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Sporting Shooter



First Words

Well it has to be said that in my mind the Stalking Show, held this April, was, although quite small, rather a success, with plenty of footfall through the doors including football and film star Mr. Vinnie Jones! Unfortunately, I was there on the Saturday, and Vinnie was there on the Sunday which was rather disappointing (I'm sure he would have loved to have met someone as jaw droppingly famous as me!).

Despite this, it was good to catch up with some familiar faces as well as meet a few new ones, as well as the customary evening meal out followed by a steady flow of Jack Daniels & Coke (sanctions are still in place by me on the purchase of Russian vodka in a bid to cripple Putin's finances). For a look at what was at the show, head over to the Shooting & Country TV channel for a video from the weekend.

This month has been a busy one for me and no doubt many fox shooters around the country with the lambing season well underway. For the past few weeks, I've been walking around in a zombie state from too many early mornings and late nights, trying to cull foxes as well as keep on top of work and family commitments. Often resulting in a few eyes closed, mouth open, 'long blinks' at inappropriate times such as family BBQs or egg hunts with the grandchildren, as well as moments of insane behaviour like finding truck keys in the fridge.

Fortunately, my longsuffering other half seems to understand the importance of my nighttime excursions to the lambing fields (or she's simply given up trying to change me and what I do).

The simple fact is that if you want to keep your shooting permissions, farmers don't want you sat at home feeling thick watching The Chaser when foxes are killing their lambs around them.

In this month's issue, my foxing buddy, Deano, is out protecting piglets on his farms, and our other regular contributor Mick Garvey is out fending off the ever-increasing invasion of grey squirrels.

With vermin control the main focus over the next few months, we've put together a night shooting gear guide for rabbits and foxes as well as our usual content.

With the weather rapidly improving (at least for us southerners! Mentally insert tongue out emoji face for northerners here) it's ideal BBQ time so be sure to get out and put some game on the grill, and don't miss Chris Marney's yummy recipe for venison wraps on page 37!

Mark Ripley
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Contents

ON THE COVER

43 EYES TO THE SKIES
14 IN THE WORKSHOP
50 GUN TEST
10 PIGEONS
58 FOXING
32 CONSERVATION
37 RECIPES
76 FIELD TRIALS

REGULARS

06 **NEWS**
28 **ASK THE EXPERTS:** Screw cut barrels, ballistic apps, clearing ditches, and a hidden danger
30 **LETTERS**
37 **ONE FOR THE POT:** Crispy venison pancakes and duck arancini!
56 **BASC:** The latest on the transition to lead-free and what it means for you
64 **IRELAND:** How improving habitat diversity can pay huge dividends
66 **CLASSIC GUNS:** The work of a pivotal figure in the shooting world
68 **THE COUNTRYMAN:** How much does running a shoot cost?
86 **CLAY GROUNDS**
88 **FIND SHOOTING**

THE MARKETPLACE

46 **PRODUCTS:** Tick-resistant clothing and gamekeeping gear
48 **NIGHT LIFE:** Mark Ripley's top kit for foxing and rabbiting at night
50 **GUN TEST:** Beretta A400 Upland 20

GAME SHOOTING

14 **RESTORATION:** Refinishing and chequering a vintage stock
43 **WALK AND SHOOT:** Spending time in the Sussex fields with a gamekeeper is an absolute joy
52 **TECHNIQUE:** Finding the right individual shooting style for you

GAMEKEEPING

18 **CREATE A DIY SHOOT:** Taking stock and looking to the future
22 **KEEPER'S COUNTRY:** Bringing the last drive to a fitting conclusion
24 **GWT:** A look at the work of the Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust as the charity reaches a milestone
26 **COVER CROPS:** Sowing advice for the summer and autumn
32 **CONSERVATION:** How to attract more diverse wildlife to your land
40 **KEEPERING:** Your essential update on the bird flu outbreak

PEST CONTROL

10 **PIGEONS:** Crowman enters the hide to protect the emerging lucerne
54 **SQUIRRELS:** Mick comes to the rescue of a red kit
58 **FOXING:** Deano answers an SOS and springs into action
61 **MARK RIPLEY:** The lambing season brings a new set of challenges

COMPETITIONS

07 Win a shotgun slip
30 Win Seeland Buckthorn trousers
31 Win Sportear Trackr ear muffs

GUNDOGS

71 **GUNDOG VET:** Bites and stings
72 **GUNDOG TRAINING:** Heel work
76 **GUNDOG FOCUS:** Top clubs to help you get involved in trialling
80 **GUNDOG DIARY:** Emrys learns about going the distance
82 **GUNDOG EXPERTS**

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Welsh Game Fair 2022



PICTURE: TWEED MEDIA

For tickets and more information, visit welshgamefair.org

The team behind The Game Fair and The Scottish Game Fair, two hugely popular annual gatherings for people passionate about the countryside, have announced the first ever GWCT Welsh Game Fair. The event will take place on 9-11 September 2022 at the historic Faenol Estate near Bangor in northwest Wales, and is being organised in partnership with leading conservation charity the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT).

The 2022 WGF is set to feature clay shooting, gundogs, game cookery, falconry, horses and hounds, as well as rural crafts, food and drink. Visitors can enjoy a wide range of attractions, displays and live debates, and browse hundreds of trade stands, all with a countryside theme. The event is set to act as a shop window for the Welsh countryside, promoting the unique culture and heritage of Wales and bringing together representatives from conservation, farming, field sports and fishing bodies for debates on rural issues. The aim is to foster greater communication and cooperation between sectors and promote the benefits of country pursuits and conservation to a wider audience.

The National Game Fair Ltd managing director James Gower said, “I’m delighted to be able to that we are planning the first ever Welsh Game Fair in partnership the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust. Wales has some of the UK’s most beautiful countryside which is home to people passionate about the landscape and the country pursuits taking place in it. It’s high time we shone a spotlight on the Welsh countryside and this event is the perfect way to do it.”

Corvids removed from Welsh GL004

The board of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has pushed through a decision to remove magpies, jays and jackdaws from the Welsh General Licence 004 for the purpose of protecting wild birds, even red-listed birds, after board members voted in favour by six votes to three on the proposal. Those requiring permission to control these three species for the purposes of conservation will now need to apply for a specific licence – a lengthy system which has been heavily criticised in the past.

The decision has been met with confusion and concern by rural organisations due to the apparent lack of regard for evidence provided to the public by NRW itself in its consultation document. In this document, NRW refers to its own 2019 review, which clearly states there is “well established scientific evidence of impact” for magpies and jays to be included on GL004.

There have also been changes made to GL001 (issued to prevent damage to crops and livestock), which will specify which species of birds can be controlled matched to types of damage, further complicating the process and presenting another barrier to effective pest control for farmers.

Rachel Evans, director for Countryside Alliance Wales said: “It seems that NRW have once again bowed down to the pressure from animal rights groups and have completely ignored their own evidence. 82% of respondents to the consultation in a yes/no exercise wanted jay to be removed from a general licence; it seems that this has been accepted contrary to NRW’s own evidence. It is completely bizarre.”

The new licences come into effect from 1 July 2022.



PICTURE: DAVID O’BRIEN / GETTY

Scurry up



PICTURE: SPORRAN / GETTY

If you have ever visited a country show and seen gundogs retrieving against the clock and wondered what was happening, you may have entered the world of gundog scurries. Scurries are generally open to all gundog breeds and come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from a straightforward marked dummy to more challenging exercises such as the Pick & Mix where only certain dummies should be picked. The aim of them is always the same, for a dog to retrieve a dummy in the quickest time possible, being pitted against both the other entrants and the clock.

These exercises provide fun for both the handler and dog, whilst also testing your dog’s abilities in the atmosphere of a gundog competition. BASC run their own scurries which are kindly supported by Skinners who sponsor the entire BASC Gundog programme. Typically held at country shows and game fairs, scurries are easy to get involved with. You just have to turn up on the day, pay for as many or as few runs as you wish, and then take your turn.

A list of rules and participating venues can be found at **basc.org.uk/gundogs/scurry-league**

Defra green paper

As part of the government's plan to restore natural habitats and halt declines in biodiversity by 2030, Defra is consulting on both nature recovery and environmental targets. At the centre of the green paper is a consolidation of BASC's current legal framework relating to designated sites and species protection. The paper is essentially an exploration into how best to disentangle the layers of regulation that have built up since the first designation was made in 1949. For protected habitats (SSSIs, SPAs, SACs and RAMSAR sites), it proposes a complete overhaul with the intention of producing a more modernised, effective system. Regarding species protection, the proposal plans to streamline the legal framework into a simplified, tiered system.

Pest control, deer management, releasing game birds, wildfowling and target shooting are all governed by various



PICTURE: DOM HOLTAM

regulations which means any changes to legislation could impact shooting activities.

The key actions that need to be addressed by any change in regulations are the creation of a streamlined legislative framework based on the best available evidence. As highlighted in BASC's white paper, Shooting for a Level Playing Field, shooting activities have long been disadvantaged within the licensing process. Should Defra to develop a fair and proportionate process, regulators will be able to focus more of their time and resources tackling damaging practices and enhancing the natural environment.

Wild Justice and the woodcock season

Wild Justice have written yet another letter to George Eustice, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – this time regarding woodcock. The letter concerns the close season for woodcock in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which currently runs from 1 February to 30 September (31 August in Scotland). The campaign group want this extended until 30 November, the justification being the fact that the resident British woodcock population is in decline. Wild Justice suggest that the GWCT's current recommendations that woodcock are not shot before 1 December should become law.

The GWCT have undertaken more research into woodcock ecology and conservation than any other organisation in the UK and said: "It would appear from the letter that Wild Justice may not fully understand the nuance of the factors driving woodcock populations; nor is it clear how their proposals for statutory changes to the shooting season would enhance the population status of our resident breeding woodcock."

It can safely be assumed that gamekeepers play a hugely important role in managing woodlands which encourage woodcock and increase their breeding numbers.

Double recognition

Dr Mike Swan, senior advisor with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), has had his remarkable dedication to conservation and game management recognized with a double award at the recent Great British Shooting Awards 2022.

Mike, who celebrates 40 years with the GWCT this year, was selected as recipient of the Outstanding Contribution to Conservation and the Lifetime Achievement awards. In typically modest fashion, he said: "Maybe it's just a case of sticking it for long enough."

Mike went on to comment: "My career with the GWCT has been fascinating and I like to think I have helped at least a few people achieve both better shooting, and better conservation from their shoot management. In accepting these two awards, I pay tribute to my many GWCT colleagues past and present. My achievements are very much a result of their dedication to the cause of conservation through wise use."

Mike has been part of the GWCT Advisory Service team since January 1982, and provides game management and conservation advice to gamekeepers, farmers and conservation organisations. He lives in Dorset, where he runs a rough shoot on a 1,000-acre farm, carrying out a range of conservation measures.



PICTURE: GWCT

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CONGRATULATIONS:

DEREK HAUSER who found HENRY HEDGEHOG on p12 of the April issue. See p88 for more successful creature finders.

PICTURE: PRETTYZHIZHI / GETTY

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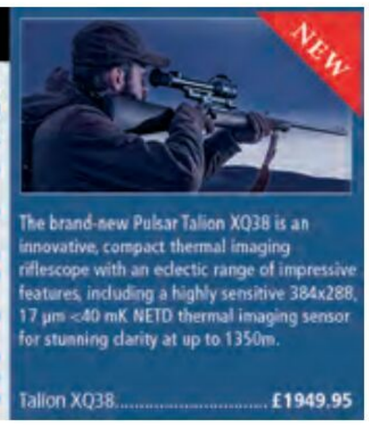
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A (birth)day in the hide!

Emily Damment spends her birthday in the pigeon hide with Crowman and cousin Gary, who are working hard to protect the freshly growing lucerne leaves

No-one could accuse me of being anything other than dedicated to the cause of great content creation when, on 5 April (my birthday!), I was up at the crack of dawn and cursing my way through the M25 rush hour traffic en route to Crowman's for another day's filming.

Early spring is a busy time of year for farmers, with plenty of crops to be drilled; it is also a key time of the year for pigeon control, as the little blighters do their utmost to undo all that hard work by munching their way through the newly emerging fresh and juicy shoots.

A call from Andy the day before informed me that he'd been watching well over 500 birds dropping in to feed on his lucerne crop, and would need to remedy the situation as soon as possible.

"I'll have to shoot them tomorrow," he told me. "The weather looks perfect for it with a bit of a breeze and some nice sunshine, and I can't leave them any longer or they'll start to cause serious damage! Gary is free tomorrow too, so we'll be shooting together... it should be a great day."

The lucerne, now in its third year, is cut for silage. It is left dormant over the winter, and is grazed down by sheep, ready to grow back again once the soil temperature rises enough. It is at this point, as the fresh leaves begin to grow, that the pigeons will give it their full attention.



Gary's hide was tucked into a treeline

"They tend to get on it once the fresh growth emerges, and stay on it right up until the end of April," said Andy. "Around the end of April and the first week of May, they will come off it again in favour of the new buds springing up in the woodlands and hedgerows. By the end of May, they'll be making a nuisance of themselves again on the spring rape and peas, so I'll be keeping a close eye then and keeping the numbers down as much as I can."

We arrived at the field in question around 10:30am. It's a huge sweep of land, with a couple of woods at one end, a tree line bordering the other end, and some houses beyond the trees. Andy and Gary promptly wandered off, deep in conversation about flight lines, wind directions, and other elements that must combine in perfect harmony to produce a successful day in the hide. After half an hour of kicking our heels, they returned with a solid plan in place.

"We're going to set up both our hides in this field, rather than putting Gary elsewhere on the farm, which is sometimes a good idea as it helps keep the birds moving while also giving us the



The birds that did decoy, did so quite nicely, but many sailed overhead towards the woods

PICTURES: EMILY DAMMENT



Sillosocks work brilliantly on breezy days, creating gentle movement throughout the pattern

opportunity to reduce numbers in another area," Andy explained. "Today, we've decided to both set up here since we've been seeing them here regularly over the last few days in very high numbers; there's not much for them to be feeding on elsewhere so I'm pretty confident we'll be in for a good day."

The boys set up two hedgerow hides at the top end of the field, with the woods behind them. The hides were set up to form a triangle, with the top of the triangle being the top corner of the field; the effect was a kind of pincer-like formation, with any pigeons hoping to reach the woods having to fly over Andy's hide, over Gary's hide, or directly between the two of them! With a hedge/treeline serving as the backdrop to Gary's hide, and the woodland serving as Andy's backdrop, the positioning of the hides also meant they could spot birds for each other; despite effectively concealing their outlines and helping the hides to blend in, the trees do sometimes make it tricky to spot birds coming from behind or directly along the treelines. With a clear view of each other's blind spots, any pigeon coming from any direction was going to be spotted nice and early, called, and hopefully, taken out!

The wind, for once, was perfect, blowing on their backs and out into the field in front of them; this would encourage the pigeons to land into the decoy pattern laid out in front of the two hides. The pattern was built using a mixture of shot birds, and plenty of Sillosocks. With a good breeze, the Sillosocks were absolutely ideal, creating fantastic movement throughout the pattern. The addition of two whirlies – one on each edge of the pattern, almost level with the two hides – ensured that any birds passing high or wide would spot them, swoop down for a look, and be funnelled into the pattern and into range. The final touch was to erect some large white flags at the very far end of the field to discourage the pigeons from feeding there – this is a smart solution if you're working with large areas and want to make sure you don't set up in one area, only to have the birds feeding in sight but out of range in another area! Finally, with the scene set, it was time to get in the hides and wait for what we were all quietly confident was going to be an absolutely show-stopping day.

After perhaps 20 minutes, a few birds began dropping in, and were neatly dropped by the boys. Working in tandem, Andy and Gary decide who will take each bird, so that they are not wasting cartridges by both shooting the same one! This works especially well when there are two or three coming in at the same time – they can decide who will take which bird, and attack in

'The boys set up two hedgerow hides with the woods behind them – this positioning meant they could spot birds for each other'



Andy and his hide blending into the woods behind beautifully!



The boys placed a whirlie on both edges of the pattern, roughly level with the edge of their hides

unison so that no birds are lost as they flare away from the first gunshot.

The action continued steadily... too steadily. It's wasn't exactly a disaster, but it was certainly not the deluge we all expected on this seemingly perfect day. There was clearly nothing wrong with the pattern, as the pigeons that did decoy, decoyed very nicely. There just weren't loads of birds, and most were sailing straight over the top without paying much attention to the enticing pattern!

"They're all heading to the woods and sitting in there I think," said Andy, his head twisting in all directions as he scanned the annoyingly bird-less skies. "We might have to put some banger ropes up there to get them moving if it doesn't pick up in a bit."

It didn't pick up in a bit, so off went Andy to lay some banger ropes up in the woods. A little while later, we heard the 'pop' of the first banger.

"Get ready," shouted Andy from his hide. "They'll be here soon!"

Sure enough, the bangers seemed to do the trick. Leaving the larger flocks well alone so as not to educate the escapees, the lads added several more to the steadily growing bag. It wasn't easy shooting, as many still weren't taking much notice of the decoys, but both Andy and Gary were pulling off some decent long-range shots and bagging the unlucky birds that came into range. On days like this, when every bird is hard work and there are long waits between each shot, it can sometimes feel like you've hardly made a dent, but my experience tells me that the final count up usually makes for a pleasant surprise.

Due to my aforementioned birthday (my mum wanted to cook me a nice birthday dinner), I did have to leave earlier than usual, and at about 4:30, cameraman Adam and I made a run for the treeline and crept back to our car, leaving the lads to continue their work.

S&CTV

Watch Andy Crow in action on Shooting & Country TV: youtu.be/Hm_5VWDYco0



The final bag, which we weren't aorund to witness!

Very predictably, about an hour later, I got a phone call from a very overexcited Andy, informing me that they downed no less than 80 birds in the 40 minutes after we departed. They finished the day on a really decent bag of about 140.

"The trouble was that they knew it won't take them long to fill up," Andy explained. "They'd obviously been sitting in the woods and having a feed on some early buds, so they wouldn't need to feed on the lucerne for long to get full. That means a shorter feeding window, so they dropped in later in the day than we expected. We had some great sport after you left and I was shooting really well, but there you go! I hope your mum's cooking is worth missing out on the action!"

In case you're reading this mum, it was definitely worth it! Still, it was a long old day standing around, only to miss out on the grand finale, and another reminder that packing up too early can cost you dearly. Next month, I'll be clearing my diary for the evening! ■

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PART TWO

GUN RESTORATION // WITH PHIL SIDDELL

THE ART OF THE AMATEUR GUNSMITH

This issue, aspiring amateur gunsmith Phil Siddell tackles stock work, gets to grips with refinishing and chequering techniques and discovers a growing affection for his AYA #4

As a time-served joiner and cabinet maker, I'm well used to the nuances of timber selection. I'm not talking about choice of species, but rather the ability to evaluate the fitness of any given board (or portion thereof) for a specific purpose. Even the most carefully seasoned piece of hardwood can change dimensionally and twist, bow and cup in devious ways. Generally speaking, the more heavily figured, the more dramatic the changes will be. Whenever wood is used to manufacture something that needs to stand up under stress and to be aesthetically pleasing, there is a balance to be struck; it's a fine line. The stocking of shotguns is a prime example. Most of us yearn after a high-contrast, heavily figured walnut stock but buyer beware, if that figuring continues up into the 'hand' of the stock it will carry with it inherent weakness. Of course, the timber on my AYA #4 was a long way from exhibition grade. However, it did have a little figure in the stock and nice straight grain through the hand, so it wasn't all bad.

Although serviceable (and probably repairable), the thick lacquer finish on the wood work of my #4 was stifling any potential character that might lie beneath. The stock of a shotgun is the portion we interface with most, it's surface finish matters. In use we press our face against it, that contact should be a rewarding sensory experience. I was settled on an oil finish for my AYA because oil finishes look, feel and smell inviting, but I had two questions to answer before I could begin: How should I remove the existing finish without doing any damage to the gun, and which of the myriad 'traditional' oil finish products should I use? I can still recall the time (as a teenager) that I refinished the stock of my beloved Air Arms TX200 air rifle with a refinishing kit. The results were deeply disappointing and the gun forever after wore a heavy treacle toned rubbery finish that dandelion seeds stuck to; not an experience I wanted to revisit! I decided I needed some expert help and so gave Paul Thompson of Slippery Dicks Gun Wax a call.

I was familiar with Paul's stock-finishing work which is always of very high quality and I was impressed too by his no-nonsense approach and willingness to share information freely. Paul manufactures and sells his own range of gun stock oils and waxes so he knows the products inside out and with a background in joinery he was able to describe the process from start to finish in terms (and using tools) I could relate to. I have always eschewed the use of chemical strippers as I can't believe they do the wood (or my lungs) any good. Paul assured me that I could simply use either a Stanley knife blade or a cabinet scraper to remove the lacquer and I found that a scraper made very short work of the task. In my conversation with Paul he'd been at pains to impress upon me the importance of thorough preparation for a good finish. With this in mind I taped up all the exposed metal work on my gun and, after scraping the wood bare, I carefully sanded the walnut, working from 240 grit paper all the way to 600 grit. I wiped down the wood with a



PICTURES: PHIL SIDDELL

Phil used scrap tool steel and basic workshop tools to make a chequering cutter

damp cloth between each grit to raise the grain to prevent a 'furry' finish once oils were applied. Finally, I wiped over the prepared stock and fore-end with methylated spirits to lift any latent mineral oil from the grain.

While the timber was bare I dribbled a little superglue into the seams of a very minor crack behind the action tang and another at the butt. I'd considered breaking the affected timber out and carrying out a more substantial repair but I have applied this superglue remedy to many similar defects in my time and have confidence that the glue gets sucked into even the smallest of crevices by capillary action. By the time I was finished with sanding, I was surprised to find there were very few dings remaining in the stock. I considered steaming these out with a damp cloth and an iron but settled on leaving them as they were. There is always a temptation when we repair anything to make it as good as new; however, this isn't always the best thing for the item in question. In conserving or restoring historic items (even relatively recent ones like my #4) I believe it's critical that we don't obscure their history behind unsympathetic work. Old firearms have a story to tell, each ding and scratch is a ledger of experience, they tell tales of high days and holidays; these guns are speaking to us, and we should listen. The work we carry out should be honest too, repair work should be of a standard no better or worse than that of the original gunsmith or stocker (taking safe operation into account).

> Like when decorating, the key to getting a good finish is in the preparation stages.

With the hard work of scraping and sanding done I turned to the chequering, some of which was worn and some of which had been eroded during the sanding process. Whilst the chequering on my AYA is fairly course it is, at least, hand worked and I find that endearing at a time when even high end guns are laser or CNC cut. With a little research and after reading a pamphlet on the subject by master stock maker Bill McGuire, I was surprised to discover that chequering cuts are actually made with a specialised tool that works more like a file or rasp than a carving chisel. Unfortunately, after weeks of enquiries and google searches, I couldn't find anybody in the UK who had stock on hand of these intriguing little tools, and whilst they are very affordable, the import duties and postage associated with importing things from America would have more than doubled the cost. Not to be defeated I decided to make do and mend and manufacture my own chequering cutter.

As a custom knife maker, I have a permanent pile of tool steel offcuts of almost the perfect size for small tools like this. During my visit to UK Gun Repairs (see last issue), I'd managed to look over one of their chequering tools and so I knew roughly what I was aiming for. After cutting and grinding a piece of 01 tool steel to shape, I used



Phil made short work of removing the lacquer finish with a cabinet scraper



Using a needle file to cut the teeth in a homemade chequering cutter before hardening and tempering it


Phil used a short sawing motion to clean and recut the chequering borders



Careful sanding working from 240 grit up to 600 grit left the stock silky smooth

needle files to cut in some teeth and then heated the shank over a gas torch to work in two bends. Finally, I heated the cutting head to a bright cherry red and quenched it in a cup of cooking oil. A further 90 minutes in the kitchen oven at 220°C and the tool was ready for a timber handle. By experimenting on a piece of scrap hardwood I learned the correct short stroke sawing motion required to cut an even and clean chequering line. Taking my newly acquired skills to my gun stock, I was pleasantly surprised at the results as I recut the borders of the chequering. Whilst my homemade cutter worked well, on reflection I could see that the teeth I had cut were far larger and more aggressive than was strictly necessary. Because of this I decided only to recut two very small areas of the inner chequering pattern leaving some other areas with evidence of wear. The grip the chequering offered overall was more than sufficient and on balance I felt a little wear and tear here and there contributed to the honesty of the restoration project.

Having completed all the preparatory work, I then got on with the exciting bit: applying the oil finish. Paul had talked about the transformative power of his Slippery Dicks Alkanet stain, but experiencing it first hand was something else. Before I applied it, the wood looked dry and somewhat grey, as I rubbed a liberal coat into the walnut with my fingers it began to glow. The colour was somewhat blond for the first few hours, but after the prescribed 24-hour curing period it developed a rich ruby tone. The contrast was heightened too, accentuating the small areas of ripple present. Following this I applied a full six coats of the walnut oil, leaving each to cure for 5 hours before rubbing back with very fine wire wool. The final step in the process was to apply and polish in a few coats of wax. Paul had recommended a wax finish as it seals the wood against water staining (on rainy days) and is easy to maintain. Note: it's worth giving your security arrangements some thought during the oiling process as you may not be able to reassemble your gun and return it to secure storage for several hours.

I'd been concerned about how open the grain was after sanding, but by the time I'd finished it had filled well. In fact, I was delighted with the return on my labour. My #4 not only looked great, it felt great too. No trace of the cold, impersonal plastic film of lacquer remained, instead the walnut returned the warmth of my hands and it positively glowed in the sunlight. My affection for the gun had grown too, I'd become attached. I'd invested time and energy into the #4 and in return it had begun to reveal the best aspects of itself to me. Sure, it isn't a particularly refined or especially beautiful gun, but it does have the kind of charm that can sometimes be sought and found in everyday things. I suspect it's the kind of charm (derived perhaps of familiarity) that drew Andy Warhol to a tin of Campbell's Soup or inspired Vincent van Gogh to paint Bedroom in Arles. Whatever the cause of my growing affection for the #4, the work I'd done so far had only served to highlight the poor state of the barrel blacking, and prompted me to prepare for a job I really wasn't looking forward to. ■

NEXT MONTH

Phil gets to grips with refinishing his barrels before taking his gun out into the field.



Phil applied six coats of walnut oil, cutting back with fine wire wool between each coat



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PART THREE

How to improve your DIY shoot

In the final instalment of his guide to creating your own DIY shoot, Mike Powell shares his advice on looking back over the season – and how to improve for the following year

In the previous two articles, I've taken a look at starting and running your own small shoot. Whatever my own views and experiences are they can only be a guide, as each and every shoot is different for a multitude of reasons. My keepering experience over quite a few years has been limited to the hills and valleys of Devon and I know from keeper friends in other parts of the country that although there are many similarities between shoots, different areas have different problems.

Let's assume that your first season on your new small shoot has been relatively successful. Hopefully, the first introduction of pheasants has added to the overall enjoyment and there haven't been too many disasters! Where disappointments occur – and these will happen – always remember that pheasants are wild creatures and no matter how well the shoot may be run things don't always work out as they should.

After the season is over, there is still work to be done! Some will take all their feeders in as they become empty, but on a small shoot I tend towards keeping a few going certainly for a couple of months until the weather settles down and there's an abundance of natural food for the remaining birds. A weekend spent checking the infrastructure of the pen, cleaning and disinfecting the drinkers, and ensuring that everything is in good order will ensure that you will be ready for the next season. Although it can be a bit of a chore, I used to take in the electric fence wire which during the summer can get overgrown. Incidentally, although the pen's entrances will have been left open I tended to close them after the season, especially if there were deer in the area, to stop them getting in and causing damage. However, it is a good idea to leave a couple of feeders in the pen, as for any birds left it will still be a focal point for them and encouraging them to stay can do no harm.

Take stock of the season

When the final shoot of the season has taken place, it's a good idea to organise a get-together and for members of the syndicate to have their say as well as perhaps make suggestions as to how things could possibly be improved. Hopefully, you will have learned over the previous months a bit about the bird's behaviour. Pheasants tend to want to fly in certain directions so this sort of knowledge will help in the future when deciding the best way of shooting over your ground.

If yours is a rough/walked-up shoot as opposed to a driven one (unlikely in the latter case with only a limited number of birds released), thought could be given as to perhaps changing the way you go about your walked-up days. Again, the type of land you shoot over will have a huge impact on future planning. If you have a lot of rough hedges for example, should you put a Gun or two forward if you found that birds were flushing ahead on a regular basis? Woodland will throw up all sorts of different possibilities again depending upon its type size and where it's actually located in relation to the rest of the shoot. Pheasants naturally head for cover, so as I have said previously if you are able to leave a patch of woodland, possibly where the release pen is situated undisturbed for most of the shooting season, then the rest of the shoot could well benefit. Then as the season nears its end, by all means drive that as well.



The success of a DIY shoot should always be measured by the quality of the birds, rather than the quantity.

PICTURE: RAY HOOD



With so many birds in abundance, vermin control needs to remain paramount

PICTURE: MIKE POWELL

One item that will inevitably crop up year on year is whether the small shoot should put more birds down for the following season. Clearly, the more pheasants you release the more (in theory) you will shoot. Again, so much depends on your own circumstances. If the land you shoot over is pheasant-friendly and you have a substantial acreage, then perhaps a doubling up of numbers the following season could be a good idea, but there will of course be financial implications. Another matter that is equally important is how secure your tenancy is. This is where a good relationship with the owner of the land is essential. It's impossible to be dogmatic over the matter of how many birds to put down or how long the shoot will go on as this will depend upon individual circumstances.

When discussing how many birds to release often the question is raised about using ex-layers (mature pheasants that have been used by game farmers for egg production). To be honest, I only tried this once and it just didn't work for me – they wandered off after release! However, I had a friend who ran a very small shoot of about 100 acres who only ever put down ex-layers and on his shoot it worked very well. Much will depend on the sort of cover available; he had a very large area of rough, marshy ground and after a spell in the release pen the birds were more than happy to stay in the area; again, he fed them well.

Jobs for the summer

Vermin control should never be let up on any shoot, especially a small one; it is a year-round task. If you are putting down a thousand birds on a reasonably sized shoot and you lose 10% to vermin you still have 900 left and the losses will hardly be noticed, but the smaller the number of birds you have, the more significant any losses will be. Birds stray naturally, some will die from accidents or disease, and there is little you can do about that. Predators on the other hand can be a real problem so their control is vital.



Ensure feeders are kept topped up to help stop the birds wandering

PICTURE: PAUL HOWARD

Losses can be difficult to assess but overall predation and disease is generally reckoned to account for perhaps 30% of your birds, a further 40% will stray or stay on site and the shoot should yield a take of the remaining 30%. So, if as was suggested earlier your starting point was a couple of hundred you will end up with sixty birds in the bag. That won't seem a huge amount spread over »



Without doubt, a few well-trained dogs on a shoot will enhance the day's enjoyment

PICTURE: MARK RIPLEY



Don't be afraid to experiment with drives in order to present the most challenging birds

several days shooting but it will have enhanced the enjoyment of your shoot immensely.

A word of caution here: more often than not the natural tendency is for the shoot to grow. More birds put down equals more cost so you have two answers to that: increase the charge to each member of the syndicate or bring in more members. I have seen both these solutions in action and both can work and both can fail!

I started off this series by underlining how important who is involved can be and how essential good, firm leadership is. It really is too easy for a shoot to just drift along and any disruption can and will cause its demise. So, the small group of friends who started off so well can, after a few seasons, be 'watered down' by newcomers, all of whom will have an equal say in the running of your small shoot, so tread warily!

Another factor that will affect the results of your shoot is what is going on around you on the surrounding land. In many areas today, a very large percentage of ground is shot over, and it pays to get to know and more importantly to get on with your neighbours. Certain unwritten etiquettes exist, especially where boundaries are concerned. It is very bad form if for example next door is a commercial shoot putting down thousands of birds for you to line up your feeders on the boundary in the hope of drawing in some of their birds. My advice here is to get to know the next door keeper or shoot captain and explain what you are doing. You will in fact get some of their birds and they will get some of yours and provided everyone knows what is going on and uses common sense, all should be well!

If you don't have land but have been inspired by Mike's series, BASC may be able to help you secure a shooting lease. Go to basc.org.uk for more info.

Over these three articles, I have tried to give some advice on starting up a small syndicate shoot, and as I've repeatedly said there are so many variations on virtually every aspect of doing this that it is extremely difficult to be dogmatic about advice. Also people's aspirations and expectations vary enormously.

All I can say is that enormous enjoyment and satisfaction can be gained by getting your own little shoot going. You will have problems, but there's a wealth of help and knowledge available and more often than not keepers will generally be happy to give advice.

Small shoots are seldom disaster areas so although there is advice available, finding your own way, as most of us have, usually works in the end. Good luck! ■



It's important to weigh up the costs involved with putting down extra birds as the shoot grows

PICTURES: MIKE POWELL

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WITH ADAM SMITH

Whistle-stop tour

Ending the last drive can be marked by whistle, shout or horn with a few other options in between. Very occasionally, as Adam Smith recalls, wild weather can force an early bath

Close of play after a normal day on my patch of Hampshire was one long blast on an Acme Thunderer pea whistle. Shorter blasts would have signalled the end of each drive but the last was always treated to a full-length serenade, sometimes extended to two or even three celebratory peeps. One was clear enough as a signal, and with volume to spare, but a bit of a fanfare was sometimes required to mark the end of a successful day. They come in various sizes, these referee-style whistles, and even the smallest can give off a fair old hoot – as beaters on either side of me always showed by ducking away from the blast of sound before any permanent damage was done.

An earlier experiment found me generously supplied with a shiny horn, in my case one of those stubby reeded types available from all good game shoot suppliers. This, suspended from a lanyard as a badge of office, was perhaps seen as proper confirmation of my role in life and yet Bert, the elderly keeper who at that time still managed the other half of the shoot (before his retirement allowed me to run the lot) was gifted the larger version. Perhaps simply a symbol of greater age, his horn was altogether more splendid and double the size but yet still not an ideal answer. In Bert's case, after a lifetime of Old Holborn roll-ups, his wind production – at least from lungs anyway – was a trifle compromised so the end results were not as audible as hoped. Many a time during 'The Horn Trials' a drive on his ground would end with "Was that the horn? We finished then? Someone ask Bert, is that it then?" which was not an ideal situation and could end in some confusion and occasionally colourful language.



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

Ensuring that the signal for the day's end is heard all along the Gun line is no easy feat, says Adam

PICTURES: NICK RIDLEY

And yet to be fair to Bert's memory, and although I've said the supply of these horns was generous, there were drawbacks to both. In fact, even when blowing with all the skill required – not brute force, there was a bit of technique required, and I could manage a few proper bugle calls in my youth – the reedy wail never seemed to carry to the whole line, let alone the pickers behind, and not least with a strong wind to snatch the sound away from its intended audience. So I reverted to my trusty whistle whose pea proved both more reliable and audible.

Many of the renowned and posher West Country shoots keepered by posher and more skilful pros – and I can blow his trumpet and count my son's four years heading up Chargot on Exmoor among them – tend to go the whole hog and use a proper hunting horn to signal drive ends. Such horns can vary from plain copper to copper and brass or nickel plate and even Henry Keat's finest in solid silver but whatever the metal, no-one can confuse that strident blare of sound with anything other than a clear instructive signal. Finishing with a well-blown and soulful 'Gone awaaaay' to mark the day's end can be quite moving too, as the long notes die away in the fading light.

Hunting horns played no part in shoot signalling when I was based in Hampshire, or beating in Berkshire for that matter, and that would have included a fair few shoots from Yattendon and Englefield over the county line to Upton Grey and Herriard south of Basingstoke, with several partridge and pheasant manors between. Far

‘One keeper I recall used a football rattle – not the best choice, but he was so proud of his innovation no-one could persuade him otherwise’


However you choose to signal the end of the drive, you need to make sure the sound carries

more likely would be ‘Aaall out!’ delivered in RSM-mode as the conclusion to many local shoots, while others used the ubiquitous whistle. There were exceptions. One keeper I recall used a football rattle, a hugely inconvenient wooden lump to carry, severely injurious to nearby beaters’ hearing and not particularly effective as a means of communication, but he was so proud of his innovation no-one could persuade him otherwise. The inconvenient fact that his workforce was also constantly changing as a probable consequence also seemed lost to him.

Whether hunting horns were confined to the ‘leg and thigh’ west of the UK mainland I can’t say for sure, although my lad has certainly taken the art with him now that he’s single-handed in Sussex – but this potential loss to tradition could be down to that word ‘art’. True, some might call it an art, and yet the cruel fact is that getting a clean clear note from the unforgiving eight inches or so of copper with its piddly little mouthpiece can sometimes end in a less-than-musical squawk – once described as sounding like ‘a ruptured duck’ – much to the embarrassment of its red-faced and less-than-composed composer. Confidence is as significant as practice where the old HH is concerned.

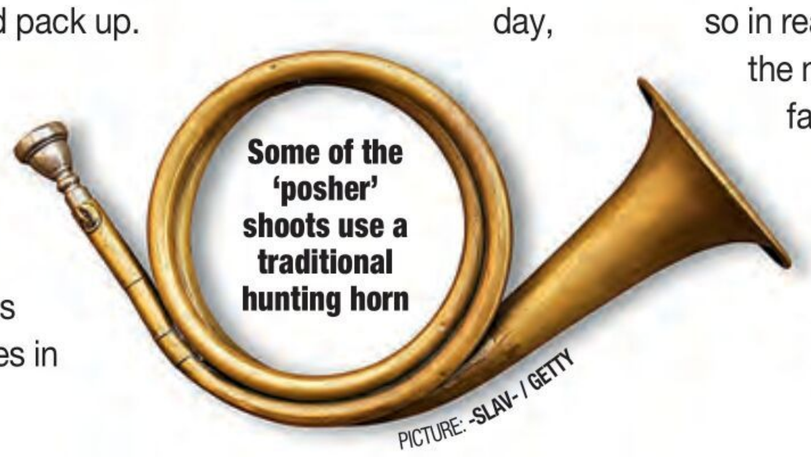
Quite apart from whistles, horns, rattles and shouts, there’s one factor that will almost always influence the decision to bring a day’s shooting to an end. And in this case an early one – usually signalled by ice cold rain running in a steady stream down the backs of all involved.

In reality rain rarely stops a shoot dead in its tracks. Most Guns accept it, beaters tend to be resigned to it and more often than not its lightest form, a bit of mizzle in the air, can improve the quality of the birds being shown – perhaps because the moisture adds lift, giving the wings more to push against. Just occasionally though, when steady unrelenting stair-rods compromise both vision and safety, the only sensible course is to give the weather best and pack up.

The beaters’ favourite of course is the rare but profitable non-starting day, when they are paid for turning up while sudden torrential rain runs in streams off the yard. Miserable figures in tweeds gather there, looking up and hoping, joined by less downcast figures in waxproofs looking to slip away before the boss changes his mind. Other shoot protocols vary: some may require at least one drive before admitting defeat but such situations are few and far between, and in truth most beaters would be as disheartened as the Guns, despite the technically unearned income. As a rule, the rain has to be almost monsoon-like to create the slippery ground, limited visibility and risk of mishandled guns to bring on the decision to cancel.

Quite aside from safety, soaked and bedraggled birds add less than nothing to the day, so in reality it ought to be the most significant factor in deciding to stop. Shooting unsporting and waterlogged birds is neither skilful nor admirable in any way.

One aspect of truly heavy downpours is that, at least in my experience, nothing short of oilskins or a diving suit is entirely waterproof. Having worn waxed thornproofs and other such items, starting with heavyweight and semi-rigid Solways to Durham lightweights and state-of-the-art more modern textiles from Seeland, Harkila and Musto betwixt and between, I know all too well that after any prolonged exposure to those stair-rods, water will find a way to cool your ardour. This is not through design failings, nor even a criticism, simply an acceptance that water will inevitably seep inside any sort of shooting clothing, even close-woven tweed. True, this may not apply to new items, but give anything a few years use and wet will discover its weaknesses. Short of starting each season with a new wardrobe, just accept that you’re going to get damp – and very occasionally so very wet you must give the weather best and go home to a hot toddy and an early bath. ■


Some of the ‘posher’ shoots use a traditional hunting horn

PICTURE: -SLAV- / GETTY

IN THIS TOGETHER

This year, as the Gamekeepers Welfare Trust celebrates its 30th anniversary, Chris Saunders takes a look at the invaluable work of the charity and shares how we can support their work

Some would say that being a gamekeeper is more of a calling than a job. There are certainly more trials, tribulations, and potential pitfalls associated with being a gamekeeper than with many lines of work, and it can be a comparatively solitary pursuit within a limited support network – very rarely is there someone else to lean on. That's just one thing that makes the Gamekeepers Welfare Trust (GWT) so important to so many.

While there's been financial assistance of some description available to gamekeepers for over 100 years, the GWT, which was established in 1992, is the first organisation of its kind which is not a membership organisation. "People often mistake us for part of the National Gamekeepers Organisation, or the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, or BASC," says Ruth Kerr, who manages the social media and press releases. "Although we work with all the relevant organisations, we're not part of any of them."

This gives the GWT the freedom to make decisions and take appropriate action based on the needs of the individual on a case-by-case basis, rather than working within the confines of a designated set of parameters. Briefly put, they exist primarily to provide support and guidance for gamekeepers, stalkers, ghillies and their dependants, wherever and however they may need it.

Whichever gamekeeping profession you're in, the GWT is available for you. Honorary president Sir John Scott says: "GWT is currently active in supporting around 600 gamekeepers and their families each year."

The charity currently offers support in the following key areas:

Jamie's Helpline

This free and confidential around-the-clock service is funded by the family of Jamie Neal who took his own life in 2016. Helen MJ Benson, GWT's chief executive officer, says "People can talk in confidence, and find help in situations like redundancy, relationship difficulties, ill-health, and just sheer loneliness and isolation."

Financial assistance

In this harsh financial climate, there are many reasons why a household may need a bit of extra cash. Perhaps there has been a bereavement, a partner has lost their job, someone in the family needs mobility aids or adaptations for the home, or a new baby comes along. The GWT also provide grants to young people hoping to make gamekeeping a career but lack the financial resources.

Housing

One of the biggest challenges facing gamekeepers is where they are expected to live when their employment, which often comes with a housing package, ends. The GWT can support and provide signposting and advice to help find suitable, affordable housing in various situations.

Jobs

Rural Recruits, the GWT's recruitment agency, can help find jobs and placements, as well as support applicants by producing a CV and



RAFFLE!

A raffle will be taking place at the Yorkshire Shooting Show & Game Fair on Sunday 25 September 2022 with the first prize being a Wolf XL Off-Road Kids Buggy. Tickets are priced at £2 and available from the GWT website or RallyUp: go.rallyup.com/gwt2022



PICTURE: ANTONEL / GETTY



The Perthshire Keepers ceilidh & clay shoot raised £3,000 for the GWT

advising on various qualifications and courses one can undertake to further one's career. All you have to do is register to receive tailored job alerts.

Additional services

As well as the above, the GWT helps provide people with their own tools with which to manage their health and wellness. In 2018 STAG Training was launched (the acronym meaning Set goals, Take acton, Awareness, Get talking), which was developed with careful consideration for the livelihoods and lifestyles of gamekeepers, stalkers and ghillies. The course, which is held at locations all over the country, has been designed by Ex-Marines and aims to tackle those difficult issues pertaining to leadership, communication, coping mechanisms and health and well being.

The charity also works with IED Training Solutions, who drew on parallels they identified between their own former professions as Royal Marine SNCOs and gamekeeping professions. Plus, in 2019 the GWT added free counselling to the menu of support available. There are free resources to download from the website, and support packs to order from their online shop.

Yet another key aspect of the GWT is simply caring. Many of us know retired keepers, or the widow or widower of someone in a gamekeeping profession. These people are still cherished members of what the GWT refers to as 'the gamekeeping family' and as well as being eligible for support and assistance, the charity will keep in touch with them to make sure they don't feel excluded and have people there if needed. For example, bereaved partners and children of all ages are among those who receive cards, calls, flowers and other small 'thinking of you' gifts throughout the year. It's little touches like this that make the GWT a cut above most charities and organizations.

Year of the Gamekeeper

To celebrate their 30th anniversary, the GWT have launched their Year of the Gamekeeper campaign to raise £220,000 to ensure they can continue providing this free, high-quality, holistic support for men, women and children in the gamekeeping community. They aim to focus on celebration and the positive aspects of life, whilst being mindful of those who are coping with various difficulties in health, job and personal lives and doing all they can to ease the burden.

The charity will be looking to the support of fundraisers large and small across the country sports community. There are many ways you can help out. For example, Ronald Rose is undertaking 'A Walk with Shaun' in memory of a colleague who took his own life in November 2019. The 460-mile trek will begin on the Solway Firth where Shaun loved to go wildfowling and finish at the most north-westerly point of Scotland, the lighthouse at Cape Wrath.

The Rose family has been involved in deer and wildlife management one way or another for many generations. Ronald has continued in this line, working in both the private and public sector and he currently works for Forestry and Land Scotland as a wildlife ranger manager.

Helen Benson said: "We feel so humble that Ronald has chosen to support us in our Year of the Gamekeeper. This is a key year for us and Ronald's efforts, like others that have already taken place will make a real difference to people. In the Year of the Gamekeeper, the GWT are inviting everyone in a gamekeeping profession and across the community to join in celebrating the 30th anniversary by finding ways to raise both spirits and funds, ensuring the GWT can continue providing free assistance to men, women and children in our community."

As a team at *Sporting Shooter*, we applaud the work that the GWT do and urge all our readers to get involved! We have all benefited from the hard work of our nation's gamekeepers and this is a great way of paying back! ■

CONTACT

If you are involved in the gamekeeping profession and need guidance or support of any kind, call Jamie's free confidential helpline on 0300 1233088

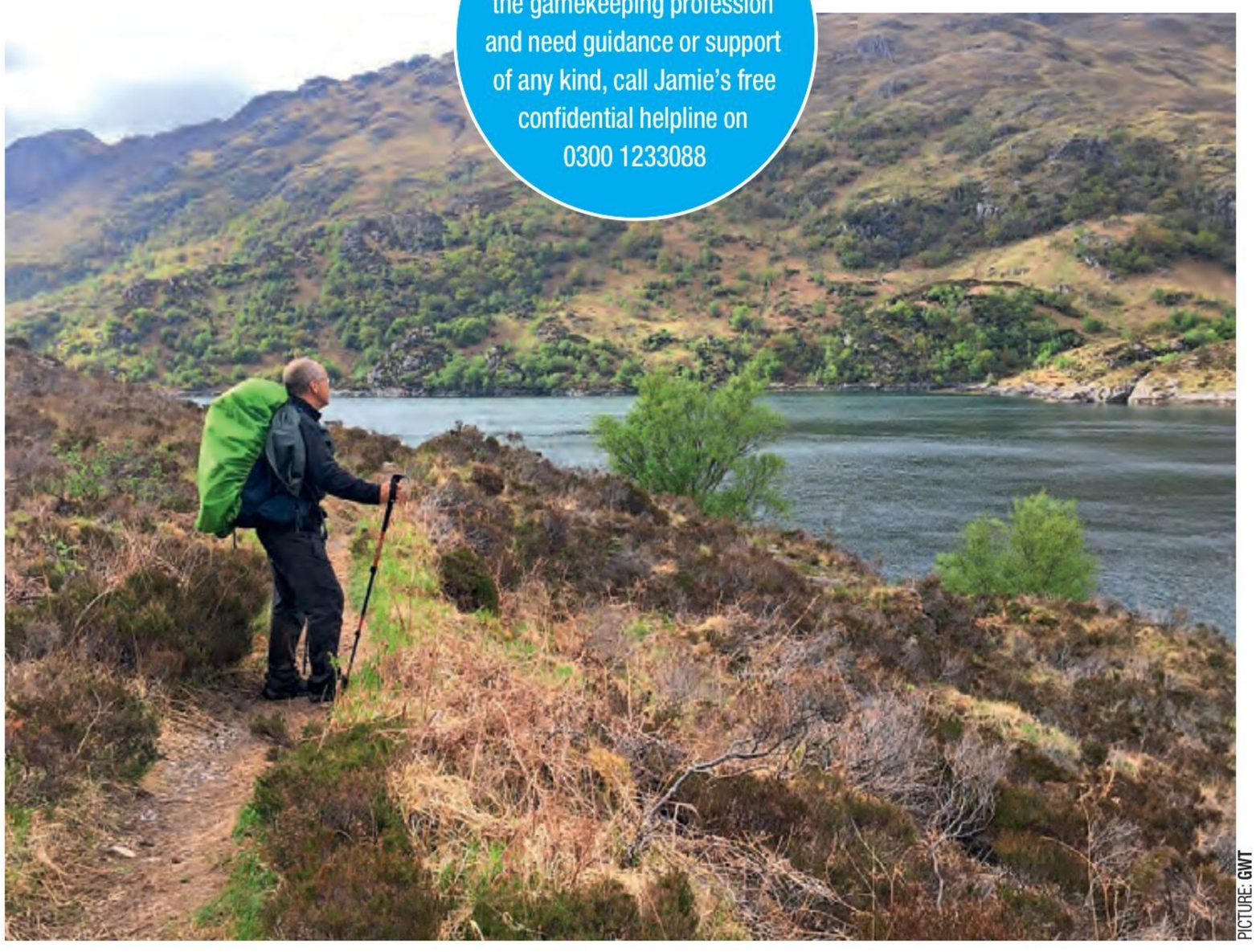
GET INVOLVED!

The GWT are open to discussing any and all fundraising suggestions you may have. But if you're stuck for ideas, you can simply donate £5 and receive a special quiz pack with all the questions (and answers!) you need to host your own quiz night. You could also buy a raffle ticket, make a donation, have a whip-round at your club, shoot, or place of work, or simply volunteer some of your time. Every contribution, however small, will be gratefully received.

A Year of the Gamekeeper support pack is available by emailing communications@thegamekeeperswelfaretrust.com

For more information on this, and the various types of support the GWT offers, please visit their website.

THEGAMEKEEPERSWELFARETRUST.COM


PICTURE: GWT



WITH ARTHUR BARRACLOUGH

Summer sowing

Arthur Barraclough of Bright Seeds follows on from last month's spring sowing article and looks at the options for summer and autumn planting

Even if conditions allowed all cover crops to be planted satisfactorily in the spring – say, with game maize – it would, nearly always, not be the most desirable option. Apart from the benefit of not putting all your eggs into one basket, summer-sown crops can be invaluable in creating the diverse habitat in which game birds and wider farmland wildlife thrives best.

With the range of seed options available for summer and autumn sowing, the opportunities to grow first-rate crops that not only qualify for stewardship but fit within the rotation of a commercial farm have never been greater. Look towards stewardship codes AB16, AB9 and SW6 in particular for later-planting options that have knock-on benefits for game.

All-out spring sowing closes the door to planting a cover or catch crop post-harvest, usually where the farmer has grown cereals. Historically, there has been a tendency among gamekeepers to address post-harvest cropping by broadcasting seed into a standing cereal crop; but recently it is more common to wait until the cereal crop is harvested and then establish the follow-crop by either direct-drilling or drilling/broadcasting the seed into cultivated stubble. Rolling will help to hold moisture and improve seed to soil contact too.

Overlooking a conventional spring-sown option in favour of later establishment has the advantage of improved weed control. Weeds can be displaced (either by glyposhate or repeat cultivations, which is particularly useful on organic sites) prior to planting and the new crop sown into a stale seed-bed.

Of special note in the current times is that later sown crops are not as hungry for fertilizer as their spring counterparts. In the case of mustard, for example, excessive nitrogen can cause the crop to lodge and go flat.

Improved soil structure

Having made the decision to move away from exclusively spring-sown crops, attention to planting into sufficient moisture is of heightened relevance as soil progressively dries as the summer approaches. Therefore, ploughing the land pre-planting, in July for example, is generally ill-advised. There is no surer way of drying the soil, and it is far better to prepare the seed-bed early, spray for weeds pre-planting and ideally wait for a timely shower before sowing. The strengthening trend of minimum tillage and direct drilling within farming systems is good news for establishing summer-sown game covers. Later-sown mixtures mainly comprise small seeds such as mustard; unlike maize, for example, they cannot be drilled at an adequate depth to access residual moisture levels. Nonetheless, on the upside, the nature of the seed means they have superior vigour so will germinate and grow quickly as soon as rainfall arrives, demonstrating again why timeliness is key.

Many customers include legumes in their summer and autumn sown crops, particularly within those crops that are to be left for more than one year. Legumes, such as vetch and crimson clover, fix nitrogen from the atmosphere which

Direct drilling your summer sown crops ensures you avoid drying out the soil and is becoming more common as a method.



PICTURES: **BRIGHT SEEDS**



The Grass Buster mix from Bright Seeds in action!

helps the non-legumes within the mix and has the potential benefit of reducing the need for artificial fertiliser application.

So called ‘catch crops’ can vastly help in achieving better utilisation of residual nitrogen, whilst also doubling up as useful game cover. By soaking up nitrogen from the soil, the nitrogen is held in the plant and is not vulnerable to run-off into water courses. As well as this, later planted crops can greatly improve soil structure, useful within game cover crop rotations as well as the wider arable farming system. Such cropping is well practised in wider-Europe, and through new environmental policies is gradually becoming a standard practice in the UK.

The various plus points associated with planting crops after the spring window is nicely in tune with wider environmental policy, not only Mid-Tier Stewardship which brings the roles of the farmer and gamekeeper into closer proximity, but also the separate Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), also within ELMS. Crops such as Autumn Bumble Bird (AB16) highlight this with clear benefits for soil improvement, pollinators and farmland birds.

SFI is the first of three new environmental land management schemes in which farmers will be paid to produce public goods such as water quality, biodiversity, animal health and welfare, and climate change mitigation. Falling within the government’s 25-Year Environment Plan, it is part of its Net Zero programme. The scheme launches in 2022, and initially farmers in England who are eligible for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) will qualify.

Many of the stewardship mixtures that qualify for Mid-Tier funding will also meet the criteria of SFI. As always, gamekeepers and farmers have much to gain by working together and readying themselves for the various new schemes ahead. Wildlife plots containing flowering and seed-bearing plants are an example of cropping that will qualify under both schemes.

Later alternatives

The gamekeeper has many late-sowing options. Among the most popular is Bright Seeds’ Autumn Promise containing lightning mustard, utopia, vetch, buckwheat, forage Rape, leafy turnip and a Rape/kale hybrid. It can be sown from June to August, and qualifies for AB9 winter bird food stewardship. The inclusion of vetch and buckwheat reduces the overall risk of flea beetle damage as the mix isn’t made up entirely of brassicas. Also qualifying for AB9 is Grass Buster, a winter-hardy brassica mix ideal for flushing points and wind-breaks. This can be planted from May through to the end of July, its tolerance to grass herbicides making it a good selection where grass weeds are an issue. The inclusion of kale within the Grass Buster adds to its popularity, and a well-established crop can be left for a second year.

There are many options for single-species crops too, one of which is Utopia. This is a kale/mustard hybrid that can be planted from June through to August. It is fast-establishing and produces a waterproof canopy particularly suitable for partridge.

In looking at the alternatives to spring-sown cropping, we must not underplay the importance of maize which will remain a staple game cover for many shoots. I would suggest maize, along with spring-sown mixtures such as Pheasant & Finch will always have a front row position. Those mixtures planted later in the season play a supportive role by moving reliance away for a single crop. Avoiding sowing all crops in the narrow window offered in spring, spreading costs and risk, and offering birds a varied habitat is a persuasive case. Add to that an environmental payment incentive, and it is surely compelling! ■



The Utopia seed mix can be planted from June to August

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WIN! QUESTION OF THE MONTH



Send your questions to news@sportingshooter.co.uk for a chance to win this fabulous Eley cap

Screw cut

Q I've recently brought a beautifully stocked, classic .308 hunting rifle for stalking, but it isn't screw cut for a moderator. If I have the rifle screw cut, will it devalue the gun? And is it worth doing? Or should I just use it without a moderator?

A MARK RIPLEY replies: If you have the rifle professionally screw cut and have an invisible thread protector made, it's unlikely to affect the gun's value. If the job is done properly, it is very hard to even see the cap on the barrel.

I have to say that a moderator on a nice classic hunting rifle can rather spoil its elegant lines. That said, the use of a moderator not only greatly helps protect one's hearing, (although hearing protection is still recommended) but it also helps with recoil, which on a lightweight stalking rifle can be quite noticeable, especially in the larger calibres.

The other consideration is as to whether the sound of an unmoderated rifle is likely to disturb anyone living nearby. The sound of a full-bore rifle going off without a moderator will carry some distance and could not only upset any neighbours or passers-by, but also likely scare off any other wildlife in the immediate area!



PICTURE: PHILL PRICE

Are ballistic apps any good?

Q I see a lot of rifle shooters, including air rifle shooters, using ballistic apps on their phones. Are these very accurate and are they worth bothering with? Surely for hunting purposes this would take too long to mess about with?

A MARK RIPLEY replies: There are several different apps like this available and I've used several of them. From the ones I've used, they have been very accurate and over the past few years, have become very advanced!

One of my favourites for its ease of use is Strelok Pro. This app has a vast array of pre-installed scope information and other features in an easy-to-use format.

As with any ballistic calculator, you will only get accurate results out of it if you put accurate information into it, and it's important to be sure you have everything entered in correctly and confirmed on targets prior to using it in a hunting situation.



Once all your rifle and ammunition information has been correctly entered, it actually takes only a few seconds to add distance and wind speed into the app to gain an accurate correction for your shot.

Who is responsible for clearing ditches?

Q Landowners adjacent to my shoot have not cleared their ditches for many years which has caused them to silt up and negatively impact my flight pond. I believe it is their duty to keep this running freely. What can I do?

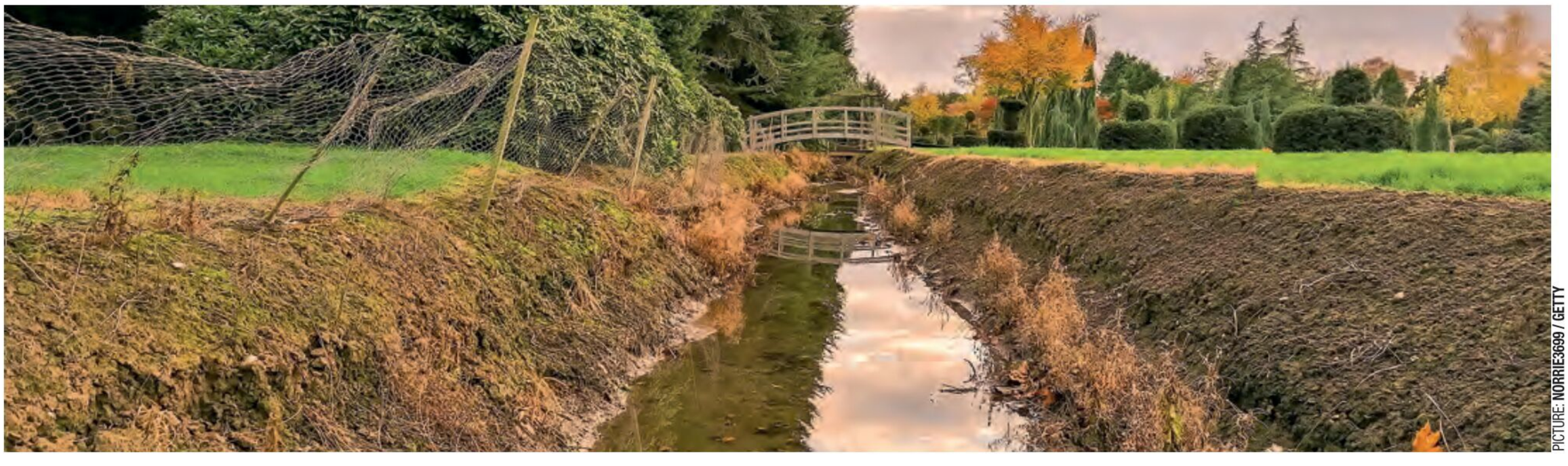
A TOM ESLER replies: Without further instructions, I can make some assumptions based on the question being asked. I assume that the ditch is an ordinary watercourse (i.e. a stream, ditch, or a culvert which could not be defined as a main river). Under the common law, a riparian owner is the person or people with a water course on, next to, or under their property.

As a riparian owner, those landowners have certain common law responsibilities to "pass on water flow without obstruction, pollution or diversion, which would affect the rights of others to maintain the banks and beds of the water course" amongst other rights and responsibilities.

In this instance, I also assume that the adjacent landowner has full responsibility for the ditches flowing into your land and flight pond.

You suggest that their ditches are silting up, which is clearly affecting the waterflow to your flight pond. The owner of the land on which your flight pond is situated, if not you as a riparian owner, can take legal action to prevent interference with his riparian rights. It is not clear if you are the owner of the land. However, it would only be the landowner who could enforce these rights. Any such action could be pursued through the County Court if necessary.

Whilst the landowner can enforce their rights through the courts, it would normally be advisable to put your neighbouring landowner on notice of his duties, in respect of his silted up ditches. It would be advisable to seek legal advice before embarking on legal action against your neighbour.



PICTURE: NORRIE3699 / GETTY

Adder alert

Q In the late spring, my Labrador disturbed an adder in thick cover and, unfortunately, she was bitten by the snake. She was quickly rushed to a vet and survived. I believe this is a fairly common incident where dogs are concerned, but I wonder whether a human has ever been killed under this circumstance?

A TONY JACKSON replies: Whilst rare, in the UK there have in fact been 14 instances of humans being bitten and killed by adders since 1870. The bite from an adder can be very painful, and in most cases an attack occurs when a snake has been accidentally trodden on. The majority of adder attacks are usually as a result of confrontations with dogs in the spring. The UK's only venomous snake, adders are an endangered species protected in the UK by the Wildlife & Country Act 1981.



PICTURE: 8660JAN / GETTY

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READERS' LETTERS

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Spring walks

We've all been moaning for years about the anti-rural-pursuits agenda displayed by the major TV channels and hoping for a saviour. Well, while flicking through YouTube TV the other evening (initially looking for this week's Shooting Show, Airgun Show and Fieldsports TV) I found a new contender on the 'recommended' list. It's called The Crafty Countryman, and is narrated by (or features) footballer-turned-actor Vinnie Jones. Some episodes feature master stick-maker Simon Heath, others look at Vinnie's conservation work on his farm. OK, it's not exactly Jack Hargreaves, but neither is it the twee, sanitised, make-believe countryside that Countryfile prefers to portray.

At first glance, it might seem a bit 'laddish', but Vinnie's love of nature, practical conservation and his common-sense approach to modern rural issues shine through. Given a little polishing, this show could easily become the media-friendly platform the field sports movement has been praying for. Nice one, Mr Jones!

Kerri-Louise Chamberlain



PICTURE: CONNIE MAY VISUALS

A sound investment!

I just wanted to write in and say how impressed I have been with the new ear protection I've brought for clay shooting!

For many years I've done a fair amount of clay shooting out of season to keep the old 'eyes in' and have always struggled to shoot with ear muff type protection on as I seemed to clip the ear piece sometimes when mounting the gun. I settled on the yellow foam plugs although when shooting with friends at the clay ground I would miss much of the banter between us on the stands - although I'm sure much of it was aimed at me!



PICTURE: EMILY DAMMENT

However, a friend of mine invested in a pair of the Cens ear devices that cut out loud noises yet allow you to hear all other normal sounds, the level of which you can also adjust. What an amazing little invention these are! I had the moulds made to my ears and they were soon produced and fitted with the gadgetry inside. I then went back for a fitting and demonstration of how to use them and look after them. I would recommend anyone wanting to look after their hearing should get moulds made!

Tom Swanbridge

SNAP SHOTS



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Saying goodbye

I had the awful experience of my great German shorthaired pointer Poppy becoming ill and on taking to the vet and subsequent scan they found an enormous splenic tumour After considering operating with the possibility of only eight more weeks if it went well, I decided to have her euthanised. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, our vet was unable to undertake a home visit due to extreme staff shortages, but they put us in touch with Over the Rainbow vets whose I contacted to arrange the procedure.

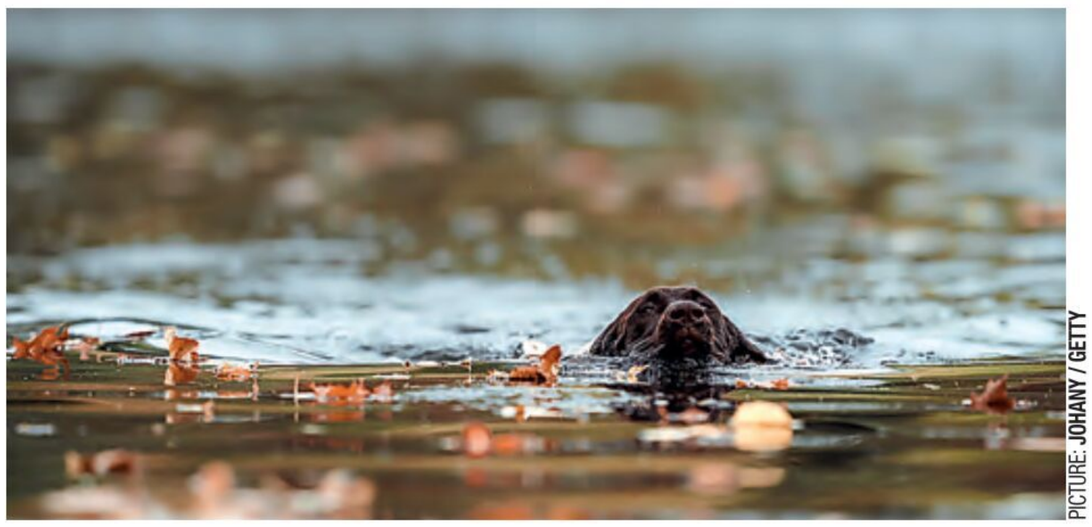
Over the weekend, Poppy was comfortable but by Monday took a turn for the worse. I rang Over the Rainbow vets and Laura offered to come first thing Tuesday as our grown sons wanted to be with Poppy and say goodbye. Come Tuesday, Laura arrived and outlined all that would happen and reassured us; my son is a 4th year vet student so we had some idea, but Laura was great and calm which was more than I was.

After a sedation which calmed Poppy we were given a few moments to say goodbye then Laura asked if we were happy to go ahead and ready. Laura introduced the medication and with us talking and stroking Poppy she quickly passed looking very very peaceful which was an enormous relief. Laura let our other GSP Mags sniff round and this seems to have helped her with the loss of her mentor.

Laura left and we took Poppy to be cremated – our choice as we wanted to scatter her ashes by her favourite swimming haunt in Northumberland. Basically, it went as well as these things can and I can't thank Over the Rainbow Vets and specifically Laura enough but I hope we won't need them again for a while.

Now it's a case of trying to do the walks without my constant companion sniffing and pointing at things I frequently missed and looking at me as if I was an idiot.

Ashley Messham



PICTURE: JOHANY / GETTY

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The auto-blocker technology shuts off all sounds over 85dB, plus they offer 25dB NRR hearing protection. The sound-activated compression has a reaction time of 0.02 seconds. *gmk.co.uk*

QUIZ QUESTION

Q A BAD RIFLED TERM TRULY is an anagram of which unmistakable garden visitor?

EMAIL US YOUR ANSWER TO THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

Please email your answer to competitions@sportingshooter.co.uk

APRIL ISSUE WINNER

Congratulations to SHARON LOVELL
The answer was SNOW GOOSE

RULES: Closing date is 1 June.
Answer published in the August issue. Please bear with us as there may be a delay in sending out prizes due to office closures. Normal Sporting Shooter rules apply. For full terms and conditions; email the address above.

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Spring walks

Now spring has arrived, my wife and I decided to go out for a wander around the countryside where we live in the Rhymney valley in Gwent. We always enjoyed a stroll on a path along the riverbank. At this time of year, the area is teeming with wildlife and we wanted to make the most of the recent bout of nice weather. It wasn't long before we noticed it had changed. It used to be tough going in places, especially for my ageing legs, but now it appeared to have been landscaped with uneven ground made more even and fallen trees and other debris cleared away. A chat with a dog walker who takes that route regularly confirmed that this is indeed the case! While we weren stuck at home, the local authority, or whoever is responsible for these things, was quietly beavering away clearing the riverbed and upgrading the local walking paths. It certainly saved my legs a bit, and I encourage readers to get out and about and explore their local area again. Give those walks you've been neglecting another try. You might also be in for a surprise.

Scott Ralls, Pontlottyn



PICTURE: KATIE DAVIES / GETTY

NEW SERIES!

CONSERVATION WITH ALEX HATTON

PART THREE

A home for nature

No matter how large your shoot is, there is always room for a greater variety of wildlife! Alex Hatton explains how to encourage more bird and animal species onto your land

Habitat management is key to a functioning countryside and that is what this series has focused on so far. In this final part, we look at some of the quicker fixes that create homes for wildlife that can have very quick results and often are of interest to the non-shooting conservationists out there!

Small shoots

As we tidy up the countryside, many of nature's natural wildlife roosting and nesting habitats are removed before they even get a chance to be used. Trees with a little bit of natural decay or those with woodpecker holes in them are ideal roosting habitat for bats or nesting for small songbirds up to some of our larger wildlife, but are often overlooked or removed long before they come down naturally. Armed with just a set of binoculars and a can of spray paint, I have spent many hours identifying trees with bat and bird potential and marking them in a way that others understand they are to be left.

It's simple but extremely effective, and if you do have time to come back in the spring to look, you will see many different crevice-dwelling species coming in and out of these features, so it really does make a difference. Bats tend to leave a dark stain around the hole, and if you look at the base of the tree you may see what looks like mice droppings, as bats tend to poo as they exit the roost – the way to tell the difference is that mice droppings are solid if you roll them between your fingers, while bat droppings are dry and crumble into dust!

TOP TIP

Bat boxes should be placed ideally 4m or above from the ground. This not only stops members of the public from having a nosy, but as a bat leaves the roost it swoops downwards, and if it is too low predators such as cats can easily catch them.

Medium shoots

Armed with a little more money, putting up wildlife boxes is an easy and rewarding project. The speed in which they get used is really satisfying and indicative of just how much they are in need.

What you put up is entirely up to you. A wonderful species to help is the dormouse. Not just confined to hazel woodlands as once thought, you do need to know you are in an area where they may be present before you embark on a project. Unlike other nesting boxes that have the hole in the front, dormouse boxes have one up against the tree on which they are placed. Although it's fine to check the boxes initially, once you have them any checks would need to be done by a licensed person.

Bird boxes can target an array of species depending on their preferences. For a simple scheme targeting our more common species, a mix of boxes with 28mm and 32mm holes will cover tits and sparrows whereas starlings prefer a box with a 45mm hole. Other species such as treecreepers and robins need more specialist boxes and blackbirds and robins prefer an open fronted box, provided with some shelter in front of them. Whatever you put up, make sure you put a squirrel plate around the entrance hole to stop it



A pine marten box being checked under licence

PICTURES: ALEX HATTON



Checking a dormouse box, again under licence

getting destroyed by greys! Tree sparrows prefer to nest in colonies in more open areas so do place multiple boxes together if you are targeting these.

Around the farmyard, there is a lot you can do also. Swallows have really suffered in this age of barn conversions for staycations. They have such specific needs, as they nest in open 'cups' meaning they need to have some shelter above them. You can buy swallow cups quite cheaply and place them in an array of places. They are best given some space between nests. Barn owls have suffered a similar fate, but a simple apex design put on the outside of a building, a tree or a standalone pole can really help, and they will help keep the rodents at bay. Boxes are best but up away from woodlands as tawny owls will outcompete the barn owls. An old tea chest placed inside a building is also sufficient, just make sure there is a lip of a few inches at the front to stop eggs rolling out, and youngsters leaving prematurely, as barn owls do not make a nest but instead lay eggs straight on a hard surface.

Bats also need as much help as they can get. Different species have different needs, but in terms of bat boxes, a simple box (as pictured) provides a roost suitable for crevice dwelling bats such as pipistrelle and barbastelle bats. For our bigger bats like the noctule and Bechstein bats, something more specialist is needed such as the Schwegler 2FN bat box. They are made from woodcrete, and have a really good uptake by these species.

A project I was involved in a number of years ago was to put up pine marten boxes in areas where they were once known to be. One of the reasons they fare less well in the UK is that we do not have the black woodpecker they have in Europe which creates the best sized cavity in a tree from them to nest in.

TOP TIP

Boxes erected for European Protected Species such as bats and dormice once used by these species become a protected feature that can only be moved under a licence, so place your boxes where they will not become an issue in any future management.

‘A simple apex design put on the outside of a building or tree can really help barn owls, and will help keep the rodents at bay’



The stunning sight of a barn owl in flight is one we never get tired of

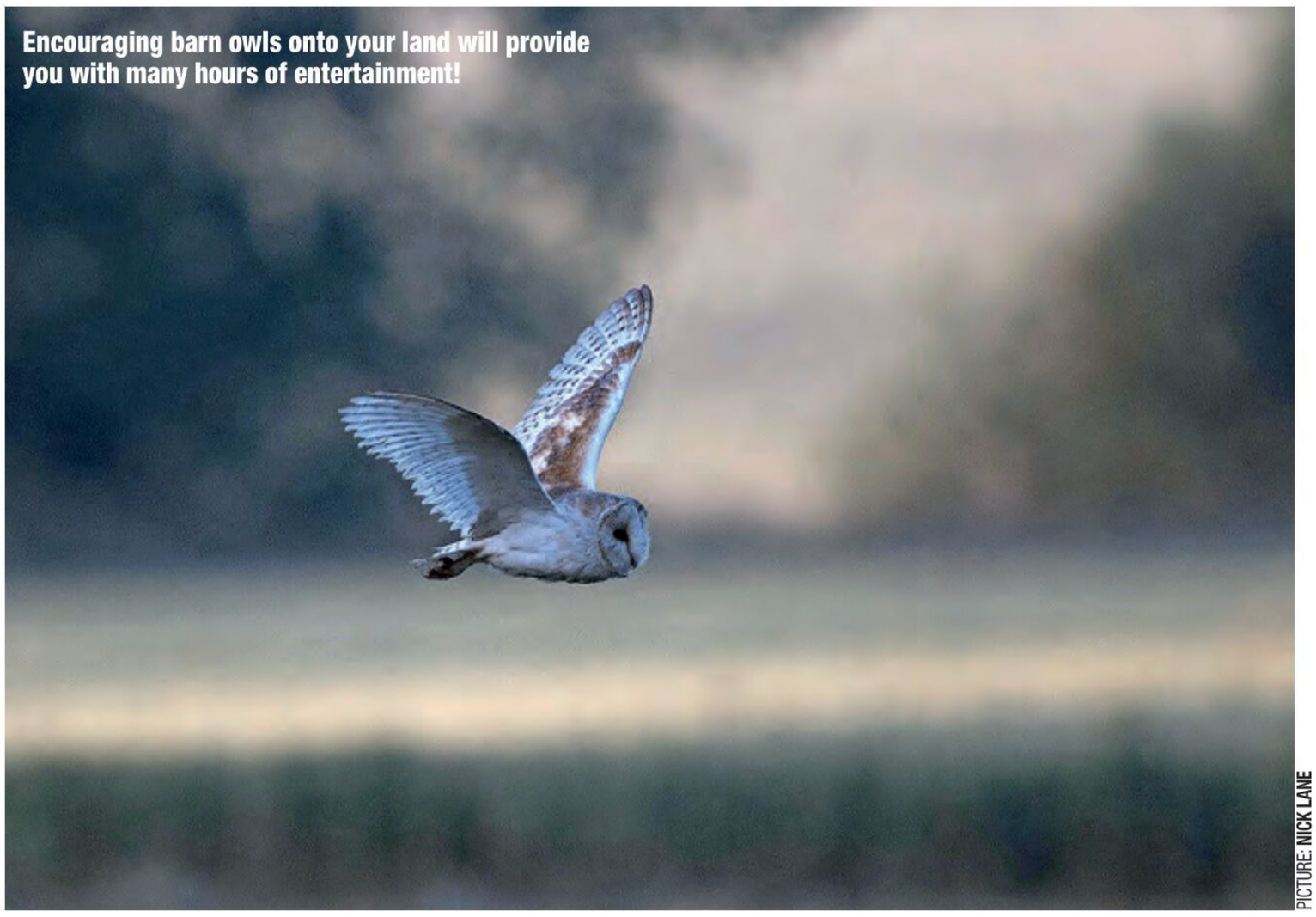
PICTURE: NICK LANE

Large shoots

Although we have touched on the retention of natural homes such as tree cavities, this final conservation project is aimed at the larger shoots that can implement landscape scale change.

Fundamental to conservation is our insect diversity and some of the simplest changes involve doing less. In order for insects to survive year after year, there needs to be an element of stability in a habitat. Such examples are a group of butterflies known as the 'skippers' and one in particular the dingy skipper. This species is really struggling in the UK. After mating in the summer/autumn, they lay their eggs on a plant called bird's-foot trefoil, which is the food plant that the caterpillars require to survive. The eggs tend to hatch a few weeks later but overwinter on the same larval food plant by spinning a cocoon, emerging from it the following April. They feed for a couple of months, before going into a cocoon, later emerging as a butterfly and thus completing the life cycle. The nearby flowering plants then provide the nectar the adults need to survive and then to mate. At any one of these stages, a mow of hay/silage or being ploughed destroys this cycle.

The answer is not to leave entire fields as this is not always sustainable, although this would undoubtedly help, but instead to incorporate either a permanent field margin or small areas of the grassland that is left uncut. Lots of our insects actually overwinter in the woody stems of species such as hogweed, thistles or use the flowering heads or stems of knapweed. If small areas or field margins are left through the winter, it provides our insects a dry home through the difficult months. If you can identify the butterflies you already have on your ground, you can help them to spread on your shoot by looking up what their larval food plant is and then collecting the seeds of it and propagating them elsewhere.



Encouraging barn owls onto your land will provide you with many hours of entertainment!

PICTURE: NICK LANE

Permanent brash and wood piles, standing dead wood that is left in place, or earth banks are all important habitats for insects and can be dotted around the shoot. They will in turn provide food and shelter for your quarry species. The level at which you implement change is dependent on the areas you have access to, but all the small things really do help.

Summary

This final part of the series has gone through quick results that make big differences. To best support shooting, make a note of what you have done and the time you have put into it. Monitor the usage of your new 'homes' and from a safe distance take pictures. Publicise what you do outside of your usual networks and get the message out there on these projects – who doesn't like a picture of a barn owl using a box that a shoot has put up – the local newspapers are crying out for 'good news' stories. Go and talk to your MP and show him what you are doing; we must not be afraid to put out the details of what we are all doing to the wider public which will strengthen our future.

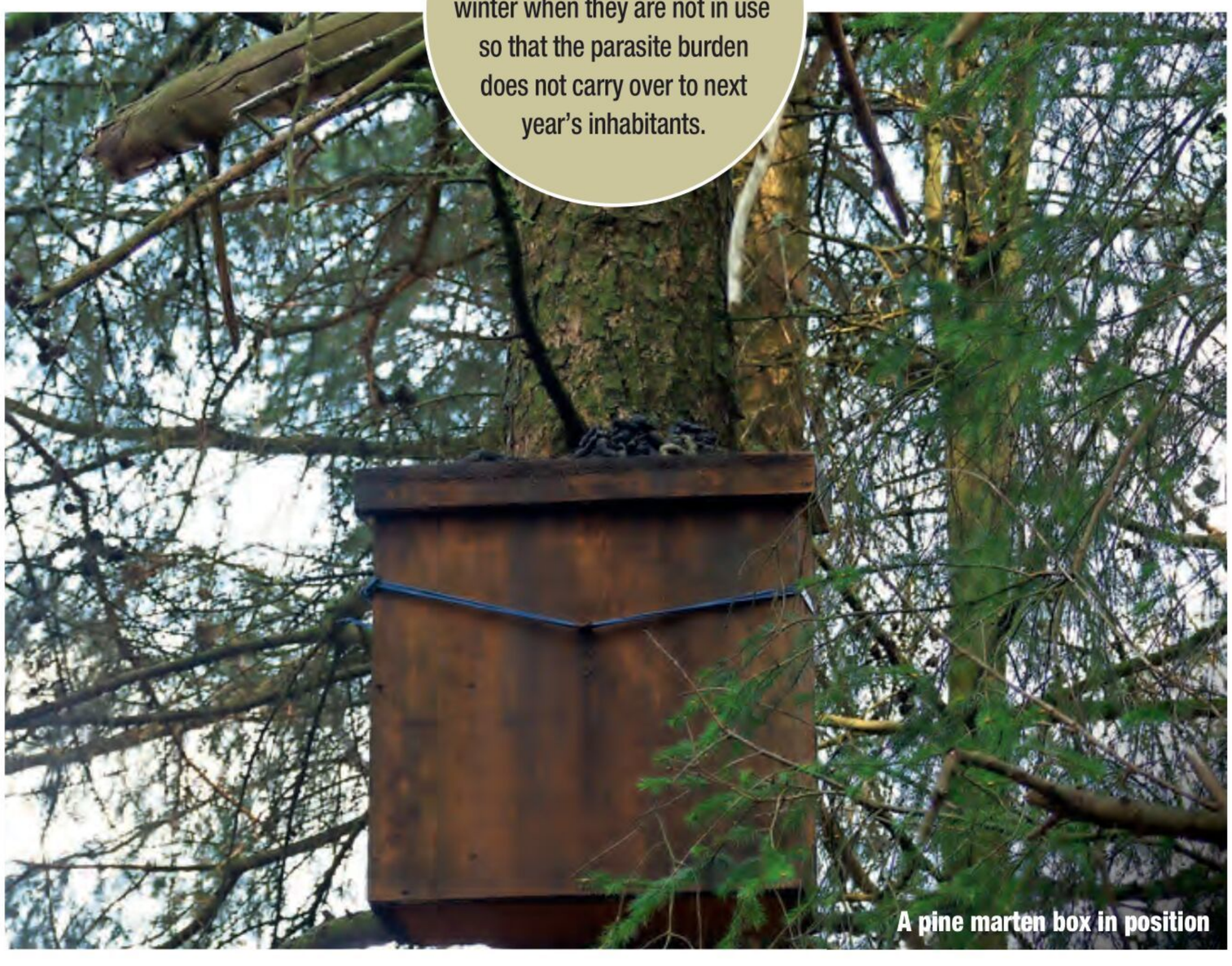
When erecting bird boxes, they should be south facing but out of the prevailing weather. ■

TOP TIP

It is a good idea to clean out old bird nest boxes in the winter when they are not in use so that the parasite burden does not carry over to next year's inhabitants.



A bird box on a parkland tree



A pine marten box in position

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ONE FOR THE POT



Venison Crispy Pancakes

Living on breadcrumbs!

Chris Marney has had to raid the freezer this month for game, but while our most sustainable meat might be in short supply, we hope you have just enough for these mouth-watering ideas

We are now coming into the summer months and when we open the freezer the game section can often feel like we are living off breadcrumbs at this time of year – and for this month's recipes we literally are!

If the cupboard is bare of game birds, there is still great venison to be enjoyed during these summer months. In months gone by, I have been beating the drum about using game not only for the special meals but for those midweek suppers or lunches and this month is no different. We have time travelled to try and recreate one of those memories from the past: crispy pancakes, but we of course have done this with a game twist.

I was also very fortunate to open that freezer drawer to find some fabulous duck we shot down in Somerset this season, so it was the perfect opportunity to make one of those brilliant 2-in-1 dishes. First you get the chance to eat a creamy sticky duck risotto. But make sure you cook a double portion, because the following day you can then use this to make duck arancini with arrabiata sauce.

We are really pleased to announce that this year we will be doing a demonstration at the Game Fair, which this year will be held at Ragley Hall on 29-31 July. Please do look at our website or follow us on Instagram for further details.

VENISON CRISPY PANCAKES

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

VENISON FILLING

- 750g diced venison shoulder
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 50g plain flour, seasoned with salt & pepper
- 200ml ale
- 300ml venison stock
- 1tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1tsp soy sauce
- 1tbsp tomato puree
- 2 dried bay leaves
- 2 sprigs of thyme
- ½tbsp crab apple jelly
- 3tbsp olive oil
- 10g unsalted butter
- Salt & pepper to season



PANCAKES

- 3 eggs, beaten
- 85g plain flour
- 225ml milk
- Butter for cooking

COATING

- 2 eggs, beaten
- 100g plain flour, seasoned with salt & pepper
- 100g panko breadcrumbs

»

COOKING
- ✦ 3tbsp vegetable oil

SERVING
- ✦ Rocket
- ✦ Cherry tomatoes, halved
- ✦ Balsamic glaze

METHOD

VENISON FILLING

1. Turn on the oven to 150°C.
2. Place the flour, salt & pepper in a large bowl and combine, then add the diced venison and toss the meat so that all the pieces are coated well.
3. In a large oven-proof casserole dish, heat 1tbsp of olive oil, then add half the venison and fry until nicely browned on all sides. Remove and place into a clean bowl and set to one side, then repeat with the other half of the venison, and remove.
4. Add a little water to remove all the bits stuck to the base of the pan – this holds so much flavour we don't want to waste it – then add this to the bowl with the venison.
5. Add the final 1tbsp of olive oil, with the butter, along with the onions and gently fry until they are softened.
6. Now add all the other ingredients including the venison into the casserole dish. Stir to combine well and bring to the boil.
7. Place the lid on and place in the oven. Cook for 3-4 hours, checking every hour. If it looks like it is too dry, just add a little water.
8. Remove from the oven and allow to cool.

PANCAKES

1. Put the beaten egg in a large bowl and add the flour, then whisk until smooth.
2. Add the milk and whisk until well combined.
3. Heat a pancake pan with a small amount of butter. Place a ladleful of the pancake mixture into the pan and move the mixture about to make sure the whole pan is covered.
4. Cook for 1-2 minutes then use a spatula to turn the pancake and cook for a further minute.
5. Set to one side to allow to cool and repeat this to cook the other 3 pancakes. Keep back a small amount of the mixture to seal the pancakes later.
6. When cooled, use a small side plate and place in the centre of each pancake and trim off the edges.

ASSEMBLE THE PANCAKES

1. Heat a frying pan over a medium heat.
2. Place a large spoonful of the venison filling in the centre of each pancake, then use a pastry brush to coat the edges with some of the remaining pancake batter.
3. Fold over the pancake and place in frying pan and push down the edges until they seal.
4. Remove and allow to cool.
5. Place the eggs, flour & panko into 3 bowls. Dip both sides of the pancakes into the seasoned flour followed by the beaten egg and finally the panko breadcrumbs.

COOKING

1. Turn on the oven to 180°C
2. In a large frying pan, heat the vegetable oil and gently fry the pancakes on both sides for 5 minutes.
3. Remove from the frying pan and place on a baking tray and cook in the oven for 15 minutes.

SERVING

1. Perfect when served with a simple salad of rocket and cherry tomatoes with a good drizzle of balsamic glaze.



Duck Arancini with Arrabiata Sauce

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.

DUCK ARANCINI WITH ARRABIATA SAUCE

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- 2 duck breasts
- Salt & pepper to season
- 200g risotto rice
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 100ml white wine
- 100ml water
- 1 chicken stock cube
- 50g Parmesan, grated
- 50g cream cheese
- 750ml game stock
- 20g unsalted butter
- 1tbsp olive oil
- Handful of basil, finely sliced

ARANCINI COATING

- 2 eggs, beaten
- 100g plain flour, seasoned with salt & pepper
- 100g panko breadcrumbs

ARRABIATA SAUCE

- 2 tins of chopped tomatoes
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 1 red chilli, finely diced
- 1tsp hot paprika
- 1tsp sweet paprika
- 100ml balsamic vinegar
- 20g caster sugar
- 2 garlic gloves, crushed to a paste with sea salt
- ½tsp tabasco
- 1tsp olive oil
- Salt & pepper to season

METHOD

DUCK

1. In a cold frying pan, place the duck breast skin side down. Turn the heat on high and cook for 4 minutes, then turn and cook for a further 2 minutes.
2. Set to one side and allow to cool. Once the duck is rested and cooled, dice into small cubes.

RISOTTO

1. Place the white wine, water and stock cube into a saucepan, then heat and reduce by half.
2. Place the butter, olive oil, onion & garlic into a large frying pan and add a little water. Put on the lid and gentle fry for 10 minutes.
3. Remove the lid, add the risotto rice and fry for 2 minutes.
4. Add a ladle of the stock and allow this to be absorbed by the rice while constantly stirring. Continue this until all the stock is used and the rice is nice and soft.
5. Finally, add the wine and stock reduction followed by the cream cheese and Parmesan; stir until well combined.
6. Allow to cool, and divide into 16 small balls, rolled by hand.

COATING

1. Place the eggs, flour & panko into 3 bowls.
2. Dip the balls into the seasoned flour, followed by the beaten egg and, finally, the panko breadcrumbs.

ARRABIATA SAUCE

1. Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat and add the onion & chilli and gently fry until soft.
2. Add both of the paprikas and the balsamic vinegar and simmer until the vinegar has started to thicken and become sticky.
3. Add all the rest of the ingredients and simmer over a low heat for 30-45 minutes. If it's looking too dry, add a little water.

COOKING

1. Heat the deep fat fryer to 180°C.
2. Place 8 of the arancini balls into the basket, lower into the oil and cook for 5-6 minutes, until golden.
3. Remove and place on kitchen roll to remove the excess oil.

SERVING

1. Place 4 of the arancini balls into a bowl with a generous serving of the arrabiata sauce and sprinkle over some chopped basil. ■

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



The arancini balls can be left in the fridge and then coated when you are ready to cook them



The arrabiata is meant to be spicy, but of course adjust for your own taste



WITH TIM WESTON

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

Bird flu update

With many keepers and game farmers facing increasing pressure due to the avian flu outbreak, Tim takes a deeper look at the issue and how it will affect the coming season

Lowland driven shooting is facing one of its biggest crisises ever. This winter saw one of the largest AI outbreaks that the UK has ever seen with free-range chicken hens eggs not being able to be sold during the month of March because the birds have had to be housed as a result of the outbreak. There have been a record 85 cases of bird flu in England this winter. Over-wintered game bird flocks do have slightly different rules than that of chickens but the game farmer does need to take precautions so that their flock doesn't get infected by wild birds. Over-wintered pheasants are not wild birds but those that are kept back as laying stock for the following year's rearing season. Not much was heard about the bird flu outbreak of the highly pathogenic strain of H5N1 in the UK because we also had the parallel Covid-19 pandemic that took all of the headlines and then the Russians decided to invade Ukraine. This meant that for some keepers and shoot organisers bird flu passed them by and to be frank bird flu in the winter months is not a major problem for shooting in real terms. We do have to be careful and keep an eye on outbreaks and make sure we have top biosecurity measures in place to protect domestic and wild birds but we can carry on shooting. Bird flu becomes a major issue for us as gamekeepers only at key times of the year: the spring when birds are laying on fields and possibly in the summer when birds are being released to wood.

Over the last 20 years, game farms have had fewer over-wintered pheasants and virtually no over-wintered red-legged partridges, instead relying on egg producers in France to supply our needs. The French do it well, with good biosecurity, genetic matting and good husbandry meaning that they have been able to keep closed flocks that also helps to maintain health and then ship high-yield, quality eggs to the UK to be hatched here. Most of these flocks are in two regions of France in the south-west where the bulk of the French poultry industry is: turkeys, chickens, ducks and of course geese for pate. Unfortunately, the region has had a significant bird flu outbreak; in this region of France by early March they had had 795 cases with over 10 million birds culled. This of course includes game bird flocks. As with the UK, when there is an outbreak certain zones are set up and birds, eggs or parts of birds are not allowed to be moved from them so the French game egg producers have been unable to send any eggs to the UK or to any of their other markets. Even in the shooting world, our markets are so tied up. I had a keeper friend of mine on the phone from northern Austria telling me that his game farm in the Cech Republic had cancelled his order of pheasants because they could not get the eggs they needed from France.

The NGO have been working very closely with the Game Farmers Association, Defra and our colleagues in France to try and resolve the situation, but because of the sheer scale of the outbreak in France the authorities over there have been unable to grant licences to move even the eggs of birds from the affected regions. The legislation around avian influenza outbreaks and the measures put in place in the disease control zones around the infected premises is very clear, both in Great Britain and in the European Union. In both locations, no exports to other countries are possible from within a protection or surveillance zones. It is also not possible to import poultry or captive bird consignments (live birds, eggs, day old chicks, meat or other products) from a protection or surveillance zone to anywhere in, for example, Great Britain. This measure is to reduce the risk of spread of the virus from the immediate area around the infected premises. Because this is international law it takes vets from the sending and receiving country to sign a movement license which they are unable to do.

Despite the best efforts of the NGO and GFA, they are unable to have international biosecurity regulations amended or changed. The other problem we have faced when trying to lobby is that the affected area is increasing almost daily meaning so do these control zones.

What does this mean for the 2022/23 game shooting season? Well, gamekeepers are an adaptive lot and so are game farmers so the first thing to say is that it is not going to be a write off. We rely heavily on France for our partridge eggs so that might be tricky, and I would guess to say that early season partridge shooting on the whole might not happen in the same way as we are used to; the Spanish and the UK held stock will be able to plug a gap but it is unlikely that it will be in any significant way. The outlook for pheasants is slightly more positive – we rely on France for around 40% of our egg stock so that means more than half come from the UK or elsewhere. UK game farms have been keeping closed flocks of pheasants so will on the whole be able to supply – you might not have birds exactly when you want them, but it is likely that you will get some. Not all of France is covered in a control zone so eggs from outside of that zone will be able to ship as and when they are needed.

Avian influenza is not going away, so I think we should be planning now for next year. We need to over winter partridges and pheasants in the UK from closed flocks, those birds should not have ever been released and caught up. This will to a degree would mean we are less likely to be in a similar situation again if lightning strikes twice. If we have eggs produced in the UK they can still move around the UK even in an outbreak. There might be additional costs and more work, but it is a way of insulating the sector from matters that are out of our control. ■

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PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN

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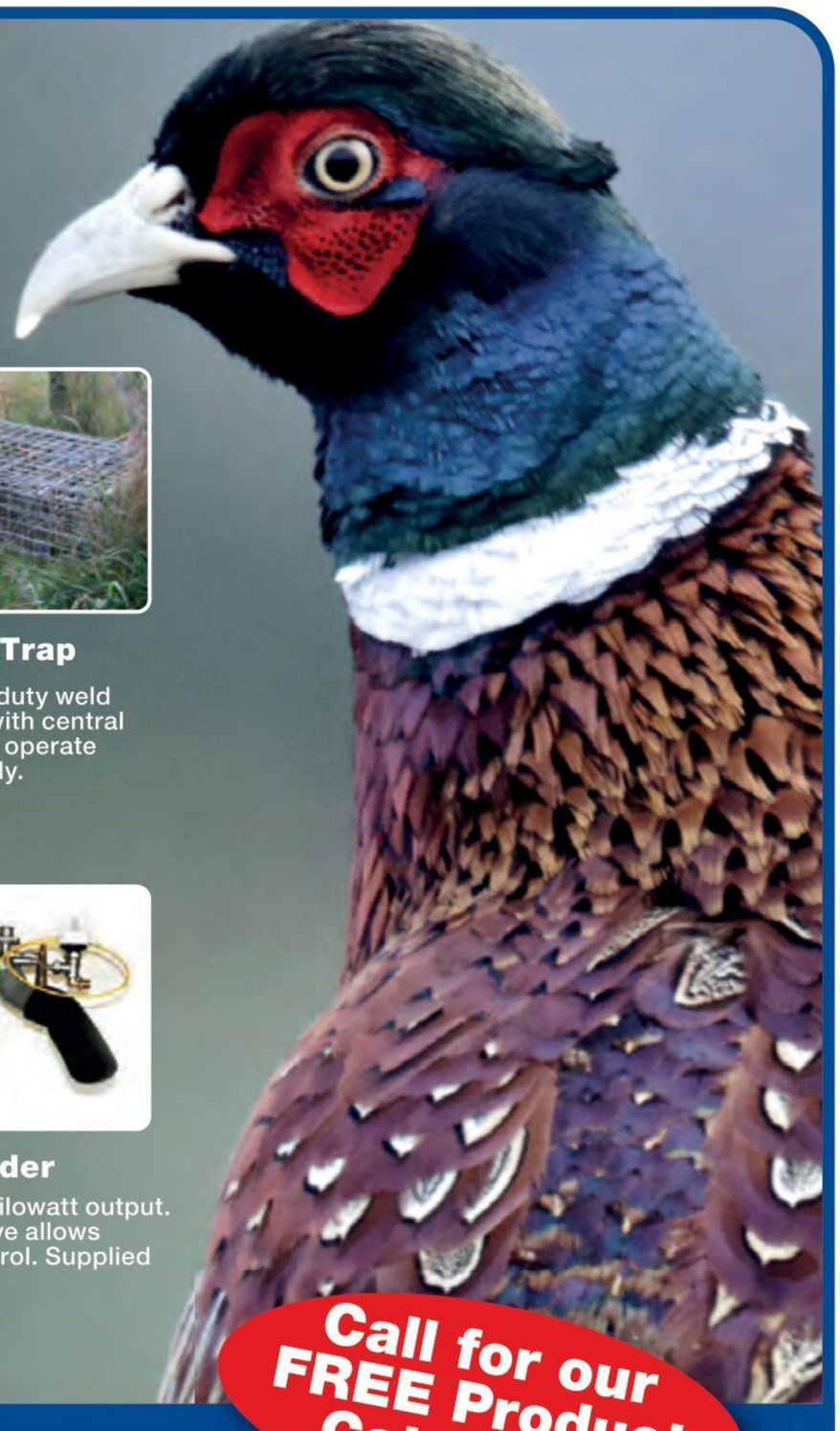
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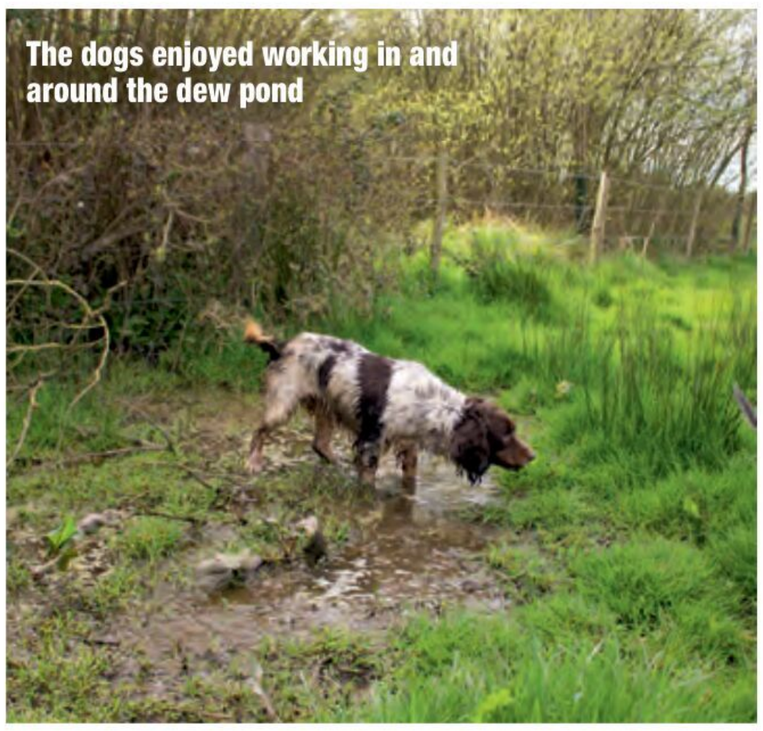
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WALK AND SHOOT

We head down to a farm in East Sussex to meet up with countryman and gamekeeper Roy Foster for a walked-up shoot – and come away with a small bag and a lot of lessons learnt

Within just a few minutes of leaving the trucks behind, and the spaniel already working the hedgerows hard, Roy's lurcher starts to point. There's definitely something in there, Roy says, and brings his side-by-side to hand.

The Lab darts over to the hedge and pushes the animal towards the waiting gamekeeper, and CRACK! The sound of the shotgun is followed by the rustling of twigs and leaves, and out jumps the springer, delivering the rabbit to hand.



The dogs enjoyed working in and around the dew pond

Seeing the three dogs work together with the waiting Gun is a wonder to behold, and Roy lets the dogs enjoy a good sniff of their catch – for them, the smell of success!

Spring in the sun

It's a beautiful day, and with this early win, Mark, Roy and I continue into a ploughed field, where the rough earth slows us down, giving us an opportunity to get to know each other. Roy tells us how he started out doing vermin control on a couple of farms, one of which ran a syndicate shoot on the land. As they were looking for a keeper, Roy was asked if he wanted to get involved and he decided to have a go – and the rest is history. "I still shoot that ground to this day, although the shoot itself packed up about 10 years ago," he says.

> 'The sound of the shotgun is followed by the rustling of twigs, and out jumps the springer, delivering the rabbit to hand'

Roy moved on to Ashbourne Lakes, where the highlight was trying your hand at the McDougal Challenge. "The Guns would come and shoot 10 pheasants in the morning, have a bit of lunch, and then catch a trout with the fly they tied using a tail feather. We did that for about 15 years.

"When that shoot was sold to Giles Braxton at Court Lodge, he wanted to start up a shoot for his teenage boys so I started one from scratch and I really enjoyed that. It was mainly woodland, new plantations, a couple of lakes and ponds – and it worked very well."

Walk about

Roy stopped keepering during the first Covid-19 lockdown and now particularly enjoys crow shooting and foxing. A true countryman, Roy's



Watching the dogs working with a handler who has such a deep connection with them is a real joy.

A trio of hard-working dogs!

PICTURES: BEN PALFREYMAN

ROUGH SHOOT // IN EAST SUSSEX

knowledge is astonishing. He found badger tracks that were almost not even there, and pointed out a pair of mallard in a puddle up ahead even before the dogs had noticed.

"After so many years out in the coutryside, you just sense these things," he says. "I don't know how, I just know things are there." Throughout the day, his knowledge was proved right time and again. While we were stood questioning whether a bird may be about to do this or that, Roy always just knew. "Those birds won't lift from the pond right now – they are only making that noise because they are fighting over territory."

Needless to say, they didn't lift.

A little later, Roy pointed to a track in the long grass. "A deer has come through here today," he notes. We ask him how he knows it was today, and not the day before that the animal had flattened the grass. "They've knocked the dew off," he says. He points to how the grass track is darker than the surrounding grass where the sun has dried off the dew. This ability to read the land around him helps Roy know exactly what is going on, whether it's on his own shoot or a farmer's field he has never been to before.

As we walked around the farm, Roy's penchant for crow shooting became apparent, and as we neared a small copse beside the hedges he managed to bag a crow, while Mark took down a pigeon. At all times, the dogs were totally focused on Roy – knowing from past experience that if they were with him, and followed his lead, they would see success.

While the bag ended with just the single rabbit, crow and pigeon, the lessons learnt from this veteran gamekeeper and lifelong countryman more than made up for it. Thanks Roy for sharing some of your wisdom, and we look forward to another walked-up day with you soon. ■



The crows were very reluctant to come any nearer, but Roy did manage to bag one in the end



It is always a pleasure to spend time with fellow shooters



THE MARKETPLACE

Shooting products and services

Welcome to the Marketplace. In this section, you will find everything you need to know about what's on the market right now – from the kit you need for the coming season, to behind-the-scenes looks at the shooting world's much-loved brands, gun shops and shooting schools.

Whether you train gundogs, work on the beating line or shoot a variety of quarry, we've got you covered!

INSIDE THE MARKETPLACE THIS MONTH...

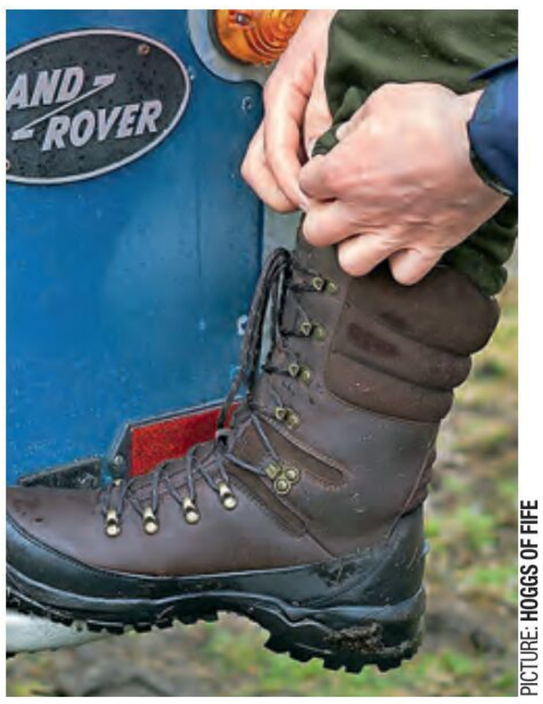




MARKETPLACE

Hoggs of Fife Aonach 10" field boots

The importance of a decent pair of boots cannot be overstated. These Aonach Field Boots are fully waterproof and feature an H-Tex membrane which provides both excellent protection and breathability. The boots feature uppers constructed from the finest Anfibio leathers protected by a rubber rand in high-abrasion areas, plus leather-lined ankle protection. The Vibram Icetrek sole gives superior grip on tough terrain, a very welcome feature if you're rough shooting in the uplands or working your dog. There is even a removable memory foam insole on top of the shock-absorbing midsole to give you that extra bit of comfort on a long day.



PICTURE: HOGGS OF FIFE



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Rigby gunmaker's apron

Whether playing about in the workshop or cooking up a storm on the BBQ, you never need to worry about ruining your smart clothes again with this stylish, functional and durable apron. Made from hard-wearing cotton and manufactured in classic Rigby blue, it is embroidered with the legendary 'Double R' logo in gold and is the very same apron worn by Rigby's world-famous gunsmiths in their workshops. As endorsements go, there can be no better mark of quality than that. Comes in one size with draw string fasteners on the back and features a large front pocket to hold all your bits and bobs.



£30
johnrigbyandco.com

Swazi Amulet merino ladies t-shirt



The thing with those early game days, and spring/early summer in general, is you're never quite sure what to wear. That's where this new ladies Amulet merino t-shirt from New Zealand-based cult clothing brand Swazi Apparel comes in. Made from sustainable NuYarnâ merino wool, the Amulet is quick-drying and highly durable, offering greater elasticity while retaining its shape, and 35% greater thermal retention than conventional merino. Guaranteed to make you warmer when it's cool and cooler when it's warm, this lightweight tee is perfect for layering up.

£59.95
swazi.co.nz

Tick-resistant Rovince gear



ROVINCE DUOFIT ANTI-TICK TROUSERS

While we all welcome the start of spring, tick season can prove a very trying time for anyone who spends a lot of time outdoors. Ticks not only irritate the skin, but they can carry serious disease, too. Dutch firm Rovince have been quietly providing sustainable protection against ticks and other insects since 2009, and the range doesn't get any more essential than these Duofit trousers. Ideal for the summer, they are fast-drying, robust and windproof, while they are also reinforced on the knee and seating areas to provide extra protection where you most need it. They are skin-friendly, machine-washable, sport multiple pockets, and provide a UV protection of 50+. It's better to have something and not need it than need something and not have it, as they say.

£91.89
rovince.uk

ROVINCE ANTI-TICK SHIELD SOCKS (LONG)

Most ticks live in shady, moist areas at ground level, clinging to tall grass, brush and shrubs. Therefore, the first requirement to protect you against ticks is to protect your lower body. 80% of ticks thrive up to a height of 50cm from the ground, and those that travel up over your shoes or boots will be the first to come into contact with your skin. That is why it is vitally important to wear tick-resistant socks when stalking or working in the above environments. Rovince gear has been proven to reduce tick bites by 98%, and these seamless socks are widely worn by hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts. They are designed to not only prevent blisters and ticks, but also keep your feet dry and fresh. The Coolmax yarn gives the sock breathability and optimal drainage of perspiration making them suitable for every season.



£21.32
rovince.uk

Patrick Pinker chick boxes

This ingenious Patrick Pinker two-compartment cardboard chick box has been developed over several years to create just the right environment for transporting day-old pheasant/partridge chicks. It is easy to assemble and stack, but folds flat when not in use making it easy to store, too. Each box measures 50cm x 26cm x 13cm and can carry a total of 80 pheasant chicks in total (40 per compartment) on shorter trips, and 68 (34 per compartment) on longer journeys. A few hours in these boxes completes fluffing-out of the down, allows some rest after the effort of hatching and further absorption of the yolk held inside the body. The chick box can be used with foam liners (sold separately) and is designed for one-time use and so aids biosecurity. These boxes come flat-packed.

£110.40 per 100
patrickpinker.com



With fox and rabbit control the main focus in the coming months, we've rounded up a selection of the best products on the market for night time use to help put more quarry in the bag.

Devastating Double 5 caller

These have to be the most effective mouth callers on the market, and are ideal when you don't have an electronic caller with you.

The original fox caller is a reed-type caller which can be held in the teeth – biting down to vary the pitch produces a loud and very realistic call with a little practice.

The other caller here is the 'wam' caller, which again makes a very realistic rabbit-in-distress sound simply by blowing through it and is also extremely easy to use. This call is slightly quieter, making it ideal to coax predators in at closer range.

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bestfoxcall.co.uk



FoxPro Inferno digital caller

This electronic caller is an excellent addition to the fox controller's toolkit, featuring 75 pre-programmed sounds and the ability to hold up to 200 (additional sounds downloadable from the FoxPro website) and operated by remote control.

This type of caller offers the obvious advantage of reproducing perfect call sounds to attract foxes, but also has the ability to draw your quarry towards the caller rather than towards you, meaning you can lure the animal into the ideal shooting position whilst you remain hidden.



£199.95
bushwear.co.uk

Spypoint Link Micro LTE trail camera



The Link Micro trailcam offers an excellent compact camera which links directly to your mobile phone via the spypoint app. The camera works day and night, sending a photo when triggered directly to your phone.

The package comes with a monthly allowance of 100 free pictures, or if you wish you can sign up to larger number of images per month for a small additional cost.

This is the perfect way to monitor exactly what is moving around your ground and at what time, day or night.

£199.95
scottcountry.co.uk

Viperflex Journey Styx 4-leg shooting sticks

The Viperflex Journey sticks are renowned for their stability and lightweight construction making them easy to carry in the field and quick to deploy.

Perfect for foxing, stalking and rabbiting, these sticks make for the perfect shooting rest. For rock-steady stability, you can also purchase the additional fifth leg option for those extra long-distance shots.

£285
bushwear.co.uk



PICTURES: MARK RIPLEY

Wicked Lights ShotPro torch

This has to be the ultimate gun-mounted LED torch, giving an amazingly bright beam which is both dimmable and focusable.

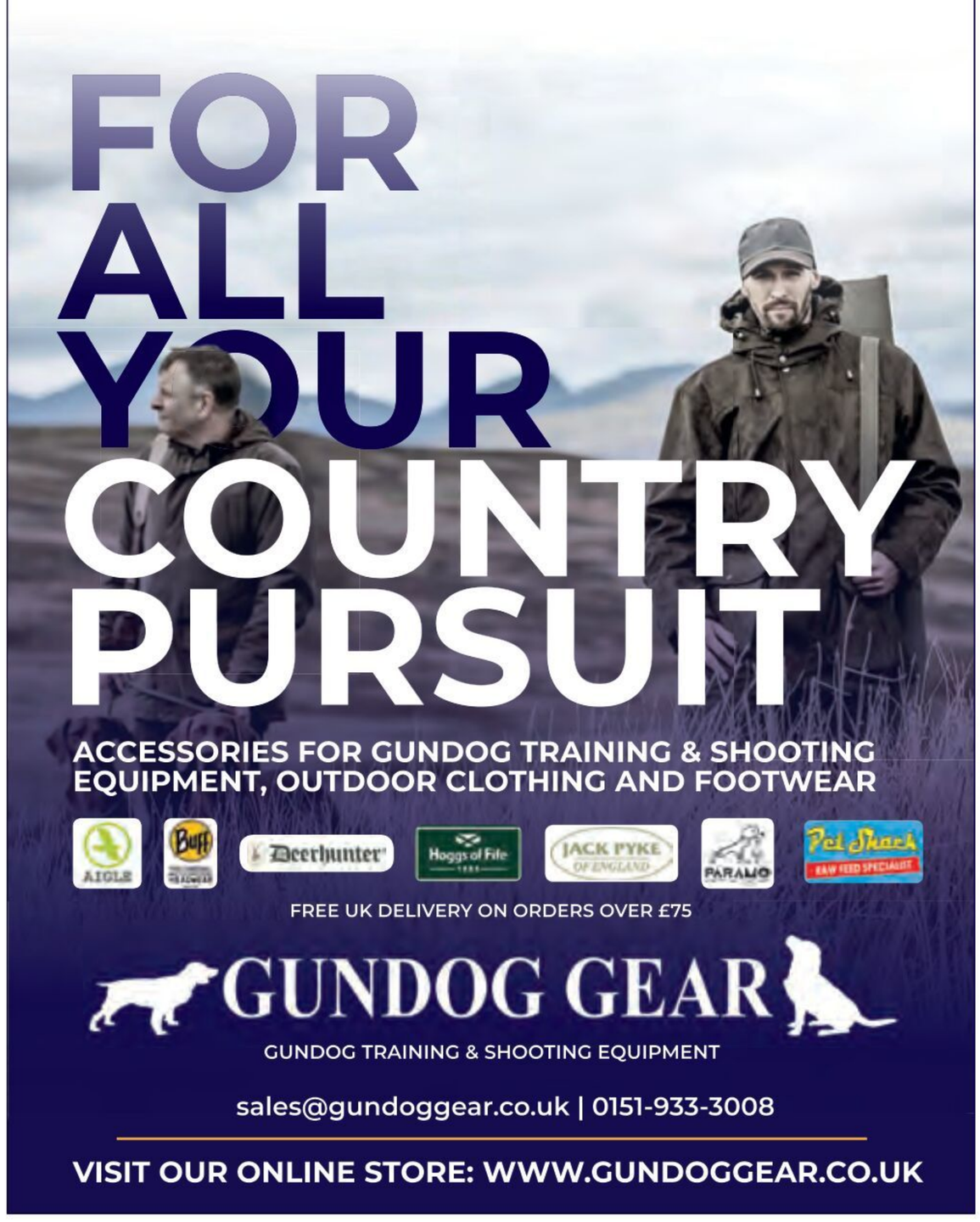
Perfect for everything from rabbiting to long-range foxing. With a choice of red light or infrared for use with NV, and giving quarry identification out to around 500 yards and eye shine to 800 yards or more, this torch packs an awesome punch for its compact size. Also included is a quick-release and fully adjustable scope mount, batteries and charger.

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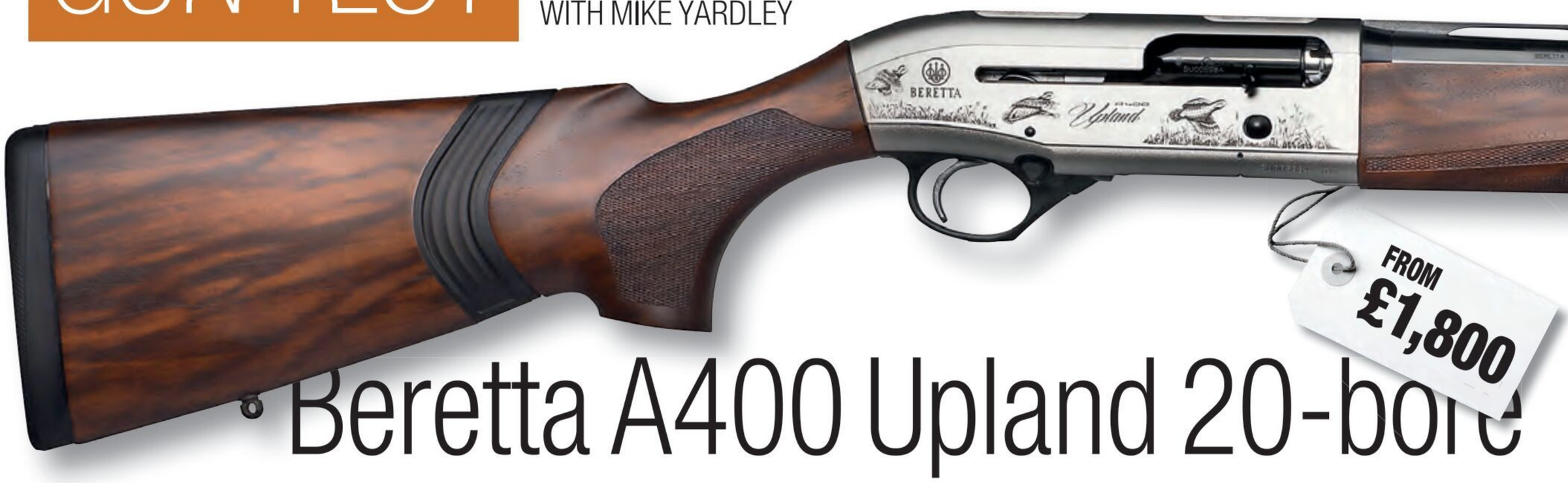
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WITH MIKE YARDLEY



Beretta A400 Upland 20-bore

Having previously been impressed by the Beretta A400 Uplands he has tested, Mike Yardley discovers how the latest 20-bore version measures up

Spring is in the air. Well, not quite from where I write. There is rain, hail and it's been bloody freezing! I've looked round for a springtime gun for us, and, with the help of Imogen Waktare of GMK, came up with the Beretta A400 20 bore 'Upland' semi-automatic. Although pheasants and partridge adorn its silver-finished receiver, it struck me as an ideal gun for spring drilling pigeons (not to mention being just the ticket if you have any youngsters that you may want to introduce to shooting). It's got a 26" barrel which is ideal for a hide (or ab initio instruction) and weighs in at just 6lb 2oz. The RRP for either the 12- or 20-bore, is £1,800. So it's reasonably priced.

We looked at the A400 Upland semi some years back in 12-bore, which weighed in at just over 7lb, and were impressed. This feels a different gun. It has its own character with the shorter barrel and lighter, scaled down, 20-bore form. The aesthetics are similar to its bigger sibling, with a nickel-finished, game scene engraved receiver and the (optional) Kick-Off recoil reducer amidships, but the handling qualities are distinct. This makes a point that is well worth remembering: don't assume because guns look alike that they are actually alike in their handling dynamics. With that said, on with the show...

On bringing the A400 up to face and shoulder, one is not only struck by the lack of mass, but by a particularly good (new) grip design. The latter is of medium radius without a palm swell and suits the gun well.

The slim fore-end is elegant too, but it would have been even better for me without relieving the profile above the chequering. My preference would have been for something just a little more rounded and hand-filling. It's nice, though, to see a real wooden stock combined with Kick-Off feature.

The 26", 3"-chambered 'Steelium' barrel of the Upland is hammer-forged. There are 24, 28 and 30" options, the first on FAC. The tube is marked as "alloy Co [chrome] Mo [moly] quenched high tensile steel" which gives a good clue as to its content. I can only say that even pre-Steelium, I've never known any barrels tougher than Beretta. Those on my Beretta semi-automatics have proven almost indestructible over the years, and I have not been kind to them!

The forcing cone here is quite long, and the bore diameter, at 16mm, is wider than some 20-bores (both features that would tend to reduce felt recoil). Longish Optima multi-chokes are fitted and look as well-made as ever.

The plain 6mm ventilated rib was well matched to the gun as well, although a solid design might be considered and could prove more dent-resistant.



Although similar to previous models, the new A400 feels like a different gun

Thanks to Lyalvale Express for the cartridges used in this test

PICTURES: **MIKE YARDLEY**



The stock looks good with an enhanced figure which Beretta call “X-tra grain”. As mentioned, it has a nice grip shape – one of the best I’ve encountered on a small 20. The length of pull is 14⅝" with an extra ⅛" to toe. There is not the usual slight extra length to heel, which I’d have preferred because it can make the butt feel more secure at the shoulder. It’s an easy remedy though, just change the recoil pad. This gun is fitted with the latest ‘Extralight’ pad, but I prefer the shape and traditional dimensions of the old Micro-Core pad which you can still get.

Finally, I was particularly impressed by how easy it was assemble the Upland. There was no scratching your head and reaching for the instruction manual here – it goes together and comes apart without undue hassle, all aided by a well designed fore-end nut. To put the gun together, just bring the bolt handle back on the action until it locks and drop the cleared barrel on, then the fore-end. That’s it. No complication at all. Perhaps the A400 is the easiest semi-auto there is for assembly.

Technical

The A400, like the 391, 390 and 303 which preceded it, is a gas-operated design, but adds to the proven Beretta semi-auto equation a rotating bolt. This came from the X-trema magnum model which first incorporated the feature developed by Benelli, which was acquired by Beretta in the 1980s, hence allowing Beretta to use it in some of their range, too.

All A400s boast a compact self-cleaning piston which remains in its gas shroud on disassembly. There are twin action cocking rods welded to a short steel sleeve which is covered by another polymer sleeve running on the outside of the mag tube.

The hinged ‘hat’s tail’ to the rear of the bolt, as seen on many semi-autos, is not present. The moving parts are brought forward by a long coil spring positioned between the cocking-sleeve and the action. It is a scaled-down version of the 12-bore and has the same (optional) Kick-Off system with hydraulic dampeners very similar to those on a car suspension. These reduce slipping between the stock and the cheek as well as reducing muzzle flip.

SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS

I shot the A400 with a shooting pal, Geoff Peck, and we were both struck by how light and handy it was. The 26" barrel would not have been my first choice, I like long barrels, especially on semi-autos. But this one handled and shot nicely.

Of recoil, there was none! Well, very little, and this in spite of the low all-up weight. Some of this might be put done to the Kick-Off, but felt recoil with 21g and 24g Lyalvale Express loads was barely noticable.

I found the fore-end a little slim for my hand as it tended to slip, and I thought the gun could have done with just a little more length to heel to aid muzzle control. You need about ⅛" extra to heel typically to secure the butt at the shoulder well. Here, the length to heel and middle of the butt sole were about the same.

Nevertheless, this is an excellent, well made semi at a less than eye-watering price. It would be a near ideal companion in a pigeon hide, or, for anyone recoil shy.

WE LIKE

- The lack of weight and fast handling
- The grip
- The absence of felt recoil for such a light gun

WE DISLIKE

- The shape of the recoil pad

TECH SPECS

- Make: Beretta
- Action type: gas operated semi-automatic with rotating bolt
- Bore: 20 (12-bore available)
- Barrel: 26" with 28 and 30" options and 24" on FAC
- Choke: Optima flush fit – 3 supplied
- Weight: 6.2lb

UP CLOSE



The well-designed fore-end nut makes assembling the gun easy



The action is nicely adorned with game-themed engravings



Mike was particularly impressed with the new grip design



A gas-operated design with the addition of a rotating bolt



WITH SIMON O'LEARY

Go with the flow

In the third part of his series on starting shooting, Simon O'Leary looks at the most common stylistic options available to beginners

So, we've arrived at part three of our introduction to shooting series and by now we should have a lesson or two under our belts. You will have experienced the pull of the trigger whilst standing correctly, a detail that is sometimes overlooked. One would hope that a connection or two has been made with a couple of different targets and your confidence is climbing in stature. This is also the juncture where the details now begin to creep in; continuity, combined with the finer nuances elevate together, the journey now begins towards that all important flow.

Last month, I signed off with a mention of eye dominance and personal style. Regarding the latter, I mean to consciously understand which approach you lean towards and how that relates to differing targets. This would narrow down to a choice created by trial and error, or alternatively a natural reaction that works and therefore fits. I have had many clients from the get-go shoot in one of the three main styles without realising. Let's briefly run through the three options.

SWING-THROUGH

This means to mount or place the muzzle behind a target, then swing through and beyond the target to the chosen lead.

PULL-AWAY (METHOD *CPSA)

This is when you place or mount the muzzle directly on to the target, then accelerate away to your chosen lead.

MAINTAINED (LEAD)

This means to immediately mount or place the muzzle in front of the target, then move the muzzle at the same speed as the target and pull the trigger.

The fun part here is to experiment with all three styles, unless of course your style has already found you! Conversely, you may master a couple, or indeed all three, and keep them in your metaphorical 'bag of tools' to bring out when necessary. We are all different, be open and don't be scared to experiment.

Your eye dominance should have been ironed out in the very first lesson. If applicable, this natural state can be manipulated if necessary to suit the shooter through simple applications like putting tape over the safety glasses, covering the stronger eye, or simply closing one eye.

Some people will swear by the fact that you must shoot with both eyes open. Not true. It goes without saying that having 100% vision is king, but not if it's hindering progress.

Another small fact is that if you are required to close or obscure an eye, this will be for vertical orientated targets only. A rising teal, for example. The straight driven target, in basic terms, any target that follows a vertical axis. It is the quartering and crossing birds that the same person can normally attack with both eyes open.

If you find closing an eye is too much, small opaque lens stickers

CLAY SHOOTING

For more clay shooting tips, check out our *Clay Shooter* magazine at magsdirect.co.uk



PICTURES: BEN WRIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY



Sometimes, stepping away from the gun can help you visualise the target and understand what you need to do

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

can be purchased. These come in a range of strengths from full mist to faint, options for the shooter to experiment with. Again, a small amount of trial and error may be required before you find your perfect setup.

With all these settings required to best enjoy your new hobby, along comes the start of standing "gun down". This is the term used for the position of the gun stock prior to taking a shot. As part of your initial lesson and for one or two beyond, you will have undoubtedly started in what is known as the 'pre-mounted stance'. This is where the gun stock is placed directly into the shoulder prior to taking the shot. It is the cleanest way to get people started and ensures a comfortable fit throughout the lesson.

The long-term goal is to shoot gun down unless you plan to shoot sporting clays only. To master this technique, you need patience and commitment. Any one can do it, it's just that some take longer to click than others.

The main vex with this change is the fact it is the complete opposite of pre-mounted. The gun is placed into the cheek, then finding the shoulder, as opposed to putting the gun straight into the shoulder, followed by dropping the cheek onto the stock. But as with all new things, time spent will save the day. Alternatively, there are plenty of tutorials online, YouTube especially.

With this mass of stored information and gained confidence, you can now move into the realms of a shooter. Choose a discipline to compete in, reside to be being a pleasure shooter, enjoy forays into the field for game days or crop control, and the great art of pigeon shooting. No matter clay or feather, a neat clean kill is the dream. Obviously, hone your skill on clays, but ensure you are completely comfortable with your performance before you entertain feathered quarry.

Ultimately, you are seeking to find you own flow. That zen like synergy where all moves together. Flow and timing will win the day, and a good instructor and little-and-often practice will ensure that day arrives sooner rather than later. One thing you must never ever do is sacrifice safety. This is the absolute top of the priority list, and as with most things in life, if you're not sure, don't do it. Or at least ask someone who knows beter before you take any risks.

Be safe, stay good. ■

'The goal is to shoot gun down unless you plan to shoot sporting clays only. To master this, you need patience and commitment'



Finding a friendly coach you gel with will help your progress in your shooting no end!



A perfect day

A visit to his new permission proves successful for Mick Garvey in more ways than one, as he continues to wage war on the grey squirrels and works equally hard taking care of the reds

Last month, I relayed my fortune regarding a new permission I've obtained to carry out my red squirrel conservation. Ridding the area of the invasive grey skinnies and creating a safe habitat for red squirrels to settle in is the long-term plan. Six greys were taken out of the game that day and it is with great pleasure I can inform you that I am now well into double figures.

The trail cams have again been invaluable in supplying intelligence on visiting times and I could plan my day around this info as different areas are seeing grey activity at different times. This ghyll saw them arriving early morning, between 6am and 7am then again from 5pm so I could easily fit in other areas in between these times.

A cold start

There was a biting wind the next morning and it was straight in my face, but at least it was in my favour, keeping any noise or scent away from the target area. Keeping warm and comfortable in these conditions is important, so adequate and appropriate clothing is the order of the day. I use a few good base layers topped off with windproof and waterproof jacket and trousers. Trapping air between the layers is key to being warm and comfortable and using quality lightweight and thin layers provides the manoeuvrability you need in the hide.

The sun was creeping up and starting to filter through the bare treetops, sending beams to the leaf covered ground. These soon heated up and were picked up by the thermal spotter, giving you the impression of a live heat source approaching. Experience lets you ignore these heat sources and not shoulder the rifle, making unnecessary movements. Jays and rooks were coming to life but I resisted the temptation to take a few... today was about the greys and everything else could wait.

An hour into the session, a quick flash of grey caught my eye way out in the wood. The InfiRay easily picked it up and the rimfire was shouldered and rested on the hide support. It seemed to take an age getting to me and even when on the tree below the feeder it still appeared hesitant. Patience is something we all learn through our respective shooting disciplines and rushing a shot can inevitably end up with a miss, or, worse, a wounded target. Waiting for the skinny to settle on top of the feeder took a minute of my time but a very worthwhile minute. I use the Sightmark Wraith 4K day/night scope on the .22LR and it gives an awesome view through the viewfinder with the added bonus of recording videos and stills... when I remember to press record that is.

The distance to the feeder was only 55 yards so it was a pretty straightforward shot and the subsonic hollow round struck home quietly and humanely. Hoping that there could be another following, I left the grey where it fell for another half an hour, but an emergency call came in from the squirrel group which would change the day's plans completely.

FIND OUT MORE

For updates on #teamoscar check out the Penrith & District Red Squirrel Group and Mick's various social media outlets.



PICTURES: **MICK GARVEY**

The sounds really echo through this valley

Rescue mission

A local lady had seen a mother red squirrel moving one of its kittens. It had been chased by a cat and had dropped the kit. The woman had done the right thing by leaving the kit for a while to see if the mother returned, but sadly she didn't, so it was brought inside and placed in a warm place in a container with a wool blanket for comfort.

On my arrival, the kit was sleeping but I had to check it for injuries, and see if it was still healthy. All was fine and the little kit was trying to climb all over my hand even though its eyes were still not open and neither were its ears.

Phone calls were made and a mad dash to the other side of Penrith was taken to meet up with Jerry Moss, one of the other rangers for the area, along with his wife, Sarah. They had all the facilities to give the kitten the very best chance of survival, and they have done this a few times with great success.

We named the kit Oscar, although it turns out he is a she, but the name is staying. I'm pleased to inform you that Oscar is doing well, feeding freely and putting on weight. The first few days are critical for her and regular feeding and attention throughout the day and night is needed to give her the best of chances. This is just one of the things that goes on behind the scenes and it's not all just 'taking out' the grey squirrels.

Back to work

The time taken on Oscar's mission had worked out perfectly for my return to the second feeder. Creeping in slowly behind the holly bushes to my position overlooking the island feeder, I was greeted by the sight of a large grey greedily taking feed from the feeder. The tap, tapping of the lid seemed to echo across the valley. Once more I had to be patient and wait for it to take something that would take more than a mouthful. This eventually came in the shape of a monkey nut. It settled down with the shell in its paws and it was game over. Another 30 minutes were given with no more action, but the day had appeared to have been a good one and all I had to do was download the images from the trail cam sd cards.

I had been on the phone to Jerry to see how Oscar had been getting on when I noticed the sd cards on the table. In the excitement, I had forgotten all about them. Taking a look through all the images, I could see greys, jays, deer and the odd rabbit but then... bang! An early morning black and white image in NV mode...

I was sure it was a red. I could see the tufted ears but despite popular belief these are not only found on reds, so I couldn't be sure. However, the next image left me in no doubt... we have reds and a couple of them at least! This is an amazing thing as reds haven't been seen here for years. Now we have at least three and they should be with young so there could be a huge influx in my new little wood.

What a day ... in fact, a perfect day. ■



One of Mick's favoured set ups for ground squirrels


The traps will now be left unset


We are pleased to report that Oscar the red kitten is doing very well



Lead ammunition proposals

A six-month public consultation on proposals to restrict the sale and use of lead ammunition has been launched – but how far will it go? Conor O'Gorman fills us in on all the latest news

Last year, a call for evidence on lead ammunition took place under the UK's post-Brexit chemical regulations referred to as 'UK REACH' which covers England, Wales and Scotland (but not Northern Ireland due to the NI Protocol). The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has been working with the Environment Agency to review the evidence submitted. This includes evidence on the uses of lead ammunition, risks to the environment, wildlife and human health, and the availability and viability of alternatives.

The HSE has been tasked as the 'agency' under UK REACH to produce a report that outlines the risks posed by lead ammunition. Where it believes those risks to be unacceptable, it has also been asked to propose restrictions to reduce those risks.

It is this 'restriction dossier' that is due to be published around the end of April and will be subject to a six-month public consultation. The report will cover various uses of lead ammunition outdoors in England, Wales and Scotland.

Call for a lead shot ban

In early April, the RSPB and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust jumped the gun before the HSE restriction dossier was even published, demanding a ban on the sale and use of lead shotgun cartridges in time for the 2024/25 game shooting season, and asking shooting organisations in an open letter to agree with them. BASC responded in no uncertain terms rejecting the 'offer' and rightly calling them out for their political grandstanding.

Having worked in conservation for decades, I think it's a rather disappointing state of affairs for organisations that have much more in common than perhaps some might wish to admit, to end up in a public mud-slinging match. But there we find ourselves in this increasingly polarised world for shooting and conservation.

War of words

This early public skirmish between BASC and RSPB/WWT is unfortunately a sign of things to come. Once the restrictions proposals are published, it's going to be a busy time given the many differing views on lead ammunition.

On the one hand, there are people in the shooting community who are still in denial that there is any evidence whatsoever of any adverse impact from lead ammunition and that it's all a conspiracy against shooting.

At the other end of the spectrum are the likes of the RSPB, WWT and others who believe that the shooting community is deliberately procrastinating and that the ammunition manufacturers can magically produce non-lead ammunition of every type and quantity needed at the drop of a hat.

The middle ground, as I perceive it, is where most of us find ourselves - where we are reasonable and can accept that some restrictions might be justified but that they should only come into effect when adequate and affordable alternatives for their shooting disciplines are available in the volumes required. I might be wrong, but that is based on countless emails and telephone conversations I have had with people from across the UK over the last 15 years, and especially the last two.

Fibre wad vs plastic wad



PICTURE: EMILY DAMMENT

HAVE YOUR SAY!

By the time you read this article, the restriction dossier should have been published and the consultation launched, so have a look at the BASC website for what our position is on the proposals, and how you can make a difference. **basc.org.uk**

What happens next?

So, what restrictions will be proposed? Is it going to be a full ban on all outdoor uses of lead ammunition or will it be limited to the use of some types of lead shot for game bird shooting?

I think it's likely that the HSE will focus on the use of lead shot for live quarry shooting and game shooting in particular. This is due to the scale of use and the evidenced risks involved when other wild birds eat that lead shot and become ill or die as a result.

Whilst there are a growing number of non-lead shotgun cartridges available in 12-bore and 20-bore, there are few options for 16-bore, 28-bore and .410. To put things in perspective, currently less than 2% of shotgun cartridge sales are non-lead, and tens of millions of non-lead 12-bore and 20-bore cartridges alone will be required for a single game shooting season. Manufacturers are saying that a transition to non-lead for shotgun cartridges could take up to 10 years, the situation being exacerbated when one factors in non-plastic wads. And that is not even taking into account the current shortages of all forms of ammunition, whether lead or non-lead.

However, the HSE might go further and recommend a ban on the sale and use of nearly all lead ammo for target shooting and live quarry shooting outdoors. In that scenario the shooting organisations will need to seek exemptions where there is evidence that there are no viable alternatives to lead, where socio-economic factors mean a transition isn't appropriate and for situations where lead can continue to be used in settings that present negligible or no risk to wildlife, the environment or human health.

For example, exemptions may be needed for airgun pellets, rifle calibres smaller than 6.5mm, various shotgun bores and historic firearms for live quarry shooting; and various exemptions for the many modern and historic firearms used in target shooting. Where evidence-based restrictions are proposed, it will be critical that appropriate transition periods are secured. The timelines must be realistic to ensure that the supply of products can meet market demands.



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Piglet protection

Having received intel from a farmer that there had been sights of a fox or two near the piglet fields, Deano wastes no time in getting out to catch up with any rogue Charlies

Spring time is, I think, one of the most important times for controlling your fox population. With newly born lambs and ground-nesting birds to protect, I don't let up until I think I have accounted for all the foxes that I know of on my permissions. This is a job I start every January, my aim being to get them before they breed. This stops us having loads of cubs in the standing crops causing havoc, although we will always have them move in, but by that time, hopefully the lambs will be bigger and young birds will have left the nests.

The one place that is always a problem with foxes is the pig farrowing field. They will come in from a long way off once they have found this easy food source and, of course, this is a disaster for the farmer. It's already bad enough this year with feed prices rocketing and the agro they have had getting there pigs into the food chain, so losing piglets to foxes is the last thing they need. I'm always quick to react all year round if they start having fox trouble on there, but it always gets worse this time of year.

I have a stack of pallets permanently set up next to a wall that overlooks the farrowing field and it's proved it's worth time and again. If you have any high risk areas to protect, such as livestock or poultry, it's worth putting up something permanent, like a high seat or, like some I've seen have seen a purpose-made fox box, with comfy seating, roof on, the works!

I find usually most of the local foxes coming in from a nearby railway line, and they will usually arrive within a couple of hours after dusk. Waiting a couple of hours or more is common so a comfortable hide is worth the effort to build, especially when it's so important to control foxes in these areas. Personally, I prefer to stand so I can move a bit, as many years of bricklaying has taken its toll on my back, and if I were to sit there for six hours or more you would have to get the fire brigade out to rescue me!

I have still been baiting and sitting all over the permission, with a good amount of success accounting for a few pairs of foxes. The other week I got the nod that it looked like a fox had been coming into the farrowing field. One of the tractor drivers had seen two coming out of the MOD ground, which is only about five minutes away for a fox, so I popped up the farm for a look. Bumping into Phil, the farmer's dad, he told me he was actually going to call me today as it happened, as the other night whilst out keeping the rat population in check with his air rifle, he had spotted a fox coming up the hedge towards the farm. He also said they had lost one or two piglets on the farrowing field, so I agreed to sit up that night and take a look.

The wind was wrong to wait by my pallets so I looked to see where else I could sit to ambush any foxes coming in. The first night I sat right up next to the farm with the hedgerow about 130m in front of me and after a two-hour wait I spotted a fox through the thermal coming from the wood a long way off but looking like he would be coming straight towards me. It disappeared for a bit, then about 10 minutes later reappeared, but this time there was two of them! The only trouble was they had stayed in the next field, and although I could see them through the thermal over the hedge, the IR for the night scope bounced back off the hedge preventing me from taking a shot.

I knew they would be out of sight before long so I decided to try and call them. They stopped

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



Deano uses the truck's cab as a solid shooting rest to gain an accurate shot

PICTURE: SHELL HARRISON


The farrowing field is always a draw for any local foxes

PICTURE: DASEAFORD / GETTY

and looked over so I called again but this time they both took off at some pace.

I gave it a night's rest then went out the following evening. It was much colder and the wind was still in the same direction, so tonight's plan would be to sit next to the hedge looking up towards where the first fox had come out from.

Getting myself set up on the back of my truck, it wasn't long before the hares started chasing each other about on the winter barley next to me, and I had to admit this was better than over looking the farrowing field, with only maybe the odd rat to look at! Certainly smelt a lot better too!

I had just changed the setting on my ATN 4K PRO from daytime to night vision mode when I spotted a hopeful looking shape coming from the MOD wood like the other night. I felt it had to be a fox and looking through my scope confirmed it straight away. It was trotting down the tramline which would put him in a nice safe place for a shot. I didn't need the IR on as there was still enough natural light to see him perfectly well. He got to about 150 yards away and stopped.

With a steady rest on top of the truck, this was the first time I have used the zoom on the scope, and I was very impressed. It made the shot look easy and although you lose a bit of quality, I could still see clear as day. I placed the dot behind his shoulder and took the shot. He dropped instantly without a twitch.

I had spotted two the other night and I was glad they had not come in together, even though you can very often get the pair if the other one stands not quite knowing what's just happened.

It had been dark for over an hour and half now and I was beginning to wonder if the other one had spooked at the sound of the shot. I knew this was really my mind having too much time to think and speculating on every possible scenario.

I kept seeing promising heat sources – two hares together and so on, until I just caught a glimpse of something in the other field behind a double hedge, again coming down the hill. There it was again and if it kept coming it would appear in the gateway right in front of me and only about 100 yards away.

I moved my rifle round and switched on my IR. Going back to my spotter I saw there was a fox coming through the gateway and into the rape field that I was sat in. Finding him in my scope, I knew I would need to be quick if I was to get a shot before he disappeared behind some taller cover. Just then he stopped and looked up to where I was waiting, again giving me a broadside shot. With a thud the bullet found its mark and that was number two down.

I packed away my kit and with the thermal spotter and torch I went over to see what I had shot. The first one was a vixen. She had not had any cubs yet which pleased me, I never like the idea of orphaning the youngsters. The second fox was a big dog fox. Both of these foxes were in good nick and had been heading for the farm where I am sure they would have caused havoc on the farrowing field given the opportunity.

I sent a picture over to the farmer and he was pleased to know that the piglets would be safe for a while until another fox moves in. Speaking to one of the pigmen a week later, he told me it had all gone quiet, with the sows calmed down and the litter numbers back to where they should be. Job done, until the next time… ■


Deano's ATN 4K proved an effective tool for the job, accounting for a pair of foxes

PICTURE: SHELL HARRISON

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SPRING BURST

Lambing season is a key time for many farmers. It's also when their interests are most vulnerable. Mark Ripley explains how to keep losses to a minimum

Without doubt, lambing season is the busiest time in every fox shooter's diary, or at least those that look after sheep farms.

Where I am, many of the downland hill farms have large flocks of sheep and typically all start lambing from the first of April. This means for the first 2-3 weeks of lambing I'll be hard at the foxes which are quickly drawn in to cries of young lambs.

Many of these large hill farms will either lamb out in the open, or will lamb in a barn before being turned out on to the hillside. It doesn't therefore take long before the foxes' interests turn from the afterbirth to the blood-covered and weak new born lambs.

If you've been doing your job efficiently, then you will have been actively culling foxes at the end of the previous year whilst they were pairing up, hopefully reducing the number of foxes that could potentially cause problems now.

Over the past few weeks, I've had several calls relating to problem foxes, the first being for one that had killed a goose. This was an easy one, with the farmer leaving the dead goose exactly where it was, and as usual in these situations, the fox returned to its kill the following evening. However, unbeknownst to the small vixen, I was ready for her and shot her as she tugged away at the dead goose.

A day or two later, I had a call from the farm next door to say a fox had been seen amongst the flock by the barn on the hill and could I come up. That night, I went to take a look and spotted a pair around the ewes and was able to get both of them within an hour of arriving.

Crack shot

The trouble with foxes is that once they kill a lamb they cross a line, and from then on they have a taste for it, building confidence to kill and kill again until they are shot.

Several years ago on the same farm, a fox began to take lambs, quickly escalating to pretty much one a night. Eventually, after a lot of sitting and waiting and taking out several other foxes, the right one met its fate as it left the sanctuary of the hay barn in the middle of the flock where it had been living the entire time.

A few years ago, there was a similar incident with a problem fox on a farm that my mate Gary looks after. He had seen it regularly dropping down one side of a valley in amongst the sheep below at dusk. On several occasions, he had waited out to try and get a shot but the route it took down into the valley meant that it wasn't possible to shoot it on the same side of the hill due to the shape of the bank. This meant that a shot would have to be taken from the opposite side

Once a fox gets a taste for lamb, it will likely become increasingly more confident and kill more frequently until it is stopped.



Lambs born out on the open hillsides can be particularly vulnerable to foxes

PICTURES: **MARK RIPLEY**

18+

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‘It’s important to respond to calls as soon as possible, ideally the same day, to keep farmers happy’



Early morning outings can often provide a good opportunity to catch foxes out at first light

at a range of several hundred yards or more.

Gary asked if I could go with him and see if I could get it and I agreed. However, the allocated evening turned out to be blowing a gale as we moved into position in the late afternoon. With wind speeds of over 20mph gusting through the valley, to say I wasn't feeling hopeful was an understatement.

Just like clockwork, the fox made its way down the bank and at around 300 yards. I took a shot, but missed by a fraction due to the effects of the wind. The fox bounded back up the bank like a rocket. Quickly cycling the rifle's bolt I reloaded, tracking the fox in the fading light.

Just as it neared the top of the hill, it paused to look back into the valley and I took a snap shot, holding off a little extra for the wind. I was instantly rewarded by the sight of the fox dropping on the spot to a solid neck strike and the moisture from the light rain on its coat drifting away on the wind with the impact of the bullet.

A quick ping of the rangefinder came back at just over 340 yards, making for a very satisfying shot.

Not quite as satisfying. perhaps. as a shot that Gary made last year when he arrived to watch over some early lambs. As he pulled up, some 150 yards away a fox was attacking a lamb and Gary was quick to get his .243 on target, killing the fox in the act of killing a lamb.

Unfortunately, the lamb's injuries where too severe, with puncture wounds around its neck it had no chance of survival and was dead soon after.

No doubt with so many lambs born out in the open, sometimes inevitably there will be natural losses which foxes will find and possibly be blamed for killing. Sometimes, foxes will do nothing more than hoover up the afterbirth. The problem is that, being opportunists and a scavengers, every fox is a potential threat.

Lambing also coincides with foxes themselves raising young which puts added pressure on them to provide extra food, thus creating the perfect storm. The best remedy is to cull foxes in the area during the run up to lambing, and then deal with any fox problems quickly after should they occur.

I will spend many evenings or early mornings sat out watching over the ewes during this time of year and will shoot any foxes that come into the area keeping losses to a minimum.

If you look after any sheep farms, then it's important to respond to any calls as soon as possible (ideally the same day) to keep farmers happy. If you're not there when they need you most, there will always be someone else who will be happy to shoot over your ground given half the chance! ■

TOP TIP

Finding a high point on your ground with a good view will help you spot regular routes used by problem foxes.



Mark uses a .260 Remington rifle to extend his effective range over such open landscape



WITH RUPERT BUTLER

Habitat improvements

This spring, Rupert Butler and his shooting pals have been making the most of the quieter season by working on the habitats on the landscapes they enjoy walking-up

Every year we endeavour to improve our habitat diversity down on the farm and this year is no exception. On this occasion, we decided to build a new pond adjacent to one of the old ones in the hope that it will prove more attractive to wintering fowl. Although not directly joined together, being separated by a bank of rushes some 5m wide, the visual impression from above should be of a larger body of water. The reason I didnt join them together is simple, I didn't want the hassle of getting our levels wrong and therefore running the risk of draining one into another during the drier summer months.

In fairness, we have a good old bunch of lads shooting here with all expenses being shared equally between everyone. When I hinted at my plans to build a new pond, they all got on board straight away. We also have on our doorstep a couple of brothers who are extremely adept at using their Hymacs. When they arrived to look at the proposed site, which I had pegged out some time earlier, I asked if it could be achieved with the budget I had available. Answering almost simultaneously, one says yes while the other reckons most of it could be achieved. I start to laugh at their different responses and indeed the look they give each other, before they agree together this time.

The birds arrive

As I write, our new pond is being visited by some mallard and a couple of egrets. A some stage, we hope to put in a hide with a drop down front section so that some of our older members can shoot from inside. It will double as a room which can be used when conditions are bad, or indeed for vermin control. I have been watching far too many American shooting videos, and of their hides in particular, many if which you could live in permantely. Ours will not be as dramatic, but a table and benches together with a gas ring for coffee or stronger is, I think, achieveable. It will be located in a gap that was specifically left between two mounds of earth from the diggings. One of the lads is kindly donating all required cladding and we hope to put soil and a meadow on the roof so as to blend in more.

In keeping with our Improvements our neighbour recently fenced off a damp corner and asked if we could secure some trees and plant them for him, both of which we were more than happy to do as this will benefit us as well in the long run. The fact that the corner in question is on our boundary makes it even more inviting. Although we didn't charge him for the planting of the above trees he did kindly made a donation towards our ongoing efforts. Good neighbours are always a bonus. The small grove of alder, birch and rowan should, in time, hold the promise of a pheasant or a woodcock or two.

A pair of mute swans have taken up residence on our main release pond, which is not ideal, but they will hopefully move onto the outer pond which should, due to its size, be more inviting. I say this because I don't fancy trying to feed ducks onto an island which has been taken over by a new family of swans, especially ones as territorial as mutes. From previous experience I know how agressive and protective they can get.

Tree planting

Up in the wood where we release our pheasants, I recently planted some laurels, ones which I had left over from a job I was doing. Planted individually, they will grow into fine specimens which will, in time, provide shelter for pheasants. As we all know, pheasants hate getting wet and a large laurel is about as good a roof as you will get in the natural world. Another advantage of

Do you have a shooting story to share with us? Head to page 30 for details of how to get in touch!



By not joining the two ponds together, Rupert cleverly avoids any issues with the water levels

PICTURE: DOM HOLTAM



Rupert and his friends have been busy creating new habitat on thier land

PICTURE: RUPERT BUTLER

planting laurels is that rabbits don't seem to like them as much as other trees. I also located some Scot's pine, probably my favourite of all the pines, which I scattered all around. Not only are they graceful in appearance but they have the added advantage of holding a good understorey due to the height of the crown. The crown of the tree is not as dense as other pines, resulting in more light getting through to facilitate growth beneath.

Not all our trees are thriving, though, as ash dieback seems to be spreading throughout the locality. We have many fine, specimen ash trees, some of which have already secumbed to this horrible disease. The airborne fungus attaches itself to the leaves of the plant before migrating downwards into the body of the plant. At first, you will notice the leaves starting to wilt causing dieback from the crown down. Large ash trees are our primary deciduous species hereabouts but according to the experts, within a decade or two, the majority could be wiped out. It could be very similiar to our Dutch elm disease which wiped out most of those glorious trees some decades ago. As I understand it, the powers that be are attempting to create a gene pool of resistant strains which can be reintroduced at a later date. Unfortunately it's the world we live in today and it is up to us to adapt.

On a positive note, I have seen far more hen pheasants around than I have for many a year. Hopefully they will make a mini revival of sorts. Fingers crossed that they too are starting to adapt to our ever-changing environment. ■

'The crown of the Scot's pine is not as dense as other pines, resulting in more light getting through to facilitate growth beneath'



Rupert has already seen a variety of duck species on his pond this spring

PICTURE: MIRCEAX / GETTY



Feeding your ponds is important to keep any visiting fowl interested

PICTURE: EMILY DAMMENT



A design for life

This well-used Charles Lancaster gun, discovered in excellent condition, reminds Diggory Hadoke of the oft-overlooked, yet incredibly innovative, work of Frederick Beesley

Frederick Beesley is best known as the inventor of the spring-cocking self-opener which made Purdey's reputation as a builder of the finest hammerless guns of the twentieth century. Patent No.31 of 1880 may be his most successful idea, but Beesley was a prolific inventor who contributed to the development of the over-centre type ejector mechanisms that are generally known today as 'Southgate ejectors', as well as numerous other designs that saw use in the gun trade during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The gun illustrated here is the body-action version of his Patent No.425 of 1884. It appears in two styles: the 'wrist-breaker' with elongated 'leg-of-mutton' lock-plates, and this boxlock type iteration of the concept. Both were named and sold by another London gunmaker, Charles Lancaster. At the time, Charles Lancaster was owned by Henry A. A. Thorn, who was a canny businessman, author of *The Art of Shooting*, and the man who drove the continued success of the firm (founded in 1826) into the hammerless era.

Thorn had apprenticed to Charles Lancaster's son, Charles William Lancaster, in about 1870. Upon Lancaster's death in 1878, Thorn bought the company from his widow, taking charge in 1879 and forming 'Charles Lancaster & Company'.

Beesley's patent No.425 appears to have been used by Lancaster under some agreement, though there is no documentary proof of this, as far as I am aware. He was certainly advertising 'wrist-breakers' in 1890, when the patent protection was still in force.

The gun pictured here, No.14584, suggests 1930 though the Damascus barrels bear 1904 proof marks which were used until 1925, so it must have been proof tested before 1925 in London. The barrels bear Charles Lancaster's 'CL' barrel maker's mark. In those days, a patent was protected for 17 years, if the relevant fees were paid, so Beesley's patent protection for No.425 would have expired in 1901.

It is likely that Beesley made these guns for Lancaster while the patent protection remained in force, but afterwards the body-action version may well have been made by others in lower-quality grades, often given a '0' prefix to the serial number and noted in Lancaster's order books as '0' or '00' quality guns. The price differential was significant, with a Best hammerless side-lock costing £60 on the 1893 price list and a body-action '0' quality hammerless ejector costing £45. Lancaster always referred to 'body-action' rather than 'boxlock' guns.

A cut above

I have owned several of these Beesley-patent Lancasters. They are cleverly conceived, and they handle and function well. It is perhaps telling that almost all the examples I have encountered have been well used and almost worn out, suggesting they served without mishap for decades, despite the 'complicated' mechanism which uses the long mainspring to

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



Charles Lancaster 12-bore body action spring-cocking gun built on Beesley s patent No.425 of 1884

PICTURES: **DIGGORY HADOKE**

‘With a direct link to perhaps the cleverest Englishman ever to design a gun, the modest sums these sell for make them very good value’


The body-action version of the ‘wrist-breaker’ is an elegant and pleasant gun to use

cock the hammer and force the barrels off the flats and ‘self-open’ the gun.

To see how the self-opening is activated, look at the action flats. There you can see two cocking cams. The barrel flats have lateral limb traversing the front lump. This bears down on the cocking cams and depresses them when the gun is closed. These cams come into contact with the long mainspring, providing extra tension. When the top-lever is activated and the Purdey bolt is released from its bites, the spring tension forces the barrels off the flats. While the gun does jump open nicely, there is nothing stiff or difficult about closing it, although the mainspring cocks the hammer on closing.

The gun has a type of open foliate scroll engraving that Lancaster used widely, with neat detailing around the pins. It extends onto the rib, which also notes ‘2’ as the gun is the second of a pair.

The name on the rib says only ‘Charles Lancaster, London’ and the action body claims ‘Charles Lancaster Patent’, though we know it was actually Beesley’s patent. This wording is why we suspect a deal was done with Beesley to make the guns so they could be marketed this way. Beesley was not averse to selling the credit for his inventions. ‘Purdey’s Patent’ is engraved on the bar of Purdey guns of the period, after Purdey had bought the rights from Beesley to that design. The practice does not seem uncommon, in any case. ‘Stephen Grant’s Patent’ is engraved on many E.C. Hodges patent hammer guns sold by Grant, for example.

The stock and fore-end on No.14584 are of plain, straight-grain walnut and the chequer is coarse diamonds, suggesting the owner was planning to use the gun in the wet and valued strength over beauty. The wood-to-metal fit remains very tight and wood appears not to have been much worn nor ever refinished.

As a rather sophisticated alternative to an Anson & Deeley action gun, with a London pedigree and a direct link to perhaps the cleverest Englishman ever to design a gun, the modest sums these Lancasters sell for in today’s market make them very good value.

The challenge of ownership is that breakages will be very hard to repair, especially broken mainsprings. If you can find one in good condition, working perfectly, it is likely to be reliable and a pleasure to use. Avoid well-worn, modified or reworked guns as they suggest past meddling by people who may not have been sufficiently knowledgeable about the design to do the work correctly.

Henry Thorn may or may not have lived to see this gun sold. He died of influenza in 1914 at the age of 59. At the time, he was the serving chairman of The Gunmakers’ Association. He is buried in Wandsworth Cemetery in an unmarked grave. ■



The cocking cams on the action flats can be seen here



The cross limb acts on the cocking cams to depress them and increase tension on the mainspring. Proof marks are 1904-1925 rules



WITH TONY JACKSON

Counting the costs

Spending the summer, as we all do, eagerly awaiting the coming season, Tony Jackson takes stock and sheds some light on the expense involved in running a shoot

A very mixed bag this month and even though late March is shining out, I have a pocketful of recent memories. Only a few days ago I enjoyed the final day of the season for our local pack, the Cotley Harriers, having enjoyed a thoroughly successful hunting season, with mounted fields and followers enjoying a variety of meets and hosted by generous local farmers, hunt members, as well as the local Cotley Inn itself.

The last day of the season proved to be a remarkable day. Not only did the hounds and mounted field gather, but they met with a West Country-style hedge-cutting competition on the same site. As a result, apart from the riders and up to 90 horses, there were also scores of foot-followers and dozens of hedge-cutters and helpers. What an assortment! There were stirrup-cups and foot-cups, and a vast range of food for the mounted field and followers, as well as the many teams of hedge-cutters and onlookers. It was hardly surprising the horn was blown later than usual, allowing the mounted field and followers to eventually depart and let the hedge-cutters carry on with their sections.

I met numerous local friends, mounted and on foot, though I confess that I often failed on occasion to recall names! However, I was not going to forget a farrier who has attended my wife's hunts for the past 25 or so years. David looks after many of the local horses and plays an important role in a local shoot which he has known since the 1980s. This is a relatively modest shoot set amidst the steep valleys and hills of southern Devon, and is a day's sport which demands energy though the results are well worth the effort.

Like similarly modest shoots countrywide, this West Country shoot has been created by a dozen or more locals who actively participate in a variety of activities from rearing poults, ensuring release-pens are in good order for the season, helping out feeding, and all the additional activities required from topping-up feed bins, vermin control and ensuring drives are still suitable for each season. Now, I have to confess that I have not been recently involved in the costs of running a modest driven shoot, though some readers are well aware that I pick-up at a local shoot, so I was shocked when David, my farrier friend, told me about the costs of running such a modest shoot and I thought readers might care to glance at the figures.

He kindly sent me a breakdown of running costs for this year's annual shoot which amounts



Game shoots are facing escalating costs this year

PICTURE: EMILY DAMMENT



PICTURE: DOUBTFULNEDDY / GETTY

to a total of £14,354! Now, I have no intention of inflicting upon you every itemised penny of the cost, but last year the poults involved 150 caught-up hens which then produced 675 day-olds plus a further 525 day-olds at 85p each, a total of £446.25. The total chicks came to 1,200 and after allowing a 10% loss, some 1,080 poults were released. The rearing food for seven week-old poults costs £1,112, and food for birds being released included two tons of growers, one ton of Flubenvet, and 1.5 tons of poult release pellets at a total cost of £2,220.

Then you have to build in 11 tons of wheat at £300 a ton for a total of £3,300 plus three tons of maize at £500 each which makes a grand total of £4,800 just to feed the birds being released. The total feed costs were £8,132. There also had to be an expansion of the main pen including drinkers, straining wire and 30 stakes, a roll of game fencing, and six bottles of gas, 10 bales of shavings, bits, drinkers and a pack of anti-drowning rings.

On top of all that there were four amounts of maize costing £241 and a pack of Cape Town blend at sorghum for flushing points at £59. I would add that this also includes a variety of lesser items of which I have forgotten but all of which had to be included.

I would add that no rent is paid for the land because it is offered in 'good will' to the shoot. The landowner is given a first-class dinner once a year, while he is also able to enjoy any pheasants for his house or for friends.

The shoot consists of 14 Guns and on a day, seven shoot in the morning, while the remaining seven act as beaters and then, in the afternoon each section changes positions to shoot and beat. There is no cost for any other beaters, and apparently the system works out very well. Most shoot days are about 50 birds at the end of the day, allowing plenty of birds for everyone to take home.

I hope some readers may have find this interesting. I have never before appreciated the current costs of a relatively small shoot, so this was all fascinating to me. I understand that each Gun each pays £1,400 a year and allowing about 12 days shooting, this works out at £116 per day's sport. Now I have given up my gun and only pick-up for local shoots, I can at least watch other Guns in action, work my dog, take home the odd brace and save a few extra pounds! ■

'I have enjoyed a thoroughly successful hunting season, with mounted fields and followers enjoying a variety of meets'



The last day of the season is a busy affair with lots of hounds, riders and foot followers

PICTURE: DABYG / GETTY

Sporting Gundog

with Howard Kirby
Gundog Trainer

The essential guide to owning and working a gundog

SPECIAL GUNDOG SECTION
EVERY MONTH IN SPORTING SHOOTER

INSIDE THIS MONTH...

71 **Gundog Vet**
The prevention and treatment of bites and stings your dog may be vulnerable to.

72 **Gundog Training**
Methods of teaching heel work, one of the cornerstones of any training regime.

76 **Gundog Focus**
How to get involved in Field Trialling and Working Tests – and some of the best clubs.

80 **Gundog Diary**
Exciting times for Emrys as he graduates to distance and direction control.

82 **Gundog Q&A**
Stopping at the whistle, recurring limps, and what to do about a shortage of rabbits.











HOWARD'S TIP OF THE MONTH: *Early Start!*

From the moment your new puppy arrives, start to work on its focus. Teach the pup to focus on you. Affection, food, dummies.



PICTURE: HOWARD KIRBY





Vicky is a keen shooter and qualified vet

Vicky runs first aid courses for groups. Email vicky@holisticvetsussex.co.uk for further details.

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Bites and stings

Being a working gundog carries the risk of encountering wildlife that can bite or sting. It is important to know what you might encounter, and how to deal with any injuries

Bees and wasps

Bees and wasps generally won't sting unless threatened, but puppies may find a buzzing bumble bee too tempting to leave alone. Older dogs may be unlucky enough to disturb a wasp nest while training or working. Bees leave a sting in the dog which will continue to pump in venom. If you can see the sting sack, try to brush it out of the skin without squeezing more venom in. A debit card can work well for this. Wasps inject the venom directly into the skin so there is nothing to remove. The best first aid treatment is to give an antihistamine immediately. Your vet can advise on a safe tablet for your dog. Many gundog people carry a few antihistamines in a small container on their whistle lanyard. If you have ice or cold water this helps reduce pain and swelling. Most wasp and been stings subside without veterinary attention but seek advice if your dog has been stung in or around the mouth or if they show signs of shock or difficulty breathing.

Adders

The adder is our only native venomous snake, and like bees and wasps tends to attack only in self-defence. Avoid adder basking areas at dawn when they will be sluggish after a cool night. Adder bites usually happen on the face or forelegs, and you may be able to see puncture marks. In most cases dogs do not receive a lethal dose, but fatalities can occur if a dog is unlucky enough to be bitten on a main blood vessel. In most cases the venom causes severe tissue damage and large areas of ulceration. Antivenom is available but is not stocked by most vets. It can only be used once as dogs develop antibodies to it which would make future treatment dangerous. You vet may choose to offer supportive care instead; fluids, pain relief, antibiotics, and wound management. If you suspect your dog has been bitten by an adder, call the vet immediately. If the area can be bandaged or a cold compress applied this will reduce the spread of the venom. Carry your dog to the car, if possible, again to reduce spread of the venom.

Jellyfish and weaver fish

Although these are unlikely to be found on a shoot day, you may encounter them during a summer trip to the coast. Most jellyfish continue to have the potential to sting even once dead and washed up on the beach. Most are not very dangerous, but the stings can be irritating. The stings of Portuguese Man o War (technically not a jellyfish, but similar in appearance) are nastier and these creatures can be toxic if eaten. They can cause vomiting and neurological symptoms but are rarely fatal to healthy dogs.

Weaver fish bury themselves under the sand and can be trodden on, causing severe pain. If the spine or tentacles are attached to your dog remove them carefully, but don't use your bare hands. Wash affected areas with sea water and if possible keep the area in 40°c water for up to 30minutes. Cold water, vinegar, and urine will not help soothe the sting! Seek veterinary advice on a dog-safe painkiller to use while your dog recovers.

Fleas and ticks

It is sensible to protect your gundog against fleas and ticks that they may pick up from quarry and in the undergrowth. Some treatments will also protect from midges and other biting insects. Discuss a wildlife-friendly product with your vet as some can cause damage to beneficial insects in waterways if your dog swims.

Rats and squirrels

More a risk for the terriers, but on rough shoots squirrel dreys can be fair game. Avoid sending gundogs to retrieve rodents as they can give a nasty nip when alive, either putting the dog off retrieving, or causing a hard mouth. The sharp bites of rodents can easily become infected. If your dog is used for ratting, ensure their leptospirosis vaccines are up to date and take care when handling dead rodents as infection can enter your body through wounds. ■

LIFE'S A BEACH

Jellyfish stings can cause vomiting in dogs but are rarely fatal. Weaver fish can also inflict severe pain if stepped on.



PICTURE: PROJECTB / GETTY

Dogs tend to bolt off at the beach, but keeping the dog close will ensure you can see any potential dangers



Howard Kirby runs Lains Shooting School and Mullenscote Gundogs in Hampshire

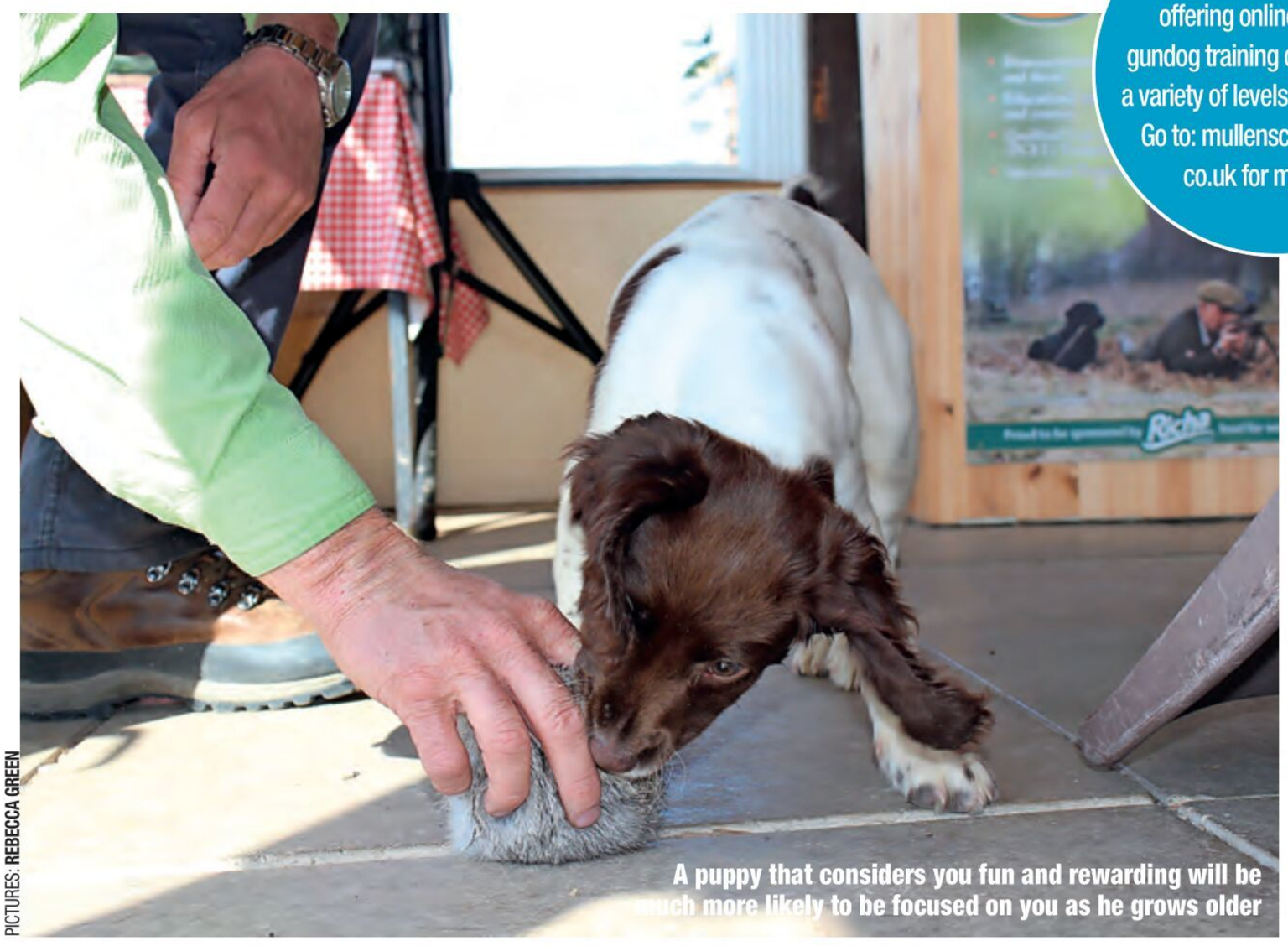
Refocusing on our heel work

While many of us have owned and trained a number of dogs, Howard Kirby believes it is always important to revisit heelwork training to ensure our dog is as steady as he can be

Over the last few Sundays, I've made it my business to take a note pad and pencil and quietly make my way around our Mullenscote Gundog classes. We have been running and teaching this particular type of six-week gundog course for a little over 20 years now. Fundamentally, we're running the same courses as the ones we started in the late nineties. Puppy, Foundation, Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum means there are six levels each with their own progressive aims and objectives, which, much like the course names, haven't changed.

The fully-trained dog that we produced in the nineties offered pretty much the same behaviours as its current descendants and is therefore pretty much the same dog? I've deliberately made that last sentence into a question. What are your thoughts? Most of you are probably not old enough to have been training dogs that long ago, but even if you weren't, you might like to think about the ideals, methods and techniques that were used to produce gundogs. Take my word for it, things have changed, significantly.

Although I've digressed a bit I'm hoping that as I get back to my opening paragraph that all will make sense…. Armed with notepad and pencil, I was observing and doing what we call 'off-steading!' By taking the time to watch the classes, my aim is to run a non biased eye over the way that we deliver our courses. Classroom choice, teaching styles, techniques, quality of the teaching and a general overview of how we are doing. Almost always, I enjoy this exercise as it's a great opportunity for me to observe the fantastic team of teachers that make up the team here at Mullenscote. Teaching really is an art, and watching other teachers can be so informative.



PICTURES: **REBECCA GREEN**

A puppy that considers you fun and rewarding will be much more likely to be focused on you as he grows older

Heelwork

To cut a long story short, I came away thinking 'we need to review the way we teach heelwork'. Heelwork has of course been successfully taught to dogs and handlers for generations. As behaviours go, teaching a dog to consistently walk to heel and not pull on a lead is something that owners really struggle with and would be listed as a significant behaviour problem on many dog owner's lists.

For some while now, we have encouraged handlers to school their young dogs to walk to heel using food rewards and targets, hoops or place boards. The handler uses a food reward to lure the dog into the 'at heel' position at which point a reward is given. Carefully and slowly now, allow the dog to work at getting the food whilst moving forward, always ensuring that the youngster is maintaining the correct heel work position. Progression comes in the form of increasing distances whilst the dog continues to offer the behaviour for less frequent food rewards.

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.

Check list for successful heelwork

1. A small , benign, distraction-free classroom. Indoors is great.
2. A hungry dog that has been taught to look to you for a food reward.
3. Food rewards that are really high value to the specific dog that's being trained. (Most influenced by ensuring that the dog is hungry. Also the dog has been schooled using food reward to a high standard before attempting this exercise. These two things are extremely important and handlers consistently overlook the importance of this.)



CONSULT HOWARD ABOUT GUNDOG TRAINING
TELEPHONE 01264 889467
OR EMAIL howard@lainsshootingschool.co.uk
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‘Ensure the food hand encourages the puppy into a Sit and allow it to take the reward’



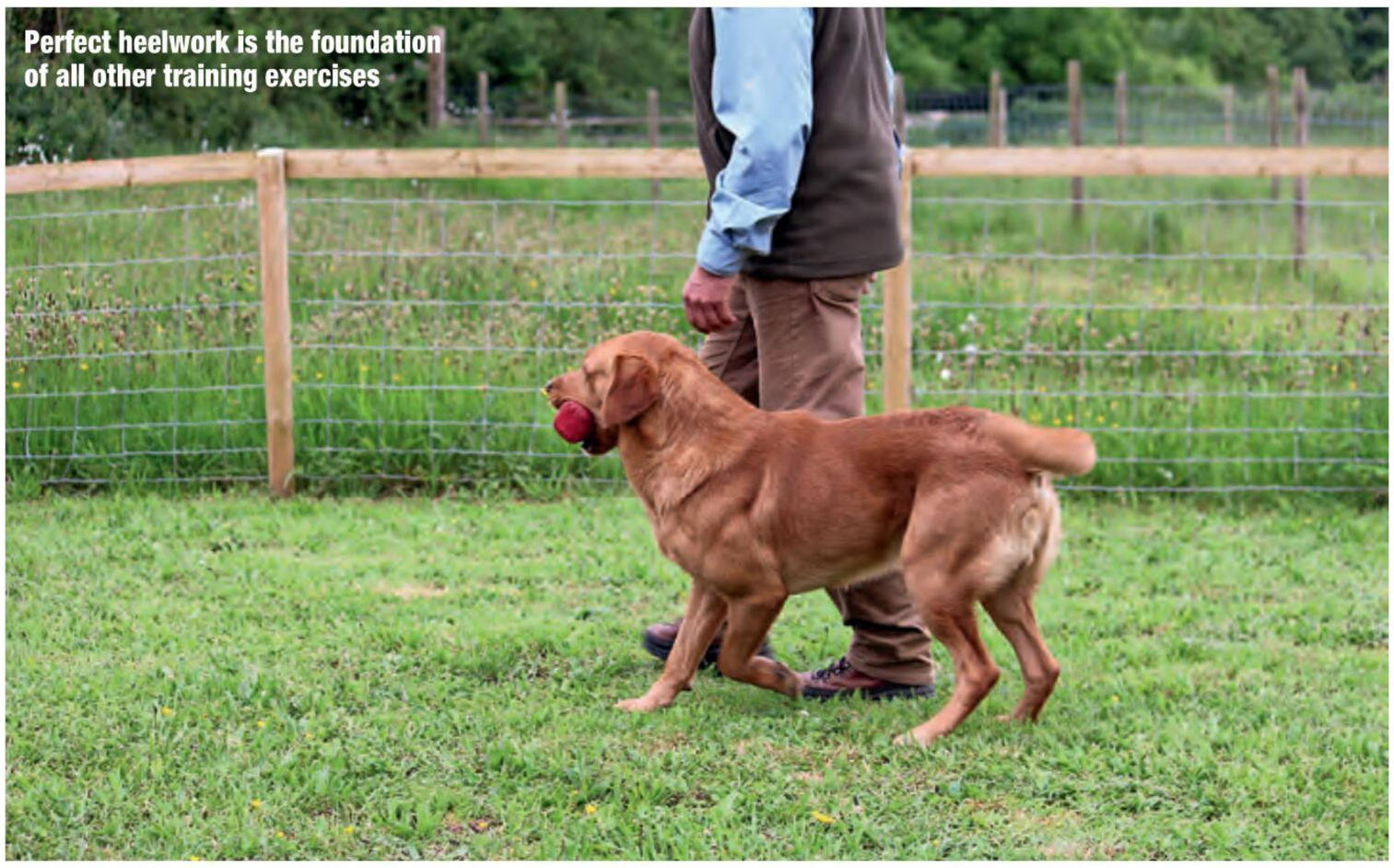
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Perfect heelwork is the foundation of all other training exercises

4 The trainer has a thorough understanding and the practical skills to deliver a training session that encourages and keeps the dog totally focused on the handler and the rewards they offer whilst consistently maintaining a sit , stand or walking at heel position.

Training the trainer

My Ofsted-style observations and subsequent reflection prompted me into firstly chatting through my thoughts with the team of Mullenscote Trainers and then setting out to record and implement our thoughts into the teaching we deliver.

Owners and handlers continue to fail miserably at teaching dogs to walk on a loose lead and at heel for a number of reasons:

1 Regular sessions on a lead where a puppy is allowed or encouraged to pull.
2 Regular on lead walks and training sessions in an environment that offers the pup an endless array of exciting distractions. To expect an untrained dog to focus on its handler in this kind of an environment is at best futile.
3 Most of the on and off lead 'training sessions' that owners encourage their dogs to participate in, actively encourage the dog to TARGET and PULL TOWARDS just about everything in the world but the handler. From the dog's point of view, the most popular of all these targets is the field or park, where you regularly slip your dog off the lead and encourage it to clear off and have the time of its life. And so begins a lifetime of doggie behavioural problems.

So the advice is to manage your dog's daily lifestyle in such a way that, whether it's on or off a lead, it is being encouraged to look to you for reward. Companionship, sitting on your lap or in its bed near you, sleeping or resting quietly in your house, the crate or its bed. Hunting, playing or offering behaviours to the handler to gain a toy or food reward would start to give us something to hang our training hats too.

Conclusions and action list

In conclusion, our revised advice on how to teach our human students to teach their dogs to walk to heel is to ensure that humans and dogs are 'targeting' the next time they stop and sit the dog at heel, which is the moment that the dog receives the food reward, for sitting closely at heel and looking up towards the handler's face.

In lesson 1, the handler starts with the dog sat in the heel position with a food treat luring the dog to reach up towards the handler's hip. The puppy will probably be trying to nibble at the food. Whilst keeping the pup's full commitment to the food, move three small steps forward and stop. Ensure the food hand encourages the puppy into a Sit and allow it to take the reward.

Quickly offer a second food reward in the same manner as before, now turn 90 degrees inwards towards the puppy and move a further three small steps, before stopping and repeating the reward process. Do this twice more and now you will have completed a 4x3 step square. The puppy should have remained totally focused on you for the whole exercise. If you're good at maths, you will have walked 12 paces with a first time puppy walking perfectly at heel. Perfect, nothing less than this will be acceptable. If you have followed all of the advice listed in the check list for successful heelwork, this new behaviour should be fairly straightforward to encourage.

Development comes in the form of taking extra steps before stopping to reward. Being slightly less reliant on the food needing to be on the puppy's nose. And of course the environment, (classroom) in which you choose to train in will be important changes that you make to each training session. As your square gets bigger, so the length of time that the youngster focuses on you will grow. When drawn into the heel position, your puppies target should be that they hope you stop walking so that they can sit, look up and get their reward. Not that they are targeting the next hoop, placeboard, lamp post, dog or park.

Nothing in this article is new, rocket science or revolutionary – for which I make no apology. Teaching a dog to walk to heel with as little correction as possible requires very well-planned and well-delivered training sessions, ensuring that your day to day management does not include regular pulling on the lead walkies.

I hope you find this useful. As always, enjoy your dogs and Keeeep Training! ■



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with Ryan Kay KCAI (WG)

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

Welcoming beginners to trialling

Ryan Kay explains how new gundog owners can get more involved in Field Trials and Working Tests and provides a summary of some of the best clubs to join across the UK

Last month, I wrote about the welcomed influx of people that had decided to venture into the world of working their gundog, after having initially bought their dog with the expectation of it to be no more than just a pet. Bitten by the bug, they then set out on an information journey, which nowadays can prove to be an information overload as resources have never been so plentiful.

Attending a shoot day for the first time can be a little nerve-wracking to say the least. Those that then decide to go one step further and compete with their dog are likely to be even more anxious. I feel it's so important that the first experiences for anyone wanting to venture down the competitive route are nothing but positive ones. Being made to feel welcome by those in the scene, where support and a friendly acceptance is the norm, will only encourage newcomers to stay and enjoy the sport. Sadly, I have to say it's not always the case, as I sometimes hear stories where know-it-all's are less than encouraging and instead seem keen to criticise newcomers and their dogs, forgetting that they themselves were once new to it all.

One of the most beneficial things you can do as a beginner is to join a gundog club. A club that will welcome you with open arms and one which lays on events such as working tests and training days which are worth every penny of the usually very reasonable joining and membership fee.

I myself am a member of over 20 clubs, which compared to many serious competitors is probably regarded as not that many. Over the years I've found some are friendly and accommodating, and some less so. Some are easy to join and go out of their way to ensure your application goes through and some are downright obstructive. What is certainly strange in the gundog club arena, is that so many clubs appear to be behind the times. Cheques are still a necessity in the way many clubs operate, though some clubs have progressed through to online payments. There are, though, still clubs out there with little web or social media presence, so finding those clubs can be difficult. I myself only heard about several of these from fellow competitors at events held by other clubs.

Although the majority of gundog clubs are local to any given area, there are some like The Cocker Club which are national. As the breed club for one of the most popular gundog breeds in the country, you'd expect this club to have a real presence for anyone looking to work their cocker – perhaps providing a stepping stone for beginners and welcoming new recruits with open arms. Yet at the time of joining some years ago, I personally found it the most difficult club to join. It has a lacklustre Facebook presence, a woeful website for the Field Trial section, provides no training days and no working tests.

To make any club successful requires hard work from all its committee members, and of course there is the sometimes thankless task of a Field Trial secretary. Without them, no club would function.

Head to www.sportingshooter.co.uk and explore the gundog section for more great articles.



This retriever Trial run by the Scottish Field Trial Association is set in stunning landscape!

PICTURES: **SCOTTISH FIELD TRIAL ASSOCIATION**



Handlers chatting and waiting their turn at a spaniel Working Test

‘One of the most beneficial things you can do as a beginner is to join a gundog club’

The reason I highlight training days and working tests is because these events are often seen as a starting block for those new to the world of gundogs or for those wishing to dip their toe into competing with their chosen breed. Working Tests for spaniels take place out of season in spring and summer and are held to replicate a Field Trial, which in turn is to replicate a walked-up rough shooting day. Using canvas dummies instead of game, working tests provide a more convivial environment for the handler. Whereas a dog may be disqualified for a fault such as running-in, barking, or whining in a Field Trial, they are simply marked down for such misdemeanours in a Working Test and asked to continue.

Working Tests for spaniels do have their critics, with many high achievers claiming that they’re a fake situation to train a dog for. And yes, hunting on sometimes gamey ground and then asking for a dog to retrieve canvas is a little artificial, but Working Tests are about much more than that. They provide a forum for people in the same boat, where novices can chat to other novices and indeed chat to more experienced handlers. Dogs get used to other dogs and also to the waiting around part of competition.

I believe that the most important thing for a newcomer is to be around other newcomers. Identifying in numbers can help ease the nerves and provide reassurance, especially for those undertaking their first competitive event.

So here’s my recommendations for the friendliest clubs around. Joining them will give you a lot of value for your membership fee.

UP NORTH:

TYNE TEES AND TWEED FIELD TRIAL ASSOCIATION

Formed back in 1979, the committee initially came up with the name of ‘Tyne Wear And Tees Spaniels’, but the realisation of the abbreviation soon put paid to that! Since its first spaniel Field Trial the club quickly applied to hold retriever stakes and now hosts three retriever trials and eight spaniel Trials each year, including several working tests for both sub-groups. This club has led the way with a brilliant online entry system,



Gary Wood winning a Novice Retriever Trial at a 2018 Scottish Field Trial Association event

making entering any event a piece of cake. The club also has access to some of the best grounds to compete on. From early-season Trials on rabbits in North Yorkshire to pheasant trials in County Durham and Northumberland, The 3 Ts covers a wide area across the north, making it an inviting club to join for anyone in the top half of England and southern Scotland.

On the website you'll find contact details for the relevant spaniel and retriever secretaries. Steve Charlton is the spaniel secretary and is only too willing to encourage newcomers into the sport of trialling.

■ **tyneteestweedfta.com**

IN THE MIDDLE:

DOVE VALLEY GUNDOG CLUB

Dove Valley has a good reputation for being a friendly and welcoming club. They're known for encouraging all newcomers and young handlers alike, with free membership and free entry to Working Tests for all under-17s. They hold several Field Trials throughout the season for spaniels and retrievers and have also just moved over to online entries using the same system as the Tyne Tees and Tweed Field Trial Association. This transition incorporated a new website too, which is constantly being updated with new info, so please keep checking back.

Guy Radford is at the heart of the club as the general secretary and retriever Field Trial secretary. He's keen to encourage the younger generation and sees them as the future of our sport.

■ **dovevalleygundogs.com**

DOWN SOUTH:

THE CHILTERN GUNDOG SOCIETY

The Chiltern Gundog Training Club was formed back in 1960 by likeminded people who wanted to improve the working ability of their dogs. Since then, it's gone on to become the Chiltern Gundog Society – a well-rounded club that offers a great deal for its members.

Aside from hosting Field Trials and working tests for both retrievers and spaniels, it also holds regular training days near High Wycombe on the second Sunday of each month between March and September.

These classes are spilt up into three groups: Puppy/Beginner, Improvers/Novice and Experienced. There's a list of the trainers on the club website.

■ **chilterngundogs.co.uk**

WILTSHIRE WORKING GUNDOG SOCIETY

Another club with a friendly reputation and an open door for newcomers. They hold Field Trials and working tests plus training days that are designed with the new handler in mind.

■ **wwgs.org.uk**

For more information on Field Trials, Working Tests and how to get involved, visit the Kennel Club Website: thekennelclub.org.uk



Ryan's daughter Lily as a 'young handler', when she ran in the Dove Valley working tests

PICTURE: RYAN KAY

WORTH A MENTION:

UNITED GUNDOG BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

Formed back in 1947, this longstanding club is based in the Midlands and as well as Field Trials, it hosts three retriever working tests and three spaniel working tests.

■ **ugba.co.uk**

THE GERMAN SHORTHAIRED POINTER CLUB

A national club with seven local branches across the UK, many of which hold training days which accommodate all breeds of the Hunt Point Retrieve gundog groups.

■ **gsp.org.uk**

SCOTTISH FIELD TRIAL ASSOCIATION

One of the few clubs that accommodates all four sub-groups of Gundogs, hosting Field Trials for Setters/Pointers, HPR's, Spaniels and Retrievers. And as you can imagine, being in Scotland, it boasts some of the most spectacular grounds for dogs to work on.

■ **scottishfieldtrialsassociation.co.uk**

NORTH OF SCOTLAND GUNDOG ASSOCIATION

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■ **nosga.co.uk**

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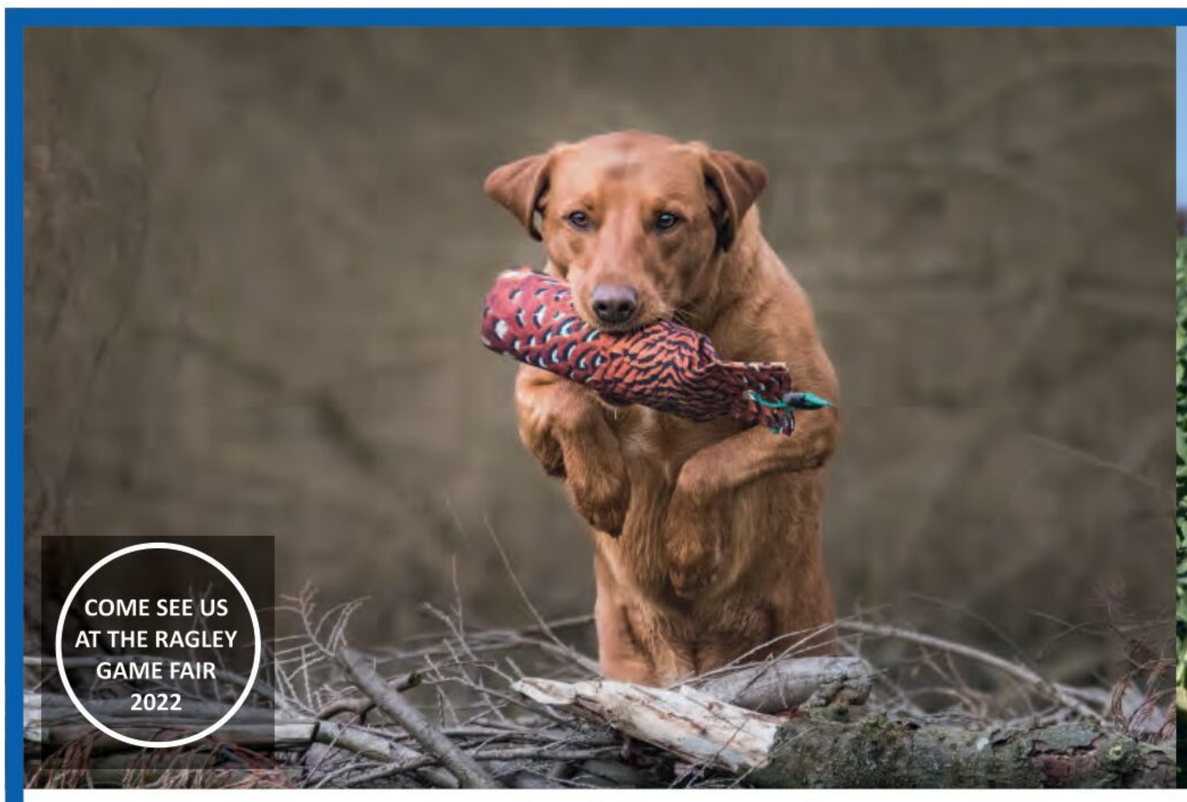


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You can follow Emrys's journey on his own Facebook page here: www.facebook.com/LifeandTimesofEmrys

One direction

This month, Lez Graham has been doubling down on Emrys's training by moving him on to distance and direction control

What a month! After doing a bit of stock taking last month, I not only upped the ante in relation to the memory retrieves that I was doing with Emrys but also decided that it was time to introduce some direction control.

Split memory retrieves

For a little while now, I've been leaving Emrys in a Sit/Stay while I've walked out and put a dummy down, and then either returned to him and heeled away parallel to the dummy, or walked out in a different direction to it and recalled him to heel, before lining him up and sending him for the retrieve. As he's been great going out straight to the dummy, I've been playing with ways of adding a bit of complexity to the memory retrieves.

One of my favourites has been to walk down a V-shaped track with white grass in the middle, turning back on the V, and leaving a dummy on the track. Then heeling back the way we came before sending Emrys straight across the white grass for the retrieve. We've also been walking around the field dropping a dummy in each corner and then sending him in varying combinations, working the dummies either side of us as short 'Get On's, and the ones at a distance as split retrieves – great for the old grey matter as well as for proofing a young dog's training.

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

Introducing distance control

Something that I really enjoyed doing this month was introducing Emrys to distance commands. Although traditionally this is trained against a fence line, I've always shied away from doing that as most of my clients train their dogs on public land, and the fence line is normally where the dogs go to the toilet and bunnies go to ground, which can really work against young dogs. So, just as my clients do, we started training in the middle of the field.

Popping Emrys in a Sit/Stay, I walked out to his side and quietly put down a shape biscuit level with his shoulder, then returned to the front of him, with around 6' between us. I then sent him with a 'Get Out' combined with the hand signal to get his treat, before calling him to sit in quietly in front of me for another reward.

For the first handful of sessions, I use shape biscuits as I want my dogs to go out really punchy and get an instant reward for doing so – because distance control is about following direction rather than retrieving, I tend to train them as two distinct exercises. Then came one dummy… again leaving him sitting quietly while I place a dummy out level with his shoulder and casting him out. After a couple of weeks of quietly placing the dummies down on one side and then the other, I upped the ante and started to throw them. This is where all the steadiness training around thrown items over the last few months really comes into its own, as Emrys has developed self-control sitting away from me as well as by my side.

'Fingers crossed that by the time Emrys gets to the shooting field, he'll be well in control of himself'

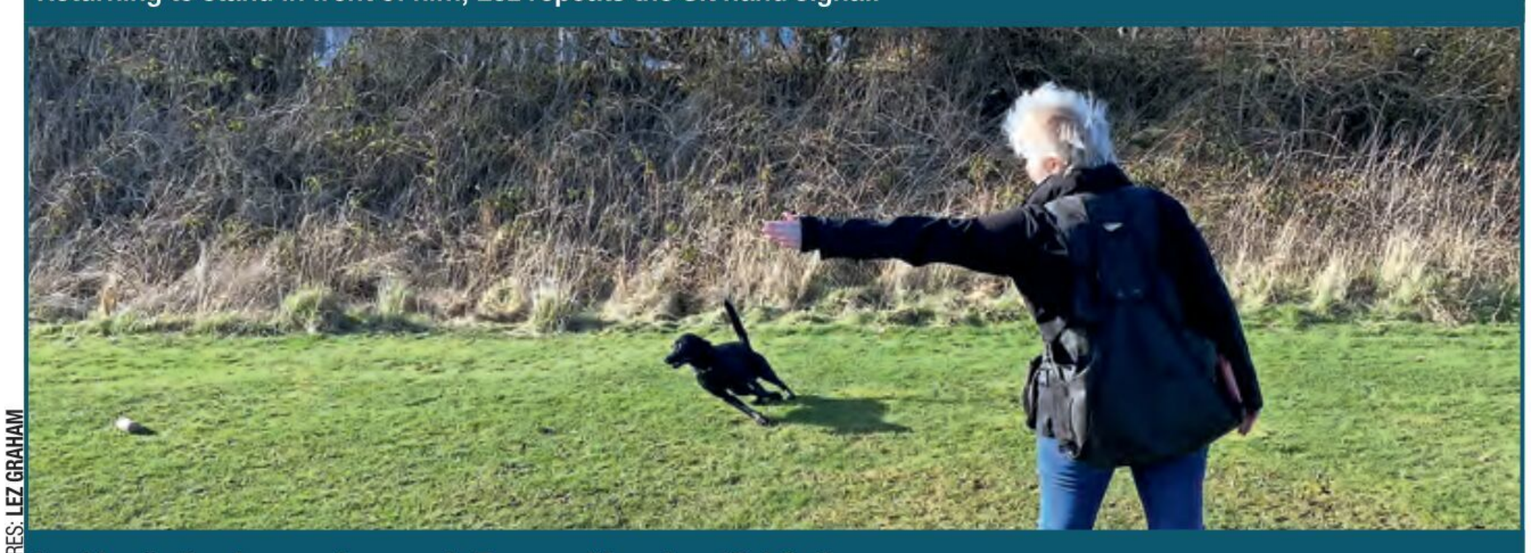
ONE DUMMY DOWN



Leaving Emrys in a Sit/Stay, Lez quietly places a dummy out.



Returning to stand in front of him, Lez repeats the Sit hand signal.



Looking to the dummy, Lez sends Emrys with a clear 'Get Out'.

PICTURES: LEZ GRAHAM

LEZ'S TOP TIP

Don't be in a hurry to move on to a new exercise. Instead, shake up an old one. For example, turn a simple memory retrieve into a ladder and add natural barriers for dog. Things like retrieving across different length grasses, going from the sun into shadow and crossing paths can all add a little bit of complexity to a straightforward exercise.

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 its sixth year.

Every book in The Pet Gundog series comes with one-year access to The Pet Gundog Online training app (£19.99, amazon.co.uk)

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



Back to the club

Being a 'lockdown dog', Emrys hasn't really been exposed to the same things my other dogs have been. All of them, with the exception of Ziggy, have been trained in competitive obedience as I love the precision of the handling and the focus; it's great for learning about motivation, timing and steadiness – plus you get to train around other dogs too which means our dogs have to learn to just settle down beside your chair.

Unfortunately, when the rules in Scotland allowed training clubs to be reopened, I was just about to have my elbow operated on, so we had to wait for that to heal sufficiently and then for a new round of classes to start. Thankfully, because I knew the trainers, we were able to enter the intermediate class rather than starting in the beginners, which was great as it meant we were able to start precision heelwork and putting in the foundations for the more advanced exercises.

It's always so interesting when you start going somewhere exciting with a dog; the first week at club Emrys was excited but calm, a bit overwhelmed which was to be expected as not only were there lots of dogs, but it was his first time in a sports hall.

The second week he was more excited but last week, which was week five, he was very over-the-top and had to be told a few times 'that's enough' and to settle down. It made me think about how when inexperienced dogs first go shooting – they're generally on their best behaviour as it's so overwhelming, but give them a few times on the field and they get to know how exciting it is, the anticipation and adrenaline is running so high they can lose the plot a bit. So fingers crossed by the time Emrys gets to the shooting field, he'll be well in control of himself.

TWO DUMMIES DOWN



First, Lez walks out and drops a dummy down, before walking back a few feet in front of Emrys.



Keeping the dog in a Sit/Stay, Lez throws the second dummy in the opposite direction.



Keeping the dog focused on her, Lez ensures Emrys is steady to the fall of the dummy.



Using a Get Out command and arm signal, Lez sends the dog for the second dummy.



Once Emrys is confident with this type of retrieve, Lez can build in slight changes to the ground she works on.

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My Lab is deaf to the Stop whistle!

Q My 18-month-old Labrador just isn't reliable on her Stop whistle. In basic training, she's good, sits at heel, and is steady to other dogs working in front of her. But once she's out looking for a dummy it seems like she just goes deaf to the Stop whistle.

A HOWARD KIRBY replies: We need to convince her that if she stops you will be able to help her find the dummy quicker. Make no mistake, once a dog has got to this stage in its mindset, this will not be a five-minute fix. Focus on doing directional exercises where she has to look to you for permission. Ensure that each time you give her a directional command that she 'gets a find'.

It's important that we get the dog to make a link between stopping and taking direction finding a dummy. I like to blow the Stop whistle just before giving the dog direction - and this includes exercises where the dog is already sat up in front of me. As soon as the dog focuses on you, blow the Stop whistle and direct her.

It's essential that you are not allowing her to continue to ignore the whistle. Keep exercises close to you, occasionally remove the dummy from the fall, let her hunt the area, and watch for the moment where she's running out of ideas and confidence. Now stop her and give a direction onto a dummy that you have slipped in surreptitiously.



PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN

in association with CHUDLEYS

Springer with a limp

Q My English springer has been limping on and off on her right front leg for over four months. I thought it would settle with rest at the end of the season, but as soon as I start training she goes lame again. My vet has done x-rays which didn't show anything, and now they are talking about referral for a CT scan, which I really can't afford. Can you make any suggestions?

A VICKY PAYNE replies: Your vet is suggesting a CT scan because common elbow diseases in spaniels can be impossible to see on standard x-rays. If your dog has a humeral condylar fissure, she is at risk of the elbow joint fracturing which will require extensive surgery, but the good news is that relatively simple operations can stabilise the joint reducing pain and fracture risk. However, I see many working dogs with intermittent forelimb lameness caused by sprains of the triceps muscle. These can take a long time to heal, and I usually recommend acupuncture or therapeutic laser along with physio to aid recovery. Before the CT scan you may wish to consult a vet with an interest in pain and sporting dogs as they may help you decide what route to take.



PICTURE: KENHURST / GETTY

Lurcher from one to the other!



PICTURE: JACKIE DRAKEFORD

Q Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD) has cleaned out our local rabbit population. What else can I do with my lurcher to maintain his hunting instincts?

A JACKIE DRAKEFORD replies: If he is OK with gunfire noise, he can go beating, rough shooting or on squirrel patrol. Lurchers quickly learn to look up for squirrels, and to manoeuvre around tree trunks so that squirrels move away from him into your line of sight.

Lurchers also add a welcome dimension to ratting with terriers, as they can reach up higher to get rats that climb as well as picking them up off the ground, but make sure the terrier pack is more interested in rats than confrontation!

I even know of a lurcher that has completed her deer tracking certificate, so that would be just the job for using her scenting abilities too, and you don't need to shoot in order to take part. Plus, I have used my lurchers for dogging-in game birds, which they took to straight away.

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10

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Open for clay practice 5 days a week – please book through our website. Skeet and DTL, 25 Bird Compact Sporting, 100 Bird Sporting, ABT, Double Rise, Bolting Rabbit & 150ft High Tower. Advanced and novice tuition available by appointment. Wed to Sat: 10am - 5pm, Sun: 10am - 1pm.

Tel: 01626 8666766
www.ashcombeadventure.co.uk/clay-shooting-grounds

11

Chalky Hill Shooting Ground

We have two shooting grounds, shooting alternate Sundays through the year. Dates and prices can be found online. Or call Duncan.

Tel: 07909 786272
www.chalkyhill.co.uk

15

North Devon Shooting Ground

Set in a beautiful valley, our sporting layout offers targets to suit all abilities. Located just 3 miles from the award winning Woolacombe Beach. Friendly and welcoming, we cater for stag, hen and corporate entertainment.

Tel: 01598 711967
www.northdevonshootingground.co.uk

16

Polowood Shooting Ground

Saturdays for 50 bird sporting. Alternate Sundays 9:30 – 14:00 for Sportrap Shoots. Tuesdays from April to September 12:00 – 19:30 for Sportrap Shoots. Now open on Thursday for a 50 target sporting shoot 10.00 – 16:00. Corporate events available.

Tel: 07818 203 871
www.claypigeonshootingbrighton.co.uk

20

Lady's Wood Shooting School

Set in 55 acres of deciduous woodland, we offer clay and game shooting tuition to all levels, corporate events, simulated game days and pay and play. well stocked gun room.

Tel: 01454 294546
Email: shoot@ladyswood.co.uk
www.ladyswood.co.uk

21

West Kent Shooting

Open Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm. English Sporting, Skeet and 100ft 8 trap High Tower. Lessons and Corporate Events.

Tel: 01892 834 306
www.westkentshooting.co.uk

25

Crabtree

spanning over 200 acres, we've been running the Crabtree Clay Shoot for over 20 years. We have over 60 automatic traps over 18 English Sporting stands, as well as undercover Compac and DTL/ABT ranges. We welcome shooters on Wednesdays and Saturdays to join us at the shoot!

07818 080841 www.crabtreeclayshoot.co.uk

CLAY GROUNDS

Find your local ground for practice, competition or instruction

LONDON & S.E.

BEDFORDSHIRE

SPORTING TARGETS
nr Riseley. 10 shooting ranges, three high towers, tuition, gun shop. Tel: (01234) 708893 www.sportingtargets.co.uk

BERKSHIRE

FOUR COUNTIES CTC
nr Newbury. Sporting, DTL, Fitasc, tuition. Tel: (01635) 201657 www.fourcountiesctc.co.uk

ROYAL BERKSHIRE SHOOTING SCHOOL
Pangbourne Tel: (07000) 410410 www.rbss.co.uk

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

EJ CHURCHILL SHOOTING GRND
(West Wycombe SS), High Wycombe. Sporting, high tower, Skeet, DTL, tuition, gunshop. (01494) 883227 www.ejchurchill.com www.wwsg.org.uk

HORNET SHOOTING GROUND
nr Long Crendon. Sporting, Fitasc. Tel: (01494) 883715 www.adventure001.com/hornet

OXFORD GUN CO GUN CLUB
nr Oakley. Sporting, Skeet, have-a-go days, tuition, corporate. (01844) 238308

VALLEY VIEW INTERNATIONAL
Shooting Ground nr Amersham. Sporting, Skeet, tuition, corporate. Tel: 07860 575055

HAMPSHIRE

CAVENDISH SPORTING
nr Bentley Tuition. Tel: (01420) 588275 Durley Hall Farm Clay Shoot Fareham. (01489) 860292.

FAREHAM CLAY TARGET CLUB
Skeet, Sporting, ABT, tuition. (01329) 315185 www.farehamctc.org.uk

FROBURY FARM SPORTING CLUB
nr Newbury. Sporting, Skeet, tuition, gun shop. (01635) 297122 www.frobury.co.uk

LAINS SHOOTING SCHOOL
nr Andover. Skeet, practice, tuition. Tel: (01246) 889467 or 07768 632567 www.lainsshooting school.co.uk

THE SPITFIRE SHOOT
Houghton Down Farm, Stockbridge, SO20 6JR. Open Wed-Sat, 9-4.30. English Sporting
Tel: 01264 810312
Email: info@spitfireshoot.co.uk
www.spitfireshoot.co.uk

TEST VALLEY CLAY PIGEON CLUB
Cocksford Firs, Popham, Hants Sporting and Skeet. Every other Sunday. £35 a year membership. Tel: 01256 771055

THREE COUNTIES NR HOOK.
Sporting. Tuition. Contact Paul Beecher on 07739 556790; www.beechershooting.co.uk

WALLERS ASH GUN CLUB
Alresford Drove, WinchesterTel: 07710872875 email:travellingclays@btinternet.com Practice, tuition, sporting, all abilities catered for www.wallersash.co.uk

HERTFORDSHIRE

BROOMHILLS SHOOTING GROUND
Markyate. Tuition, gunshop. Tel: (01582) 842280 www.broomhills.co.uk

CODICOTE BOTTOM CLAY TARGET CLUB
Codicote Bottom Farm, Kimpton road, Codicote, Herts SG4 8SR. Sporting, DTL. Alternate Sundays 10-1. Tel: 07768 714774 or 01438 814749
www.codicote-bottom.org

CUPID GREEN SKEET & ABT CLUB
Hemel Hempstead, Skeet & ABT Every Weds & 1st & 3rd Sat of month. Felt/fibre wads only Tel: 01582 849382

LEA VALLEY SHOOTING ASSN
nr Hertford. Tuition, practice, have a go days. Tel: 08707 605057. www.lvsa.org.uk

NUTHAMPSTEAD SG
Sporting DTL, OTr, tuition, shop. Tel: (01763) 848172 www.nuthampsteadshootingground.co.uk

PARK STREET & DISTRICT GC
Tel: (01923) 677 294

ISLE OF WIGHT

ISLE OF WIGHT GUN CLUB
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

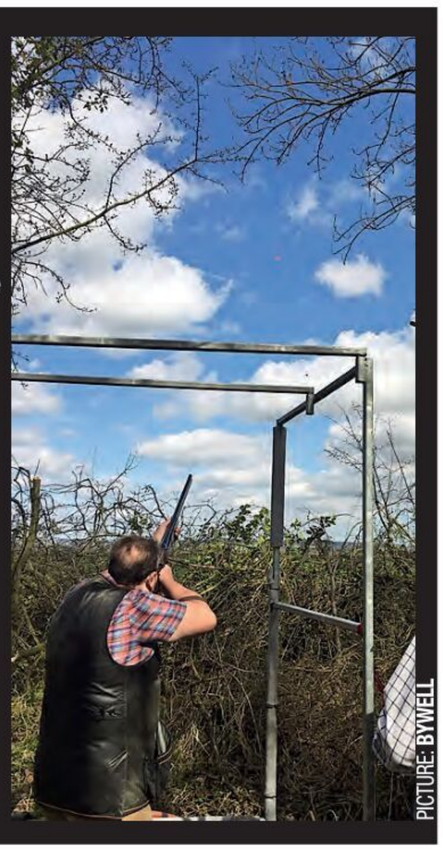
Beretta DTL Challenge

The CPSA have announced the introduction of the Beretta DTL Challenge at the Down the Line weekend being held at Bywell on 10-12 June 2022. Your total of three scores from the three days of the DTL weekend will count and GMK Beretta have generously sponsored the challenge with five guns awarded to the High Guns across classes C, B, A, AA and overall High Gun. To qualify, you must shoot all three days.

PRIZES

- High Gun overall: Beretta SP1 Field
- AA Class High Gun overall: Beretta A300
- A Class High Gun overall: Beretta A300
- B Class High Gun overall: Beretta A300
- C Class High Gun overall: Beretta A300

For more info, visit championships.cpsa.co.uk


PICTURE: BYWELL

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
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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

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CO DURHAM

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

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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

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Sporting, DTL, tuition. Tel: (01759) 368314

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NORTH OF ENGLAND CTC
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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

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

STEVE SMITH SG
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Sporting every 2nd Sunday. Tuition available. Mob: 07814 538927

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

WALES

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MID WALES SC
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NORTH WALES SS SEALAND
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SOUTH WALES 2000
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TREETOPS SG
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nr Altnaharra. Tel:(01549) 411245

BRAIDWOOD SG
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BURNTKETTLE SG AULDGARTH
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CARLISLE & DISTRICT GUN CLUB
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CENTRAL SCOTLAND SHOOTING SCHOOL
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Tel: (01369) 704362

DUNS & DISTRICT GUN CLUB
nr Cockburnspath, off the A1. Sporting usually last Sunday of month. Tel: (01361) 883500

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Tel: 07845 211102

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SUNART & MOIDART CTC
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TARBERT GUN CLUB
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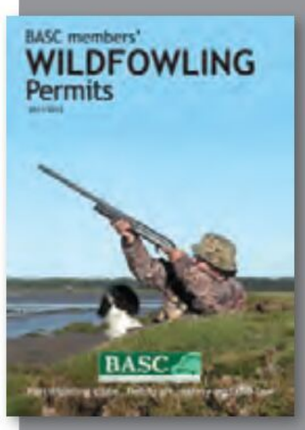
THORNHILL GUN CLUB
Dumfriesshire. Sporting, DTL. Tel: (01556) 504124

WEST OF EDINBURGH SHOOTING CLUB
Tel: 07749 503934 www.wesc.agurney.com

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For a copy of the latest BASC Members' Wildfowling Permit Scheme Booklet, send an SAE to Wildfowling Management, BASC, Marford Mill, Rossett, Wrexham, LL12 OHL or email your name and address to wildfowling@basc.org.uk

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Gundog Club Tel: 01724 734700 www.bohgc.co.uk
stephanie@bohgc.co.uk

ROBERT GIBSON-BEVAN
Lincs Tel: 01673 858387

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www.kwacs.org.uk

LEICESTER WILDFOWLERS
Contact: www.leicswa.org
feedback@leicswa.org

PESTWISE
Contact Richard Tel: 01664 850287 or 07764 485726
www.pestwise.co.uk

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Tel: 01536 761978
or 07850 380923 www.deltadeerservices.co.uk

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Tel: 07711 555295 wildfowlers@gmail.com

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www.fenlandwa.org.uk

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NBC BIRD AND PEST
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KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK WILDFOWLERS
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NORWICH & DISTRICT WILDFOWLERS
www.norwich-wildfowlers.co.uk

PETE'S AIRGUN FARM
nr Chelmsford, Essex. Contact: Peter Mallett, Tel: 07973 509198 www.airgunfarm.co.uk

RIFLECRAFT LIMITED
Tel: 01379 853745
www.riflecraft.co.uk

SPALDING WILDFOWLERS
www.spaldingwildfowlers.co.uk

LONDON & S.E.

WILLIAM & PHILIP BEASLEY
Tel: 01869 277534 for Philip, Tel: 07831 572247 for William, Tel: 07831 195736. Pigeon shooting, also deer stalking.

Brainwave's 2022 Showdown Hoedown

Children's charity Brainwave, formed in 1982 to help children with disabilities achieve greater independence by aiming to improve their mobility, communication skills and learning potential, have announced that their two clay shoot events will be back this year, bigger and better than ever. The first, the Showdown Hoedown, will take place at Catton Hall Shooting Ground on Friday 17 June 2022. Teams are £600 for 4 Guns and instructors are available for an additional fee of £100.

The day includes breakfast buns on arrival and will start with a full safety briefing. Teams will then go on to enjoy four hours of shooting. A mid-morning snack and BBQ lunch, with an accompanying glass of wine, beer, or a soft drink, will also be provided. There will be a raffle and small auction on the day, along with a prize giving ceremony which will include prizes for the winning team, the runners up, and the Top Gun.



TICKETS

For tickets and more information go to: brainwave.org.uk/showdown-hoedown

CREATURE FINDERS



WE FOUND HENRY THE HEDGEHOG ON PAGE 12 OF THE APRIL ISSUE

Richard Gaylor, Cambridgeshire • John Gosling, Kennford • Paul Warby, Thatchwood • Shelley White, Northallerton • Eddie Finney, Rocester • Susan Yates, Northampton • Ian Legg, Stockbridge • Peter Hall, Goole • Martin Gibbons, Norfolk • Mike Lloyd, Hengoed • Philip Palmer, Keighley • Colin Clarke, Reading • Jerry Read • Edna Philp, Halstead • Simon Honeyborne, Worcester • Peter Johnston, Brechin • Sylvia Binovec, Hexham • Ann Kent, Spalding • Derek King, Waterlooville • Ann Owen, Corwen • Aneurin Owen, Corwen • Nina Small, Glasgow • Ann Owen, Corwen • Aneurin Owen, Corwen • John Loveridge, Cambridge • Barry Grange, Beighton • David Moran, Kent • Andy Philp, Angus • Brian Harper, Norwich • Arthur Davy, Lincoln • Kester Warden, Bradford • Natalie Matthews, Downpatrick • Brian Matthews, Downpatrick • Gary Aitchison, Goole • Russell Dixon, Cumbria • Dave Lambourne, Northants • R. Stimson, Bucks • Ernie Booth, Cheshire • Shona Morris, Kidderminster • Miles Hall, Stainton • Roger Reed, Pontllanfraith • Tom Jones, Carmarthen • Barry Moore • Charlie Finn, Armagh • William A Dickson, Chepstow

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



MARK BOULTON HORNDEAN
Deer stalking in south; Boar shooting in Europe and Sussex. Tel: 02392 595925/07854 985006 mark-thedeerstalker@hotmail.co.uk

CHICHESTER HARBOUR WA
www.chwa.org.uk

GEORGE DIGWEED SPORTING AGENCY
www.georgedigweed.com Duck & pheasants.

EMSWORTH & DISTRICT WILDFOWLERS
www.wildfowling.com

FROBURY FARM SPORTING CLUB
nr Newbury, Berks. Contact Paul Oldring, Tel: 01635 297122; www.frobury.co.uk

HOLBOROUGH SHOOT SOUTH (KENT)
Driven pheasant shoot. 01622 891940, 07774 839319, 07876 542579 info@holboroughestate.co.uk

KENT DEER SERVICES
Contact Andrew Tel: 07754 272214 or 01892 680327 www.kentdeerservices.co.uk

KENT WILDFOWLING & CA
Tel: 07836 771715 www.kentwildfowlers.co.uk

LANGSTONE & DISTRICT WWCA
Langstone Harbour, SE Hants. www.ladwaca.com

SHAVESGREEN SHOOTING
07706 395979. www.shavesgreen.com info@shavesgreen.com

DRIVEN & WALKED-UP DAYS
Pigeon Trevor Robinson Tel: 01273 600683 or 077499 35864.

WEST LONDON SHOOTING SCHOOL
Tel: 020 8845 1377; reception@shootingschool.co.uk

WEST SUSSEX SPORTING
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SOUTH WEST

ARUNDELL ARMS DEVON
Tel: 01566 784666 www.arundellarms.com

CORNWALL WILDFOWLERS ASSOC.
Tel: 01872 864021. Mike Holmes. Weekly shoots

COTSWOLD SHOOTING COMPANY
Tel: 01285 657527 www.go-country.co.uk

DEVONPORT GUN CLUB
Rough shooting Devon/Cornwall Tel: 01752 787824 devonportgunclub@ gmail.com

DEVON WILDFOWLING & CA
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www.dorsetwildfowlers.org.uk Gloucestershire

GLOS. WILDFOWLERS
www.gloucestershire wildfowlers.co.uk

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SPORTING AGENT
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Barnstaple www.ttwc.org.uk

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NANNAU SELECT SPORT
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DES COCHRANE
Fife and Perthshire BASC registered goose guide www.GoShootingUk.com Tel: 07725054046

COUNTRYSPORTS STALKING
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COWANS LAW
Ayrshire Contact Jay Steel, Tel: 01560 700666 www.cowanslaw.com

COWANS SPORTING
Dumfries & Galloway Contact Craig Denman, Tel: 07775 760651 or 01387 760284 www.cowanssporting.co.uk

DUNMHOR SPORTING
Highlands. Contact Graham, Tel: 07778 874026 or 01540 661809

DV SPORTING
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ESTATE MANAGEMENT
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FPD SAVILLS
Contact: Roddy Willis, Tel: 01356 628600 rwillis@fpdsavills.co.uk

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THE GEARACH ISLE OF ISLAY
Contact Mark Piper, Tel: 01496 850120 or 07786 906472 www.thegearach.co.uk

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NORTHERN IRELAND

LOUGH FOYLE WA
www.wildfowlers.com

STRANGFORD LOUGH
Wildfowling Club day permits to BASC members. Contact BASC HQ, Tel: 01244 573000

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