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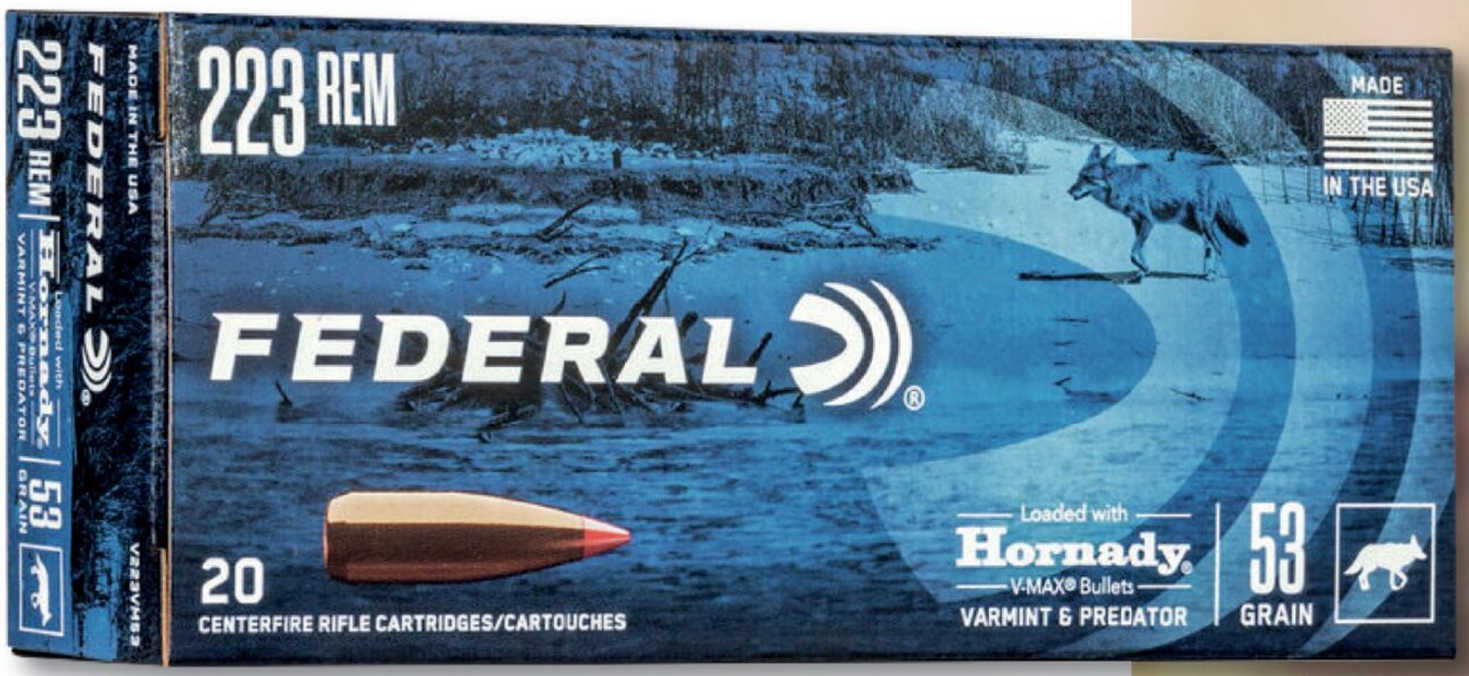
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First Words

Well, what a start to the year! New Year's Eve for me saw the dreaded little red line appear on the test signalling an impending unpleasant illness as well as up to 10 days more of no shooting! It had already been a week since I'd been out what with Christmas and all the required family time, and I was very keen for some air.

My daughter had tested positive the day before, and Mrs Rips several days after me. With a few days of feeling rough turning to boredom severe enough to bring out puzzles and a few DIY attempts, by day 10 I was climbing the walls.

However, my sporting opportunities, including two shoot days, were further thwarted by a sudden inflammation flaring up around an old broken bone in my left shoulder – my shooting shoulder.

Three weeks into January and I'd finally managed to cautiously fire a .22 rimfire, but I should imagine it will be a while longer until I'm tucking a 12-bore into my shoulder!

However, my simple delay in shooting pales into insignificance with, among other things, the tragic accident recently seen on a shoot in Roeburndale. A bridge collapsed as a shoot trailer was passing over, resulting in the tragic death of one, and several others injured. My heartfelt condolences go out to the victim's family, and to those injured in the accident, I wish them a speedy and full recovery.

The team here have once again pulled together against tight schedules and tight budgets like a well-oiled machine to bring you yet another top-notch copy of *Sporting Shooter* (OK a few of us got together fuelled by coffee and sheer panic and somehow yet again got it to print on time)!

Fortunately, our contributors do a grand job and between them have helped us put together a pest control special. With the game season over, what better way to keep one's eye in is there than with some essential corvid control, or perhaps a little fox control, especially with spring just around the corner?!

Magpies are a real menace where I live, especially around lambing time on the farm behind my house. I do all I can to control their numbers when they are silly enough to land in range of my patio door, but still their numbers seem to increase.

Many a time Mrs Rips catches me leaning out the window armed with the air rifle and despite her airing her disapproval, I still continue (often in vain) to knock them out the old oak tree before I'm spotted.

Year on year, their numbers seem to spiral further and further out of control, and sadly at the expense of our beloved songbird populations.



Mark Ripley
Guest editor

Issue 221
MARCH 2022



Contents

ON THE COVER

20 WALKED-UP WOODCOCK
50 ICELAND GEESE
16 ORKNEY ISLES
54 CORVID TECHNIQUE
38 FOXING
12 PIGEON SHOOTING
24 GREY SQUIRRELS
60 PHEASANTS IN IRELAND
72 GUNDOG TRAINING
48 GUN TEST

REGULARS

06 **NEWS**
26 **GWCT**
28 **ASK THE EXPERTS:** How to avoid foxes with young, and much more
30 **LETTERS**
40 **ONE FOR THE POT:** Buttermilk partridge and pheasant schnitzel
60 **IRELAND:** Rough shooting pheasant in the tough Irish landscapes
64 **THE COUNTRYMAN:** The sad loss of a wonderful picking-up dog

66 **CLASSIC GUNS:** How will Diggory's Charles Boswell impulse buy perform in the field?
68 **CROCKETT'S COUNTRY WAYS**
86 **CLAY GROUNDS**

MARKETPLACE

44 **GEAR GUIDE:** Essential kit for catching up with pest species
46 **CARTRIDGES:** Guide to ammo choices for a variety of game
48 **GUN TEST:** Franchi Affinity Elite 3.5

GAME SHOOTING

20 **ROUGH ROVERS:** A few Guns go in pursuit of their first woodcock
36 **TECHNIQUE:** Keeping your eye in during the off season
62 **SHOOT FINES:** Your hilarious stories from the field this season

GAMEKEEPING

56 **KEEPERING:** Update on the debate surrounding our beautiful uplands
58 **KEEPER'S COUNTRY:** Food tastes so much better outside..!

WILDFOWLING

50 **WHOOP WHOOOP:** From Iceland to Kent – the glories of wildfowl!

PEST CONTROL

08 **GENERAL LICENCE CUT-OUTS**
12 **PIGEONS:** Andy Crow's advice for early-spring pigeon shooting

24 **SQUIRRELS:** The importance of conserving our red squirrels
33 **RABBITS:** Mick is given a new permission – and Tim Maddams shares his rabbit muffin recipe
38 **FOXING:** Should we all be using night vision when out foxing?
54 **TECHNIQUE:** Controlling corvids with traps and decoys

COMPETITIONS

07 Win a multi-gun cleaning kit
30 Win Seeland Buckthorn trousers
31 Win Sportear Trackr ear muffs

GUNDOGS

71 **GUNDOG VET:** Off-season health
72 **GUNDOG TRAINING:** Using the Stop whistle
76 **GUNDOG FOCUS:** Ryan addresses your most common questions
80 **GUNDOG DIARY:** Emrys learns the split retrieve in 'V' formation
82 **GUNDOG EXPERTS**

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Current state of firearms licensing

Shortly before Christmas, the Home Office instructed GPs to de-prioritise the provision of firearms licensing letters in order to concentrate on the Covid-19 booster vaccination roll-out.

This came at a time when these letters were already mandatory for all certificate applications, both on initial grant and on renewal. Somewhat predictably, this regulatory medical involvement, combined with a peak in renewals and ever-changing Covid restrictions, are being cited as the reasons for lengthy delays that are now on course to reach record levels. In many instances, applicants are facing a wait of more than six months, with the Telegraph and other mainstream news outlets reporting that it could take up to two years.

Some police forces, including Thames Valley, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Hampshire Police, have stopped accepting grant applications altogether. This state of affairs is set to have far-reaching consequences, not just for people who shoot recreationally, but more importantly for those who require firearms as part of their livelihoods; from pest controllers and gamekeepers to professional athletes.

For more information, visit basc.org.uk/firearms-licensing-what-you-need-to-know

Bill Harriman, BASC's director of firearms, said: "We are now receiving complaints that grant applications are being returned with no reason provided. While it is nearly impossible to plan for the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, police forces should have been prepared for the peak renewal period and the introduction of medical verifications. Their failure to correctly resource has led to significant delays and thousands of certificate holders edging closer to holding firearms illegally.

"The discontinuation of grant applications is a failure to discharge the police's statutory duty. The 43 police forces across England and Wales responsible for the licensing of over 600,000 individuals cannot switch the law on and off as it pleases them."

BASC has said they will be seeking legal advice and shall be writing to all the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), to complain about this breach of statutory duty. They have already started a programme of face-to-face engagement with PCCs in general which will be focused on those whose Chief Officers are not doing what the law requires them to do, and also plan to write to MPs about the issue.

START YOUR RENEWAL EARLY

If your certificate is due to be renewed in 2022, BASC advises you to start your application at least 16 weeks before it expires. This will ensure that the application is made in plenty of time to qualify for the statutory eight-week extension.

In a bid to ensure the licensing process runs as smoothly as possible, the National Gamekeepers Organisation (NGO) has urged all its members to consider their renewal dates and start gathering the necessary documents and information at least 16 to 18 weeks prior to the expiry of their licences, even if the renewal reminder has not arrived from the police. This advice also obviously extends to non-NGO members and the wider public. The required forms are available online, and can be found by searching using the name of your force, for example: 'Devon and Cornwall Police firearms licensing'.

Having downloaded the forms, discuss the provision of the letter with your local GP practice, which is now your responsibility. If for any reason your GP is unable to complete the letter in time, or tries to charge you an excessive amount of money, another option is to go through one of the alternative organisations who can do this for you. Section 7 temporary permits may be used in emergency cases.



A 'perfect storm' of contributing factors means the firearms licensing system is on the verge of collapse

PICTURE: **EMILY DAMMENT**

New research confirms benefits of controlled burning

New research published in the journal Nature Geoscience and carried out by the University of Cambridge, confirms that controlled burning can actually increase carbon storage in soil. The study found that controlled burns cause changes in soil composition which not only off-set immediate losses but can 'lock in' or increase carbon in the soil of forests and grasslands.

Amanda Anderson, Director of the Moorland Association, said: "We hope that this important independent research will be taken into consideration by lobby groups and policymakers."

According to the research, fire stabilises carbon within the soil in several ways. It creates charcoal, which is very resistant to decomposition, and forms 'aggregates' – clumps of soil that protect carbon-rich organic matter. Low intensity fire also increases the amount of carbon bound to minerals in the soil.

The report also found that managed burning promotes new plant growth and increases root biomass, which in turn enables more carbon to be stored, as much of the carbon in grassland habitats is stored in the roots of the plants.

The researchers further noted that fires that are too frequent or too intense, such as wildfires, have the opposite effect, killing soil bacteria and fungi and destabilising the soil. This prevents carbon-rich organic matter from binding to minerals. It is known that controlled burns help to prevent wildfires from occuring.

The findings corroborate earlier research carried out elsewhere. In 2020, the Uplands Partnership found that vegetation burnt on areas of blanket bog are capable of increased levels of carbon capture in the peat through charcoal creation with a positive impact on long-term carbon storage. They also found that parts of the USA where controlled burning had ceased were more likely to be damaged by wildfires and suffer a subsequent loss of bird species.

You can view the Cambridge research in full by following this link: nature.com/articles/s41561-021-00867-1



New research extols the numerous benefits of controlled burning

PICTURE: **LAURIE CAMPBELL**

Northern Ireland to consult on general licences

The Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is to revoke its existing general licences (GLs) and replace them with interim licences prior to a public consultation. This consultation is expected to be launched early in 2022 and new general licences will be issued upon its completion.



PICTURE: **DOM HOLTAM**

DAERA initially launched a public consultation on proposed changes to its general licenses last summer, but the consultation was subsequently withdrawn due to a technical error, and the department re-issued the 2021/22 licenses unchanged from previous years. One factor in the argument is that in Northern Ireland, GLs do not apply on Sunday, and BASC has campaigned for many years to have the licences amended to facilitate the control of pest birds seven days a week.

BASC Northern Ireland director Tommy Mayne said: "DAERA has always said that its general licences were under active consideration so the news comes as no surprise. BASC welcomes the news that a full public consultation will follow, and we will be responding to the consultation in due course. BASC urges anyone who relies on the GLs to control pest birds to respond to the consultation, as it is important that the farming and shooting community speaks with one voice."

BASC will continue to work closely with DAERA, the Ulster Farmers' Union and other departments and organizations, to ensure that future licences are fit for purpose, easily understood, and can be used as an exemplar licence to influence regulators elsewhere. Users of the general licence in Northern Ireland can keep up to date with the latest news by visiting the BASC website.

basc.org.uk



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There may be delays in the sending out of prizes due to office closures – please bear with us!

CONGRATULATIONS:

CHRIS QUINN who found ANTON AARDVARK on p58 of the January issue. See p88 for more successful creature finders.

7

NEWS

New general licences in England and Wales for 2022/23

Defra have reissued the three general licences in England for the control of certain wild birds for the purposes of: conserving wild birds, flora and fauna of conservation concern (GL40); preserving public health or safety (GL41); and the prevention of serious damage (GL42). The licences, which came into effect on 1 January, are valid for two years to 31 December 2023.

There remain issues with some aspects of the licences which agencies such as the Countryside Alliance and BASC will continue to discuss with the government, but on the whole they give farmers and land managers powers to control avian pest species for legitimate reasons.

The clarification that game birds can be classed as livestock while dependent on the provision of food, water, or shelter for their survival, is also helpful confirmation that the licences can be used to protect pheasants and partridges.

Natural Resources Wales has reissued its own general licences for the control of certain wild birds to prevent serious damage and the spread of disease to livestock, foodstuffs for livestock, crops, vegetables or fruit (GL001); to preserve public health and prevent the spread of disease (GL002); and to conserve certain wild birds (GL004). These licences are valid for six months, from 1 January to 30 June 2022, while NRW reviews its approach.

As before, while it is not necessary to apply for these licences, it is essential that you comply with all the conditions of use. For more information, email shooting@countryside-alliance.org.

2022/23 GENERAL LICENCES FOR ENGLAND

Countryside Alliance

Sporting Shooter

*LIST OF ENDANGERED WILD BIRDS: SCAN ME

**LIST OF WOODLAND BIRDS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN SCAN ME

	GL40: TO CONSERVE WILD BIRDS, FLORA AND FAUNA OF CONSERVATION CONCERN			GL41: FOR PUBLIC HEALTH OR SAFETY			GL42: TO PREVENT SERIOUS DAMAGE				
Permitted target species for which action is to be taken	Conserving endangered wild birds*	Conserving Flora	Conserving Fauna	Slips and falls	Spread of human disease	Issue with birds nesting	Livestock (direct attack)	Livestock (foodstuffs and spread of disease)	Crops, fruit & vegetables	Fisheries	Inland waters
Canada Goose	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Carrion Crow	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Egyptian Goose	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Feral Pigeon	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
Indian House Crow	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Jackdaw	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Jay	Y**	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Magpie	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Monk Parakeet	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
Ring-Necked Parakeet	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Rook	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Sacred Ibis	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Woodpigeon	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N

CUT OUT AND KEEP

2022 GENERAL LICENCES FOR WALES

Countryside Alliance

Sporting Shooter

*GENERAL LICENCE WALES SCAN ME

	GL001 Prevention of serious damage to crops, livestock, foodstuffs for livestock, vegetables or fruit; or to prevent spread of disease to the above	GL002 Preservation of public health and the prevention of disease	GL004 Conservation of certain wild birds*
Canada Goose	Y	N	N
Carrion Crow	Y	N	Y
Feral Pigeon	Y	Y	N
Jackdaw	Y	N	Y
Jay	N	N	Y
Magpie	Y	N	Y
Woodpigeon	Y	N	N

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Bird flu outbreak now largest ever

There have been new instances of avian influenza in Birmingham, Coventry and Cheshire, making a total of 81 confirmed cases UK-wide since the start of the current outbreak in October last year. This is now the largest ever outbreak of avian influenza the country has ever seen, dwarfing the previous record of 26 cases in 2020/21. A million birds have been culled in Lincolnshire alone, where there is a high density of poultry farms. Birds migrating into the UK for the winter and bringing the virus back with them are believed to be largely responsible, and left unchecked this wave could have a crippling effect.

Bird keepers are reminded that the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) which came into force in Great Britain on 3 November 2021, and in Northern Ireland on 17 November 2021, was later extended to include housing measures across the UK. This means it is a legal requirement for all bird keepers to keep their birds indoors and follow strict biosecurity measures to limit the spread of the disease.

Separate AIPZ declarations have been made in each UK administration. For full details of the measures currently in place across the various regions, consult the government website.

In England, where 68 of the 81 cases have been discovered, bird keepers must house or net all poultry and captive birds to keep them separate from wild birds, and if you can't cover or net large ranging areas immediately, prevent access to ponds, standing water or waterlogged land and gradually reduce the ranging area available. In addition to this, you are instructed to cleanse and disinfect clothing, footwear, equipment and vehicles before and after contact with poultry and captive birds, reduce the movement of people, vehicles or equipment to and from areas where poultry and captive birds are kept, thoroughly cleanse and disinfect housing on a continuous basis, keep fresh disinfectant at the right concentration at all farm and poultry housing entry and exit points, and minimise direct and indirect contact between poultry/captive birds and wild birds, including making sure all feed and water is not accessible to wild birds.

The UK's chief veterinary officer, Christine Middlemiss, said: "We have taken swift action to limit the spread of the disease.

For guidance and updates: gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu

However, we are seeing a growing number of bird flu cases both on commercial farms and in backyard birds right across the country. Many poultry keepers have excellent biosecurity standards but the number of cases we are seeing suggests that not enough is being done to keep bird flu out.

Whether you keep just a few birds or thousands, you must take action now to protect your birds from this highly infectious disease."

The Game Farmers' Association added: "As the start of the laying season looms nearer, biosecurity arrangements and quarantine/isolation protocols, where relevant, have never been more important."

While the risk to human health is described as 'very low' by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), officials have confirmed that someone living in the south-west of England has contracted the disease. Cases like this are extremely rare and the individual probably became infected from very close contact with a sick or dead bird.

Catching up game birds in England and Wales is legal until the end of the shooting season and until 28 February in Scotland, and any birds you do catch up should be recorded. ■

CONTROL ZONE MAP

Keepers can check the latest control zones using the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) interactive map: defra.maps.arcgis.com



PICTURE: JACK SCRIVENER

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Early spring challenges

With the drillings on the farm taking pride of place on the pigeons' menu, early spring pest control is essential for Andy Crow... but it's certainly not without its challenges!

Work begins to get busier for Andy again from late February onwards. After the relative calm of winter, it's time to start fertilising and spraying the crops and preparing to put the spring drillings in. It's vital that the drillings are protected from the pigeons if they are to grow well.

This year, owing to the fact that rape prices are sky high, Andy has decided to put in spring rape instead of the usual peas. The spring rape will be planted in late March and, as many know, it is often a favourite food for pigeons. However, it's by no means the only thing Andy has to worry about!

"The pigeons are on the lucerne at the moment," he said. "That really starts to grow and take off in March, so I'm expecting to get a few decent days in the hide shooting over that.

People generally start putting in the spring barley and wheat in early March, so it's important to keep up the pressure on the pigeons from then onwards.

"It can be tricky at this time of year because the birds won't be feeding on the crop for long. Modern drills put the seeds in so well that there won't be much left on top for the birds to get at; it will mainly be just the rougher patches of land where the seed doesn't go in quite so well where the birds will be concentrated. The daylight hours will still be a bit short – and this, combined with small areas for them to feed on, means they might build up in very concentrated numbers... but they won't be there for long! So, at this time of year, it can actually pay to get onto them as soon as you see them start to hammer it.

"I am big on waiting for the right conditions to maximise the opportunities, but this is the time of year when you might have to accept less-than-ideal conditions in order to keep the crop protected, because if you spot them one day but decide to wait for better wind the next day, you can find that it's too late and they'll have eaten their fill and left.

"Sometimes stubble turnips that have been grazed off by sheep can provide a good day's shooting at this time of year. If the sheep don't eat the whole turnip, they can start to regrow in the spring when it gets milder, and the pigeons will come and get on those new shoots.

"Once you start to move into summer, those concentrated lumps of birds I've been talking about start to break up a bit and the daylight hours get longer, making for more opportunities. Plus, it's nice and warm and the hide is a lovely place to be!"

Andy's approach to pigeon shooting is extremely calculated. In the run-up to our filming days, we will often spend hours on the phone, pencilling in and rubbing out dates, sometimes for a week or more, until he lands on the perfect day. Despite being less than ideal for our planning and production schedules, it clearly works – even on his 'worst' days, we've rarely ended on a bag of less than about 75 birds.

"Weather conditions play a huge part in deciding which day to get in the hide," he explained. "I watch the forecast very carefully, and I try and pick a day when there's a really good strong wind. This has two benefits – it keeps the birds moving, and it muffles the sound of gunfire so you're not scaring away every bird in the vicinity. There are some exceptions to this rule, though, like the situation I mentioned earlier when it might be your only chance to get the birds off

TOP TIPS FOR EARLY SPRING SHOOTING

KNOW YOUR GROUND
If you can't be on it regularly to watch the birds' movements yourself, speak to the farmer regularly and ask him to keep you updated on everything from when he plans to put crops in, to when and where he has seen birds feeding.

WEATHER IS IMPORTANT...
A good strong wind helps make a great day in the hide. It keeps the birds moving and muffles the sound of your gunshot.

... BUT IT'S NOT EVERYTHING!
Despite perfect weather conditions playing a part in building a good bag, short daylight hours and super-efficient modern drills can mean birds feeding in high numbers for short periods of time. If you wait three days for the perfect wind, you can find they've already eaten the seeds they can get to and left. So, sometimes, it does pay to get onto them quickly at this time of year and get them off those drillings asap!

STUBBLE TURNIPS CAN PROVIDE UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITIES
If you shoot on a farm that has stubble turnips grazed down by sheep, early spring can provide a great opportunity as the ones that haven't been completely eaten by the sheep will start to sprout, and the pigeons love these. So, keep an eye on areas like this if you have them.



Andy's shooting buddies: grandson Regan and Labrador Rosa

PICTURES: EMILY DAMMENT

‘Pigeons are definitely harder to shoot than they were 20 years ago – but I enjoy the sport and I absolutely love eating them!’

the crop before they do lasting damage.

"Of course, knowing your ground and knowing where and when the birds are feeding is equally important. I am out on my ground every day as a consequence of my job, so I do a LOT of recon prior to getting in the hide, watching flight paths and feeding patterns. I know not everyone can be doing this, so talk to the farmer and get as much information as you can to help formulate a plan. You can ask him which crops he will be putting in and when, and ask him to let you know if he's seen birds feeding, and in which areas at what times. The farmer can be your eyes and ears on the ground when you can't be there every day.

TOP TIP

Recon is everything! Get to know your ground and watch the movements of the birds to help plan your attack.



The pigeons have been hammering the lucerne, which starts to grow well in very early spring

"I've been up and back to the same farm about eight times in the last few weeks, looking and watching for the right opportunity and the right conditions – these are the most important aspects of a successful day. There is no magic formula – it takes time and planning and an intimate knowledge of your ground and what's on it. It's a bit like successful deer managers I guess; if you go out stalking with someone who really knows their ground, you're probably going to have a great day. If you wander blind into a bit of woodland and hope for the best, you're probably going home empty handed. Same as if you just turn up to a field and just start shooting pigeons – you may bag a few, but you're probably not going home with a big bag unless you get lucky."

I knew Andy had been shooting a lot over winter – partly because there's less work to do on the farm, meaning he can spend more days doing what he loves. But did he have any great days?

"One was a perfect example of what we've been talking about actually," said Andy. "We had a cracking day in the hide a couple of weeks ago, which was mainly to do with having a really decent, strong wind and knowing that they'd been favouring this area. There weren't huge numbers feeding, but I knew they had been dropping into the area on a regular basis, so I waited for the right weather, and Gary and I bagged about 275 between us. It could so easily have been a poor day, but that wind made it one of the best.

"We had a few like that over the winter months, but it's cooled down a little now because the weather just hasn't been right. There's been no wind to speak of, so I've been holding off, waiting and waiting for the right forecast. In this situation, if there are birds causing a problem but I don't want to shoot them yet, I might put some bangers out for a few hours, just to keep them moving and to prevent them from destroying the crop.

"Just as a side note, I was speaking to someone the other day who was convinced there are less pigeons now than there used to be. It's something I see every so often on social media too. I can only speak from my own experience, but for me the numbers are pretty steady and I haven't noticed there being any fewer birds than there were, say, 20 years ago. The thing that has changed is that they are a bit harder to shoot now, probably because more people are doing it, so the birds are educated. Some see a rotary, know exactly what it is, and give it a wide berth. Changes in behaviour like this might make it appear like there are less around, but like I said, we're still plagued by them! Mind you, I do enjoy the sport and I absolutely love eating them, so they definitely have their plus points too!" ■



So many factors go into making your day in the hide a good one; plan your attack carefully, and you're more likely to find success



Stubble turnips that have sprouted can provide great early spring shooting

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ISLAND ADVENTURES

Though a lot has changed, there's never a dull moment on Orkney for Kenny Meason, watching the oystercatchers, and harvesting razor shells with just a breadknife and trowel!

It was time to stop. The evening flights were getting later and later, exacerbated by the fine winter weather we were having. Mallard and teal were pairing up, so I was extremely aware that we were encroaching on nature's stage, and that, in a short time, these birds, if left (and many were), would be breeding.

I turned my attention to the sea trout, as yet another season opened. But being the conservationist that I am, I was not able to catch and release this time – you have to catch them first! Years ago, the family watched Charles and Diana's wedding on TV. The lunchtime menu was locally caught sea trout that had been twice poached – delicious!

Tradition goes further back though. By taking advantage of the extreme low tides in early spring (we call them 'spoot ebbs'), I was able to go razor shell hunting. They can only be caught by hand at extreme low tides on the sandy beaches (every fisher has his favourite one) at the lower littoral zone.

The method is quite simple. You walk backwards along the strand, observing your footfall on the sand. If an oval hole appears, then that is a razor shell sensing the pressure and heading down into the safety of deeper sand. If the sand is wet, then the shell, by contracting its foot, ejects a small waterspout into the air, hence 'spout' (or 'spoot' in the local dialect).

All the tools you need are a breadknife (or any knife that has a reasonably flexible blade) and a hand trowel. By inserting the blade at an angle, a few inches from the hole, you can intercept the moving razor shell and hold it there with gentle pressure until you can excavate enough sand to get a hold on the shell. Then, extricate it firmly but gently, so as not to lose the foot (the fruit) as it comes out. It all sounds so simple.

Less experienced fishers use a spade, and can excavate large cavities in pursuit of the 'spoot', which will eventually reach rock bottom at up to 75cm into the sand. You do not want to find one of those chasms when walking backwards! But it does act as an amusing diversion from hunting, especially if it is someone else who does.

By inserting a finger into the spout hole, you can ascertain the angle of retreat and, thereby know where to insert the knife blade. However (depending on the weather, the air temperature and/or the atmospheric pressure), they don't always move, so a cut finger is inevitable, hence 'razor shell'.

The downside to all this is that, as much as I love catching them, I can't eat them because I have an anaphylactic reaction. But for some, they are an epicurean delight.

The coming of spring

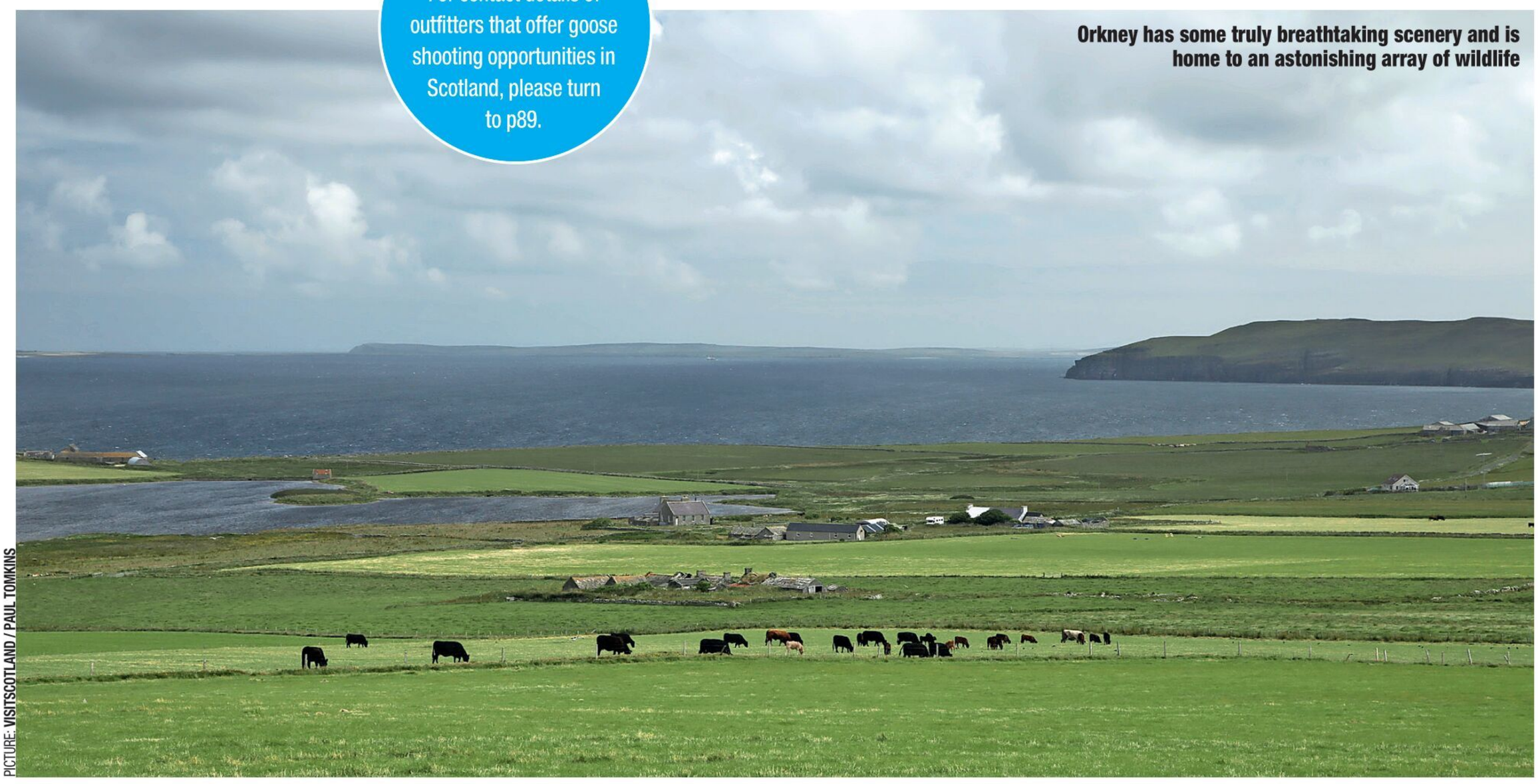
I walked back across the sand in the failing daylight. A few weeks prior, this would have been goose time, but they are now milling about elsewhere. Instead, large flocks of oystercatchers, recently returned, were finding their voices. A raft of wigeon lay offshore, keeping a watching brief.

As the seasons come around, the wildlife associated with them has changed too. My grandad used to tell me of the islanders who went "running the lee" in the late 1800s. This was the taking of seabird eggs off the cliff ledges by people suspended from ropes from above. I suppose it's a seasonable and sustainable food, but a parlous occupation at the best of times.

There is an interview recorded in the archives of

TAKE A TRIP

For contact details of outfitters that offer goose shooting opportunities in Scotland, please turn to p89.



Orkney has some truly breathtaking scenery and is home to an astonishing array of wildlife

PICTURE: **VISITSCOTLAND / PAUL TOMKINS**



Greylags have become a pest species in the Orkneys over the last few decades due to their huge numbers

PICTURE: LAURIE CAMPBELL

GREYLAG LICENCES

Due to the damage greylags cause, farmers can now take advantage of an Orkney-specific licence which covers the period from 1 February to 30 June, outside the open shooting season and the time covered by the general licence. This means farmers will no longer be required to apply to the NatureScot licensing team for an out-of-season licence, but can make a quick call to the Kirkwall office for permission.

Currently, the general rules for Scotland stat allow for greylag geese to be shot under the General Licence from 1 July until 31 August, and during the open season from 1 September to 31 January.

this activity from an old practitioner which goes like this:

"Sometimes the ropes were too short."

"So what did you do then?"

"We just lengthened the rope with a bit of string out of our pockets."

"What would happen if the string broke?"

"Och! We had plenty more in the barn!"

He also remembered the first fulmars coming to the cliffs. There were none before that time. Now, over a hundred years later, they are the commonest of birds in the islands.

The first harbingers of spring are the oystercatchers, now universally common, scurrying and scolding about the grass fields. They were uncommon breeders here in the early 60s, but now nest on hill, field and foreshore.

The grass fields, still green from the milder winters, will now senesce into brown before re-emerging into our summer pastures. These will, in turn, hold numbers of breeding curlew, even in the fields set aside for silage cutting, where they hatch early enough to escape the forage machines. Snipe and redshank like the non-fertilised margins of those heavy, close-cover crops for nesting too. That is not so with our lapwings, who are the first nesters on the stubble and damper areas.

No spring evening is complete without the distinctive calls of the peewit and their courtship flights. They are accompanied by the snipe with their distinctive drumming, their 'cheek-cheek, cheek- cheek' ascent, followed by the downward 'whooo, oooh-oooh' swoop of the tail feathers.

In the days of early mechanisation, when tractors replaced the workhorses, it was still common practice for all land workers to take a meal of lapwing eggs. They were always careful to take from nests short of their usual clutch of four eggs. After that, they were left to brood. And as the fields were turned by plough and harrow to arable seedbed, everyone went to great lengths to protect these nests by steering round, or even gently shifting them aside. We always felt that the later-hatching broods had a better survival rate than the earlier ones.

I also discovered that, having moved an oystercatcher's nest several times in the course of cultivation, she was then sitting faithfully on chilled addled eggs, so had no success. I had inadvertently, at the time, trashed another nest by power harrow. So, the bird waited until work was complete, then constructed a new nest and successfully hatched a new brood in due course.

Later, in mid-April, we would expect the warm air surges over the cool North Sea to produce a coastal fog, a sure sign that the first of the sandwich terns would be heard. But barely seen, their raucous calls carrying over from The Skerries, arctic and common terns would arrive a bit later. Sadly, their breeding numbers are much reduced now.

Sadly, too, we no longer hear the corncrakes. Once, so common, even up into the 1980s, a calling bird is now an event. My neighbour told me the other day he had heard his first corncrake this year on the wireless!

We now look forward to seeing the swallows arrive. Even 15 years ago, they were scarce non-breeding visitors. But now, they nest all over the islands and here, in the quieter sheds on the farm. In the early 2000s, I was fascinated by these birds nesting in the low, dark veal calf houses on the Brittany farms when we were having a busman's holiday there and so on.

Our patch of maritime heath still contains its share of nesting birds. The seven pairs of arctic skuas have gone; the common gulls have moved site yet again; the lesser black-backed gulls are

'No spring evening is complete without the distinctive calls of the peewit, accompanied by the distinctive drumming of the snipe'



Large flocks of oystercatchers can be seen throughout the year in the Orkneys

PICTURE: RICARDO GABRIEL / GETTY

fewer; snipe, redshank, meadow pipits, lapwing, curlew, arctic and common terns, mallard and teal all may be stable or declining.

My favourite, the red-throated diver, has gone, due I think to their quiet lochan water levels lowering. But we do still have our peregrine and their not-so-near neighbour on the cliffs, the corbie (raven), as well as resurgent guillemots, razorbills, puffins, kittiwake and even the unwelcome great skuas.

The single pair of ravens has been here in perpetuity and, funnily enough, don't actively bother any livestock in the fields next to the cliffs. But they do hunt everywhere else viciously, as only corvids can do.

Many years ago, a pair of ravens killed one of our nesting farm ducks. And when they returned for a second feast, I disturbed them with an Eley Maximum No.4 in the farm tool, the Full-choked Greener GP. I aimed a warning shot off from a goodly 10ft to let them know what to expect if they persisted, and peeled one off stone dead. I wonder whose memory will fade first, theirs or mine?



Rescuing lapwing eggs from the wheels of the ploughman is a common sight

PICTURE: TTSHUTTER / GETTY

In the breeding season, lapwing favour spring sown cereals, permanent unimproved pasture, meadows and fallow fields.

Looking ahead

But as one island door shuts, another opens. We now have a small walked-up pheasant shoot on the farm. Pheasants were introduced on to the estate farm in the island as part of their very successful wildfowling enterprise. These birds have spread, and now breed successfully in many areas. My own feeding stations support these locals, as does a neighbour's bird crop field. In season, we can manage regular walks through bird crop, areas of rashes and tussock, and the moorland heather margins – splendid days!

Now the main task is to recognise the resident breeding grey geese and eliminate them, whilst leaving the migratory ones alone. Geese really are an agricultural pest. Already, in mid-March, they are gathering in bigger alert flocks, ready for the off back north. Significant groups of non-breeders will remain as well. There is work to be done. ■

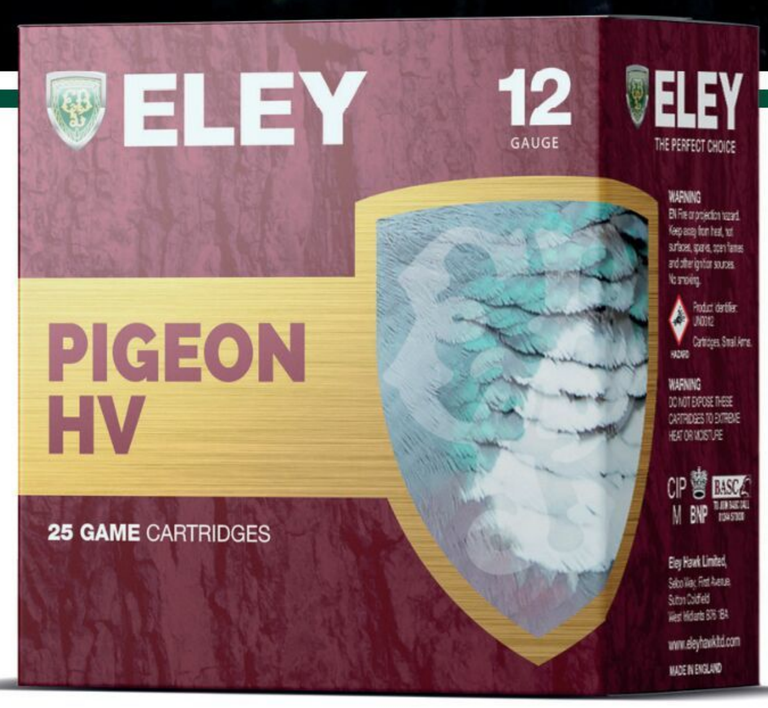


Digging for clams is something of a national pastime on Orkney and the surrounding islands

PICTURE: EDWARD PALM / GETTY

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OVER GORSE AND MARSH

Phil Moorsom takes a group of experienced driven Guns on their first day of walked-up shooting – will they all manage to bag the first woodcock of their career?

When 1 February has been and gone, it's the perfect time to reflect on the season and take a breath before starting to plan for the next. We didn't have a poor day anywhere last season but on a few occasions the weather made it difficult. Increasingly, this tends to happen in September and October when warm, sunny and still days make the birds reluctant to fly with any conviction. I am often asked which is my favourite shoot of the many that we visit, and it's a very difficult if not impossible question to answer. On a day with a cloudy sky, a fair wind in a favourable direction, low pressure, enthusiastic birds and the right team, any shoot day anywhere in the country can be an unforgettable experience.

The wonderful thing about walked-up shooting is that whatever the conditions, one can usually have a great day out. One of the most satisfying days of last season was taking a team of dedicated driven shots up to north Wales for their first wild bird walked-up day. I absolutely love these days, but my concern was that one does not usually get too many opportunities, and when they do arise one has to be quick and decisive.

We were aiming to get four of the team of six their first woodcock, all six of them their first snipe, plus their first goose and woodcock flight with the grand finale being flighting teal on one of the ponds. Having heard many of our other members talk about the wild bird trips, the team were keen to broaden their horizons and try something very different from the traditional driven days they normally shoot.

We started the day with a stealthy approach to a large long lake that usually held a variety of wildfowl. There was not a breath of wind, and obviously we were not as quiet as we imagined as two large springs of teal got up showing probably 60 birds in total. Thankfully, having listened to instructions from the keeper, none of the team took a speculative shot that would have undoubtedly cleared the lake before we got there. The birds did get up a bit early due to a beater approaching on the wrong side of the hedge, but everyone managed a couple of shots and we came away with a teal, a gadwall, two widgeon and four mallard. We saw plenty of snipe which flew on safely, but at least gave the guys an idea of what they need to be looking for and just how tricky they are to bring down.

This had obviously helped as we split the team into walking and standing Guns and shot a small marsh that showed eight snipe and two woodcock, one of which came low up a track straight towards me and then flared up over the trees with clear sky behind. It still plagues me as to how I missed it, but the team were absolutely thrilled that I did and I was of course reminded of it for the rest of the day. We did come away with three snipe, which thrilled those that were successful as there was some fierce rivalry going on with the species sweep. We then shot a few more ponds with varying success and managed to add two more teal, another widgeon, two mallard and our first woodcock of the trip.

We then stopped for a very animated lunch; the team

When startled, snipe fly off at speed in a zig-zag motion to confuse predators, making them especially difficult to bring down.

Boggy areas with an abundance of gorse and heather are a haven for woodcock



PICTURE: CERVUS CREATIVE

‘When we finally made it out, we had three pheasants, two woodcock, one pigeon, and a hare!’

PICTURE: **RAY HOOD**

discussing each and every shot, their missed opportunities and hopes for the afternoon session. The plan was to shoot two very large snipe marshes and then finish the day with a woodcock flight. On the first section of the marsh, I lined the Guns out while our team of spaniels pushed it towards them. There were hordes tucked into the grass and slashes which took everyone by surprise. As snipe do, they were going everywhere, but some went straight over the line and as accomplished driven shots they took their time and we managed to shoot six, although we picked only five. We walked-up the next section and all the Guns found that difficult; not only the soggy uneven terrain, but shooting at birds six feet off the ground. We put up 22 snipe at varying distances and came away with nothing, but the team absolutely loved it.

As the sun set, we turned into a huge partially clear-felled forestry to flight some woodcock. I could see from the team's baffled faces that they were very unsure about shooting at this time of day. We lined out in an L shape covering one corner of the wood. The sky was clear and the moon full and bright – perfect conditions. As the light faded, the bangs started and exclamations and swearing could be heard on what was otherwise an extremely quiet night. Eventually, I heard a couple of cheers and, once we gathered together again, found that three more of the team had shot their first ever woodcock.

Back for more

We started the second day with another new experience for the team – an early morning goose flight. Sadly, a very dense low mist had settled in, so I wasn't too hopeful that we would see much. Even so, we lined the team out along a hedge and after about 20 minutes we heard a skein coming. They went about 100 yards to the left of the line, but it was nevertheless encouraging. After another 10 minutes, one skein of 18 and another of six came directly over the line and three greylags came down. Everyone had a shot or two, and there immediately ensued a good-natured argument that continued over breakfast as to who actually shot the geese.

After our late breakfast, we walked three large grass fields that had recently been reseeded and saw an incredible number of snipe including a wisp of at least 30. We managed to shoot another three and pushed many towards another marsh area that always held a few woodcock. The beaters were instructed to drive the marsh towards the team and this proved hugely successful as we had another two snipe and one woodcock. One gorse bank produced no fewer than six woodcock, three of which went over a member of the team still looking for his first. He missed every one!

We then stopped for a break, as the next section we were shooting would take about three hours; a lovely boggy area of forestry with heather and gorse banks that was a haven for woodcock. After clear safety instructions and making sure we knew where each other were, we set off. It wasn't long before cries were heard of "woodcock," "pigeon over," "pheasant forward". When we all finally made it out the other end we had three pheasants, two woodcock, one pigeon and a hare. Everyone was exhausted, but had found it incredibly exciting. We pushed one last gorse bank out on our way back to the vehicles and managed two more pheasants before the last "woodcock virgin" finally got his bird.

We then decided to try the teal flight in spite of the clear, still sky and the full moon. Thankfully, the gamble paid off and the birds dropped in fairly regularly in ones and twos. The team were remarkably quick for their first time, and all of them had a couple of shots. We came away with a total of nine teal.

We were all absolutely knackered when we got back to the hotel, and once we had safely stowed our guns we headed straight for the bar to analyse the day's sport. All the first timers had thoroughly enjoyed the experience, but did say they were initially very concerned (quite correctly) about species recognition and safety. Their preconception of walked-up shooting was that it would be easy, as on the whole one would be shooting lower birds. However, they now appreciate how much information must be processed before one even considers pulling the trigger, and realized how much skill, stealth and fieldcraft is required in order to achieve success. Not only that, but they could see just how focused one needs to be to take advantage of any sudden opportunities that may present themselves.

The overriding sentiment of the team was that they found our two days very exciting, and felt much closer to the game they were hunting. They did find it pretty hard going, but understood the reward to be gained when you have to work hard for your birds. All the team signed up for a similar day next season, and it will be interesting to see how many follow through. ■



Our first outing brought very much the kind of mixed bag you wish for on a walked-up day

PICTURE: **REBECCA GREEN**

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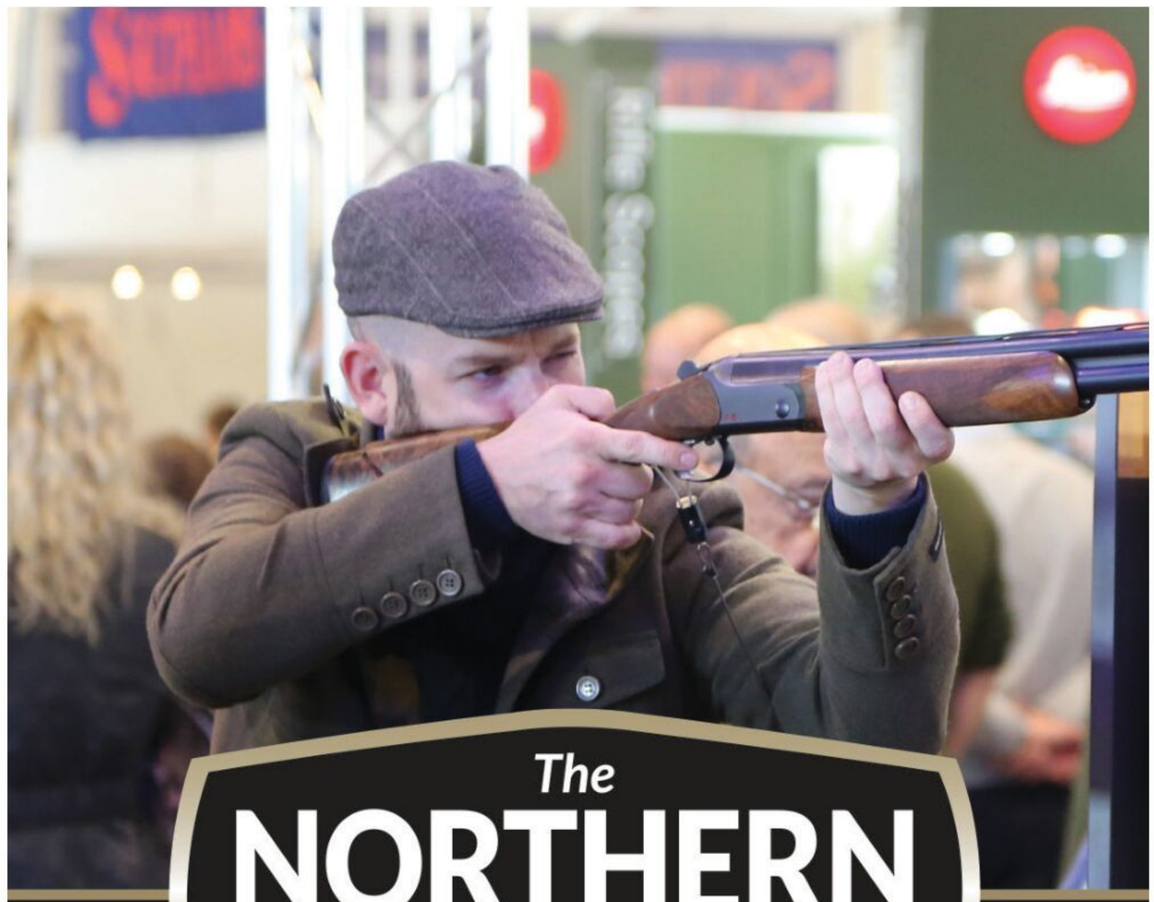
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On the trail of greys and jays

Having enjoyed many trips out on squirrels over the years, Mick Garvey's fieldcraft skills are paying dividends in his new passion: conserving the Cumbrian red squirrel population

In days gone by, I have had many a good outing on the squirrels, taking numbers in the teens up to peaks of 30+. These are times to remember, and will stay with me forever. In recent times, though, my squirrel-hunting efforts have taken a somewhat different direction in the name of red squirrel conservation. I have been carrying out this work for almost a year now, and it has been considerably different to my days back in Derbyshire. The pest control carried out back then taught me the skills and fieldcraft that have stood me in good stead for longer than I care to remember. It's something that is always there and often used without thinking twice about it, pretty much like breathing, a natural occurrence that happens automatically when needed.



Trail cams are an invaluable part of Mick's armoury

My time in Cumbria has seen me using these skills on a daily basis, and this includes hours if not days walking the land and woodlands searching for telltale signs of squirrel activity, especially of the grey variety. Now, don't get me wrong, there are quite a few red squirrels in the Cumbria area, thanks in no small part to the squirrel rangers and the team at Penrith & District Red Squirrel Group. But they are still an endangered species, and the threat from the grey squirrels should not be underestimated. The greys carry the squirrel pox. It's one of those strange quirks of nature that they don't suffer from it, but can and will pass it on to the reds, and the sight of a red infected with the pox is a heartbreaking image. So, a day or two of reconnaissance in the woods will pay dividends when tracking down an invasive grey.

I have a couple of areas that are predominately inhabited by red squirrels, but one can never become complacent and less vigilant. I was at one of these hotspots recently and was enjoying the sight of six reds feeding and playing freely. But my reason for being there wasn't to observe, it was to engage with a huge grey squirrel that had been showing up just about every day. The trail cams I use are set up to view the feeders that are placed out in areas I feel have the potential to attract reds. A good indication of a likely spot would be a drey in the tree tops, split hazel nuts on the floor, digging of the ground and, most obviously, a physical sighting.

TOP TIP

Whether sunny or cloudy, squirrels love calm days when potential threats are more visible and are most active at dawn and dusk.

Slow and steady

A stealthy approach in such an area is my favoured method, stepping slowly and stopping every 10 or so


When you have identified a feeding spot, it's best to dig in and wait

PICTURES: MICK GARVEY

SHOOTING JAYS

Jays are scavangers and will eat the eggs and chicks of many bird species. Under the GL40 conservation general licence, it is lawful to kill jays for the purposes of conserving threatened wild bird species, as listed on the Red and Amber lists of Birds of Conservation Concern). In England, the licence specifally states that jays may be killed to protect woodland species only.


Jays and greys are a twin menace

paces to scan the rides in front and the treetops with the thermal spotter which will pick out any skinny activity. The way we humans move separates us from any other creatures, and changing this is key to getting close and personal with the skinnies. The reds will sit aloft and generally watch you, feeling safe in their elevated position. The greys, on the other hand, will be off, not to be seen again any time soon. But they will be back, especially if they are feeding from a feeder or scattered feed. I have recently managed to get within 6ft of a feeding red just by reducing my movement, being suitably dressed with my Jack Pyke digital camo gear, and keeping the spotter to my face to hide my features, which are scary at the best of times. I got it all on video on the InfiRay Eye E6+ V3, until I got too adventurous and it hopped off to a nearby fallen tree. It did come back, but I left it to feed undisturbed.

The invasive grey had regularly been at the feeder at 7:30am just about every day, so my plan was simple – get there early and set about waiting. The sunrise was outstanding that morning, but the old adage of red sky in the morning et cetera was in the back of my mind and it was bitterly cold. The sunrise was picked up beautifully as a reflection on the truck side window and was almost a mirror image of what could be seen by the naked eye. I really do love this place, for all the right reasons, but three hours in and there was no sign of the grey and a slight fluttering of snow coming in. The fantastic sunrise had given way to snow-filled clouds that were closing in menacingly.

Some comfort was taken by seeing the reds still feeding and if it hadn't been for them, I might have considered wrapping up and calling it a day. The importance of the job was more important than my need for home comfort, and it was another hour and a half before I saw the grey squirrel saunter across the track and climb the tree to the feeder, which is filled with the best quality feed. It was most certainly not the one I had seen on camera, which is very concerning as I now had two to take care of. It was a decent-sized grey, but definitely smaller than the one on film.

I had my Rimfiremagic 10-22 with a Sightmark Wraith 4K NV day/nightscope resting on an old gate, loaded with Eley hollow subs. I was hoping for a clear headshot, but it just wouldn't present itself for me so a heart/lung shot was my next and only option. The hollow sub worked its usual magic and the job was done with no dramas. The snow had really started to fall. Even the reds had retired to the warmth of their drey, and I conceded I would be back the following week.

I had to head back to Derbyshire that night and the forecast wasn't looking good. I had two attempts at getting back but got turned back both times due to snow and abandoned cars. I did get back to Derbyshire the following day, and later that week I was back in place waiting for the big 'un. The trail cam had shown me how big he was, and it had a head like an old gnarly hare. The next visit was a much smoother affair with the grey turning up on time and this time taking a headshot from 60 yards and the Eley hollow sub giving an instant kill. I've said before that the hollows are supremely accurate, consistent and reliable.

To finish the day off, I picked off three jays from the bottom of the track at 80+ yards. Again, the hollow subs schwacked them with absolutely no fuss. With a total of eight hours under my belt for the greys and jays it was a job well done, and all thanks to the patience and fieldcraft gained over the years. It's a way of life and a lifestyle I would not change for anything. ■



'It's a strange quirk of nature that greys don't suffer from pox, but will pass it on to the reds – the sight of an infected red is heartbreaking'

Game & Wildlife CONSERVATION TRUST

Taking the lead

James Swyer details the results of last season's GWCT survey on changing attitudes to lead shot, and calls for more action in the summer ahead in advance of the coming season

It is now two years since a number of organisations, including the GWCT, released a statement calling for the shooting community to voluntarily move away from lead ammunition within five years. The intervening time has been remarkably difficult for everyone, with a focus on incredibly pressing issues linked to the pandemic, so it may come as a surprise to many to know that we'll soon be halfway through that timeframe. Despite that, last year's UN Biodiversity Conference in France and COP26 in Glasgow provided timely reminders that putting the environment at the front of our minds is more critical than ever.

Moving away from lead ammunition is just one step that individuals in the shooting community can take, and we are keen to understand how many people have actually moved to alternatives, how they have found them and, if they're yet to try something other than lead, what the main barriers are. That's why we're asking you to complete a short two-minute survey to share your views at gwct.org.uk/leadsurvey.

When we ran the same survey in early 2021, we received over 2,500 individual responses. Of those who got in touch, 4% had made the switch away from lead, 20% had started testing alternatives, and a further 28% were planning to do so in the coming season.

Covid-19 delayed the process for many, but we are interested whether this was still the case in the 21/22 season which had less disruption than the previous one. Please do complete the short anonymous survey to help us to understand what's happening on the ground.

Of those unsure about using non-lead cartridges, the biggest concern was whether it would damage their guns. This varied from concerns about old guns ("I shoot with an old English side-by-side made by Purdeys in 1894 with a 65mm breach, I am concerned that steel shot will damage the barrels," and "I am waiting until suitable alternatives are available for old guns") and the availability of cartridges for specific guns, be they 20-bore, 28-bore or something else. However, others reported positive experiences, with one respondent reporting that they had sent a 1930 vintage shotgun for a service and was delighted to discover that it was perfectly okay for standard steel shot.

Around a tenth of respondents so far have raised fears about the additional costs of non-lead cartridges. Many comments echoed one respondent's assertion that "there needs to be a reduction in the price of alternate cartridges before any meaningful switch will happen," and that "cartridge manufacturers must play a major part in the move from lead to steel". The manufacturers seem very aware of this, and are working hard toward achieving a more palatable balance.

It could be argued that cartridge manufacturers and gunsmiths need to do more to explain these situations to those yet to try the alternatives, and we'll be sure to keep people updated as to any developments. If you would like to read more on the topic, you can visit the GWCT lead ammunition hub at gwct.org.uk/lead. The hub includes a Q&A guide about moving away from lead shot, advice from the Gun Trade Association on the use of lead-alternative ammunition for live quarry shooting with shotguns, and much more.



Great strides have been made in the shift away from lead shot – but more can be done

PICTURE: LEE BEEL

What more can be done?

Of course, lead is only one factor in the relationship between shooting and biodiversity. We encourage all Guns to consider the contribution towards biodiversity that their shoot provider makes. If a shoot is well run, it can be a real boost for other birds, but how do you know if a shoot is good or not? Our guidelines for sustainable releasing are available free at gwct.org.uk/sustainablereleasing and we also have a list of important questions to ask your shoot, including 'how many birds per hectare do you place in your release pens in the summer?'; 'how will you support the remaining birds at the end of the season?'; and 'do you shoot fewer birds towards the end of the season?'.

> 'There's lots of great work being done in our countryside, but we can always strive for more. Let's show the world how much good we do'

It's also important that you know your stuff. In an effort to drive up standards, we launched our free Accredited Game Shot test in 2018. Since then, almost 15,000 people have taken it. It will give you the confidence to ask appropriate questions of shoots, appreciate how a gamekeeper can be a working conservationist, and participate in debates surrounding controversial issues affecting shooting such as lead shot and the use of medication in game rearing. The test also explains the ways legislation and regulation cover shoot management. You can take part today at gwctknowledge.com.

There's lots of great work being done out there in our countryside, but we can always strive for more. Let's show the world how much good we can do. ■

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ANDY CROW
PIGEONS
Crowman has forgotten more about pigeons than most of us will ever know



DEAN HARRISON
FOXING
Deano is a lifelong fox shooter and keen countryman



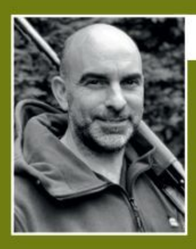
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COUNTRYSIDE
Jonny teaches survival courses and other backwoods skills



WILL EDWARDS
SHOOTING
Will is an APSI-qualified shooting coach



TOM ESLER
LEGAL MATTERS
Tom is a partner at mfg Solicitors, providing services for rural sectors



MARK RIPLEY
SHOOTING
Avid foxer and rough shooter, Mark is currently sitting in as guest editor

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WIN! QUESTION OF THE MONTH



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How can I avoid foxes with young?

Q I've recently started to do a bit of fox control on a local farm with my new .223. I've already shot seven foxes on there, but I don't want to shoot any with dependant cubs. What is the easiest way to tell which are the vixens?

A MARK RIPLEY replies: Well, to be quite honest, it's very difficult to tell them apart before you shoot them! You can get large and small dog foxes and likewise with vixens!

Unless you need to control foxes through the spring and early summer, the simple answer is don't shoot them at this time of year. It's also not just the vixens but the dog foxes too that hunt for food for the new family, so shooting either will put strain on them.

The majority of cubs will be born around March and will be dependant on the adults until they are old enough to be hunting themselves and will be independent between three and five months old. Realistically, I would avoid shooting foxes unless you really need to from the end of Febuary until around the start of August to avoid orphaning possible dependant youngsters.



PICTURE: PAUL AUSTIN

Do you have a question for one of our experts? Email us at news@sportingshooter.co.uk

Buzzard attacks

Q My small shoot will once again be releasing 300 pheasants. Last year, we suffered several severe assaults from buzzards. What is the best way to protect the poults?

A TONY JACKSON replies: Buzzards, sparrowhawks and owls are especially attracted to pheasant poults, and to defer attacks you must make the pen as difficult as possible for the predators.

Make sure you have a large area of ground densely covered with brambles and a variety of shrubs, allowing the remaining area to consist of small patches of grass.

Poults can also hide in dense brashings in the pen. If possible, coppice any trees in the pen so that predatory birds are unable to perch on them and, in addition, make sure there are no similar trees adjacent to the outside of the pen wire.

We also deter predators by attaching white bags to the pen sides, and you can cover the posts to make it difficult for a bird to perch. Some shoots leave dead rabbits outside the pen as an alternative food source, but this could attract additional predators.

You can always release a few extra poults to compensate for losses. Poults from seven or eight weeks old are usually safe from birds of prey.



PICTURE: DAVID KJAER

Do black rats exist in Britain?

Q I have been told that, apart from the common brown rat, there are black rats in the UK. I have never seen one, though, nor has anyone I know. Does this species of rat really exist?

A TONY JACKSON replies: The black rat is the old British rat which was largely replaced by the brown rat, or Hanoverian rat, in the mid-18th century. The black rat originally came from Asia, arriving in Europe during the 12th century. Within a hundred years, it was swarming all over the UK and was found in great abundance in old wooden warehouses along the Thames until concrete appeared.

By the 1960s, black rats were rarely encountered, and by 1975, apart from the occasional sighting, the only specimens encountered were on offshore islands such as Lundy, the Channel Islands, and in a few London and Liverpool docks and warehouses. It is now believed that the black rat is one of Britain's rarest mammals.

Occasionally, a brown rat is seen with black fur, but a genuine black rat is very slender and its body only measures 7– 9 inches, though its tail is as long as its body.



PICTURE: CARLOS ARANGUIZ / GETTY

How can I increase my bag?



Q Andy – I always see on YouTube and social media that you get big bags all the time. How are you doing this?! I seem to have lots of pigeons around but rarely get a decent bag.

A ANDY CROW replies: Controlling pigeons is about more than just shooting them. It's about managing the birds. If you turn up to a field on a still day and there are 300 pigeons feeding, and you decide to set up and start shooting them, you might get a few in the bag but the rest will scarper pretty quickly... they'll also be more educated making them flightier and harder to decoy next tme.

There are so many factors that go into achieving a successful day in the hide, the wind being one of the most important. I see pigeons feeding on my ground almost every day, but I won't go and shoot them every day. I watch the weather carefully, I watch their behaviour patterns, flight lines and movements, and I choose my time and place very carefully to ensure that I get the maximum birds in the bag, since that's the job I'm there to do.

If I've got 200 birds on the crops but not a scrap of wind, I'll set up half a dozen bangers instead to keep them moving in the meantime. If there's a good strong wind and they've been showing clear flightlines and I know roughly when they've been coming in to feed, that's when I make my move. Shooting into a huge flock of pigeons will never get you a good bag. You might get one or two, but the rest will fly away!

New pine pathogen

Q The Forestry Commission have announced another fungus-like pathogen affecting Douglas fir, western hemlock and some pines. How may this affect our trees on our shoot?

A JONNY CROCKETT replies: The pathogen you're referring to is *Phytophthera pluvialis*, and it does affect western hemlock, Douglas fir, tanoak, patula pine and the Monterey pine, the most common of which are western hemlock and Douglas fir. It was first discovered in Cornwall and is steadily spreading east. It has also been spotted in Cumbria and Scotland. It does seem to affect more mature trees, causing lesions on their trunks. It is worth looking out for and notifying the Forestry Commission if you see it, even on felled trees. They will advise you on what you should do. If you do have to clear fell, it may affect your shoot, but take it one step at a time – there is nothing you can do about it.



PICTURE: SERG_VELUSCEAC / GETTY

READERS' LETTERS

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Rekindling the passion

I used to be quite a keen clay shooter, but my trips have become much more sporadic in the past few years and ceased altogether during recent lockdowns. However, with an upcoming game shoot on the horizon, I thought I ought to dust off the shotgun and put in a bit of practice at the local clay club.

I was a bit nervous about turning up on my lonesome, but I needn't have worried. There were loads of familiar faces (some a little greyer about the whiskers than when last we met) and I was placed in a squad with folk of similar ability. The banter was great, my shooting surprisingly OK, and although the weather was horrendous, there was a great sense of team spirit as everybody mucked in to make the shoot run smoothly. One upgrade from my previous visits was a new catering shed – it was great to be able to grab a hot coffee and a bacon butty after getting a good soaking during the round. All in all, it was a real pleasure and has definitely rekindled my interest in clay shooting!

Stu Jones, email



PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN

Garden birds

I found the article on our garden birds very interesting. Yes, I agree with Tony, we have lost so many. I had not see any goldfinches in my garden, but on 20 December seven turned up, and the garden just seemed to be full of birds. I have spotted woodpeckers, long tail tits, and generally things have improved. I hope it continues. I have been living in this house for 32 years and see far less birds now than when we first came to live here.

I have, however, seen a big increase in magpies and grey squirrels, which take the young from robin and blackbird nests.

I can remember as a boy walking through the countryside and seeing yellowhammers in abundance, but I can't recall the last time I saw any.

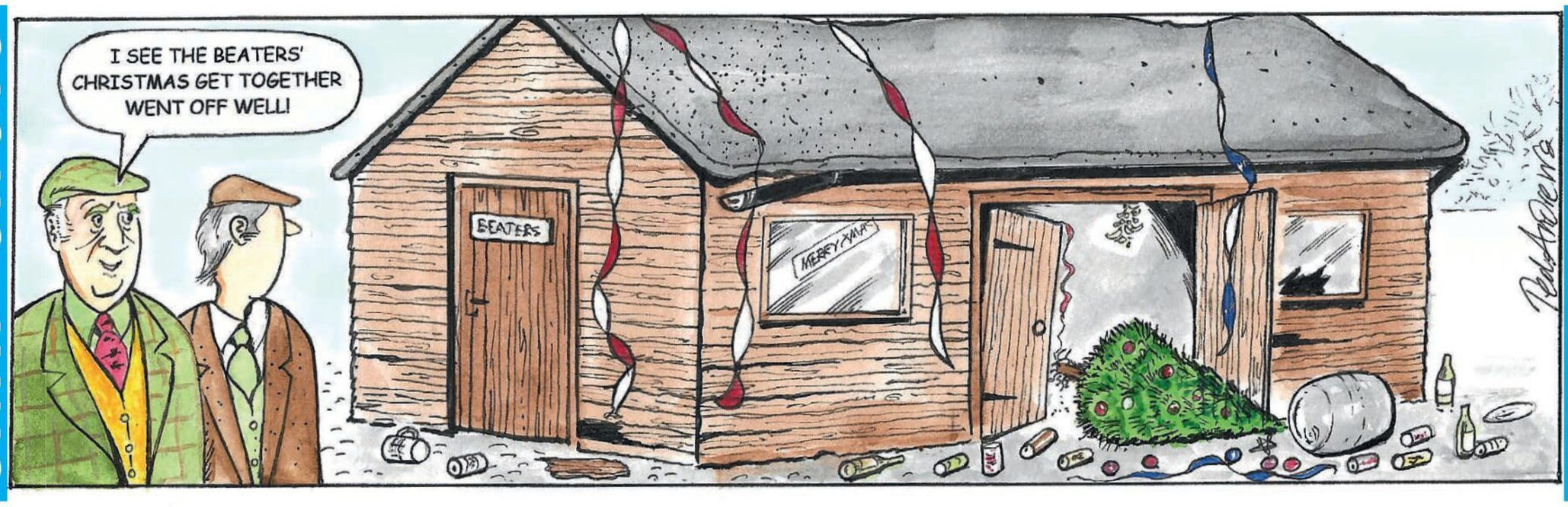
Keep it coming, Tony – this is the sort of thing that I love to read.

Barrie Payne, email



PICTURE: ROTT70 / GETTY

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Gull and crossbones

I just read Tony Jackson's 'The Countryman' column in January's issue regarding disappearing bird species from his garden and would like to chime in by saying I have encountered a very similar situation here in Whitby, North Yorkshire. My wife and I have been in this house for almost 11 years and our (quite large) garden was always a good attraction for various song birds, tits and finches, as well as starlings, wood pigeon and quite often, exhausted field fares.

As Whitby has seen a huge decline in the fishing industry over recent years, the seagulls have lost their main food supplier so now spend the majority of their time around the town and surrounding areas. When the multitude of tourists are not disobeying the town's rules on feeding the them (apparently they have adapted to fried fish now there is no regular supply of fresh) the gulls flock around the gardens to see what they can steal. This has resulted in a steep decline of the aforementioned wild birds through either the gulls eating the food from the bird feeders, or killing and eating the young as they fledge from the nest boxes. I have witnessed this first-hand from my kitchen window.

Until not so long ago, gull's nests were cleared of eggs by the council in order to maintain a reasonable number in the town. But this has been stopped now, and the gull population is completely out of control. When will people realise that as long as the gulls are virtually hand fed, their numbers are just going to escalate unrestrained compared to when they had to fly, dive, and even fight to get their fish gut meals from the trawlers?

Mick Naisbitt, email



PICTURE: STANCIUC / GETTY

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QUIZ QUESTION

Q LEMONADE KART is an anagram of which rodent you don't want to be in the depths of winter?

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Backyard dangers

In response to Tony Jackson's article in January's issue, almost word for word the observations describe my own experience – from a full and active attendance at my garden feeding stations to a disappointing trickle. A sparrowhawk will move into the area and the garden birds diminish markedly and become very wary. Feeding stations are near good cover and feeding becomes a quick dash and retreat. There is constant competition from huge flocks of jackdaws and pigeons for ground feeders (discouraged within the limits of protection). Ditto the annual attentions of crows and magpies, not forgetting the ubiquitous moggies around the nesting and fledging period.

Your average small birds are just clinging on, and many are conspicuous by their complete absence. Yet the admiration of the experts seems to lean towards the predators, not the prey. We regularly see up to five buzzards circulating above the fields. Crows and ravens are admired for their intelligence. We tend not to see corvids killing lambs on nature programmes, taking eyes and tongues as they are born. Not nice. The balance is wrong, and control and common sense need to be applied.

Neil Minto, email



PICTURE: KYAW_THIHA / GETTY

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Guns on the greens

A trip out on the fairways brought Mick Garvey face to face with the impacts of a rabbit infestation – which, of course, resulted in a new shooting opportunity

Back in the day, I played a bit of golf, and got to a decent standard too, but my coach eventually turned me loose as he reckoned he couldn't show me anything more. My long game was my strong point and my short game wasn't too bad, but it all fell apart around the greens and bunkers. Once in the sand, my day was more or less over. This made me work harder at this aspect of my game and made me more aware and appreciative around the greens. I had a brief return to the fairways a couple of years back and I soon discovered that any skills I once possessed had deserted me, but my attention around the greens remained – albeit in a different way.


Less a telltale sign and more a glaring signpost!

The beautifully manicured greens were showing plenty of signs of a rabbit infestation and the bunkers also looked like a war zone, where the rabbits had been digging into the soft sand. I stood at the truck looking at the clubhouse and thought, 'give it a try worse that can happen is they say no'.

My luck was in as the manager said they were on the verge of looking into installing electric fences to ward off the invasive rabbits. I explained that this would not only be expensive but highly likely to be totally ineffective due to the vast amount of access available. I proposed that they let me tackle the problem over the next few weeks using airguns and rimfire rifles with subsonic rounds and if they weren't satisfied with the results, I would walk away and they could continue with the electrification.

Success story

To say I was keen was an understatement as I was back that very same evening, totally blind to where the best areas would be but willing to learn all I needed in the first few hours.

I had taken note of public rights of way and backdrops while out on the course, and a quick chat with the head groundsman prior to him locking up gave me some valuable intel so I was ready to rock and roll.

That evening, I took 24 rabbits and mapped out all the problem areas. This would not have been possible without my trusty thermal spotter turning night into day. I returned the next day to bring them up to speed and I was greeted with smiling faces and a hearty handshake. Apparently, it was the first time in ages that they hadn't seen rabbits on the greens when opening up. I had a job for life I was told and I carried on with the pest control regularly until I struggled to get into double figures. I then returned every month or so just to keep on top of them.

The club has new owners now but my position with them is the same, as my services were highly recommended by the previous owner. On a recent trip to Keswick, I called in during the day just to catch up with the owners and groundsmen. It appears that my previous work had kept the numbers down but there were signs of a resurgence at the far end on the driving range as some proposed building work on an adjacent

TOP TIP

The best time to hunt rabbits is the morning after after a rainstorm. Having sheltered in their burrows, they will come out hungry.



This was Mick's first time on the course armed with a rifle instead of a golf club!

PICTURES: MICK GARVEY



The view through the thermal spotter

paddock had driven them towards the golf club. Good news was that I now had permission to shoot over the unused paddock, almost doubling the size of my land.

The gates were being locked at 8pm and I was in position at 7.45pm with nothing showing on the course at all, but five minutes after the last car passed by the first bunny showed itself, and then another. It was if they knew the coast was clear. Wasting no time at all, I placed the crosshairs of the Sightmark Wraith 4K while resting on a large fencepole. The almost silent Rimfire Magic 10/22 had its first humane kill of the night at a little over 60 yards and it was all over with just a slight jump forward on impact and a little kick of the feet. Its companion was still out there, unaware of what was coming its way, and it too was humanely dispatched. I had both the InfiRay Finder and the E6+ V3 with me as I had neglected to charge them both fully – bad admin on my part.

The driving range has floodlights all around the building so keeping to the shadows was a must; using the dry stone walling and the various hedging kept my presence a secret and let me get to within shooting distance of my quarry. As always these days, my problem was with the lack of a breeze to hide any noise I accidently made – twice that night I stepped on a golf ball which made me put my other foot down to heavily and



Mick's bag was bulging after only a couple of hours



Once again, Mick's thermal spotter proved invaluable

even stumble, costing me a couple of dead cert rabbits. Slowly and purposely making my way around the course in the shadows steadily taking a rabbit every now and then, I was slowly building up a nice bagful. The InfiRay thermal spotters picked out the heat source easily and the Wicked Lights A51 IR directed the crosshairs. The bag in question is an open-top rucksack which spreads the weight nicely when getting full, and with no swinging as with shoulder game bags. It was easy to manage the Rimfiremagic and Rekon tripod on my shoulder and just set it down when I needed to shoot. The bag also works as a counterbalance and helps steady me when breathing hard – it can be a long walk with a few bunnies in the bag.

On my way back to the truck, I managed to miss a rabbit. I saw the Eley hollow sub whistle over its ears, but the only reaction was a slight ducking of the head. Being semi-automatic, the next round was chambered instantly and I made sure the follow-up shot was good. The Eleys have never let me down and I put the miss firmly at my door, maybe a bit over-eager… maybe over-complacent; either way, it was me and not the ammunition.

The bag was brimming now, so with nine taken in a couple of hours I called it a night. I could have stayed, but I'd rather have many nights like this than the odd big-number nights.

It's good to be out on the fairways again – but as pro Gun not pro golfer! Having said that, maybe in time I'll get the clubs out of retirement and get swinging again – after all, the offer of a free round has been given. ■



Mick's butchery tools got plenty of use this month!

The Maddams Muffin

If you've been out at dawn with shotgun in hand and bagged yourself a rabbit, you can celebrate your success with this delicious breakfast muffin recipe from Tim Maddams

For many home cooks, attempting to take on the challenge of rabbit meat can seem a step too far, even for those of us that cook and eat plenty of other game. All that tearing around in the wild makes for a relatively tough meat! Mincing tougher meat like rabbit is an easy way to solve this conundrum and enjoy free-ranging, wild food.

Tim cold-smoked the rabbit for this recipe; if you want to do the same, you can check out his helpful 'cold-smoked wild rabbit' video on our channel. If you don't own a smoker, you don't have to do this (although we can't deny it adds something to the flavour!). Either way, hang your rabbit for at least a day. You could also use pheasant, mallard or partridge for this recipe.



INGREDIENTS — FEEDS 2

- Rabbit fillets (or diced leg meat)
- Fresh herbs
- 2 muffins
- 2 eggs
- Cheddar cheese
- 1 tsp brown sauce
- 1 tsp ketchup
- 2 tsp harrisa paste

MAKE YOUR RABBIT BURGER

1. Mince the rabbit.
2. Season rabbit if unsmoked. Add fresh herbs (Tim used thyme) and mix with the meat.
3. Oil a large cookie cutter and press minced meat into it. Make the burger fairly thin.
4. Remove patty from cookie cutter, rest in the fridge for 10 minutes (then repeat steps 3 and 4 so you have two patties).
5. Add butter to hot pan and fry patties for a couple of minutes on either side until nicely browned and set aside.
6. Use the same pan to fry the eggs using the cookie cutter to keep them muffin sized.
7. Mix brown sauce, ketchup and harissa to make the spicy sauce.



S&CTV

Find the video for this recipe – and many more from Tim Maddams – at our Shooting & Country TV YouTube channel.

STACK YOUR MADDAMS MUFFIN!

Toasted muffin top
Spicy brown sauce
Grated Cheddar cheese
Fried egg
Rabbit burger
Toasted muffin base



WITH SIMON O'LEARY

Five practice essentials

The end of the season provides the perfect opportunity to brush up on your skills and introduce some new ones. Follow Simon O'Leary's advice to round off those rough edges

And another season passes. It was a huge improvement on last year, but it always amazes me how versatile people can be. I have been fortunate enough to entertain one or two shoots this year, all of which have been so beautifully run. All the relevant protocols have been upheld, with health and safety exercised to the letter, which is testament to the professionalism of all involved.

By default, this healthy commitment has added huge value to our shooting school, where we again see our committed clients coming back for their pre- and indeed through-season sharpeners, which are essential for clipping bad habits and honing technique. New issues present themselves from time to time, but the old favourites are still well and truly alive. I therefore decided to compile my 'top 5' list of essential elements for regular practice, in the hope of adding some small value to your next season's sport. I have based the following points on human pattern and technical requirement.

1 YOUR SHOOTING STYLE

Try to understand your take on how you approach the bird with your muzzle. Do you mount on or behind the bird? Do you prefer maintained lead or a version of it? You might possibly employ two or more distinctive styles dependant on angle or, indeed, topography.

Continued practice at the clay ground or school will enable you to hone this all-important aspect of your shooting. Don't be afraid to embrace change, either. I've seen many clients this year incorporate 'pull-away' over 'swing-through'. Some have suggested it feels neater and slower, while others noted that the immediate connection gave them more confidence in creating the lead required for the shot. Maintained lead is very difficult indeed on a straight-line bird. Birds are rarely truly straight. This is fixed by adjusting the body to accept the shot as a quartering/crossing bird. It's all psychological, and we are all very different. Find a groove that works for you, but push the boundaries. You might surprise yourself.

2 FOOTWORK

This is and always has been essential for good, safe shooting. It also allows a little more time to prepare your gun for the line of the bird. A simple sidestep left or right will ensure a neat placement of the muzzle, ready to swing through your quarry. Again, when visiting a shooting school, why not practise on crossers or a tower bird?

Purposely position yourself off-line with the bird, then step into it, so on and so forth. Many will shoot with their feet glued to the deck, and miss the bird as the muzzle slopes down under the line of travel.

I must stress that movement is minimal. Take, for example, a right-handed shooter with a straight-ahead stance, feet positioned at 1 and 2 o'clock. A simple step leftwards, moving the lead foot from 1 o'clock to say roughly 10 o'clock would normally suffice. Reverse the process for the bird traveling over the right shoulder.

3 THE MOUNT

If there's one thing that affects all shots taken, it's gun mount. So your footwork is good and your lead is on point – but then you mis-mount, and everything will come tumbling down. This steady movement is completely and utterly imperative to consistent shooting, a non-negotiable requirement if you are to stand any chance of in-field domination.

The gun should always come up to the cheek which will, in turn, set the butt of the stock correctly in the shoulder. Obviously, you will have practised this movement a hundred times before. We produced a small video on our YouTube channel showing how this procedure can be smashed by following a few simple steps at home in front of the mirror.

Start incorporating this movement on game-related targets throughout the year. Away targets are especially tricky and leave no room for error. Once this motion is familiar, it becomes a joyous zen-like feeling that will fall into place time



Regular practice at the glay ground will help you recognise and hone your style

SIMON O'LEARY



Simon is the co-founder (alongside Benita Wright) and head instructor of Hownhall Shooting School. He has been coaching for over 10 years, focusing strongly on training for game shooting.

With expert tuition at Hownhall provided by Simon and a selection of highly trained professional coaches, and with access to a range of simulated game targets including grouse butts, Hownhall is a great place for game shots to tune up between seasons.

Hownhall is in association with Hull Cartridge and in partnership with Le Chameau.

Email: shoot@hownhallshooting.com
Instagram: @hownhallshooting


If you want to increase your chances of hitting the bird, work on your timing


Foot position in relation to the target is vital; don't get glued to the floor!

after time. As the old adage goes; practice makes (nearly) perfect!

4 TIMING (LEAD)

Of course, it is obvious that one must give lead, or forward-allowance as it's otherwise known, to hit a driven bird. However, lead is only a byproduct of muzzle speed exceeding that of target/quarry speed and, when correctly exercised, you are by default applying the correct timing. I would boldly suggest that most birds are missed through lack of timing as opposed to muzzle speed. It's very rare to hear of a fellow shot consistently missing in front.

Firstly, you need to establish your own tempo. The next trick is to maintain a constant muzzle speed. This sounds incredibly obvious, but it is a common issue to fractionally slow the muzzle before pulling the trigger. With my clients I tend to use a term: "Don't turn the trigger into a brake". I do not relate this to stopping the gun entirely, as this is normally due to a massively overzealous swing, but momentarily losing muzzle speed just before the shot is taken.

When you hear a shooting mantra, it's usually muttered in threes, like a 3-beat with each point evenly spaced. 'Move-mount-shoot', or 'bum-belly-beak'. Simply boil everything down to 1-2-3. As the muzzle comes up behind or on the target (mentioned earlier) this becomes number 1. The muzzle is pulled through or away from the target, which is number 2. Then the trigger is pulled, and this is number 3. Most will fail by putting numbers 2 and 3 too close together – or in layman's terms, missing behind. This idea could be floored when applying a maintained lead approach. However, the number 2, or the maintained movement part, so to speak, allows that split second to accurately match muzzle to quarry speed. To throw a spanner in the works, my dear friend Mike at Chichester Armoury shoots with a hybrid mix of maintained lead, albeit placing the muzzle just slightly short of the desired lead, to then pull-away for the shot. He manages to mix both styles with devastating effect. As I said earlier, find your groove and onwards you go.

5 PATTERN PLATE

This is a brilliantly simple device, normally included in the process of fitting a gun (separate subject) but also very useful for patterning cartridges and checking eye dominance.

It's so important to see how varied brands and shot loads behave in your gun, and more importantly, how they feel. If you're confident in your choice, then there's no need to deviate. If you're unsure of your eye dominance, try both eyes open first, followed by squinting the opposing eye.

The subject of eye dominance can be very detailed, with professionals specialising in this one subject alone. If your results are not conclusive, then seek their advice. It would be unfortunate to have all other details in place, only to then find out you can't see your sight picture clearly! ■


Practising your gun mount is an easy thing to do at home during the off-season

PICTURES: BEN WRIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

'I suggest that most birds are missed through lack of timing, rather than muzzle speed – you need to establish your own tempo'



NV or not NV?

Deano discovers that there's no substitute for experience, although modern technology certainly does make things a lot easier

Once again, we've had a good season on the shoot I control the foxes on. It's not just about what I do, it's a big team effort to rear the chicks until they are strong, healthy poults nicely feathered-up ready to be released, get the release pens checked and provide a good habitat for the young birds to live and shelter in. Then there's the work that goes into planting the cover strips by the farmers and all the hours the gamekeeper spends feeding, getting the water, and pushing them back when they start to wander. The list goes on and on, and it adds up to a large investment both in time and money. That's why I take my role in this operation so seriously.

I like to be prepared so my year begins at the start of January. With most of the main shoot days done, I get myself out on the foxes that have moved back on the ground. My task is now to think about having as many of them shot before the spring as possible, which stops us having breeding pairs of foxes hunting all over the place and helps to protect the ground nesting birds. I am not just talking about the game birds; we also have lapwings and stone curlews, and the foxes see and hear everything. When they have cubs to feed, they are more likely to hit the livestock as well, which includes piglets, lambs and poultry.

It should be noted that foxes are not to blame for all of the predation; the gamekeeper puts a lot of time in thinning the corvids, too, and badgers will also account for some of it. At least we don't have a lot stoats or weasels to worry about. This is mainly due to the decline in rabbits, which is another factor that forces foxes to seek other prey. The fox is the top predator, and I think that has always been my fascination with them. You can't help but admire their ability to tap into different food sources at different times of the year. You could say they are the perfect hunting machines.

Of course, there are many ways you can tackle foxes. It all depends on what your set up is. As NV is now more affordable, it seems to be the most popular choice. But for many years, like most of you I did the job without it. If you are only accounting for a few foxes a year, you might feel it doesn't warrant spending the extra money. And if you are one of those that does not have NV, there are still plenty of ways you can deal with foxes. Lamping was always my favoured method. Get yourself a little team together; you can do it with just two of you, but the best set-up would be a three-man team consisting of a driver, a lamper, and you on the rifle. You will find it so much quicker that way, as often if the driver is lamping and you are the other side or on top, he is instantly picking up the eye flash and you're not. It's those few seconds that can make all the difference to you in getting the shot, even more so because the fox might never sit again in the light. It doesn't take them long to associate the lamp with danger. At first I used the white light, but if I found that they were a bit jumpy I would fit an amber filter to the lamp. Hopefully, you will get most of the foxes before they just won't have it anymore and you need to think of another method using the information you have built up from using the lamp.

The next step is coming up with an effective plan on how to get that lamp-shy fox. If you think you know were he is laying up, work out where the best place to sit would be to get a clear, safe shot at him. To increase your chances, start a bait station. If you can get one coming regularly every night, he is more likely to get confident enough for you to see him through your scope. This could take many evenings, or it might

S&CTV

Head over to our new YouTube channel, Shooting & Country TV to find all your favourite shooting content brought to life on screen.
bit.ly/2XkNvTW



PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN

Night vision gear is now much more affordable and will transform your foxing



Each and every fox kill is a unique situation and brings its own set of challenges

PICTURE: DEAN HARRISON

be a case of sneaking there first thing in morning before it gets light and waiting. If you are involved with deer stalking, you will know how successful it can be at first light and this is also the case for foxes. That first hour can be very productive.

Nothing is a given when it comes to fox shooting. This is especially applicable if it's an old, wise one that you are after. You can try and speed things up calling. This can even work on an old fox if he is really hungry. I did a video about calling for Shooting & Country TV that you might find useful.

Tooting my own horn

Like I said, we had a good season, but two shoots ago we had a big dog fox come out of one of the cover strips and run right through the line of Guns. After the drive, the leg-pulling started. It was all in good fun, but there was no way I was going to go through that again! I started to put some bait out next to a telegraph pole, across from the cover, and I also put a trail cam on it. After two nights, it started to go off. Upon checking the footage, I saw it was the fox I was after, who had arrived about two hours after dark. The wind was good, but the ground was soaking wet so I would have to stay at the gateway. At least, that was my plan.

'You can't help but admire foxes' ability to tap into different food sources throughout the year – they are perfect hunting machines'

I managed to get home just before dark the following night, grabbed my kit, and rushed up there. It was freezing, but I wrapped up warm, as I knew it could be a couple of hours before he turned up judging by the time he came the night before.

Setting up my sticks outside my truck, I rested my .243 on the window and got out my thermal spotter. On top of the rifle was the ATN 4K X-Sight pro digital Smart Day/Night-time scope. It was already too dark to see, so I set it up on NV straight away. I had only been there 15 minutes, when out in the field to my right I picked up the fox with the thermal trotting up the field without a care in the world. I turned on the IR and thought, "this is it!" I was just moving around a bit to line up the fox when suddenly... HONK! I'd accidentally pushed the bloody horn with my elbow.

In an instant, what would have been a straightforward fox suddenly turned into a panic situation on my part. The fox just stopped in its tracks, looked over at me, and to my amazement, carried on walking up to the bait. There, it stopped to sniff the ground, and that was when I let fly. My aim was true, and the fox leapt up and went straight back down, though my heart was still thumping from that horn going off!

When the dust settled, I was happy to discover it was indeed the fox I was after. A big dog. It meant that the next week I wouldn't have to take all that stick again. I drove back home where Shell asked me what I'd forgotten as I had only been gone just over half an hour. The whole experience illustrated the difference having the NV makes. It does speed things up, as I wouldn't have been able to see him with a standard daytime scope. ■


Trail cams are becoming an essential piece of kit and when used correctly can make all the difference

PICTURE: DOM HOLTAM

ONE FOR THE POT



Buttermilk Partridge Burgers

End-of-season treats

While the rest of the world seems to be taking on fad diets and dry January, we are enjoying the fruits of our labours with some delicious meals from the Game for Anything kitchen!

With the season coming to an end, I think we all have to be grateful that we have managed to get out shooting again this year and, more importantly, completed a full season! With lots of birds still about when we get to this stage, it is important to make sure we are still clearing the game cart at the end of each shoot day.



We are so fortunate to have a steady supply of sustainable meat at our fingertips

PICTURES: GAME FOR ANYTHING

This is, of course, the perfect time to be putting some game meat aside for the months ahead. We always try, when time will allow, to prepare the birds in the way we will be using them, whether as a whole bird, breasts, legs or minced. Then even going as far as making them into burgers, sausages or dicing before they go into the freezer if this is what we intend to use them for.

This month, we have broken that New Year diet plan for a couple of end-of-season treats, one of which is our famed partridge burger. Of course, when it comes to a good burger bun, opinions are divided. A good bun does not make a great burger, but with a bad bun it will not matter how good the filling is – it will always be a bad burger! We have gone for our enriched burger bun which you can find the recipe for on our website.

Pheasant, as we know people will say, is dry and tough so a great way to overcome this is to use our schnitzel recipe, where the breast is butterflied and tenderised by hammering out.

And everyone has their opinion on the best way to cook chips, but here in the GFA kitchen we go for the twice-cooked method. We hope you like them!

BUTTERMILK PARTRIDGE BURGERS

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- 8 partridge breasts
- 300ml buttermilk
- 200g self-raising flour
- 2tsp dried oregano
- 2tsp dried thyme
- 2tsp cajun spice mix
- 2tsp garlic salt
- 2tsp onion granules
- 2tsp celery salt
- ½tsp ground black pepper
- 1tsp smoked paprika
- 4 baked potatoes – peeled and cut into your own preferred style of chips

TO SERVE

- Enriched burger bun
- Burger sauce
- Lettuce
- Beef tomato

METHOD

THE BURGER

1. Trim up and remove any sinew from the partridge breasts.
2. Place them in a bowl (not metal), cover with the buttermilk and coat all the breasts thoroughly.
3. Leave to marinate for 2-3 hours or preferably overnight in the fridge.
4. When you are ready to cook the burgers, place all the dry ingredients to make the seasoned flour into another bowl and combine.
5. Remove the partridge from the buttermilk and coat in the seasoned flour.
6. Shake off any excess flour.
7. Using a deep fat fryer or a deep frying pan, heat vegetable oil to 180°C.
8. Fry in small batches of 4 breasts at a time for 5-6 minutes until golden and crispy.
9. Remove and place on kitchen roll to remove excess oil.
10. Place in the burger buns, add a slice of tomato and top with a good helping of burger sauce.

THE CHIPS

1. Once chopped up, place in a bowl of water.
2. Heat the deep fat fryer to 130°C.
3. Remove the chips from the water and dry them by laying on a tea towel.
4. Carefully place into the frying basket and lower into the oil.
5. Cook until they are soft (test with a small knife) but without taking on any colour.
6. Remove and place in a bowl lined with kitchen paper.
7. When you are ready to cook, increase the deep fat fryer temp to 180°C, place the chips back into the basket and again carefully lower into the oil.
8. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes until golden.
9. Take out of the fryer and remove any excess oil by placing them on some kitchen paper.

CONTACT

If you would like to talk to Mark and Chris about catering for an event you are planning, you can contact them via their website, www.gameforanything.co.uk, where you will find more details about what services they can offer.

PHEASANT SCHNITZEL WITH SALSA VERDE

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- 4 pheasant breasts
- 200ml milk
- 200g panko breadcrumbs
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 100g plain flour
- Salt and pepper
- 50g unsalted butter
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 handfuls of flat leaf parsley, finely chopped
- 1 handful of basil, finely chopped
- 1 handful of fresh mint, finely chopped
- 1tbsp capers, finely chopped
- 1tbsp gherkins, finely chopped
- 6 anchovy fillets, finely chopped
- 1tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1tbsp cider vinegar
- 10tbsp olive oil

METHOD

1. Trim up and remove any sinew from the pheasant breasts.
2. Butterfly the breasts.
3. Place the breasts between two sheets of greaseproof paper and using a rolling pin, hit them to flatten them out.
4. Place them in a bowl (not metal) and cover with the milk.
5. Leave to marinate for 2-3 hours or preferably overnight in the fridge.
6. When you are ready to cook, remove the breasts from the fridge.
7. Into three separate bowls, place the breadcrumbs, beaten egg and flour. Season the flour with salt & pepper.
8. Dip the pheasant breasts into the flour and shake off any excess, then dip into the egg, followed by the breadcrumbs. Repeat until you have coated all of the breasts.
9. Lay onto some greaseproof paper.
10. Using a frying pan, melt the butter over a medium heat then fry the breasts for 4-5 minutes until golden and crispy, turning halfway through.
11. Remove from the heat and place on kitchen roll to remove excess oil.
12. To make the salsa verde, place all the ingredients into a bowl and combine.
13. Perfect when served with potato wedges! ■

Recipe cards



Some of the recipes featured in this column over the past few months now form part of a new range of recipe cards that Game for Anything is offering to shoots.

If you'd like some GFA cards to hand out to the Guns at your shoot, or if you'd just like to find out more, please contact one of the guys at GFA:
Chris Marney: chris@gameforanything.co.uk
Mark Robson: mark@gameforanything.co.uk



Pheasant Schnitzel

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THE MARKETPLACE

Your one-stop shop for shooting gear

Welcome to the Marketplace. In this section you will find everything you need to know about the kit you need to go shooting with – from product tests and reviews to in-depth features.

Whatever you want to know about or buy, we've got it covered. And if we've missed something that you'd like to see tested, drop us a line by post, telephone or email at the usual addresses.

INSIDE THE MARKETPLACE THIS MONTH...





PRODUCT NEWS

Rigby leather binocular case

With spring on its way, and the game season over, now is the time when many of us will be dusting off our binos and going out for a spot of bird watching. This case, handmade in South Africa by fine leather craftsmen Els & Co., is adorned with the Rigby name and 'double R' logo and features an adjustable canvas and leather strap for both comfort and style.

A stunning bino case, which is available in three sizes: small, medium and large.



£300
johnrigbyandco.com

Ogdens Autoslip car case

We all know how important it is to safely and securely transport shotguns and rifles from A to B. How many times have you left it on the back seat of the car only to arrive at your destination to find it on the floor? Well, Ogdens have designed a great solution.

Made from 600 denier, heavy-duty polyester with a 6mm foam padding and a black velour interior, this 50" (127mm) x 14" (35cm) slip suspends from the car's headrests and hangs securely in position allowing quick and easy access.

The overall appearance is designed to give the discreet appearance of a car organizer, while two large exterior pockets provide storage for your kit.

Plus, adjustable straps mean you can adjust the height/drop of your case to suit your car.

£54.99
ogdensshootingsupplies.co.uk


The overall appearance is very discreet


The velour interior keeps your gun safe


Adjustable straps for ease of use

FoxPro Inferno electronic caller

The FoxPro range of callers has, for many years, been the benchmark all other electronic callers are measured by and used by professional vermin controllers around the world.

With a preloaded list of 75 call sounds and the ability to download up to 200 from FoxPro's extensive online library, you are sure to find the perfect calls to lure that elusive fox within range. Weighing in at 1.5lb, the Inferno is light enough and small enough to cram in a large jacket pocket or pack making it much easier to transport into the field.

Electronic callers offer distinct advantages in that they can replicate authentic calls and sounds that are hard to imitate, and can also be remotely controlled. This means the quarry is drawn in towards the caller rather than to you, meaning there's less chance you will be spotted as you line up a shot.

The Inferno comes with an easy-to-use controller putting functions like volume, call selection and sound mute at your fingertips with a backlit display. This is an excellent caller at a reasonable price, and should not be overlooked by any serious fox controller.

£199.95
bushwear.co.uk



Pulsar handheld thermal imager

Without doubt the biggest game changer to hit the night shooting market in the past 20 years has been the introduction of affordable handheld thermal imagers. Pulsar would have to be the market-leading brand for these, and all their products are of a very high quality. Thermal units may not be cheap, but they are worth every penny. Prices have come down as more and more people have adopted their use, and the technology has improved so has the quality of product your money will buy. Thermal imagers work by picking up temperature differences in objects and using them to create an image from these heat signatures. The ability to see your quarry without it knowing you are there is a major advantage, and allows you to spot quarry you could easily miss when using a conventional lamp. There is a vast range of units now available, each with various additional functions and picture quality as you edge toward the upper end of the market, including features such as in-built recording, colour palettes, and even laser rangefinders. These units are ideal for all night-time hunting from ratting and rabbiting through to foxing, and can also be used during the day for spotting deer.

From £1,349.95
pulsar-nv.com



If you're in the market for a thermal, be sure to check out products from other top brands such as HikMicro and InfiRay.

Sightmark Wraith HD day/night scope

The Wraith HD 4-32 x 50 digital scope has to be the best value riflescope currently on the market. It offers high-quality colour day images and black and white/green at night time at the touch of a button.

With a wide range of magnification, recording ability and, simply, ease of use, the Sightmark Wraith makes the perfect all-round scope for all types of pest control. It mounts directly to a Picatinny rail, and can be used on anything from an air rifle to a full bore rifle. The Wraith comes with a basic IR which is suitable for ratting, rabbiting and general foxing, but with the addition of an upgraded aftermarket IR the scope will compete with anything else on the market, allowing for extreme long-range shots.

The unit records HD footage to an SD card (not included) which can easily be uploaded to a pc or reviewed in the field through the scope using playback mode.

This scope is comparable to other units costing twice the price, in a no-nonsense, easy-to-operate package, suitable for all types of nocturnal and daytime pest control.

£473.95
scottcountry.co.uk

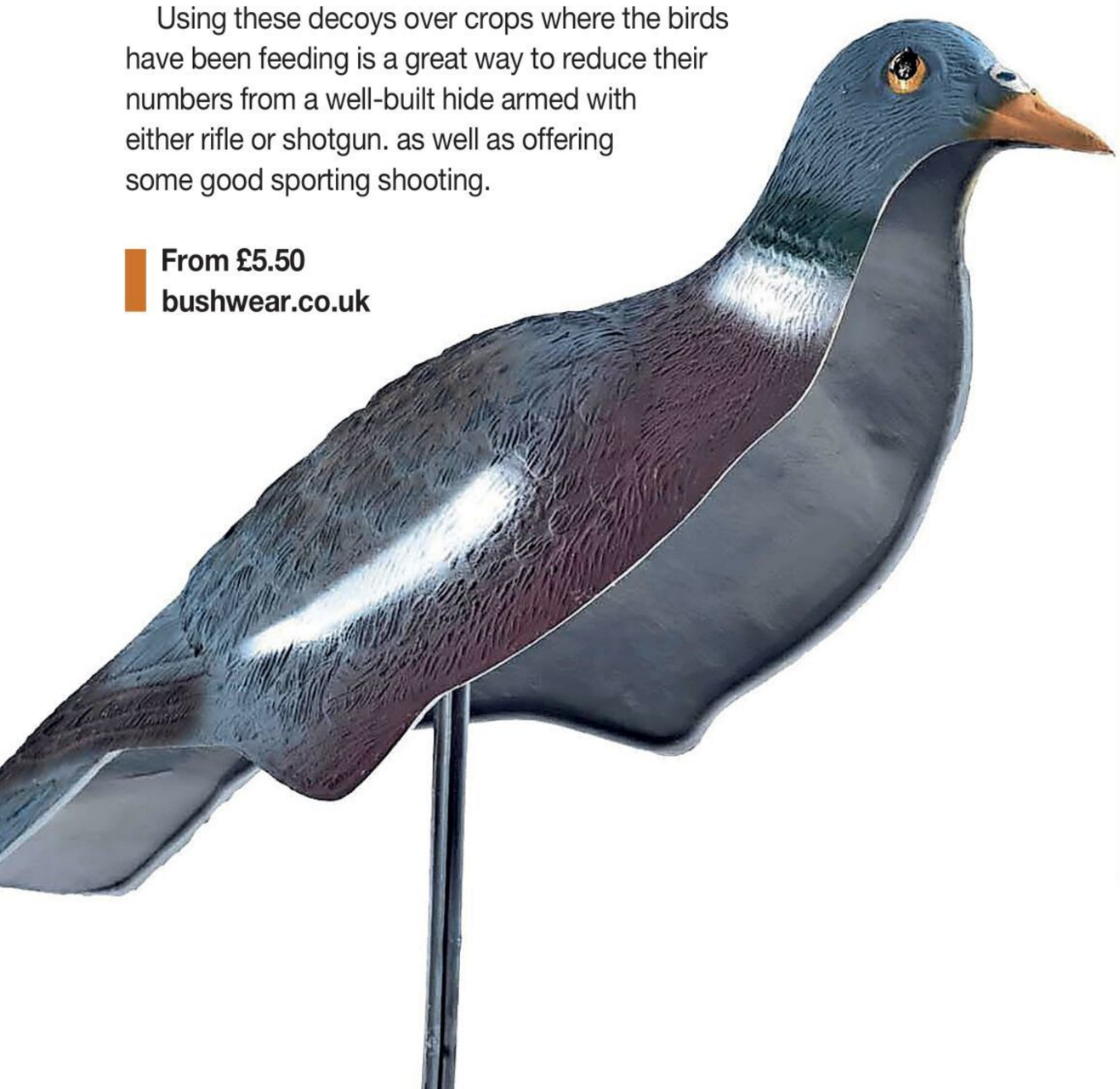


Flocked half-body decoys

Decoying crows, pigeons and other pest species can be challenging, so realistic decoys are a must. The flock coating on these decoys give them a realistic, non-reflective matt look, even when wet. These half-bodied decoys are extremely lightweight and easy to carry, with multiple birds stacked inside one another. Decoying always seems to work best with larger numbers of birds, and as these stack together they take up less room in a decoy bag allowing more to be carried into the field. Stake your decoys into the ground using spring-top spikes, and they will also rock in the breeze giving them the appearance they are feeding adding eye-catching movement to your pattern.

Using these decoys over crops where the birds have been feeding is a great way to reduce their numbers from a well-built hide armed with either rifle or shotgun. as well as offering some good sporting shooting.

From £5.50
bushwear.co.uk



Wicked Lights Rekon tripod



The Rekon tripod is one of the most innovative products to hit the market in the past 10 years. This style of tripod was originally produced and designed for military applications, but soon became popular with rifle shooters in both competition and hunting circles. The Rekon offers a steady support for your rifle and can be quickly adjusted for height as well as uneven terrain. It can be used from standing, sitting and even prone positions thanks to its clever design.

The tripod can be either mounted directly to the bottom of a rifle with a suitable rail, or you can purchase the pig saddle option which includes a locking clamp, which is suitable for almost any rifle. The legs are made from carbon fibre so weight is kept to a minimum making them comfortable to carry in the field. The head of the tripod can be adjusted using just a single locking knob, offering 360° rotation and elevation.

From £299.99
scottcountry.co.uk

CARTRIDGE CHOICE

Mark Ripley takes a look at shot sizes and what might be the best choice for various game and pest species

Choosing the right cartridge for your chosen quarry is very much a subject of personal choice, and we all have our own chosen cartridges, usually based on previous successes.

When it comes to brands, there's often not a lot of difference between them, apart from perhaps the box and the price! That said, a brand you trust to serve you well inspires confidence, and this is often the key to its success!

In reality, the most important factor is going to be the combination of shot size and charge weight. A heavier charge will add more pellets to the pattern and increase the potential effectiveness of the chosen cartridge, but will come at the price of additional felt recoil. If using a semi-auto, this may be an advantage in the form of more reliable cycling, However, in a light side-by-side game gun, this could make shooting uncomfortable for some and therefore have a detrimental effect on one's shooting.

By and large, many of us will favour No.6 shot size with a charge weight of around 30g or 32g as a good all-rounder. This is a popular load for pigeons, pheasants, rabbits and general game and for a good reason – it's a very effective combination of a good size shot and a good spread.

Sometimes though, on slightly tougher game such as crows or high pheasants, going for a slightly larger shot size, such as No.5, gives us a little extra punch.

Crows in particular can be tough little numbers, and I know I've shot plenty in the past that have taken both barrels of No.6s and hardly flinched before seeing them stagger in flight and dropping in the distance.

For larger game such as duck, I would also favour No.5s and for geese I would step up to anything from No.3s to BBs. I would go for a heavier charge weight too, especially if they were likely to be particularly high.

Consider a bigger shot size when shooting high or particularly large or tough game to maximise the cartridge's potential.

When it comes to foxing with a shotgun, I will always go with around 50g of BBs and through a tight choke to ensure clean kills. Foxes are extremely tough creatures and I will generally use a semi-auto. Even if I bowl one over with the first shot, I will fire a quick second shot if I see there is still any slight movement.

As a rule, there's not much call for a shot size smaller than No.6 for game, with perhaps the exception of snipe. These are small fast-moving birds that don't need a large pellet to ensure a clean kill. It's better to use a size No.7 or No.8 with these birds to give a better pattern and higher probability of connecting with these quick and evasive little birds. ■



We often choose brands which inspire confidence - and that in itself can be the difference between failure and success

PICTURE: MARK RIPLEY

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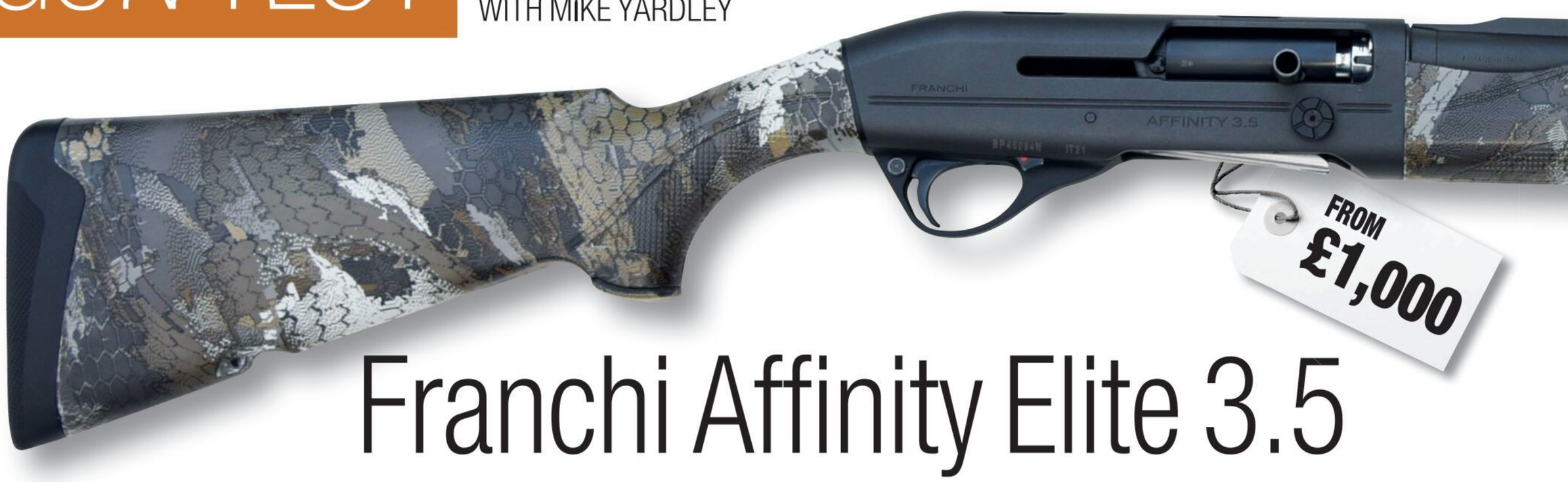


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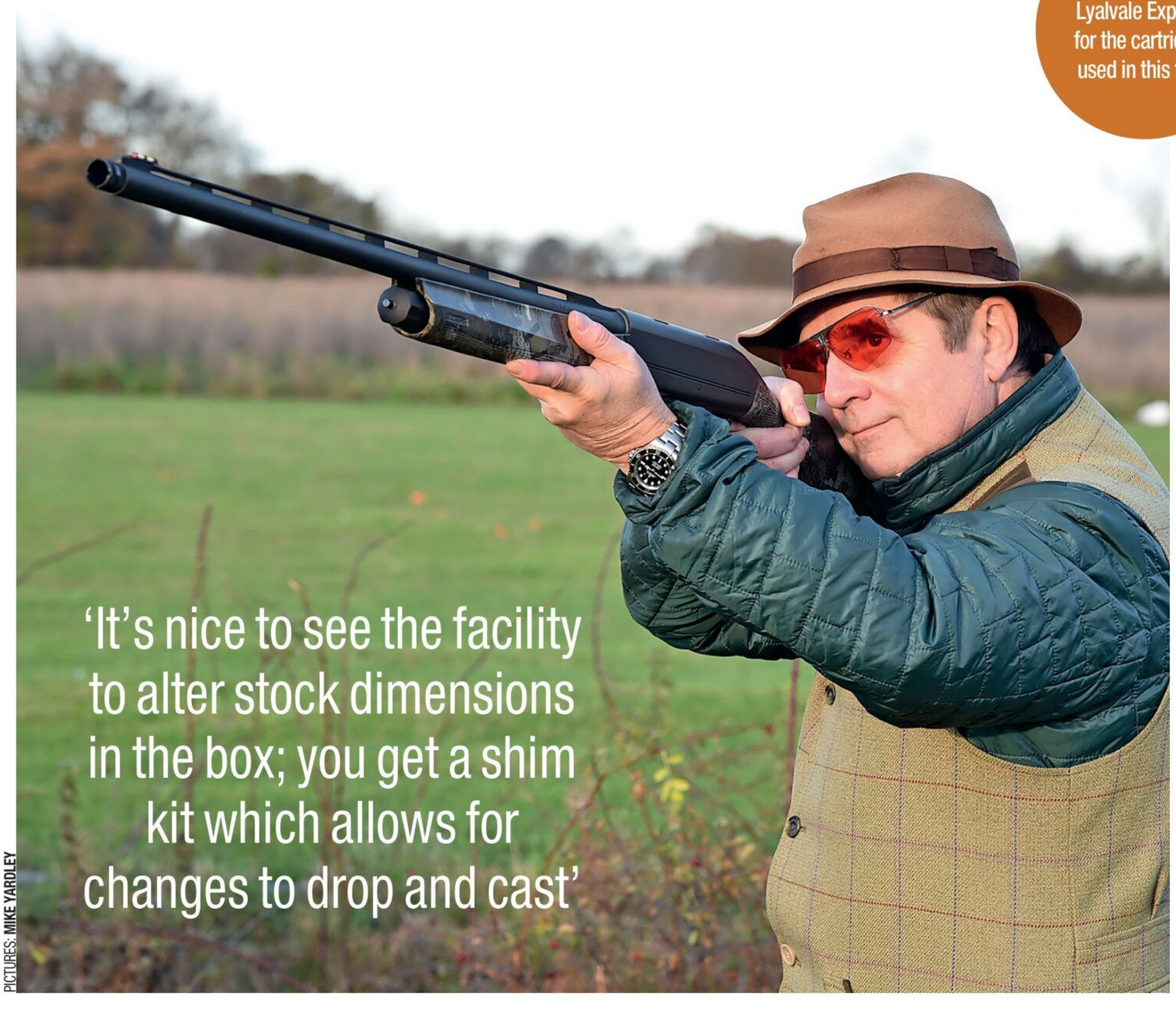
Franchi Affinity Elite 3.5

With its synthetic stock, corrosion resistance and inertia operation, this steel-proofed semi-auto is a great, affordable option for the foreshore, says Mike Yardley

This month's test gun is a Franchi Affinity Elite 3.5 supplied by GMK of Fareham. It's a long chambered (3 1/2"/89mm), steel-proofed, inertia-operated, semi-auto with an RRP from £1,000. So, it's competitively priced compared to some of its Benelli stablemates which tend to be in the £1,500+ price range (though basic 3" Benelli models begin just over the £1,000 mark).

First impressions are of a well-specified, modern repeater with a trendy 'OPTIFADE' camo finish to the synthetic stock and corrosion-resistant Cerakoted barrel and receiver – a bonus for a gun that might be used under extreme conditions. The barrel is available only in 28", with a raised 9mm ventilated rib. Three extended mutli-chokes are supplied. The gun weighs in at a whisker under 7lb - lighter than average, but near my ideal weight for a repeater that may need to be carried with other kit on the foreshore.

The test gun is 3½" chambered as noted, but you can get the similar 3" chambered, MAX-5 camo Afinity 3 with an RRP of £850. There is an FAC 3+1 mag capacity version of the test gun (as well as the standard Affinity) and an extension tube may further increase capacity to seven rounds. Although, the Franchi range is intended to offer value, these guns have actions made by Benelli and barrels hammer forged by Beretta. Many action and trigger parts are interchangeable with Benelli (the Affinity itself is quite similar to the M2). Franchi semi-automatic shotguns were gas-operated (save the old long-recoil 48AL) but changed to inertia when Beretta bought them. Beretta themselves adopted the Benelli rotating bolt (as seen in the test gun) on their 391 Xtrema. Corporately, it's all quite complex now. Franchi exist and operate as a separate brand but is headquartered at the Benelli facility at Ubino. Beretta itself has two more factories in Italy, and two in the US and also a manufacturing facility for less expensive semi-auto guns in Turkey (but no parts for its own guns are made there). There is a Spanish choke factory as well. It's an extensive empire – Beretta itself, Benelli, Franchi, Holland & Holland, Tikka, Uberti, Burris optics and several others.



PICTURES: MIKE YARDLEY

Thanks to Lyalvale Express for the cartridges used in this test.

What of the 3½" shell? This was developed in the late 1980s by Federal in association with Mossberg who created a pump-action gun to suit it for ducks and turkey shooting. Semi-automatics soon followed, notably from Benelli and Beretta. I have to confess to having shot very few 3½" loads, and not that many 3" ones in my shooting life. The advantage of the 'Roman Candle' cartridges is increased shot payload – but, and for me it's a big 'but', at the potential cost of greater recoil (and much greater actual cost). I have never been afflicted by 'magnumitis'. I like light recoiling shotguns. That said, with the advent of steel, 3" cartridges begin to make more sense for wildfowling (I still use 70mm).

Anything more to be said of the Affinity 3.5? The action uses, like functionally similar Benellis, a short

ALTERNATIVELY

Try the Affinity 3 for up to 3"/76mm shells starting at £850



stiff spring between the rotating bolt-head and the main part of the bolt. This compresses on firing eventually unlocking the mechanism on full compression. Once the cartridge is fired and ejected, a long return spring around the magazine tube, which is itself compressed in the firing cycle, pushes the working parts back into battery.

Anyone exploring inertia operation as seen in Franchi and Benelli guns must be impressed with it's ingenuity and essential simplicity. The only downside compared to gas operation is that felt recoil may be greater. The test gun is, however, fitted with a particularly efficient polymer 'TSA' recoil pad (with 13 and 32mm retrofit options) and it's nice to see the facility to alter stock dimensions in the box too. You get a shim kit which allows for changes to drop and cast.

Technical history

I've always been fascinated by inertia actions. They have been developed considerably since Hiram Maxim first mused on both gas and recoil operation circa 1880. In the meantime, the lever and pump-action shotguns were perfected creating the basic magazine tube below the barrel configuration for the gas and recoil operated guns that followed (which are, essentially, similar to pump guns using recoil or gas to operate their mechanism instead of hand power). John Moses Browning came up with the first successful semi-auto shotgun circa 1900 (in this the barrel moved). The Danish Sjögren arrived shortly after (in this the action mass, rather disconcertingly, wizzes back towards your head on firing). Gas operated shotguns were perfected after WWII (much influenced by military rifles). And, in 1966, Benelli patented their inertia-operated gun. These have been made both with and without a rotating bolt-head. The test gun falls into the former category. It's advantage over the gas gun is that its simpler mechanism has fewer complications; there's no need to bleed off gas from the barrel and no regulating valve. It's easier to clean and very reliable assuming the load is suitable. ■

SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS

I always start testing on the No2 station at Skeet (which is my datum bird for all gun reviews). The Affinity did the biz, breaking target after target until we moved to the middle to make it harder, then on to Trap and Sporting birds with equal success. The gun shot better than expected frankly (as well as any semi-automatic recently tested).

It didn't feel particularly refined, though. The grip surface and size could be improved, and, the trigger has some creep, but it shot well nevertheless with no malfunctions using 70mm loads (I had nothing longer). I liked the raised 9mm rib. The balance point is on the front edge of the action. The 14½" length of pull suited me. I also liked the extended bolt-handle and bolt-release button.

With Half choke fitted I struggled to miss. It was forgiving too. I mis-mounted on a couple of shots, having trouble with achieving good purchase with cold hands, but still broke the target.

Overall, this is a well-considered gun at a not unreasonable price. If you don't need 3½" capability, however, consider the equally good Affinity 3.

WE LIKE

- The easy to clean and assemble inertia action
- The Cerakote (thin film ceramic) finish to metal parts
- The sensible field weight

WE DISLIKE

- The trigger has a little creep
- The grip is quite thin and lacking in purchase

TECH SPECS

- Make: Franchi
- Model: Affinity 3.5
- Action type: rotary-bolt inertia
- Bore: 12
- Chamber: 3½" (89mm) steel shot proof
- Barrel: 28" (only option)
- Rib: ventilated mm
- Weight: 7lb

UP CLOSE



A 3½" chamber allows for heavy cartridges to be used, making for an ideal wildfowling gun



A Cerakoted action and prominent cocking lever make this a practical gun in harsh conditions with cold wet hands!



The Affinity Elite 3.5 comes supplied with three multichokes and a fibre optic style foresight



Although Mike found the grip a little slim, it didn't stop him connecting with a multitude of targets while testing the gun



Wonderful whoopers

Encounters with migratory wildfowl are always special moments for Alan Jarrett, whether the trip out involves the small groups over the Isle of Sheppey or the great skeins in Iceland

Ever since I first peeped over a seawall on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent and gazed across that expanse of saltmarsh and mudflats, the sheer breathtaking beauty of such places has gripped me. It was then that I fell hopelessly in love with these wild places and with the sport that has flowed from them. So many times my passage has been halted by some spell-binding moment. Another place, another shore, another passage of birds – all there to enthral me and cause me to marvel at nature's creations. Over the years there have been many of those 'wow!' moments. Whether it be the diving passage of teal coming in the gloaming to the slushy saltmarsh edges, the massed battalions of pinkfeet as they head inland to feed, or the almost spiritual calling of sandhill cranes as they head back to roost after a day on the feed. All these things and many more have captivated me.

Often, there is a certain familiarity for the wonder is a frequent and yet still a transfixing event. The 'wow!' moments may come less often, but they are all the better when they do arrive, and never cease to remind me why I love this sport so much.

It happened a couple of times this past season. Once, it was anticipated and expected, and there was no disappointment because of that. The second occasion it came completely out of the blue, and it suddenly became possible to live through some 90 minutes of sheer magic.

The sun shone from an almost clear sky, whilst white cumulus hurried across the heavens in thrall to a strong wind. Ahead lay the river bank, and there was the opportunity to hunt the edge out for an hour or so in search of a mallard, a snipe, or perhaps even a wily marsh pheasant. From somewhere at the back of my memory came a sound that took me back fleetingly to another place and another time. Then, as they rose above the trees, they could be seen as the Vikings would have seen them soaring over an Icelandic fjord.

A breed apart

Whooper swans in the air are a far cry from the lumbering flight of our commonly seen mute swan. They exude grace and elegance as they cleave the sky on wings which sigh through the air rather than drum it laboriously in the manner of the mute swan. The five birds headed out to eventually sweep down to a far-off green oasis in the midst of the peat-black arable plough. Soon, more calling came from the far side of a long line of poplar trees and another dozen birds came into view.

I walked for a while with the dogs foraging close at hand, and as the minutes ticked by, more and more of the majestic birds came through. In skeins of a dozen, or 20 and once 40, rending the air with the calling.

At our boundary, it was time to turn back. By then the swan flight was over, and they straddled the distant green as a band of solid white as they grazed to sustain those huge bodies.

The elegant flight of these graceful whooper swans is a delight to witness

PICTURE: FRANK FICHTMÜLLER / GETTY

‘We revelled in the opportunity to hunt the edge of the river bank for an hour or so in search of snipe’

PICTURE: **DRAKULIREN / GETTY**



Opportunities arise in the morning and evening in Iceland as the geese move from their roosting sites

PICTURE: 1TOMM / GETTY

Then they started to come back, and all thought of the walk was forgotten as my backside settled on the side of the river bank to watch and count the return flight. They came in trumpeting wave upon wave so that at times there where skeins almost nose-to-tail as they headed back the way they had come.

They soared around me and above me, calling all the while as they went. Amongst the dazzling white of the adults were plenty of dirty-looking greyer birds where the cygnets flew in unison with their peers.

By the time I had stirred myself, the flight was thinning out, so back at the car the distant green field was empty. But still the whoopers called from another field nearby, and these were in addition to the 320 counted through on their reverse flight. The next time at that place there were none, and that merely emphasised what a unique experience it had been for me. It reminded me of other places and times.

On our last morning in Canada, in pursuit of snow goose and cranes, the sky was alive with great masses of yelping geese. Then, as if to bring some semblance of order to proceedings, the great tundra swans had passed through – high-flying and imperious.

Everlasting memories

Our first evening in Iceland had been to arrive and prepare for the goose hunt of the following day. We sat on a cold veranda tucked into warm wildfowling clothing and marvelled as the whoopers come in skein upon skein from some far-off marsh to their watery roost nearby.

On another occasion, we had lain in an Icelandic marsh in the hope that greylag geese would come close enough for a shot. In the end, I managed to dump one over a wire fence into long unkempt grass from whence it was eventually retrieved.

The marsh was dotted with great unturned white feathers, some of which blew hither and thither as the cold wind gusted through, and the swans came to the marsh on great sighing pinions. When they passed, they seemed to be so close one could reach up and touch those great black paddles tucked against the white underside.



It's not uncommon to see stray phasants in marshland settings as these landscapes mimic their natural environments in Asia

PICTURE: JMROCEK / GETTY

Our guide suggested we shoot just one each, for he no doubt had visions of steaming swan flesh upon the plate. But I could no more have contemplated shooting one of those whoopers than of shooting myself!

So, whether it be a river bank in the fens, or an estuary in Iceland, this was how the Vikings must have seen them 1,000 years ago when they came to that magical island. Black volcanic sand of the shore, mountains and glaciers rising into the clouds, and those great white apparitions calling to them as though they were the very gods from Valhalla. ■

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CORVID CONTROL

Improve the pest control management on your land with these expert tips from Mark Ripley on decoying, sniping and snaring

The need to control predators is never more important than this time of year. With spring almost upon us, Mother Nature is about to start her cycle once again with a new batch of young songbirds and mammals. With increased restrictions on shooting and trapping, as well as more machine-based farming methods, less time is invested in the control of predators, especially of the corvid variety.

Fox control has become somewhat of a sport for many, and with the current night vision and thermal products on the market, fox numbers are generally kept in check where needed. That said, many foxes have now taken to the urban lifestyle with its rich sources of food and shelter, supplying regular replacements to those culled in the countryside surrounding the ever-expanding towns and cities.

With the constant changes and restrictions to the general licences we all use to control corvids, many people have eased up on shooting crows in particular for fear of falling foul of the law. Shooting crows over decoys can be an effective way to reduce their numbers. However, it's not just crows that will be attracted, with jackdaws and rooks also keen to join the decoys.

With the need to stay well hidden before quickly shooting incoming birds, it can be difficult to differentiate between the species, especially in low light conditions meaning depending on the reasons you're shooting them, you could find yourself shooting outside the law. Crows and magpies are regular predators of young chicks and eggs from the nests of songbirds and game birds, as well as any animal small enough for them to kill. Of course, crows and magpies will also attack livestock and are capable of killing newly-born or sick lambs. Even adult ewes are not free from harm from these birds, with any sheep left stuck on its back or tangled in bramble, likely to quickly be attacked – usually having their eyes pecked from their skulls in their weakened state.

Having seen the aftermath of such attacks and having to dispatch sheep in terrible states, I've no time for crows or magpies and would happily shoot them at any given opportunity if I could. Thanks to Mr Packham and the rest of the Wild Justice clowns, controlling corvids has become increasingly more restricted and there is now the need for a very targeted approach to dealing with them to remain confidently within the law.

Before you undertake any culling of corvids, I'd urge you to check the latest changes to the general licences to ensure you understand what you can and can't legally do (see p8 for more on this). Once you are satisfied you have good legal grounds to control these pests, you can look at some effective methods of culling them.

Decoying

Decoying crows is a good way to make some serious inroads into their numbers when they are targeting crops. Crows (and magpies) are extremely intelligent birds with equally keen eyesight, so staying well hidden is key to luring them into range. You will need to make sure your hide is well hidden and that you are not visible or silhouetted behind any netting, or you will be quickly spotted. Camouflaged clothing is a must in my mind, and covering your hands and face is also a definite advantage.

Crows will quickly spot a dead bird on its back, so I like to get out of the hide anytime the action

TOP TIP

To encourage birds to land more confidently, add shot birds as decoys to the pattern. The more decoy birds you have the better.



PICTURE: ERIC PRIOR

slows up and prop these birds up. I always carry a bunch of cut bits of stiff wire about 8" long which I use to prop up the shot birds. By pushing one end of the wire up into the underside of the birds jaw, and the other end into the ground, you can tuck the wings in and make a realistic-looking decoy.

Generally, I will peg out all the birds I shoot and bring in the plastic decoys once I have a good number of birds out. As a rule, the more decoys/dead birds you have pegged out, the better incoming birds will decoy.

Sniping

This is a good way to deal with crows and magpies around the lambing fields, as well as targeting particularly troublesome birds. Shooting birds with a rifle is effective, but it's also time consuming as they need to be on the ground, still, with a safe backstop and within range. Shooting them with a centrefire allows you some extra range, but it's an expensive method of control!

This is the ideal situation for a .17 HMR. Being reasonably cheap to shoot, accurate and flat shooting, it's the perfect rifle for this kind of pest control. Most farmers and keepers don't have the time to sit and shoot crows and magpies all day, but will often be happy to have someone else do it purely for sport, so be sure to offer your services any opportunity you have during the lambing season – you may also bag yourself a bonus fox!

Another good way to draw corvids into range is baiting. This is an especially effective way to get them on the ground and can be carried out with just an air rifle or .22 rimfire. I find the best tactic for this is to use a freshly shot rabbit and open it up on its back with the entrails exposed. Add a few plucks of white belly fur around it to make it look as though it's already been fed on, and you will soon attract the attention of any passing crow or magpie, especially at dawn.

You can also use a dead bird as a lure. Magpies and crows will often come to inspect a dead comrade, offering the chance of a quick shot or two. Sometimes, the birds are so preoccupied calling and pecking at a fallen victim, they neglect to keep an eye out for danger.

Trapping

This can be a really effective method of control, especially for magpies and crows. The use of a Larsen trap, if done properly, is ideal as it's working all day while you are busy doing other things. Initially, you will either need to entice a bird into the trap to use as a decoy by means of some form of bait, or you will need to see if you can acquire a decoy bird from someone else who has already trapped an additional bird. A good form of trap bait can be a few chicken eggs in a pretend nest to entice your first bird into the trap.

Once you have obtained a decoy bird, you will need to keep it fed, watered and sheltered. Also, don't forget to check the trap regularly. There are certain regulations you must abide by when using a Larsen trap, so be sure you have read and understood these before you start.



A Larsen trap is an excellent method of corvid control, working when you are busy doing other things

The idea is that the decoy bird will be seen as an intruder on another bird's territory, enticing then into the trap's catchment compartment in an attempt to drive the intruder away. This compartment has a perch cut into sections and placed against a spring-loaded door. The bird drops into the trap and lands on the perch which collapses under its weight, releasing the door, and trapping the bird alive in the catchment compartment. The advantage of catching birds live is that non-target species can be easily released unharmed. Occasionally you can catch more than you bargained for, and it's not unheard of to catch the odd squirrel or fox cub that has managed to find its way into such a trap! Some of these traps have two or more compartments to trap further birds. Once a bird has been caught, it should be quickly and humanely dispatched and the trap reset.

Spring and summer are the most effective times of the year for trapping, because this is when the birds are most territorial. At the end of the season, even the most despising trapper will likely take pity on the call bird who has spent the season in the trap and release it back into the wild having earned its freedom. ■



Using a dead rabbit is a great way to lure magpies into air rifle range

TX Caption Contrast 2

PICTURES: MARK RIPLEY



Tim is Development Officer for the National Gamekeepers' Organisation (NGO)

Protecting our uplands

Tim Weston offers an update on the ongoing debates surrounding grouse shooting, and shares some findings of a recent report that will be extremely useful in the years ahead

The hen harrier seems to be the one thing that many campaign groups like to use as a device to kick the driven grouse shooting 'industry' as they call it. They use this one bird as a kind of barometer for how bad driven grouse shooting is in their view, and don't tend to look at many of the facts. Probably because they wouldn't fit the narrative they are trying to present.

Firstly, there are huge conservation benefits to a wide range of species. For example, wading birds do really well on moors managed for driven grouse shooting. In many places, these very same birds are incredibly rare such as the curlew and redshank, but both are thriving on our moors. A really good comparison is the uplands of England and those of Wales. In England, the uplands sing with the sound of small and large birds as well as raptors like the merlin and, yes, the hen harrier, as well as a whole plethora of others. In the spring time, the English uplands are a wonderous place and this is mainly concentrated around the areas that are managed for driven grouse shooting. Wales, in contrast, has virtually no grouse shooting at all, and apart from one very small area where grouse are shot, the Welsh uplands are a pretty desolate place in terms of wildlife. I wonder if that is what these characters want for the rest of the UK, too? That surely can't be the goal of getting driven grouse shooting banned, could it?

The fact is that the hen harrier isn't doing all that badly. Yes, things could improve, but you don't get nature to work like that. It takes time, and the grouse keepers of England are doing a great job of helping the hen harrier thrive on the moors once again. The figures speak for themselves, and so do the facts from Natural England. In 2021 we had one of the best hen harrier breeding seasons on record. This was mainly due to a combination of good weather and an abundance of voles and other prey. We often forget that the hen harrier is reliant on these species as well as the unique habitat that grouse keepers create for the birds.

Natural England have been tagging hen harriers for many years now, and this has shown some really interesting results. For example, one bird that was tagged in 2019 called Colin stopped transmitting in April 2021. However, he was photographed this breeding season and positively identified at the nest. The trouble is, he would have been listed as "missing in suspicious circumstances" by the RSBP bird crime report, and others will have put out a press release saying that a hen harrier has gone missing over a grouse moor. They never let the public know when these birds turn up.

The other thing worth knowing is that birds of prey struggle to get through the first year of life due to natural causes. Several tags stopped transmitting in 2021. Natural England acknowledge that illegal persecution could be a factor in this, so as soon as a tag stops transmitting they, together with the police, conduct an extensive search of the area for the body of the missing bird. On this occasion, the bodies of two of the tagged birds were recovered and sent for a post-mortem examination. The findings did not suggest that the birds were illegally killed at all, and instead died of natural causes.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

To join the NGO, go to www.nationalgamekeepers.org.uk and help defend your sport.

Moving forward

It's not just about the flora and fauna of the uplands. A recent report by the University of Nottingham looked at many aspects of driven grouse shooting on the uplands. The document has now been published, and looks at over 350 pieces of evidence from both sides of the debate to draw some extremely pertinent conclusions. The idea of the report is to have a live document that will be updated regularly when new evidence comes to light making it an important resource now and in the future.

The report examines subjects such as why driven grouse shooting stimulates such passion and opposition, when so many other things like the industrial fishing of our seas don't. It also looks at economics, various social aspects, and the effects on biodiversity, as well as looking at it in relation to renewable energy, tourism, predator control and land management.

In conclusion, the report states that driven grouse shooting is an important part of a mosaic of income-generating activities that sustain upland communities. It notes that management for grouse results in an increasingly rare assemblage of plants, animals and invertebrates being supported and enhanced to the benefit of the UK and Europe. The report also states that stopping driven grouse shooting would have a detrimental social impact as the individuals involved come from a wider range of social backgrounds than other forms of shooting.

Plenty of food for thought. And though it's early days, overall it's looking quite positive. ■

'In spring, the English uplands are a wonderous place – this is concentrated on areas managed for driven grouse shooting'



Oblivious to the furore surrounding it, a hen harrier soars majestically through clear skies

PICTURE: **PAUL HOBSON**

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WITH ADAM SMITH

Making a meal of it

Shoot lunches and suppers are more than simply social occasions, they're part of a day's sport. Adam Smith revisits some particularly delicious memories

It's true. If the description had been accurate and not just quaint pronunciation, the howls – or even hoots – of outrage from the RSPB, condemnation in the *Guardian*, and threats of lawsuits from Mr Packham would have been entirely justified. As it was, the "steak and owl pie," as worryingly termed by our charming young waitress at the White Hart, could have been better described. What she meant, of course, was steak and ale, and saying so would have removed any confusion, reduced any remote risks of raptor persecution, and also proved far more palatable, although only after the pie's content had been fully clarified and cleared for public consumption by Defra (Del, Fred, Roger and Arnie).

Nine of us (the four above, four beaters and me, together with five dogs) had tramped muddy boots/paws and tired limbs into our 'local' after a day's rough shooting over land farmed by Roger, an oversized and ruddy yeoman straight out of Surtees. It had been a casual hedgy and copsy sort of day and it was that sort of a pub too, with neither delusions of grandeur nor carpets, just flagstone floors well used to being sluiced down and mopped over.

Under usual circumstances, in this neck of the woods it makes for a more relaxed atmosphere, along with a glowing log fire, real ales and proper home-cooked food. Even back in the days when bread and cheese – yet to be defined as a 'ploughman's' despite being eaten by the genuine articles at the time – was the only fare on offer, save for a suspicious-looking and permanently untouched jar of pickled eggs on the bar, muddy boots were still the only footwear to be expected.

The food in question now was proper pub grub, not least the pie, and all the more enjoyable after a day out in cold, drizzly windy weather. Shooting is both social and sociable, and to spend time with friends around a table, tucking in to pies, stews, casseroles, roasts or fry-ups washed down with local beers, is as good a way to wind up the day as any known to us.

Some, I know, will feel that silver service and polished mahogany are an equal part of a shoot lunch or dinner, and at one end of the market that may be true. But overall, I think relaxing in the pub takes a bit of beating.

Whatever the venue, stoking up to replace calories especially at a mid-day break or at the day's end is not just good fun, it helps keep you safe. Shooting can be a surprisingly tiring sport – all the more so because the excitement and expectation means you're often not even aware of being physically drained – so topping up in a warm and comfortable environment will pay dividends in the afternoon or the drive home.

On the other hand, exceptions can also be the rule, as one of the best and most memorable shoot lunches I ever enjoyed was to prove. Set on the edge of Salisbury Plain, we'd enjoyed a sort of Korporate Keepers day on simulated game/driven clays organised by the keepers of a nearby estate. The targets themselves were fairly basic (mostly pairs off manual traps firing patterns of birds for one to shoot and his partner stuffing, swapping places and pegs on the next drive), but great fun for all its simplicity. What made the day truly memorable was the lunch, though the setting initially raised some eyebrows.

An old, rusty and decaying Nissen hut buried in a hazel copse, held together mainly by cobwebs and having doubled as a pig shelter at some time in its life, was our venue. And although a bright and sunny day, it wasn't a warm one, so being open to the elements at one end didn't inspire confidence, either. But that was quickly forgotten once we'd seen what awaited us. Laid out and piled up on crisp, white linen was the most lavish spread of homemade pies, cold meats, cheeses, breads, biscuits, hot and cold veg – from jacket spuds to buttered asparagus – cakes,

WRITE IN!

The shooting scene certainly has its fair share of interesting characters, and we love to hear your stories. Email news@sportingshooter.co.uk



One of the most underrated aspects of a shoot is enjoying the social side of things

PICTURE: RAY HOOD

cream, custard and tarts, all accompanied by red and white wines, beer, and soft drinks with vintage tawny port to finish. In fact, if there was a downside to the lavish generosity of the spread, it was that all the alcohol had to be sampled sparingly. That really was a meal to remember!

Back at home, and rather more basically, the beaters on my shoot and most others in the area tended to rely on soup as the mainstay with chunks of bread to mop up. That and a can of beer was the accepted part of the deal back in those days. Today, more shoots are recognising that hard work deserves hot food, with shepherd's pie a popular option though some offer a full-on sit-down lunch – especially those that 'shoot through' which also saves the pain of donning beating kit and going back into the cold for another drive or two.

So while soup remained popular on my patch, for a while the beaters vied with each other to include ever more exotic snacks to their menus. It didn't add much in the way of substance or benefit to mid-day refuelling, but it was good for a laugh. An early supermarket, the International Stores, was a fruitful source of edible oddities like, for one example, Russian antipasto which came in an oversize sardine tin full of strange bits of meat and fish with even stranger vegetables in some undefined oil. Other memorable items brought in were tinned frogs legs, octopus, smoked oysters, mussels, crab, lumpfish caviar and smoked tuna, all of which were greeted with cheers (or groans) of varying volume. Cold meats were represented by a selection of increasingly smelly German and Italian salamis, but a peculiarly pungent, spicy and greasy Spanish chorizo took top honours. On the other hand, one rather sheltered young man tried to impress with a small tin of Spam – he swore he'd never heard of it before – but that was voted a non-starter.

For my part, I once enjoyed a delightful al fresco lunch on a brace of roast quail bought, believe it or not, from the Co-op cold meat counter in Hungerford. And very nice they were, too. Although they were truly a one-off as I never found them there again.

What we did enjoy, thanks to the Lady of the estate, were occasional grouse and woodcock. Very much an equestrian person of well-entrenched opinions, she once banned the hunt after they ran across one corner of the park without asking her permission. She tolerated her husband's shooting peccadillos where pheasant, partridge and duck were concerned, but would not allow him to bring shot birds she did not approve of into her kitchen. Thus, we were able to enjoy grouse fresh from the moors once or twice a year and woodcock rather more often.

I did once offer to smuggle a brace of roast 'cocks to him for his breakfast but, as he said with a rather wry smile: "Not worth the risk Adam. Kind thought old boy, but no. Not worth the risk."

Naturally, I didn't ask what he meant. ■



Time spent enjoying the fruits of past labours is the icing on the picking-up cake! Pheasant pasty, anyone?

PICTURE: PHIL MOORSOM



'Some shoots offer a full-on lunch – especially those that 'shoot through' to save the pain of donning beating kit and going back into the cold for another drive'

PICTURE: RAY HOOD



NOTES FROM IRELAND

WITH RUPERT BUTLER

In pursuit of hen pheasants

One can't help but be thrilled at the start of a new pheasant season, but finding hens while rough shooting wild birds can be a challenge, says Rupert Butler

Many moons ago, when I was a wee lad, 1 November was the second most important date in the shooting calendar. I say 'second' because Dad's affinity with those purple monstrosities and the wonderful grouse that lie within could never be topped. That said, the opening day of the pheasant season was momentous nonetheless.

Long before the first rays of light streaked from the east, we could be found rumbling about trying to ready ourselves so that we could be at our chosen location come first light. In those days, many more shooters could be found trampling the surrounding countryside, all hoping to bag a bird or three, and for this reason alone it was imperative to be away early so that we didn't arrive at our desired location to find another vehicle in residence.

Like all club areas the length and breadth of this wee country of ours, there are certain farms that harbour greater numbers of birds than others, primarily those of a tillage variety where leftovers from that year's harvest have sustained many a bird through the harsh winter months.

Amusingly, some shooters used to leave their vehicles at their preferred locations the night before in an effort to deter others that might arrive the next morning – there is nothing more frustrating than jumping over a ditch only to find boot prints imprinted in the soft ground on the other side, a sure sign that the area had already been trampled. If the day turned out to be frosty, though, that ruse was of little use, as vehicles with frozen windows can't be driven in a hurry!

In those days, it wasn't unusual to meet 20 or more cock birds and double that number of hens in the course of a morning. Nowadays, not only are cocks scarce on the ground, but more importantly it is the lack of hens that one finds particularly worrying. A combination of factors have led to the demise of a once-thriving population, factors that have been well documented in these pages previously. Aside from a change in farming practises, exploding vermin populations and changing climatic conditions, I personally think that a major contributing factor is the lack of hen birds being released. Many clubs, societies, etc, tend to release a far greater percentage of cock birds in order to appease members and get some sort of return on their investment. Because of the climate we live in, many clubs don't have the time nowadays to look after young birds, hence many of those released are adults which are far less cost effective.

When I was a nipper, we would often raise a dozen or more hen birds before a wily old cock, one which in many instances had been running ahead of his lady friends, would rise far out. Because cock birds are only shot here in the south, the number of hen birds flushed was, in those days, sometimes frustrating. If only we had that problem now, as meeting a group of hens these days is almost a cause for celebration!

Close encounters

One of the more amusing stories from that era occured not long after I was first allowed to trample some nearby fields on my own. As you will probably agree, being allowed out alone with both

Do you have a shooting story to share with us?

Head to page 30 for details of how to get in touch!



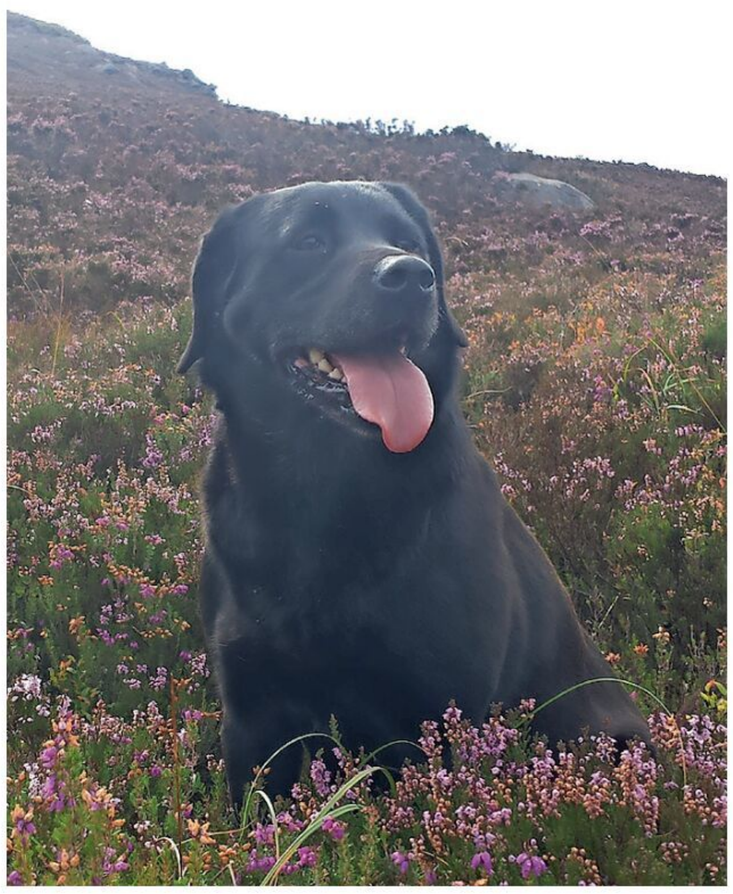
Ireland's beautiful green landscape is heaven for a variety of game!

PICTURE: **SEAMUS BUTLER**



A variety of factors have lead to a decline in hen pheasants where Rupert shoots

PICTURE: DAVID O'BRIEN / GETTY



Heading out alone for the first time with gun and dog is a big deal!

gun and dog was a pretty momentous occasion. My companion at the time was a chunky golden Labrador named Teal, whose training hadn't really had the desired effect as he generally did more or less what he wanted to do.

On the morning in question, I decided to make a beeline for a nearby old quarry, one which over the course of time had become overgrown with a variety of regenerated trees and scrub, and always held the promise of a bird or two. Sending my golden missile into the cover, I waited with baited breath, knowing that returning with a cock or two some time later would cement my status as a bona fide shooter.

It wasn't long before I could hear a bird trying to clatter its way skywards. If nothing else, Teal had an exceptional nose. Much to my dismay, hen after hen rose to disappear into a watery sun until finally I saw a flash of colour signifying that a cock bird was airborne. My natural reflexes took over and, much to my amazement, my single 20-bore managed to scrape him down.

My excitment was now intensifying, and I didn't even wait for my companion to locate my prize, preferring instead to hurl myself through thorn and bramble bushes in search of it. I tore my trousers and my skin in several places, but it mattered little. Teal reached the downed bird seconds before I did, but was warned in no uncertain terms to leave it alone. My big, majestic bird turned out to be a large, melanistic hen, and as I picked it up, reality hit. I decided to stuff it down the nearest rabbit burrow because I couldn't for the life of me return after my first outing with a hen bird.

Eventually, I dragged myself from the thorns, crestfallen and bloody, only to hear a snuffling noise behind me. Here came a triumphant Teal with my hen again and, to make matters worse, a wee plane circled overhead. I now know that it was probably conducting some survey or other, or perhaps engaging in some aerial photography, but at the time I was convinced my hen pheasant was the source of its curiousity.

Edging toward blind panic, Teal was put on a lead, my pheasant hidden once again, and away home I went at a rate of knots. I think I told those that listened in amusement that I had tagged a cock bird and spent ages looking for it in the old quarry in a bid to explain my dishevelled appearance.

Hopefully in the years to come, our majestic long-tails will increase in numbers once again and stories like this one will not be so rare, but it will take a considerable effort. ■



For Rupert's father, hunting through the purple mountains was the pinnacle of sport

PICTURES: RUPERT BUTLER

SHOOT DAY FINES

While we have no doubt our readers are beyond reproach when it comes to shooting, there are occasions when the keeper feels differently – as can be seen in these amusing tales

In for a penny...

I was at a fantastic little shoot the other day when the tradition of fines for various shooting offences was taken to the absolute limit! On the shoot in question, the captain wanted to raise some extra money for charity, and decided to do this by fining every shooter there... of course, with 10 fines to come up with, he had to get fairly creative with the offences.

YOUR SEASON

We would love to read stories of your season. Find our details on page 30.

He worked his way through the group, starting with the classic "You shot a pigeon before you were meant to". Fair enough. Then a lad was fined for not shooting at a beautiful bird that sailed directly over his head while he wasn't paying attention. Another was fined for shooting the only partridge of the day. Someone was fined for being 10 minutes late, and his brother was fined for the same thing (having hitched a lift with him). One unfortunate man was fined for having a few too many after-shoot gins at the last meet, and one for not wearing a tie. When he came to the last of the 10 shooters, the captain faltered for a minute, then grandly declared that "You are being fined just for being here!" It was all very good-natured and amusing, and we raised £100 for charity in about five minutes. So, I have to admit it worked!



PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN

A score for a guinea

I was lucky enough to be invited on a small private shoot recently where at the start of the shoot we were briefed on what we could and couldn't shoot.

My hearing not being as good as it once was, I missed something about the shooting of guinea fowl, but caught the bit about shooting one was a £20 fine. Yet I'd heard him say there was a possibility of guinea fowl flushing.

Knowing the ground well, I knew there were only about four of these odd birds on here anyhow so I didn't bother to enquire further.

As luck would have it, on one of the drives, two of the odd-looking birds flushed directly over me and at a reasonable height. Figuring that if there was a fine for shooting them then they didn't want them shot, I simply watched the pair flutter overhead.

After the drive, I was informed that although there was a £20 fine for shooting one there was also a £10 fine for not shooting at one! So I ended up with a £20 fine anyway!

Very odd rules! Clearly, the only way to avoid a fine was to shoot to miss!



PICTURE: MERRILLIE / GETTY

The ‘too early’ bird

It was the first time I’d managed to get a place on our little local shoot. Being small and affordable with a decent 60-bird bag almost guaranteed, it’s hard to get a peg, but my partner and I were lucky enough to be gifted a place when one of our friends had to drop out at short notice.

Standing on the first drive, buzzing with adrenaline, I scanned the skyline in anticipation of the first pheasant breaking cover. Being a farmland shoot, everything is on the menu apart from ground game – shooting a pigeon, crow or magpie is strongly encouraged.

I could hear the beaters getting closer and could see the occasional spaniel erupt from the cover, ears flying and eyes bright, before disappearing again to go about its business. It wouldn’t be long now...

Suddenly, from further down the line, came the cry of “pigeon”! I glanced up, just in time to see it whizzing overhead. Was it in range? It was certainly worth a try! I raised my barrels, swung through it, and was genuinely surprised to see it crumple perfectly and drop like a stone. Turning proudly to my left to see who’d witnessed my moment of genius, I was a little confused to see most of the Guns sniggering into their coat sleeves.



Fifteen quid for a pigeon – that’s London prices!

The joke was on me as I’d failed to listen closely enough to the pre-shoot briefing – pigeons could be taken, but ONLY after the first pheasant had been seen and shot at. Otherwise, it was a £15 fine for the guilty party. I duly paid the fine – after all, it was a small price to pay for a wonderful day out that had cost me nothing but some cartridges, petrol and a tip for the beaters!

Caught spending a penny

The following story still makes me blush with embarrassment! I was at our small local shoot, which is wonderfully fun, affordable and sociable... and fairly low on birds. We’re doing very well if we finish on a bag of 45. So, if a decent bird does come over you on a drive, it’s all eyes on you!

It was the first drive of the day, and we were live on the peg. Suddenly, I desperately needed a wee – no doubt thanks to several pre-shoot coffees – and with all still looking fairly quiet, I quickly unloaded, handed my gun to my girlfriend who had come along for the day, and turned my back on the field to do my business in the nearest bush.

I was mid-flow when I suddenly heard what sounded like the entire beating team and all the Guns screaming my name. I half turned just in time to see the most beautiful pheasant sailing in a dead straight line over my peg. There was absolutely nothing I could do but continue to hold onto the wrong “gun” and watch the bird fly away, unscathed.

I was fined £20 to roars of laughter, and still haven’t managed to live it down.



It’s sod’s law that the one time you leave your peg for a wee, the perfect bird will pass over!

PICTURE: JAKE EASTHAM

When you’ve got mates like these...

On one small syndicate shoot my mate shoots on, they have an amusing fines system where you could be fined for anything that can be thought of on the day, from shooting the wrong bird to having too many pheasants printed on your tie (or maybe not enough if it was felt you needed fining!).

Although it sounds ridiculous, the shoot is run at cost to all involved and the fines are all donated to a local charity. No one is fined more than around £200 and by the same token, no one gets away without paying much less! All in all it makes for a cheap day’s sport for all involved regardless of the fines.

My mate recently had a shoot day where the first rule was if your neighbouring peg shot a white pheasant, then you had to pay his £50 fine! On the first drive, my friend didn’t even get a shot at a pheasant, but both his neighbours shot a white pheasant!

So without even firing a shot, he was down £100 on the first drive, much to the amusement of the other Guns!



PICTURE: COATESY / GETTY



WITH TONY JACKSON

Sad farewells and new beginnings

It's the end of a much-loved chapter for Tony Jackson, and the beginning of another

The passing of a greatly loved dog is always a time of acute sorrow, and even worse if the animal's death is sudden and unexpected. My 11-year-old dog, Elvis, was picking-up at a local shoot only a few days before, showing no indication of any problem. However, several days later, after his breakfast, he fell ill and was quickly taken to the vet. Later that day, after an ultrasound scan and a laboratory interpretation, I was aghast to be told that his liver and spleen were ruptured, resulting in severe loss of blood. The vet told me that there was no hope and the kindest thing was to have him put down. Elvis has often featured in *Sporting Shooter* and was bred from my own yellow dam and a black sire from a local breeder, Margaret Allen, who also breeds and trains Labradors. My bitch gave birth to her litter under the kitchen table. There were three black and five yellow pups, and I decided to keep the smallest, a yellow dog. Elvis was easy to train and within two years he was picking-up and was soon working regularly at several local shoots.

To lose one's dog, suddenly in these circumstances, is heartbreaking and the only answer for both my wife and I was to get a new dog. For days we trawled every possible contact who might know of a suitable Labrador. We tried several rescue Labrador sites but there were only a handful of elderly dogs seeking a home and I was told, time and again, that suitable young or even middle-aged dogs, even if they could be found, were changing hands for outrageous sums. One lady offered us a young dog for £12,000!



A quality picking-up dog is worth their weight in gold

Then, when we were on the verge of giving up, I received a call from my eldest daughter, Sarah, from Yorkshire. She, too, had been on the phone countrywide and, she said, had found a four-year-old black Labrador bitch that sounded perfect! The dog's owner bred a kennel of Labradors. However, this one had been neutered as she had a very slight hip problem. Her owner, very responsibly, would not let her be bred and she required a suitable home. The bitch had been worked under a professional trainer and was now seeking a home where she would be worked. We were told she had been picking-up regularly and enjoyed swimming.

A new era

My daughter convinced the owner that ours would be an ideal home for the bitch, and she would be regularly picking-up on several local shoots. The only problem was the distance. She was in a kennel just north of Edinburgh, while I live in south Somerset. However, my daughter and her husband, Carl, kindly agreed to drive to see to the owner and the bitch. To cut the story short, an agreement was made by both the owner and Sarah. A day later, she and her husband kindly



The game season has only half the enjoyment without a dog at your feet

PICTURES: **REBECCA GREEN**



The beautiful Somerset countryside and Breagha's new home

PICTURE: KRZYCH-34 / GETTY

made the 11-hour drive all the way to south Somerset. The bitch swiftly settled down into her new home and now, as I write here in my office, she is curled up beside me! Her name is Breagha, which is a Gaelic name meaning 'Lovely Lady' and is pronounced Bree-gha.

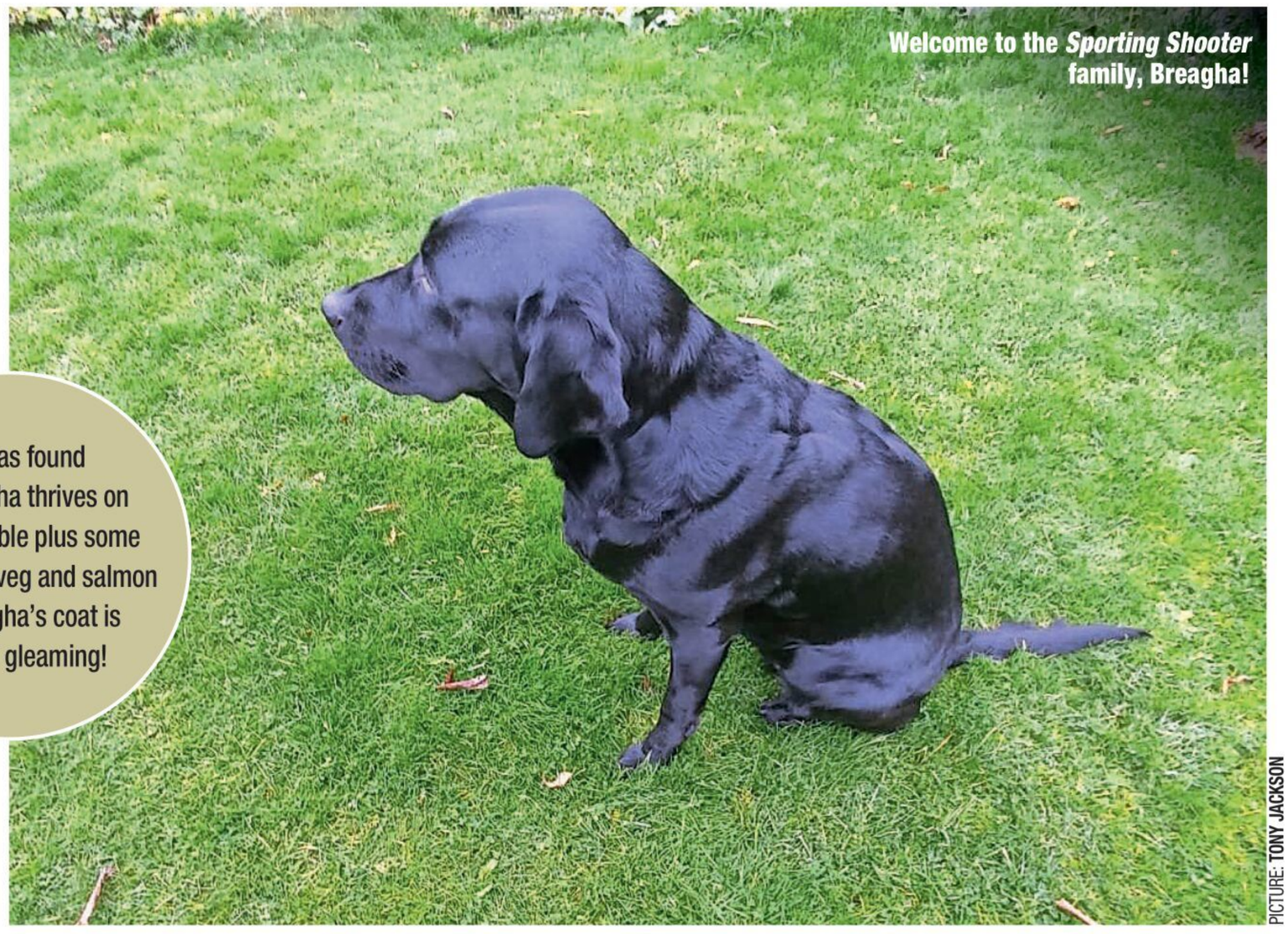
Her former owner told me that the bitch had been sent to a professional trainer and the results were immediately apparent. I was sent a list of 15 instructions for her which have been invaluable. She had even been instructed to "be quick" when spending a pee! But most of all, she thoroughly enjoys picking-up. So, in a fortnight, I will introduce her to the local shoot where Elvis was a regular. I have little doubt she will perform in good style but I will be nervous until she delivers her first bird. As mentioned, I have also been told that she enjoys swimming and as there is a small lake with reared duck, I fancy she will take a dip! For my part, I have to recall the list of calls sent to me. So far, she answers perfectly whether "go back" for a memory retrieve, "hi lost!" or "go find" for a right or left blind retrieve. Fortunately, she is used to the Acme 210-5 for whistle commands, as I have always used this same whistle!

In addition, I am now adopting a completely new feeding system. Where I previously simply used Skinners Field & Trial Maintenance, and she still indeed has this for one meal per day, she also has fresh frozen meat, whole chicken wings, raw vegetables and cold-pressed salmon oil daily, plus rabbit ears for worming. It may be a more complicated menu system, but she obviously thrives on it and her black coat gleams. I also have to be careful not to let her put on any weight as she has been neutered. I have owned springer spaniels, four Labradors, a German short-haired pointer and several terriers in the past, but this new arrival is the best-trained dog I have ever owned, though I admit I can only hope to be able to continue in the same style!

'Elvis was born under our kitchen table, and within two years he was picking-up and was soon working regularly at several local shoots'

I did, at least, so many years ago, enjoy the benefit of training from the late Peter Moxon, a remarkable trainer at his Beoley Kennels near Worcestershire where I stayed with him on several occasions. At the time, I had a springer spaniel, and Peter was kind enough to show me how I should train a dog, though I am afraid I was only an indifferent pupil! I did at least acquire Peter's outstanding book *Gundogs – Training and Field Trials* and I would recommend this excellent book to any new gundog owner, covering as it does in every detail, from a puppy to running in a Field Trial. I believe that copies of this book can still be found at a very modest price. I would also include another excellent book, *In the Bag! Labrador Training from Puppy to Gundog* by Margaret Allen, published in 2013 by The Crowood Press. This is a really excellent book and should be in the library of any novice Labrador owner.

However, I don't think I will be needing these books as Breagha's former owner has instructed me fully. I can only hope to justify her confidence and I expect Breagha will feature in the pages of *Sporting Shooter*. ■



Welcome to the *Sporting Shooter* family, Breagha!

PICTURE: TONY JACKSON

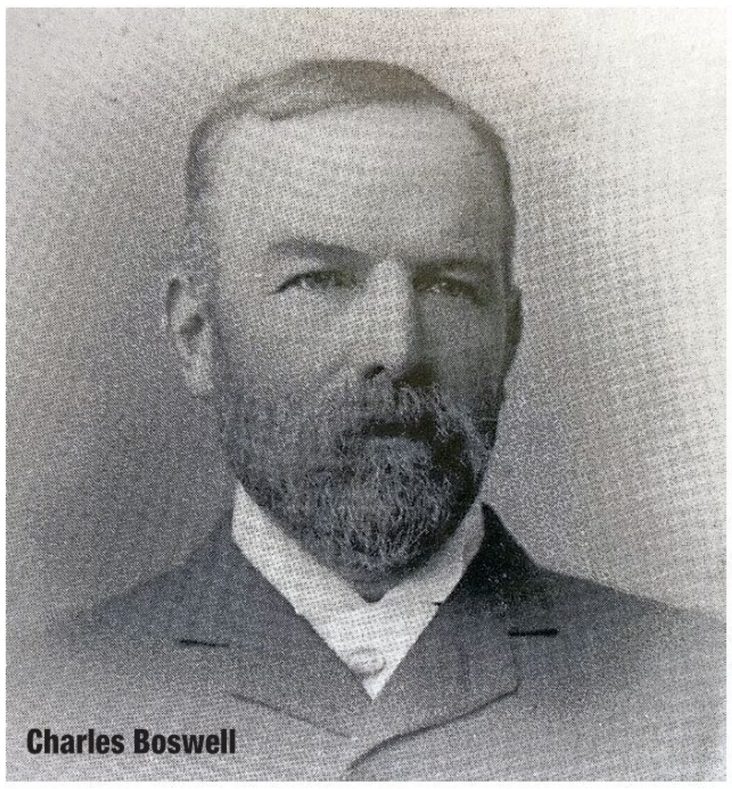
Tony has found that Breagha thrives on a diet of kibble plus some chicken, raw veg and salmon oil – Breagha's coat is certainly gleaming!



Bringing back a Boswell

A mysterious Charles Boswell 16-bore demands some detective work and triggers a lengthy restoration process for Diggory Hadoke

Charles Boswell established his business in London in 1872. At 6 Chappel Place, Upper Fore Street, Edmonton, to be exact. In 1883, he moved to a more central and fashionable home in The Strand, at number 126, where he stayed until 1921. Unfortunately, Boswell's numbering system appears chaotic. Some of his record books survive, but the earliest ones do not. Brown suggests the earliest known number for a Boswell gun is 1,539 but the records extant begin in 1897 with number 13,113.



Charles Boswell

What then to make of this gun?

Well, it bears the number 503, the barrel flats are stamped 'C. Boswell' and the tubes 'H.W.' for the barrel maker. The address on the rib is '126 Strand, London, WC' and the original proof marks include London View, London Provisional Proof, the bore size '16' and Definitive London Proof. The locks are rebounding but of a style common in non-rebounders, underlining the probable early 1870s origins. The Jones underlever and screw-grip mechanism was patented in 1859 and proved popular well beyond the 1870s for its strength and reliability, but by the 1880s had largely given way to snap actions in higher grade London guns. None of the proof marks indicate manufacture after 1874. So, how is this possible if Boswell didn't move to The Strand until 1883?

It appears that Boswell recorded serial numbers for guns in the order in which they were sold, rather than in the order in which they were made, which makes dating difficult. The earliest known guns carrying the Strand address are in the 9,000 series and it is thought these were started in Edmonton, so how and why is this 'Strand gun' numbered so low? Number 503 suggests a very early Boswell breech-loader.

Looking back at the gun, it is of first-class quality. Every detail indicates the best workmanship and the full coverage engraving is very well executed, right down to the detailing of the dolphin hammers and the fine bordering on the guard strap. The serial number appears only on the guard strap, not on the barrels, nor stamped on the action flats, nor the fore-end iron. Were the number a fitting sequential one for The Strand, say in the 14,000 series, it could be speculated that the gun was started, proofed and partly made-up in the early 1870s, mothballed, then finished and assigned a serial number ten years later. But it seems odd, if that were the case, to have put a low, out-of-sequence number on the guard.

Out in the field

Whatever its origins, the gun came my way in 2007 at the Midland Game Fair. It was a bit dusty and was an impulse buy from a small dealer on the last day of the event. It looked quality, the price was tempting, and it 'spoke to me' as we



Boswell may not have the name recognition some firms enjoy but the quality speaks for itself

PICTURES: DIGGORY HADOKE

say. So, I took it home. I took it partridge shooting a week later. Happily, on the first drive, I was in the hot spot. Unfortunately, after two shots, the cartridges became stuck in the chambers and would not extract. I watched the birds fly over me and bent my thumbnail, delivered a number of expletives, and retired to the Gun bus with my pride severely dented.

We then discovered that the chambers had been poorly lined, or 'chamber sleeved' to use the correct term. The sleeves were too long, not properly graduated into the bore, and not straight. Putting that right proved to be the greatest challenge of all. In fact, it took over a decade to work it out and complete the job. But we eventually got there. With new chamber linings installed and a successful re-proof at 65mm and 900 BAR, we were back in business.

The gun responded well to a sympathetic restoration. It had not been hard-used nor badly mangled by country gunsmiths beyond the chamber debacle. With the mechanics fully serviced, guard blacked, stock re-finished and fitted with a leather-covered Silver's pad, it looked just as it should. The original barrel browning was a lovely shade and in good working order so we kept it as it was.

A 16-bore is, to my eye, the perfect proportion for sporting gun making. 16-bores look elegant, throw an ounce beautifully, and can be made stronger than an equivalent-weight 12-bore. When they are of the quality that this Boswell clearly is, they are simply stunning. Weighing 6lb 6oz, with 26" barrels, it feels perfectly weighted and has the right combination of fast movement yet reassuring stability that keeps the shooter in control of the swing and the shot without being hindered by the gun in any conscious way.

Boswell was an interesting character. Self-made and from relatively humble origins (his father was a butcher), he rose to a respected position in the London gun trade, with a thriving business, fashionable premises and a reputation as a fine gunmaker, as well as being a skillful live pigeon Trap shooter. He served as chairman of the Gunmakers' Association in 1906 and 1907.

On the back of his competitive success, he gained a clientele for his live pigeon guns and it is for these he is best known. His Australian agent ensured his export business was a success, and Boswell is still respected there as a purveyor of competition pigeon guns, many of which are still in regular use. Charles Boswell retired in 1914 and his son took over the business, which, like many gunmakers, went into steep decline in the 1930s. Charles died in 1924.

Guns like this, in my opinion, represent the finest in British gunmaking, made in a period when everything was done by hand and overseen by the proprietor in a very personal manner. They carry the stamp of their maker, and, I like to think, something of his personality. ■



16-bore bar action hammer guns are among the most beautifully proportioned guns ever made



The stock was short, so a spacer of horn was fitted and a leather-covered pad

GET IN TOUCH

Diggory Hadoke runs Vintage Guns, the specialist site for buying, selling and repairing classic British shotguns and rifles. Contact him on 01584 878485 or go to www.vintageguns.co.uk



The original brown was in good enough condition to keep



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Track them down

This month, Jonny Crockett invites us to take a closer look at the way we lay down our footprints, which could help us when tracking animals

Last month, I wrote about our footsteps and how they told so much about us. When we look at a print, we can glean even more information if we can tell how it was put down in the first place. Most people have a relatively symmetrical gait, as do animals, but individual prints can speak volumes about the person and perhaps their background.

When we lay down prints, we lay them down in one of three ways: pronated, neutral or supinated. Pronated prints have more weight on the inside 1, so that the big toe leaves a deeper indentation that the little toe. Neutral prints are more common in humans and leave an evenly imprinted mark, where the little toe is as deep as the big toe. In the animal kingdom, this is by far the most common. Supinated prints 2 are usually made by humans by striking the heal first and then rolling the outside of foot into position, leaving a deeper impact on the outside of the print.

I've had dealings with the military for decades and I've yet to meet a pronating member of HM Forces. The vast majority of military personnel range from neutral to slight supination and strike the surface with the outside quarter of the heel.

As I've mentioned, animals are generally neutral, although age and injury can make a big difference to the gait. A lack of wild animal physiotherapy could be to blame. However, neutral impacts do prevent injury.

Toe strength is largely responsible for how our feet roll during walking and running. Strong toes are not usually on the list of ambitions when you join a gym, but perhaps they should be.

Two caveats before we go any further. When we look at prints we must take into account the gradient of the ground. If the prints are contouring around a hill, then you'll get a false reading. The second caveat is that you should be aware of sub-surface stones, rocks, roots and hard vegetation. If you place a foot down, be aware that under the surface the density of the soil is not uniform.

To indicate the difference you can see within the print, I've left a supinated left foot print in some sand. I've placed two red lollipop sticks into the sand around the edge of the print. The outside of the print had a depth of 36mm whilst the inside had a depth of 22mm 3 and 4. You can see the difference when the sticks are placed beside each other 5.

I've then done the same at the primary impact point (the heal) 6 and the terminal impact point (the toes) 7. You can clearly see the difference in impact depth 8. In this case, the heel has a depth of 38mm and the toes a depth of 10mm.

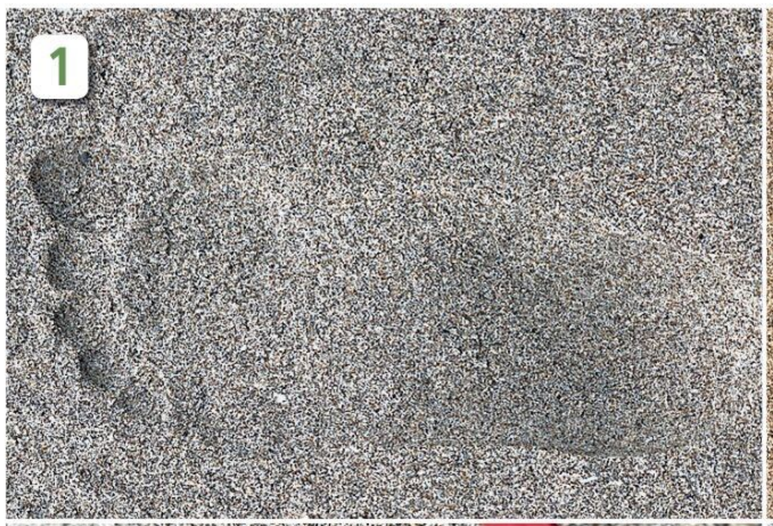
With the information that you've measured from the lollipop sticks, you can work out a gradient. It should go in two directions. You also need two further measurements: foot length and foot width.

These are my measurements from this print:

Foot Length	269mm
Change in Length Depth	28mm
Length Gradient	1: 9.6
Foot Width	107mm
Difference in Width Depth	14mm
Lateral Gradient	1: -7.6

The way we work out the gradient is Foot Length divided by Change in Length Depth and Foot Width divided by Change in Width Depth. As the lateral gradient goes off to the left, it is a negative figure.

The two gradient figures are really useful when tracking either a person or an animal, especially if you are trying to tell the difference between two moving in the same direction. ■

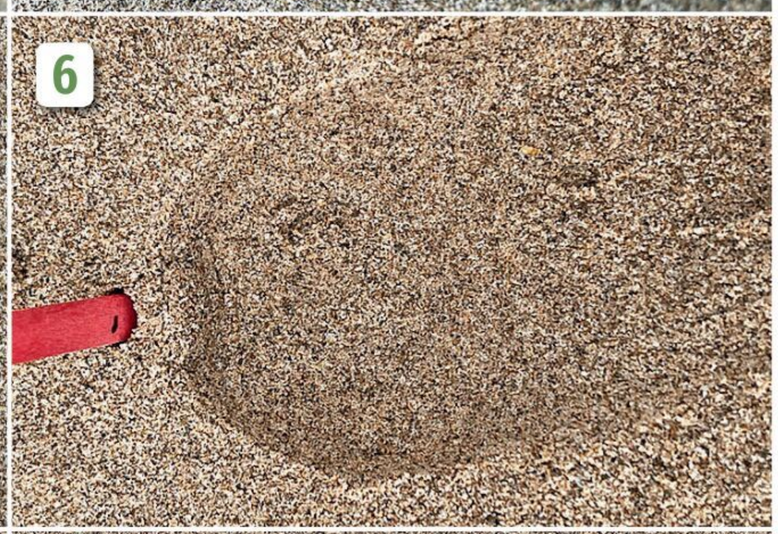




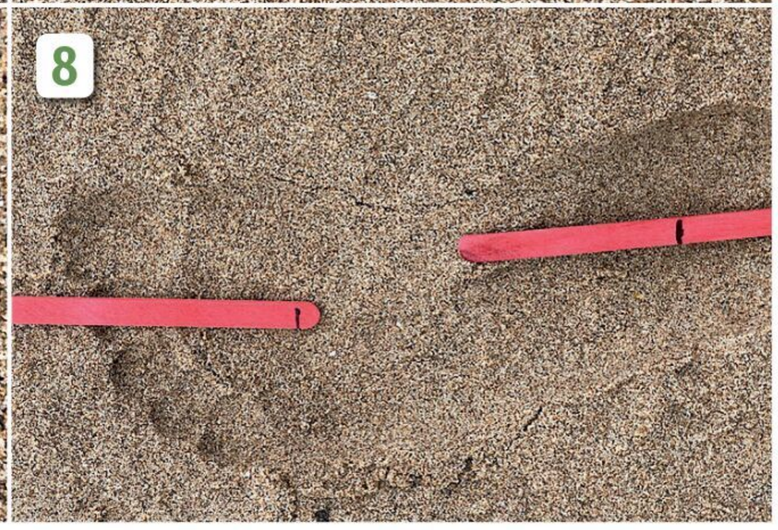












PICTURES: JONNY CROCKETT

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with Howard Kirby
Gundog Trainer

The essential guide to owning and working a gundog

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INSIDE THIS MONTH...

71 **Gundog Vet**
How to keep your gundog fit, focused and in great condition during the off-season

72 **Gundog Training**
Perfecting the 'Stop' before attempting to go into the field will set your dog up for success

76 **Gundog Focus**
Your top questions answered – from whistle confusion to how old is too old?

80 **Gundog Diary**
Emrys progresses to split retrieves and has his first sudden experience of pheasants

82 **Gundog Q&A**
Expert advice on getting your first gundog and which breeds to cross with lurchers











HOWARD'S TIP OF THE MONTH: *Dummy choice!*

When retrieve training, ensure you are using the correct dummy for the stage your dog is at with their training. Texture, weight, flaps and throwing toggles can all influence the outcome.



PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN





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End of term report

It's easy to assume that the end of the season brings a well-earned holiday. But not, as Vicky Payne explains, if you want to keep your dog healthy and in top condition

By the first of February, our dogs are as fit as they are going to get. And then… everything stops. So, what is the best way to treat your dogs at the end of the season for their physical and mental health?

Nutrition

Many gundogs will lose body fat over the season due to working in wet and wintry conditions. Although they end the season with an excellent muscle score, they can drop below their ideal overall body condition score. If you can see and feel the hip bones and ribs with little fat covering, your dog needs to gain some condition. You may want to keep feeding it a diet formulated for working dogs for several weeks after the season ends as the higher protein levels will aid muscle repair, and the higher calorie density makes weight gain easier.

However, some owners feel their dogs are too lively on a high protein diet when not working, so a 'maintenance' diet with extra calories added in the form of fish oil may be more suitable. If you are planning to breed from your bitch, you may find she doesn't come into season until she returns to a higher body condition. But don't allow her to become overweight, as this can cause problems at whelping.

Exercise

Although it might seem kind to give your dogs a rest at the end of the season, it is probably healthier to continue a with a regular exercise routine. Middle-aged and older dogs who might have early arthritic changes particularly benefit from exercise which maintains muscle mass and flexibility. Vary the type of exercise your dogs get to include lead walks, off-lead running, training, exercise over uneven ground, and even swimming once the weather improves.

Enrichment

Young working dogs can become bored once the season finishes and may become destructive in the house or kennel. Obviously, you can use this time to brush up on any areas of their gundog training which have slipped during the season. Alternative brain games for gundogs can include scent work, where the dog searches for a target scent indoors or outside like a police sniffer dog. Mantrailling is another sport which mimics police work and can help dogs tracking wounded quarry in the field. You might even want to try a different discipline altogether; my spaniels have enjoyed competition obedience classes and agility out of the shooting season.

Health

The end of the season is an excellent time to visit your vet and deal with any minor health problems. It is vital that gundogs have comfortable and clean teeth if they are going to retrieve game. As cleaning and extractions require an anaesthetic, this is best done outside the season. You may also want to have any lumps which have developed over the winter tested and removed if required and neutering now gives plenty of time for recovery before summer working tests and pigeon shooting. Your vet can also review your kennel vaccination and parasite control programme for the year ahead. ■

Instead of letting all activity stop during the off-season, build some obedience work or alternative training into their routine.



PICTURE: RAY HOOD / COUNTRY TRAIL IMAGES



Howard Kirby runs Lains Shooting School and Mullenscote Gundogs in Hampshire

Stop, look and listen

Howard Kirby explains the importance of creating that balance of encouraging your dog to hunt, while being steady and focused on your instruction – and shares how to do it!

So now that the dust has settled and we've had time to reflect on our work and achievements in the shooting field, I thought it might be the perfect opportunity to review the things that might need working on before next shooting season.

As we have discussed In previous articles, there is nothing like working or competing with a dog in the shooting field to expose the weaknesses in our preparation and training. Even if you felt your dog was fully prepped, it is likely that you will now be thinkking you need to tweak a few things during the spring and summer months. Training gundogs inevitably brings moments of euphoria. But these can easily be completely erased by just one, soul-crushing performance.

For me, anyway! At an early season spaniel Feld Trial I was forced to endure the longest walk of shame that I have ever had to make. It still pains me so much that I am unable to share the details with you. But trust me, even the best trained dogs are just one 'run in' away from ensuring that you don't get over-confident and keep your feet firmly on the ground!

As gundogs go through life experiencing early puppy-hood, adolescence, physical and mental maturity, a first, a second, and then a third shoot day, it's highly likely that you will see the many changing faces of your dog. With each phase, you will see a new development in the dog's agenda. The problems arise when your agenda and theirs fail to align. As mentioned earlier, a busy season in the shooting or trialling fields will often evolve into a clash of wills between handlers and their dogs.

Howard is now offering online, tutor-led gundog training courses to suit a variety of levels of experience. Go to: mullenscotegundogs.co.uk for more info.



In early training, it's best to blow the Stop whistle before you throw the dummy

PICTURES: **REBECCA GREEN**

Recognising the problem

It's easier said than done, but it is perfectly possible to predict many of the problems that we may run into. When any dog is worked on game, the experience it gains will inevitably shape new and informed behaviour. The dog's enthusiasm or prey drive will serve to reward it for doing things independently of its handler, and it is likely that the dog will become progressively less reliable or obedient. Your dog's ability for recall, stoping to the whistle and sitting to flush (plus general obedience) will often take a hit.

While on shoot-over and training days, it may well be possible for us to make adjustments to our training and use the opportunity to school and, where needed, correct a dog. If trialling and competition is your thing, then of course the opportunity to neutralise any unwanted behaviour during a run is pretty much impossible. Many experienced triallers are well aware that high-drive dogs have a limited shelf life.

Back to school

In a perfect world, we can plan to intersperse shoot days with regular visits to the training field. This statement, if taken literally, can mean the best laid plans will fail miserably. The problem is that your dog will often appear to be 'foot perfect', when being schooled on your training field. "He never does this at home," are words best not used when you're rubbing shoulders with experienced handlers. Of course he doesn't! The local sports pitch has very little in common with a scent-lined cover crop or woodland. Top handlers and trainers make it their business to get out and about in order to have their dogs shot over. There's no substitute for the real thing. However,



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please don't misunderstand me. There is a lot that can be done to condition the desired behaviour from the comfort of your back garden.

The Stop whistle

We can use dummies and tennis balls to sharpen and motivate a dog to sit to the whistle. Blowing the Stop whistle just before giving the dog a directional command can help to form and maintain a positive link to the whistle sound. Sit the dog up in front of you and throw a dummy behind or to the left or right. Walk away from the dog and then, as you turn to face it, blow the Stop whistle. Wait until the dog is staring straight at you. You're waiting for that moment when he's clearly looking for instruction. Now give the visual command with your arm. It's likely that this will be accompanied with a verbal cue: Left, Right or Back, for example.

This exercise can be developed by adding multiple dummies, although it's important to understand that our real objective here is to develop the Stop whistle.

Some dogs will be totally focused on you throughout the whole exercise. But be patient with those that choose to stare at the dummy or look vacantly around the field. Wait in silence, for as long as it takes, until the dog turns and looks at you. With this type of dog, send it as soon as it gives you eye contact. We are aiming to leave them with the thorough understanding that the Stop whistle means, 'Hey! Stop and focus on the boss, and good things will happen'.

I like a dog to really study me before it makes a decision to act on a command. Don't let that be misinterpreted as indecision. There is a significant difference between a dog or person that waits for just long enough to thoroughly understand the instruction you are giving, and one that is halfway out of the door before you've finished.

Please note that teaching the dog to look to you for instruction is important, but if a spaniel or HPR is hunting and a single bird is shot, we need them to stop and maintain 'the mark', waiting for a verbal command rather than looking at you. If the dog turns to look at the handler, this will risk losing the dog's fix on the location of the bird.

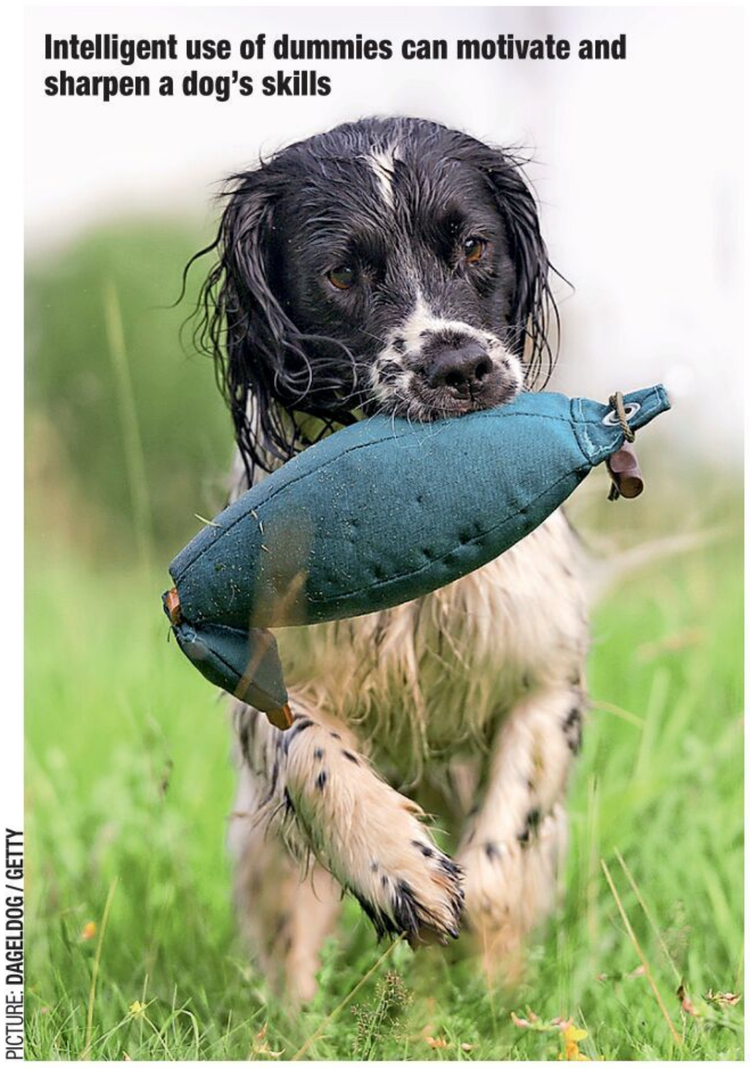
Another of my favourite techniques to help with the Stop whistle is to stop the dog on its way out to a dummy that the dog has marked down. Using the techniques described earlier, we can now re-direct the dog onto a strategically-placed dummy. We are really lucky and have a 4m-wide track that is flanked on both sides by some really nice 'box hedgerows'. This facilitates this exercise really well. As the dog flies down the alleyway towards the marked retrieve, I stop them. I use a small marker post to identify the optimum place to do this, and then redirect either left or right onto a dummy that was carefully hidden before starting the exercise. It's really important that the dog is successful in finding the dummy having trusted you and followed your advice.

This exercise is a great way to evaluate just how much your dog trusts and values your input. Non-believers will often stop then choose to ignore you and continue with their quest to retrieve the original mark. If this happens, stop the dog immediately. Quietly walk towards them so that you are much closer. Now carry out a recall and once again stop them by the marker post. You may need to get yourself to within only a few paces of the dog. Insist they follow what must be very clear instruction, which if followed correctly will put a dummy into the dog's mouth. Once the dummy has been picked, I like to point out to the dog, "there, you see? It's worth listening to me"!

This article has been about refreshing a dog's obedience skills. I make no apologies for focusing on the Stop whistle as this one behaviour is the route to managing most others.

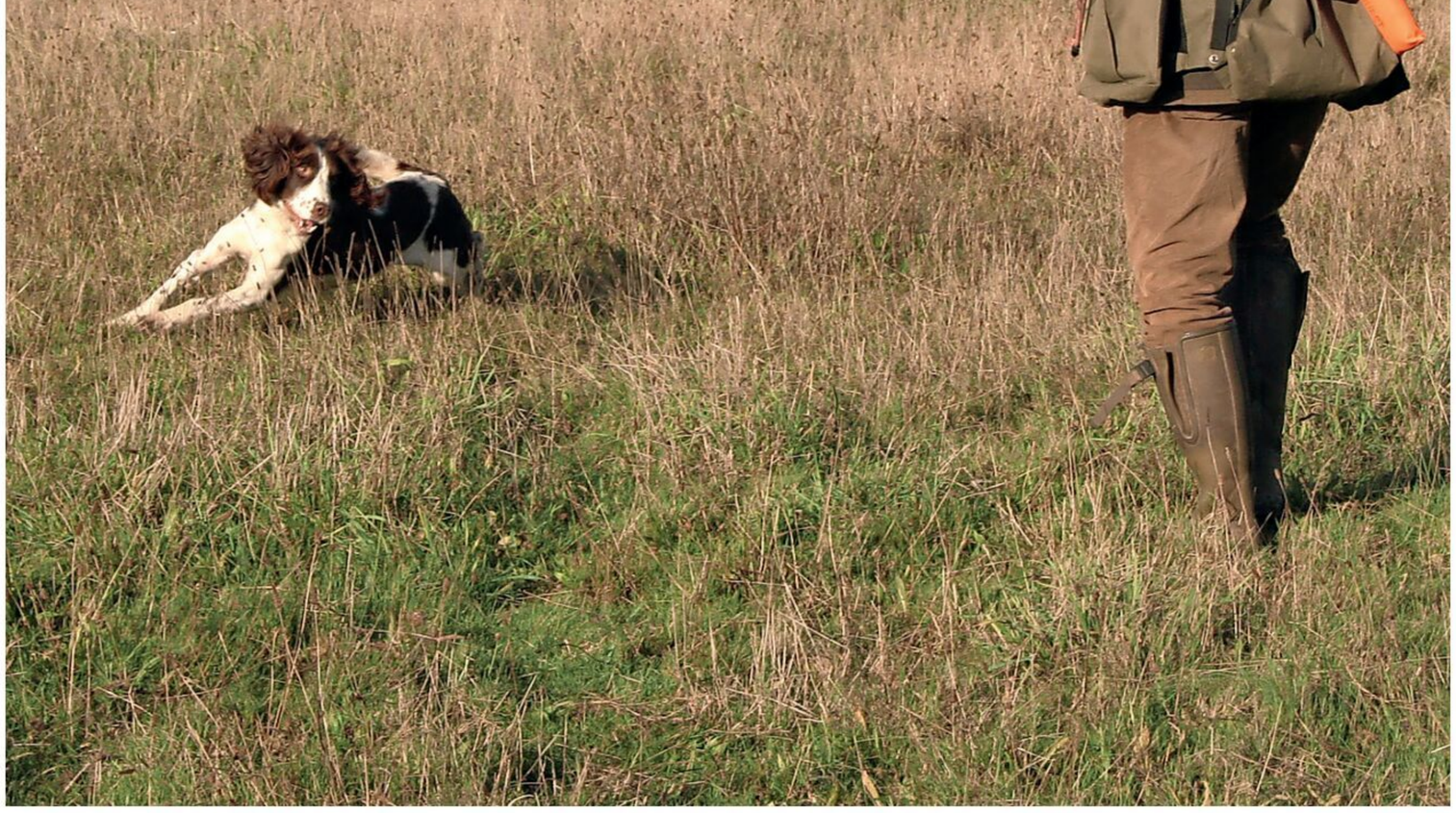
In future articles this year, I plan to look at teaching, improving or refreshing essential gundog behaviour. Days are longer, and definitely warmer. Enjoy your dogs, and keeeep training! ■

Intelligent use of dummies can motivate and sharpen a dog's skills



PICTURE: DAGELDOG / GETTY

This clever gundog is hunting hard while keeping an eye on the handler



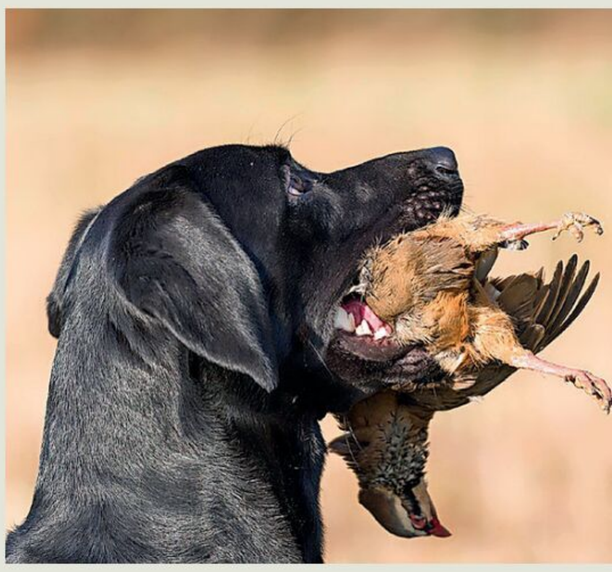
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Ryan Kay is a keen trialler and trainer and is a Kennel Club Accredited Instructor for Working Gundogs. He runs FarlaVale Gundogs in North Yorkshire. www.farlavale.co.uk

High five!

This month, Ryan Kay answers five of the most common questions he comes across during training sessions – from when to introduce gundogs to shoot days to the use of whistles

How long does it take to train a dog? Well, you may just as well ask, 'how long is a piece of string'?! To be fair, this is usually a question I get asked by people just venturing into the world of gundogs and becoming first-time dog owners. There are, of course, several factors that influence the length of time it takes to train a dog to the level where it can be described as a finished article, one being the actual definition of what a person calls a 'finished article'.

That's to say, it is relative – the requisite skill level that you want your dog to reach will perhaps differ from other people. But the main considerations that determine how long it takes to train a dog are: the natural ability of the dog; the trainability of the dog; and the capabilities of the handler. Add to this, the breed (with all its inherent quirks); access to good and varied training facilities or grounds; and the amount of time the trainer/handler puts in.

Even after all that, there is another aspect that develops over time: the element of experience. For instance, I was co-judging an open cocker trial last week where there was one spaniel that hunted better than any other dog on the day. It also happened to be the oldest at around eight years old. Whilst other dogs were very well trained and schooled, they simply lacked the presence and guile of a dog that hunted in such a way that said, 'I know what I'm doing – I've found and flushed a thousand pheasants'.

Can you work more than one dog at once?

In a word, no. I'm talking hunting breeds here, and the hunting aspect in particular as that is usually the area people are referring to when they ask this question. It's not possible to hunt more than one dog at once effectively. Aiding and guiding more than one dog in an efficient search to find and produce game would require each dog to know when you're aiding or directing them individually. And as dogs operate and communicate through body language in the first instance, each dog would need to know when you're communicating to them or another dog. Then there's the added confusion of using a whistle. If directed at one dog to signal it to turn, it would also turn the other when it didn't need to.

It does, however, depend on your level of required hunting. Say, if your need is to simply use a recall in order to call several dogs back at once, then that's fine. But I guarantee all the dogs you have loose in front of you are not working efficiently, nor are they working for you all the time. If you're happy with chases, no matter how small, then you'll achieve this perfectly when trying to hunt more than one dog at once! If you have a more sedate sort with less drive, then that's perhaps all you require anyway and several of those sorts pottering about will get a job done.

The ideal scenario is really to have one dog at heel whilst you hunt another one. I prefer this when beating, as I can concentrate on working one dog really well and the other gets to exercise a little control in the heel position. I also like to swap them over several times throughout a drive, as it tends to keep them keen whilst alternate resting periods assure they stay fresh.

Won't my dog get confused if everyone is using the same whistle?

This question kind of leads on from the last one. It's true that dogs may get confused by other folks' whistles on a shoot day, especially one

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Hard work pays off!

PICTURE: **NICK RIDLEY**



Hunting more than one dog at the same time is inadvisable; keep one at heel and work them individually

PICTURE: HOWARD KIRBY

that's very responsive. Invariably, I find it's younger dogs that struggle with this. My older cockers have accumulated the experience of knowing where they expect their whistle command to come from, i.e. where their handler is, at all times. This indicates that they will respond to whistle commands from that direction only.

When we're hunting younger dogs in the beating line, my wife Alison and I try to make sure that we have several other beaters in between us. If we were next to each other in the beating line, because we have very similar whistle styles and the fact that all our dogs have been trained by both of us, we could cause mass confusion as they'd respond back and forth to both our whistles.

There's also the added problem that practically everyone in the beating line with a spaniel will be using an Acme 210.5 and most of the retriever and HPR folk will be using an Acme 211.5. The main issue, though, is overuse of a whistle. There's always one pied piper who constantly badgers their dog with excessive use of the whistle! However, thorough training, coupled with increased experience on your dog's part, will ensure that it responds to your whistle only.

When can I take my dog on a shoot?

Another regular question, and my answer remains the same for any dog: you can take it right now! Whatever age it is, it really doesn't matter. What does matter is what you expose and reveal to it when you are there.

I maintain that drinks time is the perfect opportunity for pups and youngsters to get used to the sights and smells of the day, but that's it. Don't be tempted to take them on a drive or anywhere near your peg at four months of age!

Drinks time will provide valuable encounters and learning experiences like getting used to the smell of spent cartridges and freshly shot warm game in the air. The more off-putting things to look out for are the likes of bullish and unruly dogs that are likely to be less than polite with a young puppy knocking around.

But when is the best time to get them stuck into the real excitement of a drive or anticipation when sat at the peg? Well, that brings me back to a



The two essentials prior to getting out in the field are brakes and steering!

PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN

'Before you decide to engage your dog on the shooting field, you need to be able to do two things solidly: stop the dog and steer it'

point from the first question; it depends on the handler and how well they've prepared the dog for the shooting field.

In my mind, before you decide to engage your dog in any of the elements or disciplines of the shooting field, you need to at least be able to do two things solidly: stop the dog and steer it.

As well as the Stop whistle, under the 'stop' remit also comes the practice of simply sitting and waiting. Under the 'steer' heading comes the recall. But if your steering and stopping is nailed on, your recall will rarely be needed.

Is my dog too old to train/re-train?

No. A dog is never too old to start training. However, it's proven that the first 16 weeks of age are the most crucial. What it learns in this period will stay with it for life. Indeed, what is revealed to the dog throughout its first year is hugely important and will lay the foundations for the future. If you've taken on a rescue or an older dog that's had little training, then yes it can be retrained, but what it has been exposed to and how often will determine how much there is to undo. Often, gundog training in the 70s and 80s involved a 'breaking' approach. The dog's training didn't start until later in life – sometimes not until they were a year old. In the eyes of many handlers, only then would the dog be old enough for a firmer approach. And because some dogs were simply kept in kennels and knew very little about life beyond their exercise yard, there were actually few habits to undo. So in reality, many methods involving less patience and more firmness worked to some extent – albeit to the dog's detriment!

Dogs are willing to learn from the word go, so why not teach them via positive methods and encourage them from eight weeks of age? It is very possible to have a forward-going spaniel ready to be shot-over by its first birthday, with it only lacking in game experience; something that it'll build on with each trip out. There's no doubt that there are greater advantages to starting training from the first moment you have him, but be aware that he is learning all the time from everything you do and everything you don't do.

It should also be noted that we're very good at unwittingly undoing natural behaviour. For example, when it comes to retrieving, most dogs carry and bring items to their owner straight away, so the instinct is already there. Then, somewhere along the line, we may lose that and turn it into a run-past, a drop, or a straight forward bugger-off. So, whatever the age of your dog, always keep your objectives in sight and take the time to look back and see how far you've come. You may want to seek the help of a good trainer, and if this is one which has been recommended to you, so much the better. Most of all, enjoy the training journey – it's often the best part! ■

TOP TIP

Praise your dog any time he picks up a toy in early training. This will encourage him to retrieve in the field.



In time, your dog should learn to only respond to whistles coming from your direction!

PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN



What a dog learns in its first year is hugely important and will lay the foundations for the future

PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN

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You can follow Emrys's journey on his own Facebook page here: www.facebook.com/LifeandTimesofEmrys

Doing the splits

Emrys is really starting to nail his retrieves, so this month Lez Graham has started to ask him to perform split retrieves in the fields and woods – with a couple of pheasants watching on..!

Now that Emrys is flying out for retrieves, marking consistently and returning immediately to deliver to hand, I've started to up the ante with him by putting down some retrieves on the track through fields and in the woods while we're out on our walks. Nothing too difficult at the minute, just short memory retrieves and short seen marks as I want to develop his focus and concentration in different, more challenging environments.

To this end, we had a trip 'down south', well to the Scottish Borders anyway, to do a bit of training with Joe Hipwell at the Sealpin Gundogs ground.

As well as walking on a loose lead through some pheasants, Joe set up some marked retrieves for us which was great as it meant not only was Emrys working on different ground, but he had a different person throwing dummies, both of which will set him up for the future.

He really was such a good dog. His eyes were on stalks when he first saw the pheasants (and there were a lot of pheasants); we just let him stand and watch them before calling him to heel and walking through them. Although he ran in on the first dummy with the excitement of it all, I was so pleased with him; he wasn't put off at all by being in a new environment – if anything, he was more focused on marking the dummies and even more enthusiastic for the retrieve.

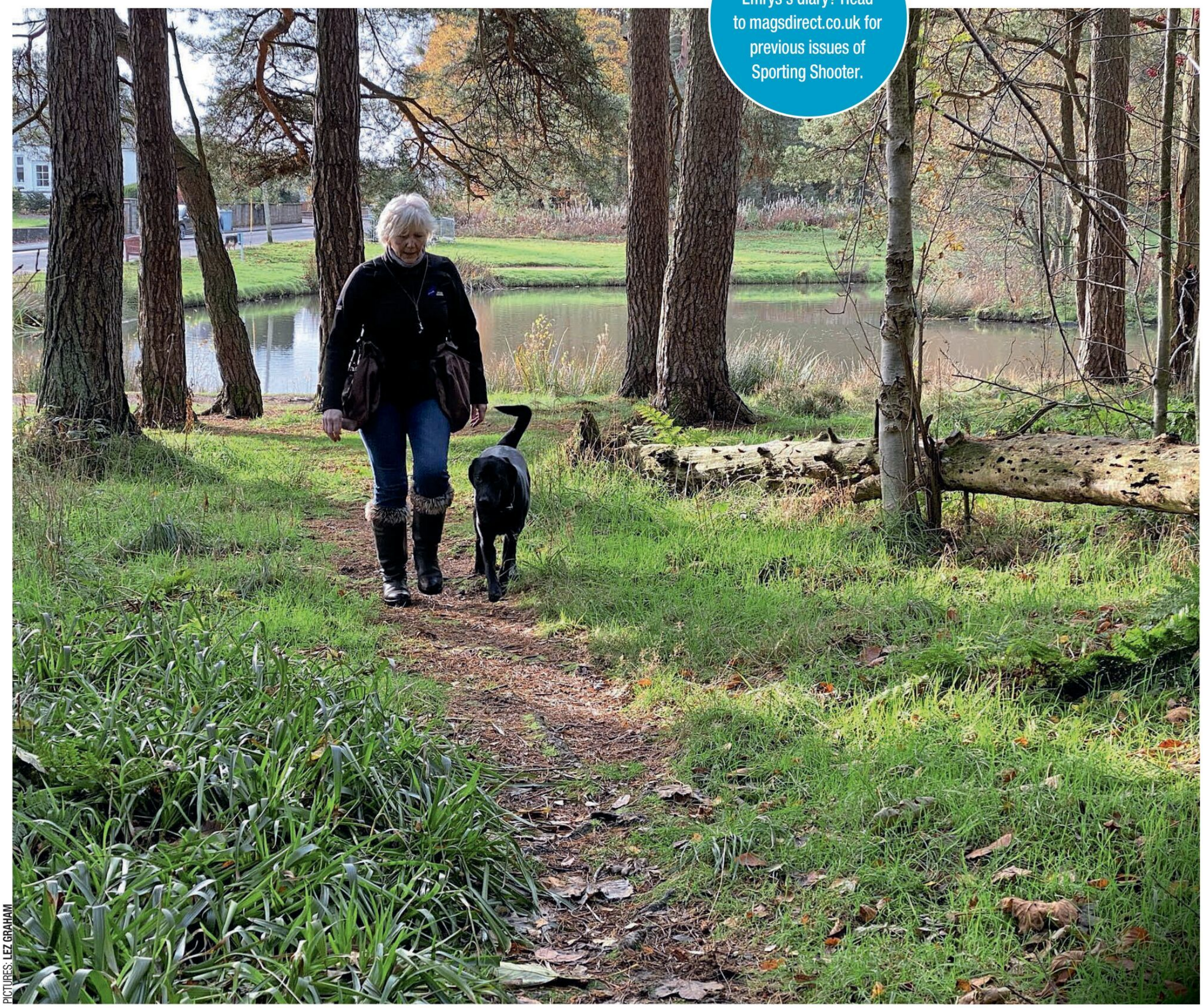
LEZ'S TOP TIP

When you train the split retrieve, really set your dog up for success by positioning yourself between your dog and the dummy on the ground, thereby blocking the one that you don't want him to pick up.

Two dummies and a dog

The main focus for this month has

Missed the start of Emrys's diary? Head to magsdirect.co.uk for previous issues of Sporting Shooter.



PICTURES: **LEZ GRAHAM**

‘Emrys’s eyes were on stalks when he first saw pheasants; we let him stand and watch before calling him to heel and walking through them’

been extending the use of two dummies, which for me really feels as if I’m ‘gundog training’ as opposed to simply playing fetch with my dog.

To start a dog off on the split retrieve, I always do a short throw in front then turn (with my dog) 90° towards him, throw a long mark and send him for it as soon as it lands. By doing this, I’m firing up the predatory response in my dog and he’s more likely to ignore the static dummy down.

Once I’ve taken delivery, I pop him to heel and turn to face the dummy that isn’t too far away from us, again setting a novice dog up to succeed.

Once he’s confident doing this, I start increasing the distance of the first dummy down so that they’re fairly evenly spaced and then, and only then, do I start sending him for the first dummy down, which is what I’ll be progressing to with Emrys in the next couple of days.

Teenage challenges

It looks as if Emrys may have entered his second fear period. He picked something up off the ground that he shouldn’t have, I turned quickly to get it from him, and he seriously backed off…

These teenage months are a real balancing act as we have to ensure that our young dogs understand what is acceptable behaviour, and what is unacceptable behaviour, but we need to tread carefully to ensure that we don’t trigger fear in them by moving too quickly or being too growly. All I did when he reacted was to take the item off him, walk away and call him to me and then praise him for coming. If I’d soothed him for being wary I could have run the risk of praising the startle response, which potentially could have embedded the behaviour of him backing off when I turned quickly towards him. ■

ABOUT LEZ GRAHAM

Lez Graham is author of The Pet Gundog series and a canine behaviourist and gundog trainer. Focused on training the next generation, she runs the Accredited Pet Gundog Instructor programme which is now in its 6th year.

Contact her via lez@thepetgundog.co.uk or visit www.thepetgundog.co.uk

SPLIT RETRIEVE IN ‘V’ FORMATION



With your dog at heel, throw your first dummy a few metres away in front of you both.



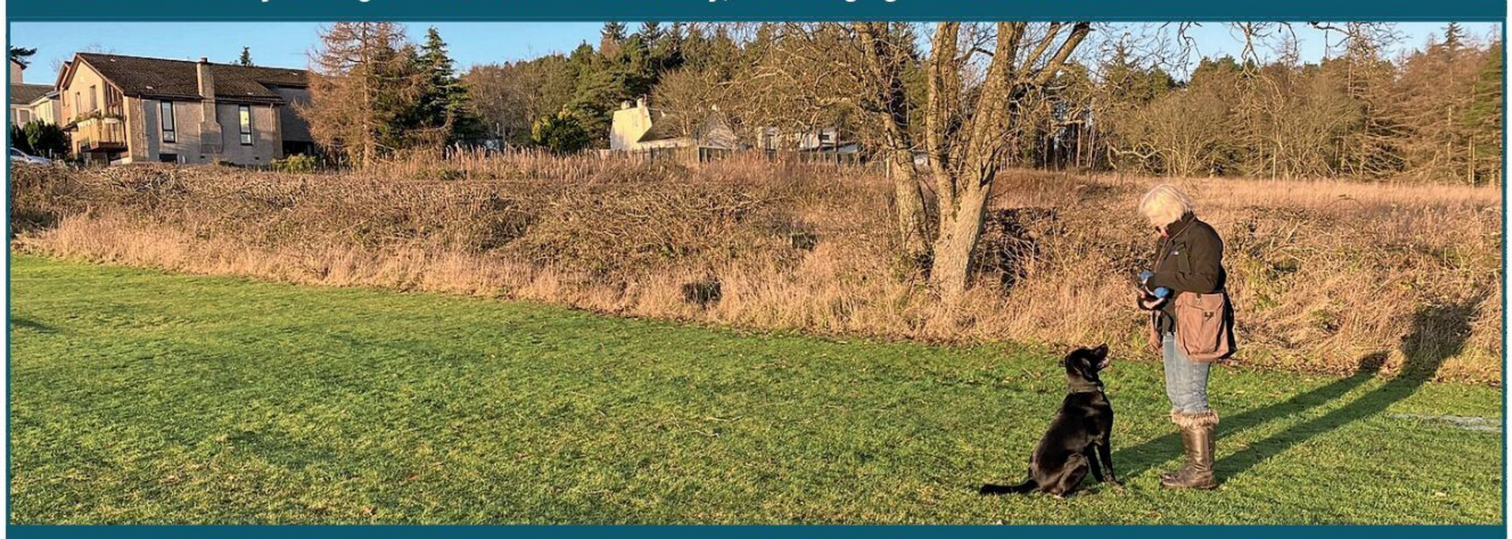
Then, throw your second dummy further away at 90 degrees and send the dog as soon as it lands.



Encourage your dog to bring the dummy to hand immediately, and put him into a Sit at heel.



You can now send your dog to retrieve the first dummy, encouraging him back into a Sit.



A successful split retrieve! Remember to work up to each level slowly, ensuring your dog understands each stage.

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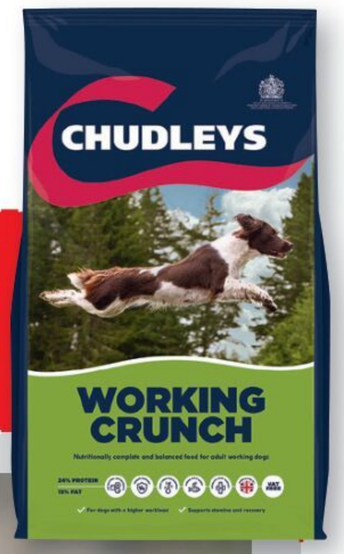
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Which breed makes a good first gundog?

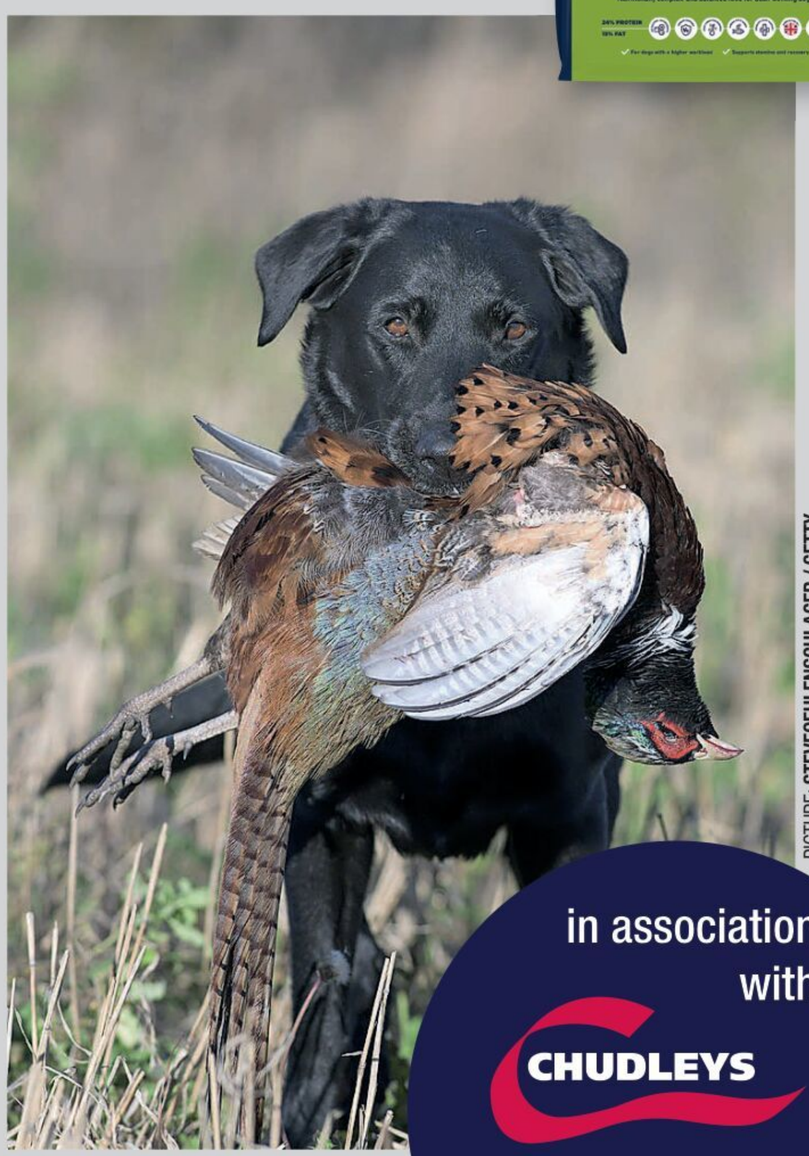
Q I am new to the sporting shooting scene and would very much like to buy and train a gundog. I live in the south of England. I would be interested in your thoughts as to which might be a suitable gundog breed for me to have as my first dog?

A HOWARD KIRBY replies: It's really important to consider the area of the UK in which you reside when choosing a gundog for working purposes. Beating and picking-up is readily available to enthusiastic gundog trainers in the south of England. I believe this should be part of your consideration when thinking about breed choice. There are four main breed groups to choose from; retrievers, spaniels, hunt point retrievers (HPRs), or pointers and setters.

As well as there being plenty of shoots on which you can work your dogs in your area, retrievers and spaniels are most suited to the role of beating and picking-up. Subsequently, there are plenty of opportunities to access training clubs, trainers and, most importantly, suitable grounds and shoots on which to work your dog.

As someone who owns and works dogs from all four of the breed groups mentioned, it would be hypocritical of me to advise you to only look at retrievers or spaniels. However, you would need to be prepared to do lots of travelling in order to fully utilise and enjoy the most suitable grounds for HPRs or a dog from the pointer and setter groups.

Of course, with plenty of time and steely determination, you could make it work for you with any of the breeds. However, my advice would be to choose either a retriever or spaniel as your first gundog. Clearly there are differences between the two breeds, so do your research before making a final decision.



PICTURE: STEVEOEHLENSCHLAGER / GETTY

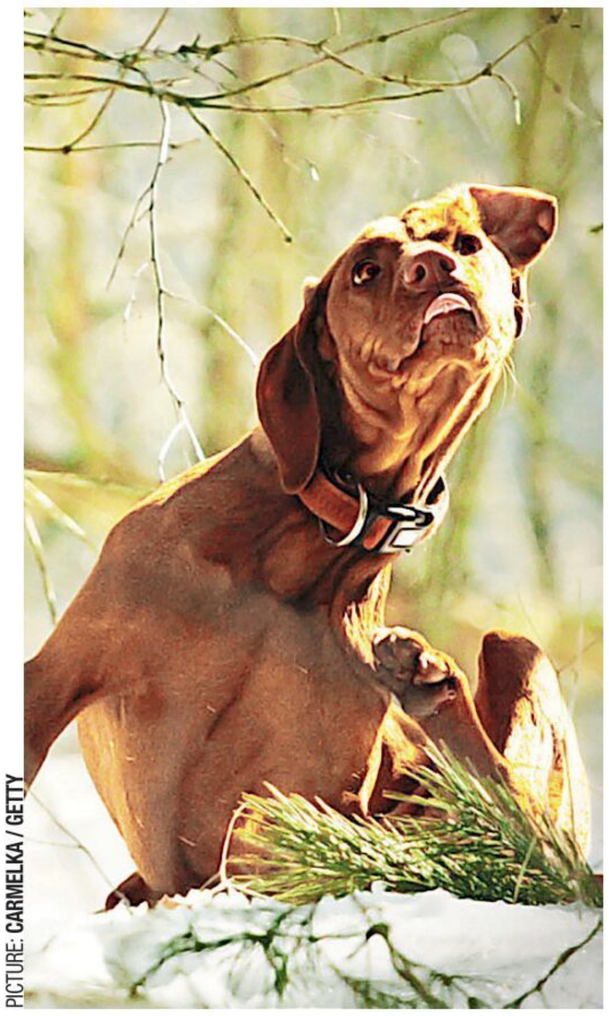
in association with CHUDLEYS

Itching to get out into the field

Q We have two vizslas who are six years old and we have been working them for just over four years. Reg has always been itchy, and last year we had a particularly bad moment, but he got over that. This year, Ronnie came home and two days later his back legs swelled and he was covered in large green pustules. We took him to our vets and he was put on 20 days of antibiotics, plus steroids – and Reg was put on the same treatment for 10 days.

Eventually, we tried going out on another shoot day, but with Reg that was a mistake.

They are both well now, but do you have any suggestions? They are such good dogs, and it seems such a waste as they love their work and sulk when Geoff leaves them at home.



PICTURE: CARMELKA / GETTY

A VICKY PAYNE replies: What you describe with Reggie is not uncommon when gundogs are running through cover, especially in wet conditions. Bacteria gets under the wet, scratched skin and pustules appear a day or so later. Unless the dog is clinically unwell, antibiotics are not required. I find a wash in an antibacterial shampoo resolves the issue quickly. Most of my dogs grow out of this after a couple of years in the beating line.

Caution! Lurcher crossing!

Q Why don't we see more gundog crosses in lurchers?



PICTURE: GILL KENNETT / GETTY

A JACKIE DRAKEFORD replies: Good question! At first glance, they would seem ideal, but a closer look tells us otherwise. The rush and haroosh of spaniels sending out quarry to be shot is counterproductive for dogs that have to flush and catch by themselves, and the rapid quartering pattern wastes too much energy.

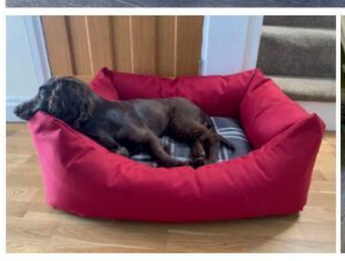
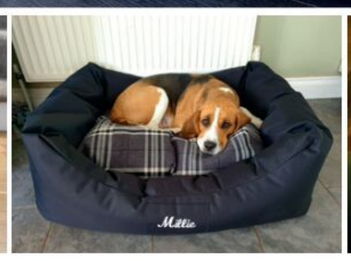
Labradors' big-boned physique doesn't favour the speed and deftness needed to course and pick-up, though they have super feet and a built-in retrieve. A second cross back to running dog often improves agility, though the big skull tends to come through even then. HPR types take a lot of work to make them sufficiently biddable and hunt more closely, though they can be very effective in certain scenarios. I have known lurchers bred from all of these that were very handy workers, but they did require a great deal more training and forgiveness than the more conventional crosses.

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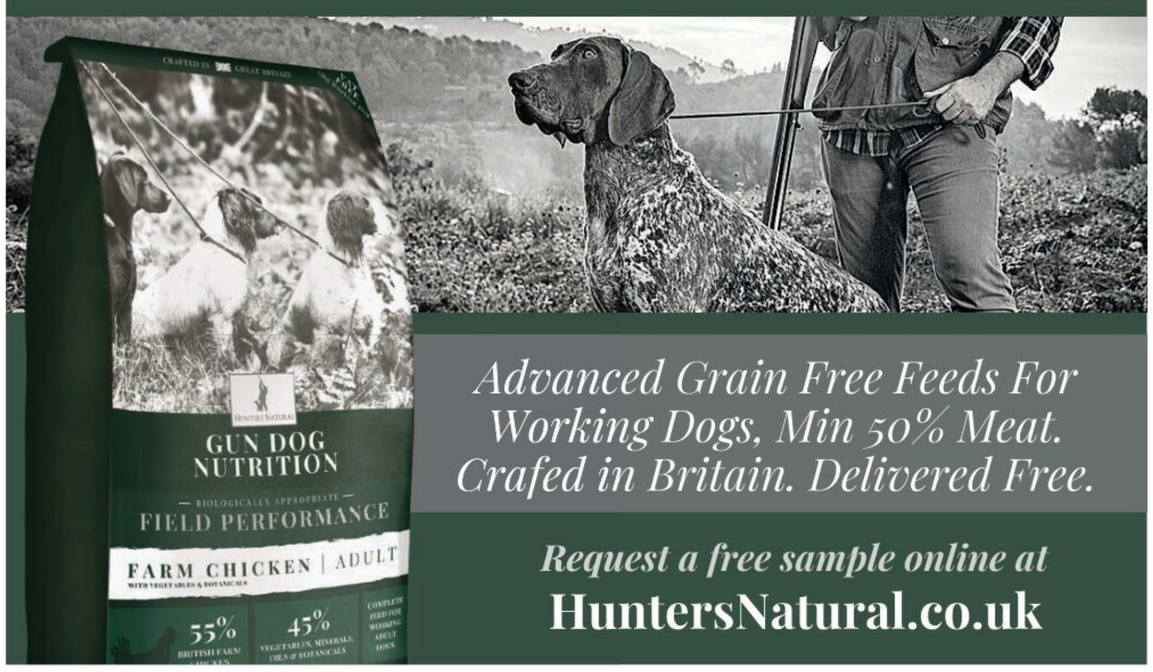





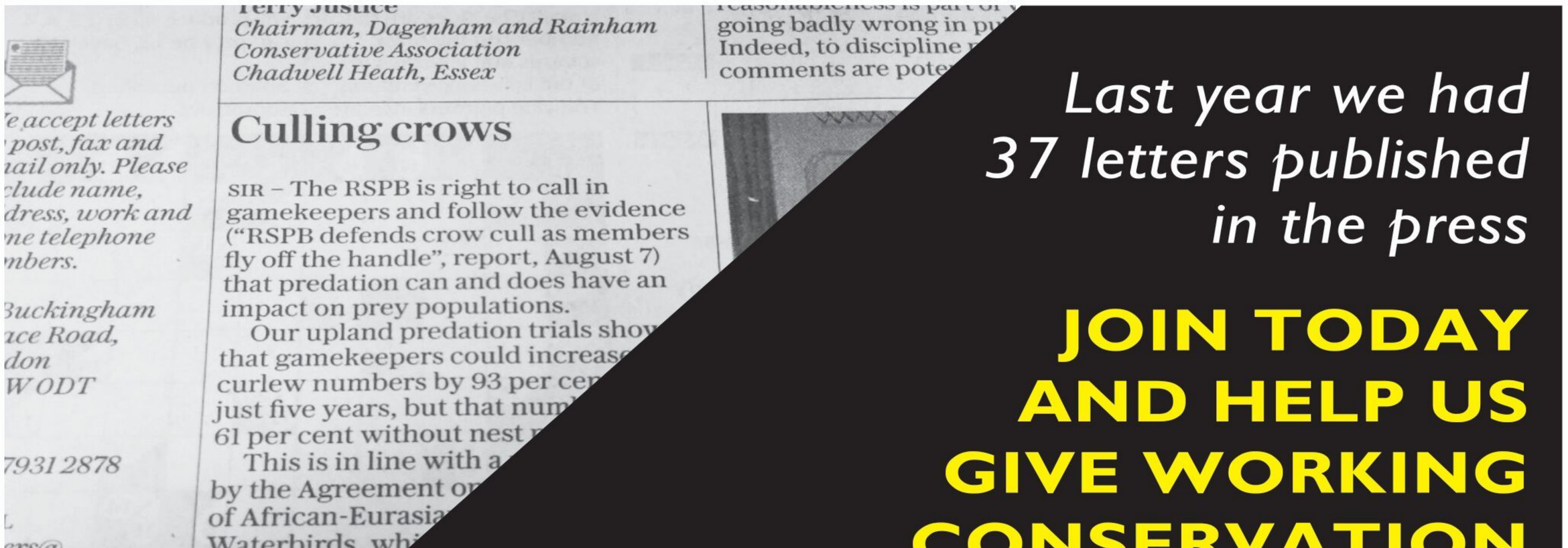
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near Godshill. Sporting, Skeet, DTL, ABT. Tel: (01983) 567330

KENT

ABBEY SHOOTING DETLING SG
Skeet, Sporting. Tel: 01580 860783 / 07710 463896

GREENFIELDS SHOOTING GROUND
nr Canterbury. Practice, tuition, have-a-go days.
Tel: (01227) 713222
www.greenfields shooting.co.uk

DARTFORD CLAY SHOOTING CLUB
Sporting, Skeet, OTr, Compact.
Tel: (01322) 311001
www.dartfordcsc.co.uk

HIGH BROOMS GUN CLUB
Meet fortnightly. Sunday morning 60-bird shoot. Pembury and Tunbridge Wells. Visitors welcome at cost of £15.
Tel: 01892 539103;
Email: malbow65@gmail.com

INVICTA ZZ
Off A21 btwn Tonbridge/ Tunbridge Wells. Helice (ZZ) only. Full Eng breakfast until cook goes to shoot. Reg shoots only.
Tel: (01580) 892542

KENT GUN CLUB
near Dartford. Trap, DTL, ADT, ZZ. Free tuition to beginners. Tel: (01883) 340248

KINGSFERRY GUN CLUB
Kingsferry Bridge. Skeet, Sportrap. Non-lead shot only.
Tel: (01795) 877037

MARTIN GORSE WOOD CPC
nr Dover in Kent
Tel: 01304 813101
www.martingorse.co.uk

WEST KENT SHOOTING SCHOOL
Paddock Wood. Sporting, Skeet and 100ft tower Tel: (01892) 834306 www.westkentshooting.co.uk

LONDON

A1 SHOOTING GROUND
near Rowley Green. OTr, DTL, Sporting, tuition. (020) 8441 9986 www.a1sg.freeserve.co.uk

WEST LONDON SHOOTING SCHOOL
Northolt. 100 traps, 8 towers, tuition, restaurant, corporate. Tel: (020) 8845 1377 www.shooting-school.co.uk

OXFORDSHIRE

GREENFIELD ENTERTAINMENT
Islip, nr Oxford. 50 Sporting, tuition. Tel: (01869) 325218 www.greenfieldentertainment.co.uk

SURREY

BISLEY GUN CLUB
Near Brookwood.DTL. CPSA competitions held 1st & 3rd Saturday of month. Tel: (01737) 242332 www.bisleygunclub.org.uk

BISLEY SHOOTING GROUND
nr Brookwood, Woking. Sporting (inc towers) tuition & practice. Open 7 days. Booking essential.
Tel: (01483) 797017
www.bisleyshooting.co.uk

CATERHAM CLAYS
off Caterham bypass. Sporting. Tel: (01883) 622656

This year's CPSA championships

The entries for the CPSA major championships are now open to any full CPSA members, offering the unique opportunity for novices to test themselves in competition alongside seasoned pros and Olympic champions. Ten major championships are held during the season split over five disciplines. The running order is as follows:

- English Open Skeet: 6-8 May, Dartford Shooting Ground
- English Open Sporting: 18-22 May, High Lodge Leisure
- Down the Line Weekend, including the Sponsored Day, Dougall Memorial and English Open: 10-12 June, Bywell Shooting Ground
- English Open ABT: 2-3 July, Bywell Shooting Ground
- English Open Sportrap: 15-17 July, Eriswell Lodge Shooting Ground
- British Open Skeet: 12-14 August, Eriswell Lodge Shooting Ground
- British Open Sporting & Sportrap: 31 August to 4 September, Barbury Shooting Ground

All CPSA major championships will be competition-only entry, and places can be booked at cpsa.co.uk/championships

GATWICK CLAY SHOOTING SCHOOL
Skeet, SKD, DTL, Sporting Tel: 07769 701842. www.gatwickclay-shootingschool.org.uk

HORNE CLAY PIGEON CLUB
Sporting shoots, tuition, corporate at Gatton Bottom, Markedge Lane, nr Reigate and Court Farm, Chaldon, nr Caterham on the Hill. Tel: (01342) 842986 or 07711 332097 www.clayandcountry.f2s.com

NATIONAL CLAY SHOOTING CNTR
Bisley. Four OTr layouts, Skeet, OS, ABT, Double Trap. T: 01483 797666 www.nsc-clays.co.uk

THE STAR GUN CLUB CHESSINGTON
Sporting. Tel: (020) 8898 3129

SUSSEX

BLACKDOWN SHOOT
Midhurst: 50 Sporting 4th Sunday of month. Fibre wads only. Also at School House Farm, Northchapel: 50 Sporting every 2nd and 5th Sunday. Tel: (01428) 707584 Mob: 07770 777679.

NORTHALL CLAY PIGEON CLUB
Sporting, Compact, ABT, D/T, Skeet, tuition, corporate. Tel: (01825) 791783

OAKESFIELD SPORTING GUN CLUB
Compak, Sporting, tuition and corporate Rudgwick, West Sussex Tel: 01306 740537/ 01737 222998

SOUTHDOWN SPORTING GUN CLUB
nr Worthing. Sporting, Skeet, Fitasc, Sportrap, DTL, ABT, tuition. Tel: (01903) 877555 www.southdownsgc.co.uk

EAST

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

CAMBRIDGE GUN CLUB
Cottenham. Sporting, Sportrap, ABT, Skeet, DTL Tel: (01353) 648004

FENLAND GC
Washbrooke Farm, Benwick Road, Doddington. Tel: 01354 655583

GRANSDEN AIRFIELD SG
Tel: (01767) 627663 www.gransdenshootingground.co.uk

HIGH HARTHAY SG
Tel: 07956 293390, www.hhsg.co.uk

MOVING TARGETS
Gt Eversden 50 ESP practice 2nd & 4th Sundays. Contact:
Tel. 07811815499
www.mobileclayshooting.co.uk

ESSEX

BUSH HILL CLAY CLUB
nr Billericay. Sporting.
Tel. (01277) 220974

CLACTON GUN CLUB
Little Clacton. Esp, Skeet, DTL.
Tel: (01255) 673146

COLCHESTER GARRISON
Clay Pigeon Club Sporting. Tel: 01206 576 756 (Chairman), 01206 392 357 (Secretary)

ESSEX SHOOTING GROUND
nr Harlow. Tel: 01245 283534, www.essexshooting ground.com

FENNES SHOOTING SCHOOL
Braintree CM7 5PL Tel: 01376 324599 www.fennesclays.co.uk

FOWES CLAY CLUB
Belchamp Otten. 01787 312930 www.fowesclayclub.org.uk

MAYLAND & DISTRICT GUN CLUB
ESK, DTL, compact. (01268) 470 323

ORION GUN CLUB
nr Brentwood Sporting, Skeet, DTL. 07000 486258 www.gunclub.co.uk

PARKFORD SHOOTING CENTRE
Skeet, Sporting, DTL.
Tel: (01255) 820230

SOUTHEND GUN CLUB
nr Rochford Tel: (01702) 219395

THREE ACRES SPORTING CLAYS
Leaden Roding. Sporting, pool. Tel: 07768 742117

WALTHAM ABBEY SHOOTING GRND
Sporting, tuition. Tel: 07768 742117 www.claypigeonshoot.co.uk

SPELLBROOK CSC SPORTING
Tuition. Tel: (01279) 419427 www.spellbrookclays.co.uk

NORFOLK

MID NORFOLK SHOOTING GROUND
Taverham, nr Norwich. Sportig, Skeet, ABT, DTL, Airgun range 121 & Corporate. Tuition by appt. www.midnorfolkshootingschool.com

SUFFOLK

BADWELL ASH GC
nr Bury St Edmunds. Sporting, Skeet, DTL, ABT. Tel: 01359 259547

BARROW HEATH GUN CLUB
nr New- market. Sporting.
Tel: (01322) 405226

HIGH LODGE SHOOTING SCHOOL
nr Saxmundham. Skeet, SkD, DTL, Sporting. Tel: (01986) 784347 www.highlodge.co.uk

LAKENHEATH CLAY TARGET CLUB
Between Mildenhall and Brandon. Skeet, DTL, Sportrap, gun room, tuition. Food. Tel: (01638) 533353 www.lctc.co.uk

NORTH WEST

CHESHIRE

SOUTH CHESHIRE CLAY CLUB
Alasger Nr Crewe, 1/2 mile from junction 16 M6, Cheshire, North West

ENGLISH SPORTING SHOOT
tuition, refreshments, Tel: 07768570132 Catton Hall Shooting Ground nr Frodsham. Practice, tuition, corporate. (01928) 788295

CLOUDSIDE SHOOTING GROUND
nr Congleton. Skeet, DTL, Compak, Sportrap, ABT, OT. Tel: 01260 226392. www.cloudside.co.uk

MIDDLE FARM CLAY SHOOT
Bredbury. Tel: 0161 4302492 North Wales Shooting School nr Chester. Sporting, Skeet, OS, Fitasc, tuition, practice. Tel: (01244) 812219 www.shootingschool.net

CUMBRIA

PENRITH & DISTRICT GUN CLUB
DTL, Sporting, ABT. 01697 342062

KENDAL & DISTRICT TARGET CLUB
Kendal, Cumbria. DTL esc b trap Tel Colin Phillips 01539 560298

ISLE OF MAN

AYRE CLAY PIGEON CLUB
Skeet, DTL, ABT, Double-Trap, UT, OT and Sporting. Tel: 01624 880744 www.bluepointshooting.co.uk

LANCASHIRE

A6 CLAY TARGET CENTRE
Westhoughton, nr Bolton. ABT, DTL, Skeet, Sportrap, tuition, restaurant. Tel: 01942 843578 www.a6ctc.co.uk

BLACKPOOL GUN CLUB
nr Kirkham Preston. Sporting. Tel: 07730 409415

KELBROOK SHOOTING SCHOOL
nr Foulridge. (01282) 861632

RUNNING HILL CLAY PIGEON CLUB
Sporting clays, Saddleworth www.running-hill-cpc.co.uk

WITHETS SHOOTING GROUND
Nr. Carnforth Lancashire M6 J35 Sporting; ABT; DTL; Skeet; Practice; Tuition by appointment Tel 07967 194120 www.withetsclayshoot.co.uk

MANCHESTER CLAY SHOOTING CLUB
Sporting, Skeet, tuition, club house. Tel: 0161 653 4438 www.manchesterclayshooting.com

SOUTH WEST

CORNWALL

CART RIDGE SHOOTING CLUB
1⁄2m east of A38 btwn Landrake & Tideford. Sporting, tuition. Tel: 01752 851262

COUNTY GUN CLUB
Tel: 01579 363301
Imerys Gun Club 01726 823895

NORTH CORNWALL GUN CLUB
nr North Petherwin. DTL, tuition. Tel: (01566) 785550

TRAX AND TRAILS ACTIVITY CNTR
Tamar Valley. Tuition.
Tel: (01579) 384714
www.traxandtrails.co.uk

DEVON

ASHCOMBE SHOOTING GROUND
nr Dawlish. Sporting, Skeet, DTL, high tower, tuition. Tel: (01626) 866766 www.ashcombeadventure.co.uk

AXMINSTER GUN CLUB DTL
tuition. Tel: (01404) 881588 Bradford Shooting Ground, Skeet, Sporting, DTL, ABT. Tel: (01409) 281341

CULM VALE GUN CLUB
nr Cullompton. Sporting.
Tel: (01460) 234245

CWA SHOOTING GROUND
Winnards Perch, Wadebridge, Cornwall. Skeet and Sporting clays, contact Mike Holmes 01872 864021

FOUR SEASONS GUN CLUB
East Hill Strips, nr Ottery St Mary. Skeet, Sporting, Compact.
Tel: (01395) 278862

NEWNHAM PARK SG
nr Plymouth. Sporting, Skeet, ABT, DTL, Sportrap, tuition. Tel: (01752) 343456 www.newnham.co.uk

NORTH DEVON FIELD SPORTS
Southdown Adventure Centre Nr Barnstaple. DTL, Sporting, Sports Trap, Practice and tuition
Tel: 01271 858791
www.devonfieldsports.co.uk

NORTH DEVON SG
nr Ilfracombe. Sporting, practice & tuition.
Tel: 01271 863959 or 01271 850393
ndsg@hotmail.co.uk

SHALDEN SHOOTING SCHOOL
nr Shillingford. Sporting.
Tel: (01398) 331021
www.shaldenshootingschool.co.uk

SOUTH WEST SHOOTING SCHOOL
Lynton Cross. Sporting, Compact.
Tel: 01271 862545

TAMAR SHOOTING GROUND
Bradworthy.
Tel (01409) 241839
www.waterland-days.co.uk

DORSET

PURBECK SHOOTING SCHOOL
nr Poole. Sporting, Skeet, OS, Fitasc, Sportrap. Tel: (01929) 405101 www.shooting.uk.com

SOUTHERN COUNTIES SHOOTING GROUND
Sporting, Skeet, OS, Fitasc, Sportrap, DTL, ABT, tower.
Tel: (01935) 83625

AGENTS: Send any updates to Clay Grounds, Sporting Shooter, Evolution House, 2-6 Easthampstead Road, Wokingham, Berks RG40 2EG



GLOUCESTERSHIRE

COTSWOLD CLAY PIGEON CLUB
Fosse Way, nr Stow. Sporting, pool. Tel: (01451) 821431

GLOUCESTER CLAY SHOOTING CLUB
on the A38 between Tewkesbury & Gloucester. Skeet, OS. Tel: (01452) 739472 or 07785 508238.

IAN COLEY SHOOTING SCHOOL
Nr. Cheltenham ESP & DTL Practice – Pay & Play. Tuition by Appt. Tel: 01242 870391 www.iancoley.co.uk

LONGRIDGE SHOOTING GROUND
Bromsberrow Heath, Ledbury Tel: (07971) 447138

MORK CLAY CLUB
nr St Briavels. Sporting. Tel: (01594) 530102

STROUD & DISTRICT CLAY SHOOTING CLUB
nr Bisley. Skeet, OS, DTL. Tel: (01453) 764443

WESTFIELD SHOOTING GROUND
Sporting, tuition, groups, corporate & simulated game. Tel: 0870 6091751 www.the clayshooting-company.com

SOMERSET

BROOK BANK SHOOTING GROUND
nr Cheddar. Sporting, Skeet, UT, DTL, ABT, tutition & corporate. Tel: 01749 871055. www.brookbankshooting.co.uk

IVYTHORN SPORTING
nr Street. Compact Sporting under cover. Tuition & corporate. Tel: (01458) 447120 or 07970 151321 www.ivythornsporting.co.uk

MENDIP SHOOTING GROUND
nr Wells. Sporting, Skeet, DTL, ABT, clubhouse, gunshop. Tel: (01749) 673471

PODIMORE SHOOTING GROUND
Ilchester. Sporting, Fitasc, Sportrap. Tel: (01935) 862510 www.podimore-shooting.co.uk

SHIPHAM SPORTING CLAYS
nr Clevedon. Sporting, tuition, practice. Tel: (01275) 877851

VALLEY SHOOTING GROUND
info@valleycalyshoot.co.uk

WOODSPRING CLAY SHOOT
Wick St Lawrence, nr Weston super Mare. Sporting/ 50-bird practice/ private parties. Tel: 07503 766373

WILTSHIRE

BARBURY SHOOTING SCHOOL
nr Swindon. Tuition, corporate, Sporting, FITASC, Compact, Skeet. Tel: 07872 666154 www.barburyshoot.com

BASSETT BREAKERS GUN CLUB
Flaxlands Shooting Ground, nr Swindon. Sporting. Tel: (01793) 750801

CADLEY CLAY SHOOTING GROUND
nr Marlborough. Sporting, practice, tutition, corporate.Tel: (01672) 512052 www.cadleyclays.co.uk

URCHFONT CLAY PIGEON CLUB
nr Devizes. DTL, Sporting. Tel: (01380) 721218

WOOD FARM CLAY SHOOTING CLUB
nr Warminster. Skeet, DTL, Sporting. Tel: (01747)860471

MIDLANDS

DERBYSHIRE

BAKEWELL & WIRKSWORTH CPC
nr Brassington. Sporting. Tel: (01629) 814395

DARLEY DALE CPSC
nr Brassington. Sporting. Tel: (01629) 733161

DOVERIDGE CLAY SHOOTING CLUB
nr Doveridge. Skeet, DTL, Sporting. Tel:(01889)565986

LOWES LANE SHOOTING GROUND
nr Swadlincote. Sporting, Skeet, DTL, high tower, flush, tuition. Tel: (01332) 866800

OCKBROOK SPORTING CLAYS
nr Derby. Tel: (01773) 714731

YEAVELEY ESTATE
nr Ashbourne. Sporting, Tuition. Tel: (01335) 330247

HEREFORD & WORCESTER

LONGRIDGE SHOOTING GROUND
M50 (Jn 2) Tel: 07971 447138

SOUTH WORCESTER SG
nr Upton-upon-Severn. DTL, Sporting, Practice, tuition. Tel: (01684) 310605 www.swsg.co.uk

WORCESTERSHIRE GUN CLUB
Illey, W Midlands. ABT, Sporting. Tel: 07836 225580 www.w-g-c.co.uk

WYRE FOREST GUNS
nr Button Oak. Sporting. Tel: (01299) 403730

LEICESTERSHIRE

BAGWORTH MINERS CPC
nr Coalville. DTL, Sporting, ABT. (01530) 260816

GRANGE FARM SC
nr Desford. Sporting, Skeet, OS, DTL, ABT. Tel: (01455) 822208

HOTON CLAY CLUB
Sporting. Tel: 0116 230 2311 www.hoton-clay-club.co.uk

KEGWORTH SHOOTING GROUND
(YS) Sporting Tel: 07973 111 650 Long Lane, 1 1/2 miles due north of Kegworth Village, at its junction with Ratcliffe lane. Nearest Sat nav: one mile south of the ground DE74 2GA.

KIBWORTH SHOOTING GROUND
Off A6 Kibworth-Market Harborough Rd. Sporting Skeet, DTL, Tower, Fitasc, Sportrap, flush. Tuition. Tel: 01162 796001 rose@kibworth-shootingground.co.uk

MARKET HARBOROUGH & DISTRICT SC
Sporting, Skeet, OS, DTL. Tel: (01858) 463698

NORMANTON SHOOTING GROUND
nr Thurlaston. Sporting, ABT, DT Tel: (01455) 888210

SPA VALE SHOOTING GROUND
nr Lutterworth. Tel: 0116 247 8917 www.spa-vale.co.uk

LINCOLNSHIRE

GRIMSTHORPE ESTATE SG
nr Eden-ham. Sporting. Tel: (01778) 591128

HAVEN CLAY SHOOTING CLUB
Haven Bank, New York, LN4 4XR. Enquiries to Graham Fordham 07854227175. 30-bird Sporting, DTL, family days, friendly club. Visit havencpc.webs.com for shooting dates.

LINCS CLAY CLUB
Church Lane, South Clifton, Nr Lincoln, Lincolnshire NG23 7AW, www.lincsclayclub.co.uk

LINCOLNSHIRE SHOOTING GROUND
Sutton Bridge. Sporting, Skeet, ABT, Sportrap, tower, tuition, restaurant, corporate.Tel: (01406) 359300/ (01945) 700622 www.shooting4you.co.uk

PINEWOOD SHOOTING GROUND
nr Gainsborough. Sporting, Skeet, DTL, OT, D/T, Compact. Tel: (01427) 628900. www. pinewood-sg.fsnet.co.uk

SINCLAIRS SHOOTING GROUND
Whaplode Drove, nr Holbeach. Skeet, Sporting, Compact, ABT & DTL. Open Weds-Sun, all year. Tel: (01406) 540362.

SPA VALE SHOOTING GROUND
Coventry Road (Near to Magna Park) Lutterworth, Tel No. 0116 2478917 www.spa-vale.co.uk

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

A614 SHOOTING GROUND
Near Nottingham, tuition. Tel: (0115) 9656144

COCKETT FARM SHOOTING GRND
nr Mansfield. Sporting, Skeet, STr, White Gold, tuition. Tel: (01623) 882244 www.cockettfarm.com

NOTTINGHAM & DISTRICT GC
DTL, Skeet, OS. Tel: (0115) 9273492

ORSTON SHOOTING GROUND
Sporting, Skeet, Sportrap, DTL, ABT, D/Rise, Trench, practice, tuition, corporate and shop. Tel: (01949) 851181 or 07831 221110 www.orston.com

OXTON SHOOTING SCHOOL
Sporting, Skeet, Compact, Sportrap, ABT, DTL, Fitasc, tuition, shop. Tel: (01623) 882523

STILEHOLLOW SHOOTING SCHOOL
nr Mansfield. Sporting, Skeet, DTL, ABT, tower, tuition. (01623) 823930 www.stilehollow.com

NORTHAMPTON

NORTHAMPTON SHOOTING GRND
Skeet, DTL, ABT, tuition. (01604) 642252 northamptonshooting-ground.co.uk

SHROPSHIRE

BRIDGNORTH & DISTRICT GUN CLUB
nr Wolverhampton. DTL. Tel: (01562) 883092

WEST MIDLANDS SG
Sporting,Skeet, ABT, Compact, Fitasc, ABT, gun room. Tel: (01939) 200644 www.wmsg.co.uk

STAFFORDSHIRE

CROSS GUN CLUB
nr Kinver. Sporting year-round, ABT in summer. Tel: (01384) 873017 or 07973 875449

GARLANDS SHOOTING GROUND
Tamworth. Sporting, OT, DTL, Skeet. Tel: (01827) 383300

KINGSLEY MOOR SG
nr Alton Towers. Sporting. Tel: (01782) 550371

LEEK & DGC
Sporting. Tel: (01538) 386127

QUARNFORD SHOOTING GROUND
nr Leek. Sporting. Tel: (01298) 22204

RANTON CLAY TARGET CLUB
DTL, ABT, Sporting. (01782) 611775.

RODBASTON GUN CLUB
Sporting & tuition, Weds eves. www.shotgun.me.uk

MILLRIDE COUNTRY SPORTS
Sporting, Skeet. Off junction 1 of the M54. WV11 2AZ. 01902 725165 www.millride-country-sports.co.uk

OAKEDGE SHOOTING GROUND
Sporting, Fitasc Sporting, High Skeet, DTL. (01889) 881391

WERGS GUN CLUB
nr Essington. Sporting, Skeet. (01922) 476508

WARWICKSHIRE

BARBY SPORTING CLUB
nr Rugby. Sporting, Skeet, DTL, Compact. Tel: (01788) 891873 www.barbysporting.com

EDGEHILL SHOOTING GROUND
nr Banbury. Sporting, Skeet, OS, DTL, ABT, Compact. Tuition & corporate. (01295) 670100

HONESBERIE SHOOTING GROUND
Sporting, tuition, corporate.Tel: (01327) 260302 www.honesberie-shooting.co.uk

RUGBY & DISTRICT TRAP CLUB
ABT. Tel: (01788) 573257

WEDGNOCK SHOOTING GROUND
Sporting, Skeet, DTL, Sportrap. Tel: 01926 491948 www.adventuresport.co.uk

YORKSHIRE & N.E.

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SPENNYMOOR & DISTRICT
Clay Pigeon Club Sporting, Skeet, ABT, DTL. Tel: (0191) 3772412 www.keithbutterwick.com/spennymoor

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EAST YORKSHIRE GUN CLUB
nr Beverley. Skeet, OS, SKd, DTL, ABT, UTR, Sporting. Tel: (01964) 551134

HUMBERSIDE SHOOTING GROUND
nr Beverley. Skeet, DTL, ABT, Compact, White Gold. Tel: (01964) 544357. www.pthorn.co.uk/shootingground

MONCKTON SG
N. Newbald, Tel: 01430 827229. www. moncktonshoot.co.uk

NORTH WOLDS GUN CLUB
Sporting, DTL, tuition. Tel: (01759) 368314

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NORTH YORKSHIRE

CONISTON SHOOTING GROUND
nr Skipton. Tel: 07831 399860

KNARESBOROUGH & DISTRICT GC
Sporting, Skeet, DTL, ABT. Tel: (01423) 561174.

NORTH OF ENGLAND CTC
nr Rufforth. Sporting, Skeet, OS, DTL, ABT. Tel: (01904) 738120.

NORTH YORKSHIRE SHOOTING
School nr Thirsk. 07966 387273 northyorkshireshootingschool.com

THIMBLEBY SHOOTING GROUND
nr Osmotherley. Sporting, Sportrap, tuition, corporate. Tel: (01642) 351725 Mob: 07776 223609

WARREN GILL SHOOTING GROUND
nr Ripon Tel: (01765) 689232 www.warrengill.co.uk

NORTHUMBERLAND

BYWELL SHOOTING GROUND
nr Felton. Skeet, DTL, ABT, tower, shop. Tel: (01670) 787827 www.bywellshootingground.com

STEVE SMITH SG
nr Dinnington. Sporting, DTL, Skeet, ABT. Tel: (01661) 822444. www.stevesmiths.co.uk

SOUTH YORKSHIRE

FOX HOUSE CLAY SPORTS
Sporting, tuition, corporate. Tel: (0114) 2663822 or 07976 5211369

SYCAMORE SHOOTING GROUNDS
Sporting, DTL, D/R, tuition, corporate. Tel:(0114) 272 4602

WEST YORKSHIRE

BATLEY & DISTRICT GUN CLUB
nr Morley. Sporting Tel: (01484)711874

EMLEY CLAYSHOOT
Sporting every 2nd Sunday. Tuition available. Mob: 07814 538927

GREYSTONE WOOD SHOOTING GRND
nr Otley. Sporting. Mob: 07960 352123

HOLMFIRTH SHOOTING SCHOOL
nr Huddersfield. Skeet, DTL, ABT, Tel: (01484) 685464

N. IRELAND

FOYMORE LODGE
off the A4 in Co Armagh (signed from Portadown & M1 j12). Sporting, instruction, club house. www.foymorelodge.com

WALES

CRYNANT SHOOTING GROUND
Port Talbot, South Wales. Sporting, Skeet, OS, DTL, ABT, tuition, corporate. Tel: 07855 828167; Email: firstcorporate2003@yahoo.co.uk

DOVEY VALLEY SHOOTING GRND
Llanwrin, Machynlleth, Powys. Sporting, Skeet, DTL, sim game, practice, tuition, corporate. (01650) 511252. www.doveyvalley.co.uk

GRIFFIN-LLOYD SHOOTING GRND
Mid-Wales, Welsh Marches. Sporting, ABT, OT, tuition. Tel: (01547) 550634 www.griffinlloyd.co.uk

FAUXDEGLA SHOOTING GROUND
North Wales. DTL, ABT, Skeet. Tel: 01978 790198

MID WALES SC
nr Llanidloes. DTL, ABT. Tel: (01686) 430654

NORTH WALES SS SEALAND
nr Chester. DTL, OT. Tel: (01244) 812219

SOUTH WALES 2000
nr Newbridge. Sporting, Skeet, OT, ABT, DTL, tuition, clubhouse. Tel: (01495) 201182 www.southwales2000.com

TREETOPS SG
nr Newport, 5 min from M4 j28. Sporting, tuition. (01633) 681197

WOODLAND PARK SHOOTING GRND
Brecon. Sporting, tuition, corporate. Tel: 078111 89413 www.wpshoot.co.uk

SCOTLAND

AUCHTERHOUSE COUNTRY SPORTS
nr Dundee. Sporting, Fitasc, Skeet, DTL. Tel: (01382) 320476 www.treemac.co.uk

ARRAN GUN CLUB ISLE OF ARRAN
nr Altnaharra. Tel:(01549) 411245

BRAIDWOOD SG
nr Selkirk. Tel: (01835) 870280 www.braidwoodsc.co.uk

BURNTKETTLE SG AULDGARTH
nr Dumfries. DTL, Skeet, Sporting. Tel: 01848 331131.

BUTE CLAY TARGET CLUB
Kingarth. Tel: (01700) 500274 Cairndow Clay Target Club Argyll. DTL. Tel:(01499) 600201

CARLISLE & DISTRICT GUN CLUB
nr Wigton. Tel: (01697) 331452

CENTRAL SCOTLAND SHOOTING SCHOOL
nr Falkirk. OSK, DTL, ABT. Tel: (01324) 851672

CLAY TARGET SHOOTING SCHOOL
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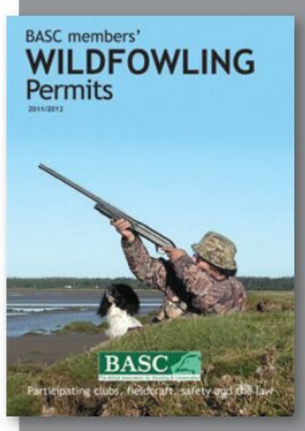
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Benelli SP'Auto 2022

The Benelli SP'Auto is returning to Barbury Shooting Ground on 28 May for the 2022 edition of their popular competition. The 100-target course set over 12 stands will combine the usual mix of triple targets and doubles with full three-shot use of the gun. The SP'Auto is designed to be a fun event providing a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere for shooters of all abilities, whilst challenging participants' powers of concentration in a unique way.

English Sporting rules will govern the competition. Ladies, Juniors, Under 18s and Veterans will shoot in their CPSA-classified classes and are also eligible for prizes in their respective categories. Shooters not registered with the CPSA and who therefore do not have a CPSA class will be placed in a class determined by their scores on completion of the event.

ENTRY PRICES
Seniors: £52
Juniors: £36
benellispauto.co.uk

Barbury is one of the country's best clay shooting facilities and hosted the English Open in 2021. Set in the beautiful Wiltshire countryside, the on-site facilities are described as plentiful and modern, which is befitting for one of the premier events in the clay shooting calendar.



PICTURE: DON BRUNT

CREATURE FINDERS



WE FOUND ANTON THE AARDVARK ON PAGE 58 OF THE JANUARY ISSUE

Gareth Curtis • George Hall, Argyll • Sylvia Binovec, Hexham • Ralph Stimson, Bucks • Liz Harper, Norwich • Richard Sables, Devon • Ian King, Thaxted • Gary Aitchison, Yorks • Philip Kent, Spalding • Ann Owen, Corwen • Anneurin Owen, Corwen • Martin Rowell, Norwich • John Mercer, Co Wexford, • Jason Williams, Guildford • Avril Owers, Dorchester • Anthony Cheetham, Worcs • Shona Morris, Kidderminster • Frank Holman, Norfolk • William A Dickson, Chepstow • John Loveridge, Cambridge • Ian Shannon, Co Armagh

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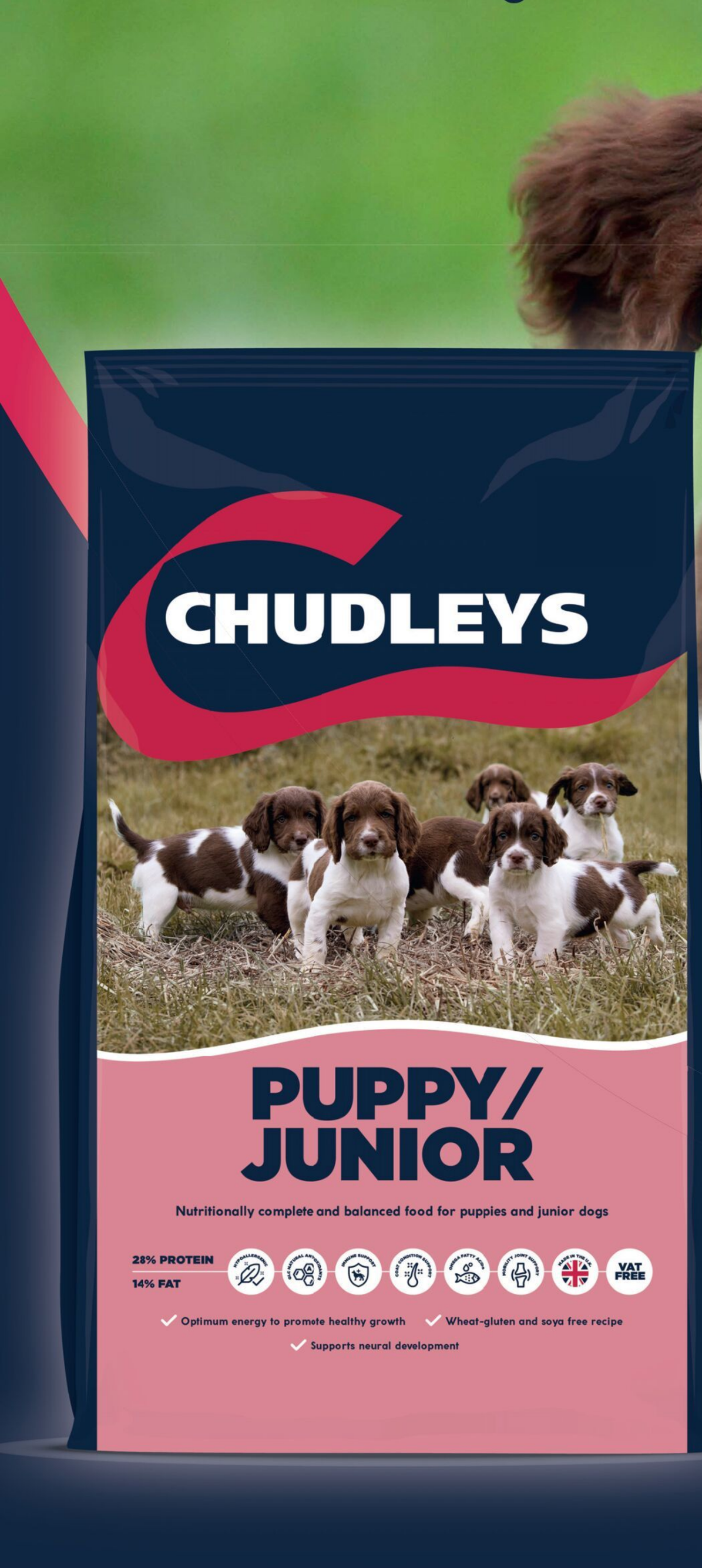
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