. Our shop 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.

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Email: info@wyevalleyguns.co.uk

WEST YORKSHIRE

• **Kirklees Guns**



Located in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, Kirklees Guns has been established over 60 years, stocking a large variety of guns which includes modern and vintage air guns, pistols, sporting rifles and shot guns. The large range of new and secondhand fire arms we stock offers one of the most comprehensive selections in the area. We also stock a large variety of cartridges, ammunition, targets & other ancillaries. A friendly shop run by shooters for shooters, we are available for any advice.

Tel: 01484 544600 • **Web:** kirklees-guns.co.uk
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NORTH YORKSHIRE

• **Coniston Shooting Ground**



Coniston Shooting
Ground

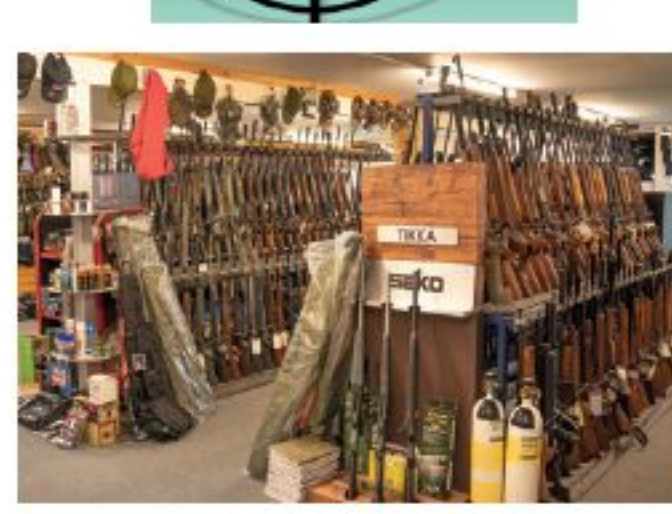


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DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

• **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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Sharpshooter



The Government has advised people to prepare for emergencies, having acted for decades to remove personal responsibility and self-reliance

When you read the history of the American West, it is impossible not to admire the early pioneers. They had no option but to grow, catch, rear and kill their food. They built their homes and farms with their own hands and had to take responsibility for their own defence. Firearms ownership was universal; guns were part of their infrastructure.

Something of that pioneer spirit survives in the American psyche to this day, although it has occasionally been twisted far from its original purpose, chiefly in urban situations. Things are very different in the densely populated UK, where the vast majority of people live in towns and cities.

A cabinet minister recently set out recommendations regarding the need for British people to make basic preparations for a crisis or emergency. He was talking about measures such as having spare batteries, cash, stocks of essential food and medical kits. Some European countries already have such state-sponsored resilience schemes. Yet his fairly modest proposals were derided in some quarters — largely among the latte-drinking

commentariat, who couldn't contemplate life without Tesco home deliveries.

The minister's idea is probably doomed, because you cannot legislate for common sense. Yet we rely on centrally provided services for the care of elderly or vulnerable people, health, food, water, power and communications. This has sapped the instinct for self-reliance. If you treat adults like children, don't be surprised when they behave like children. You only have to look at the mayhem that ensues when we have power outages or cyberattacks to realise we are now overly dependent on centralised services.

In the feather

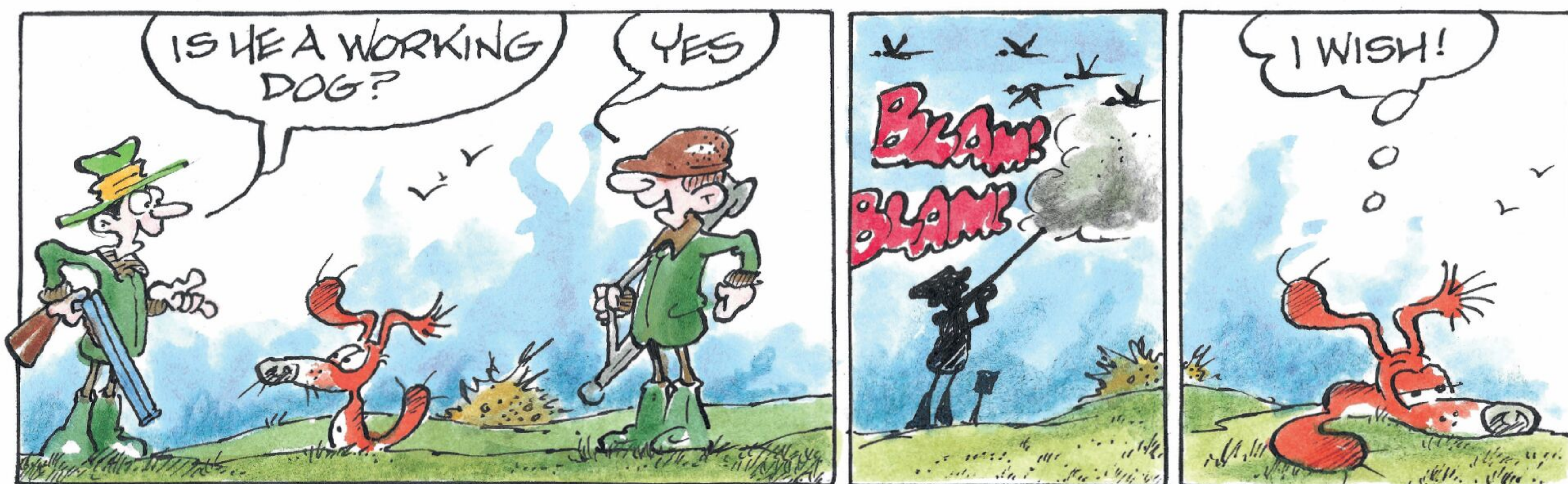
It is hardly surprising that shooting and fishing often get treated by officialdom as hangovers from another age because, in a sense, they are. What's wrong with that? Our forefathers would laugh at modern society's inability to cope with modern life. Try offering most people a brace of pheasants in the feather, or a freshly shot rabbit, and watch their reaction. Meat-eaters don't like to be reminded that the stuff comes from animals.

Despite expressing back-to-nature and real-food sentiments, statistics show people still prefer to buy cheap, plastic-wrapped, imported, highly processed food from supermarkets. They may decry "killing for sport", despite the fact that they overwhelmingly condone the rearing and slaughter of livestock to produce food that is, these days, mainly recreational. I mean, does anybody in Britain need to eat meat?

They don't see why any civilian "needs" to own a gun. They secretly regard anybody who lives a self-sufficient lifestyle as a bit weird and possibly antisocial, at best. These attitudes are mainstream and reflected in official policy.

In my own locality, the planning authority decreed that no new dwelling should be allowed anywhere that is "remote from services". This is despite the fact that people have lived in this area since pre-Roman times. We all have our own water supplies around here — and many of us are grateful that we do, given the failings of commercial supplies. My farm didn't have mains electricity until 1967. Others are off-grid to this day. Perhaps we should be grateful that we are still allowed to vote. 🐦

DOG BY KEITH REYNOLDS



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