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African goose adventure

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venison flatbreads

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Cover image: Nick Ridley

With the weather improving, I'm sure many of you will have been out making the most of it by enjoying a bit of pigeon or rabbit shooting while it lasts as our contributors have! Andy Crow has of course been out protecting his crops in an endless battle against the grey hordes and Simon O'Leary gives us some top tips on the best equipment to use for the purpose.

I've been out thinning out the bunnies so you'll find a bit of a run down on rabbit control on page 32 and Mick Garvey has also been knocking a few over in his article on page 34.

The only downside to the summer months is that to get the best shooting opportunities at dusk and dawn you need to be up at an unearthly hour or stay out late into the evening – but the rewards of being out this time of year are more than worth it with the British countryside in its full glory.

For me, however, I'm cursed with hayfever, as I was reminded on a recent outing over a field of freshly cut grass. Within minutes I was reduced to a snivelling sneezing wreck with tissue stuffed into each nostril, prompting me to start my usual double dosing and combining of various tablets and

medication in a bid to retain some form of dignity throughout the early summer months without inducing liver failure or an overdose. Hopefully in a month or so I should be over the worst spell and left to enjoy the rest of the summer without too much trouble.

It seems the push for the lead ammunition ban is moving steadily forward with suitable alternatives and supply issues a concern. It's imperative that we all highlight these issues, and you can find out more on how to do this on page 36.

This month is also a gundog special with features including counting grouse with pointers on page 10 and working an unusual breed in the field on page 18.

Deano has also been out on his fox control duties as I shall be tomorrow night. With several more fields due to be cut for silage, I'll be out to see if any foxes will make an appearance. The freshly cut grass is always a draw to foxes so it should be well worth a look.

I shall prepare my antihistamine drug cocktail and head out early!

Mark Ripley

Mark Ripley
Guest editor





PICTURE: LINDA WESTON

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New Natural History GCSE to be launched in 2025

A new Natural History GCSE set to launch in September 2025 has the potential to engage thousands of schoolchildren each year by tackling

topics such as conservation, sustainability, species interactions, climate change and land use, according to BASC's head of pathways to

shooting Curtis Mossop. "We welcome the announcement of this new Natural History GCSE as a means of engaging and inspiring young people to take a holistic view of our countryside and wider global issues," he said. "On average, children now spend around 40 hours per week looking at a screen of some kind. In stark contrast, only 70 minutes per week, on average, is spent outdoors or being connected with nature. Hopefully, this new GCSE option will help redress this balance and create a passion for nature in a whole new group of young people."

But he has warned that the new GCSE must be objective, adding, "This subject must be science-led rather than based on emotive decisions and opinions. We made this clear in our response to a consultation by the exam board on the new qualification last year. There is an array of potentially volatile and emotive topics, but the learners must be directed to proven fact and science to enable them to take a holistic view of the subject."



PICTURE: DELIMAGES / GETTY

Lead restrictions dossier published

On 6 May, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published its findings on the risks posed by the use of lead ammunition for people, wildlife and the environment in England, Wales and Scotland. Based on these findings, the HSE launched a six-month consultation on the proposals which include banning the sale of lead ammunition, banning its use for both live quarry and outdoor target shooting (with possible exemptions), and mandatory packaging labelling.

Proposed transition periods for the restrictions to take effect vary from 18 months to five years, and buy-back schemes have been proposed which largely mirror the lead ammunition restrictions proposed in the European Union last year as part of the EU REACH process.

Turn to page 56 to find out how BASC have responded.



PICTURE: K. NEVILLE / GETTY

Hen harrier scheme renewed by Natural England

Natural England has announced that it has issued a licence for a fifth year of the hen harrier brood management scheme which has been such a vital part of the recent hen harrier success story in England, resulting in the best breeding records for decades.

With assistance from the Natural England scheme, last year saw the most successful breeding season for 50 years. The conservation management on grouse moors creates quality habitats that many of our most threatened species call home, including hen harriers. Such is the importance of these habitats that around 80% of English hen harriers nest on land managed for grouse shooting. Brood management involves a small, but key proportion of hen harriers, with most of the

population still breeding successfully in the wild. Hen harriers face a variety of challenges including predation, disturbance, weather conditions and a shortage of available prey.

Brood management has boosted the overall survival rate of hen harrier chicks which can then go on to breed successfully themselves.

The brood management scheme, among others in the Hen Harrier Action Plan, acts to reduce conflict between hen harriers and grouse moors.

The approach aligns with other innovative conservation projects across the globe that ensure key species continue to flourish. The scheme has won support from various sources, not least BASC who have granted £75,000 to Natural England over the next three years via their Legacy Fund.



PICTURE: RANCHO RUNNER / GETTY

Sir Jackie Stewart Challenge

The Sir Jackie Stewart Challenge takes place on 17 June at Thirlestane Castle in the Scottish Borders in aid of Race Against Dementia, sponsored by Eley and Beretta.

Sir Jackie Stewart OBE was an Olympic-class shot who competed for Scotland in the '60s, winning numerous accolades all over the world before retiring from competitive shooting at 23 to take up motor racing. He founded Race Against Dementia to raise money to fund research into finding a cure for the disease. Dementia affects over 50 million people across the globe including Sir Jackie's wife, Helen.

The event will be closed to the public and will host 120 participants. It is organised by the Scottish Clay Target Association. The Challenge will be a Down the Line competition – chosen by Sir Jackie as he won the Scottish Championships twice in this discipline. All skill levels are welcome as



PICTURE: BIG PARTNERSHIP

shooters will compete in their own class and competition prizes include a Beretta 694 shotgun for the High Gun plus additional prizes from Eley Hawk.

Rodrigo Crespo, managing director of Eley said: "We are thrilled to support this event in aid of Race Against Dementia. Jackie Stewart and Eley Hawk have had a relationship since Jackie's clay shooting careers' inception and we are thrilled to continue to work with him at this event.

To register, call 07776 256539.

Defra asks all shoots to join BGA

In a public imbursement of the organisation, Defra minister Lord Benyon has said 'every single shooting interest' should sign up to British Game Assurance. This news came shortly after a separate announcement by Aim to Sustain, the coalition of shooting organisations, also stating that all shoots supplying the public food chain through AGHES should register for BGA assurance.

Mindful that in a traditional sense this may not be a financially viable option for everyone, the BGA responded by saying that all shoots that comply with the Code of Good Shooting Practice and

the FSA Wild Game Guide can register as an 'Associate' with them for free. Associates are not audited but are subject to a complaints procedure, bringing all who participate into the

self-regulatory framework. They will still offer the only certified assurance scheme available to the shooting sector for shoots that wish to produce BGA-assured game to meet the growing demand. The BGA say

that the scheme will continue to be honed as it progresses, and the standards are currently undergoing their most rigorous review and overhaul to date.

What are your views on this? Get in touch and let us know!

NSS attracts record number of visitors

The Northern Shooting Show welcomed a record 21,323 visitors over the weekend of 7-8 May. Now under new management, the two-day event has been running since 2016 but this was the first year it was organised by Stable Events.

Held at Yorkshire Exhibition Centre in Harrogate, the popular event showcases shooting-related activities such as shotguns, airsoft, archery, bushcraft, airguns and target shooting. Plus, there was a dedicated area for Gundog demos and gamekeeper networking, as well as a new Hunt & Hall Ladies' Lounge. There were also hundreds of exhibitors from all over the world offering everything from country lifestyle to technical shooting gear.

Show director James Gower added: "This event has a very loyal following from both visitors and exhibitors. The atmosphere was buoyant and buzzing all weekend with traders reporting amazing footfall and sales. We will build on this year's success to expand the offering for visitors with even more features and exhibitors to showcase British shooting sports and the countryside. Watch this space!"



PICTURE: TWEED MEDIA

WIN A SHOTGUN SLIP

Find the creature hiding in this issue to win. To enter the Creature Finder competition, send us the page number, your name, telephone number and address by email to: ispy@sportingshooter.co.uk.

CLOSING DATE: 1 JULY. Unless you have chosen to receive other information, Archant Community Media Ltd will solely use the data you provide for the purpose of running the competition, including contacting winners and the distribution of any prize.

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Kindly supplied by UK Shootwarehouse, market leader in shooting equipment and accessories, their new shotgun slips are made from 600D Cordura in Field Green, and are fully padded with a half zip and an adjustable end flap. The padded hand carry strap & shoulder/back strap enables you to carry a gun flat across your body in more comfort. Plus, there is a handy zipped side pocket for ancillaries. The overall length of this slip is 134cm.

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CONGRATULATIONS:

ROSE DENNEHY who found ALICE ASIAN PALM CIVET on p69 of the May issue. See p88 for more successful creature finders.

PICTURE: PRETTYMAGN / GETTY



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COUNTING GROUSE

Each year, a team of dogs and counters take to the moors to make an assessment of the grouse and help the estate plan for the season. Howard Kirby shares how the process works

We are privileged to live on an island that supports a unique ecosystem and environment that gives the UK its world-famous grouse moors. Located primarily in the north of England and in Scotland (although there are also moors in Wales and Ireland), the grouse moors and the red grouse that thrive on these vast and unique habitats are considered a sporting and wildlife Mecca that is a privilege to visit.

The red grouse is a fascinating bird and is every bit as wild as the rugged and beautiful habitats that it populates. For sure this is one of the many reasons that captivates and draws people from all over the world to be part of a phenomenon that begins on the Glorious Twelfth. The twelfth of

August is the beginning of the grouse shooting season, of course, and is the culmination of years of investment, management, conservation and hard work by land managers and the keepers that manage the moors. One small part of moor management are the twice-yearly grouse counts that are carried out.

Grouse counting

Grouse counts are done to establish an understanding of an estate's harvestable surplus. The count also assists in understanding the size, health and location of birds. This knowledge can then be used to plan an estate's shooting programme.

Most estates do two counts each year. Spring counting is done in March and documents the number of adult breeding stock, whilst the July count will show how well the breeding season has gone. Counters and their dogs carefully hunt, point and flush the cock, hen and their brood of chicks, carefully recording numbers and locations for use by the keepers.

Counting is usually carried out using specially trained pointing dogs, however, it can be done with almost any breed of hunting dog and their human assistants. For the purpose of this article I'm going to focus on the use of the pointing breeds.

The pointers

English, Gordon and red setters along with the pointer (often referred to as an English pointer) are the breeds chosen by the majority of the grouse counting community. However, there are also many counters that choose Hunt Point Retrievers as their canine grouse counting mates.

Fundamentally, it is the natural pointing capabilities of these two breed groups that ensures that they are the 'chosen ones'.

However there's so much more to these super predators than just their ability to indicate and point game. Whilst we're on the subject, ask any pointer or setter owner what it is that first drew them to the breed and it's highly likely that they'll recount the first time they saw a dog slam into point.

Whenever possible we demonstrate these dogs at game fairs, polo matches, racecourses and any venue that asks for a gundog demonstration (we did one in a town centre once!). Without fail even people that aren't that fussed about dogs will stop and stare, mesmerised by the 'on point' dog.

The pointers, setters and the majority of HPR

The spring counts are a chance to give younger dogs some experience ahead of the summer ones



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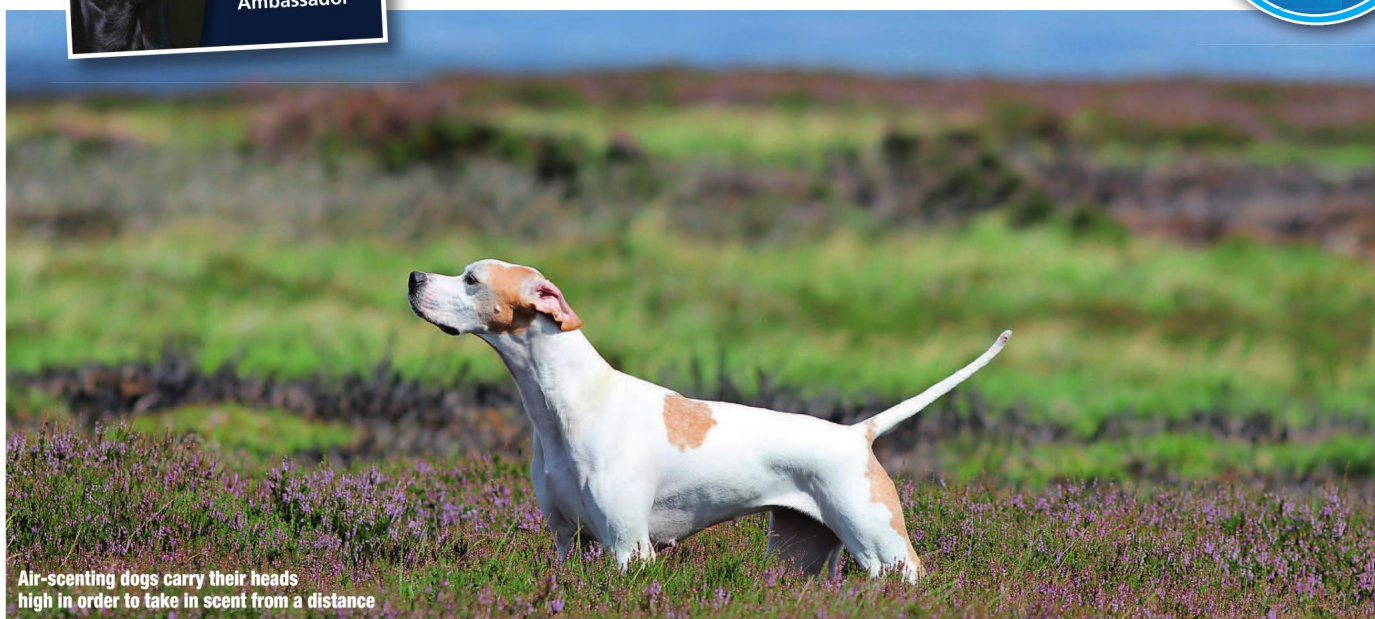


FUELLING
GUNDOGS
FOR GENERATIONS





WITH HOWARD KIRBY // GUNDOG 7



Air-scenting dogs carry their heads high in order to take in scent from a distance

breeds are bred from generations of air-scenting dogs, whose chosen hunting style is to quarter their ground at full gallop. They carry their heads high whilst galloping in order that they can take in scent from a good way out in front of them. For this reason, and whenever possible, handlers do their best to hunt their dogs into a head wind.

If you study the physical characteristics of these breeds, they are a bit like a greyhound fitted with the head and scenting capabilities of a hound. As I mentioned earlier, a 'High Speed Super Predator'.

The counting team

Grouse counters, and by that I mean the humans, generally work as a team. These teams of people come from all over the UK and Europe. Hotels, cottages and camping pitches are seasonally snapped up and occupied by the teams. For most, this is an opportunity that is too good to miss.

Several handlers, often with multiple dogs, take it in turn to work a specific area of a moor. The dogs locate, point and flush the grouse. A record is kept of where and how many birds are found. The counting team are careful to ensure that they cover the same area that they covered on previous counts.

'The level of self control required from the dog and the teamwork with the handler is right up there on the scale of successful partnerships'



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These formidable dogs really are
'high speed super predators'



The wonderful photographs that accompany this article were taken by one of my very good friends, Linda Westron, who was kind enough to give myself and my dogs an introduction to a grouse counting team – for which I am eternally grateful!

The dogs

As I mentioned earlier, these breeds are hard-wired to point or sett when they come in contact with bird scent. It is truly incredible to watch eight-week-old puppies form themselves into mini pointing dogs, the very first time they encounter a bird. Nobody showed them, they haven't watched a video, it just happens. It's really important that you acquire your puppy from really good working lines. These lines go back for many generations. This in-built desire to point has been cultivated through careful breeding and selection.

So you've bought a puppy that runs like the wind, takes all of its hunting information from the air and will, if exposed in the right way, learn to point and manage its game. All you need to do now is teach them to come, drop and STOP. Do not underestimate the skill, time and effort required to teach a dog that is running with the pace and power of a greyhound, to drop to shot, flush or the whistle. As with all dog sport, the top pointer and setter boys and girls continually appear with dogs that do this. If you're thinking, 'ohhh I might like to train a pointer', here's a health warning, it takes enormous amounts of experience, knowledge and skill to fit brakes and steering to a Ferrari... you have been warned!

During the spring counts, the grouse are over-wintered adult birds that are wild and wily. They have avoided the Guns, predators and survived all that the harsh climate and the moorland winter throws at them. They are now thinking about breeding; cocks and hens form pairs or trios. They are perfectly capable of avoiding being caught by an over-enthusiastic dog. Experienced young handlers use the spring count to introduce young dogs that have had all of the

'controls' fitted. This then gives dogs the experience they will need to be able to work on the summer count.

The summer count needs experience and obedience. With young grouse all tucked into the heather in family units (called broods), these young birds are vulnerable to a predatory dog. When a dog comes onto point and is then asked to flush, it is essential that the dog drops immediately that the bird lifts. These youngsters sit tight until the very last moment. Each member of the brood will need to be

carefully and gently, 'cleared out'. Watching an experienced dog 'clear out' is something that any dog trainer can only be impressed by. The level of self control required from the dog and the obedience and teamwork with the handler is right up there on the scale of successful partnerships.

This article is nothing more than an overview of grouse counting, and the amazing dogs that perform these counts. I hope it will go some way to explaining why the pointer, setter and HPR people in your life will move hell and high water to ensure they are there! ■

A chance to work your dog on a grouse-counting day is one not to be missed



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THE ART OF THE AMATEUR GUNSMITH

In the final part of this series, Phil Siddell works on refinishing the barrels of his AYA #4 project gun and gets to enjoy the fruits of his labour with a little rough shooting

Working with wood can be a dusty business, but overall, it's a fairly clean pursuit. A shed floor covered in fresh shavings or a piece of walnut glistening under a fresh coat of oil are quite pleasing to the eye, and indeed the nose. Working with steel, however, is not always so pleasant. As a custom knife maker, I am well accustomed to the general grunge that settles in one's nostrils and the swarf that is so adept at lacerating and irritating the skin that comes along with metalwork. But the grime associated with barrel work wasn't the only reason for my trepidation over refinishing the tubes on my AYA. I was also perturbed at the near alchemy incumbent in blacking, browning and blueing gun barrels. I'd read *The Craft of the Gunsmith* (by G.W. Spearing) as a primer, and *The Art of Gunsmithing – The Shotgun* (by Lewis Potter) for more in-depth information on barrel work, and came away genuinely concerned about the potential for becoming the source of a "serious

chemical incident". I asked around for advice too, but could never quite get a consensus on how to proceed. I have experience of using strong acid to etch Damascus steel blades, but even that is straightforward in comparison with the task I was facing.

The main hurdle I encountered came from the fact that there isn't just one way to finish the exterior surfaces of shotgun barrels. All the procedures have the same purpose, to form a slender, benign layer of controlled corrosion to inhibit future rusting of the steel, but all of them differ in methodology, final appearance and efficacy. Furthermore, all these approaches seem to have been devised centuries ago and look outwardly to have more to do with witchcraft than metallurgy. The barrels on my #4 had been blacked at manufacture, probably by the 'express blacking' method. The finish was thick in all areas except those that have been most frequently handled; where it had a

smudged appearance. While the blacking was serviceable, it had been laid over a very poorly prepared surface with finishing marks of at least 80 grit still present. To refinish my barrels by the same method, I would need to buy or build a stainless steel tank that could be heated to a suitable temperature as well as be able to dispose of two tanks worth of waste water and chemicals. The 'express blacking' method also relies on fastidious degreasing of the tubes in a way that I suspect is out of reach of someone working out of a shed.

The next option I considered was browning, which can be done with very little equipment. Browning barrels are most commonly seen on tubes made from Damascus steel and on other older types of firearm. I think a browned barrel has a charm of its own and the tones that can be achieved are certainly richer and subtler than those offered by blacking. However, I decided against browning for two reasons. Firstly, the process of corrosion can be difficult to control and

Look out for the *Sporter Shooter* guide to buying secondhand guns at auction in next month's issue!



What was once a tatty and unloved side-by-side has become a serviceable and attractive shotgun

PICTURES: PHIL SIDDELL

Phil modified a carpenter's screwdriver to make it a proper fit for the gun pins



Although a little unconventional, cold bluing offered a good balance of ease, rust protection and aesthetic appeal

secondly, the vintage of my AYA just didn't warrant it.

Eventually, I settled on cold bluing, using Phillip's Professional Cold Blue; it seemed appropriate given the name! While cold blue is intended for small parts such as trigger guards and pins, it can be used on larger items too. I knew it wouldn't give me the heavy block colour of 'express blacking', but I reasoned it would prevent corrosion and be easy enough to remove if I ever opted to have someone else black the barrels at a later date. All I needed was a plastic tank, some emery paper and lots of elbow grease.

Before I could begin to rub down the barrels, I needed to remove any parts I didn't intend to blue: in this case, the ejectors and the sight bead. I suspect that many a gun pin ('pin' is the correct term for a screw when used in gun making) has been ruined by the use of a carpenter's screwdriver. With this in mind, it was necessary to adapt or make a suitable tool to back out the pin holding in the ejectors. To this end I bought a reasonably priced screwdriver and 'hollow ground' the blade to fit tightly in the pin head in question. With the parts stripped, I began to sand away the blacking, working my way from 240 grit all the way to 500 grit. I was obliged to make several sanding blocks of diverse shapes and sizes to get into all the nooks and crannies; needless to say, the work was dirty and tiring!

In preparation for the actual bluing process, I degreased the barrels several times very thoroughly with methylated spirit and clean kitchen towel before stopping up the breech and muzzle ends with rubber walking stick ferrules

and all the smaller holes with Blu Tack. I filled a clean and degreased brand-new plastic plant trough with the diluted bluing fluid and submerged the barrels for just five minutes as directed.

After removing the barrels from the bluing fluid, it was simply a case of rinsing thoroughly with fresh water and spraying liberally with WD40, before rubbing thin coats of gun oil into the surface a couple of times a day over the next few days. Note: with chemicals such as this it's worth thinking about how you can responsibly store or dispose of them ahead of time.

At first glance, I have to admit that I was a little

disappointed with the results. The steel looked grey rather than blue or black. However, as the days went by and I kept going with the oiling process, the barrels seemed to get darker and develop a richer tone. By the time I reassembled the gun for the first time, I was really quite pleased with the overall finish. The bluing went well with the recently refinished stock and had a bit more depth and character than the old grungy blacking. After a thorough clean of the exposed metal work and a touch of grease here and there I realised, not without a some excitement, that my AYA #4 was ready to earn its keep.



The barrels were taken from 240 grit to 600 grit after the blacking was removed – and this finish is a huge improvement

The lightweight, pointable nature of the AYA was perfect for Phil's Boxing Day rough shoot



The gun gets some action!

I now faced a new dilemma. My heart told me to take the gun rough shooting for its first outing, but my head strongly advised me to try it on clays first. As luck would have it, a typically busy pre-Christmas work schedule decided the matter for me and I ran out of time to visit my local clay ground before setting off to visit family (and some excellent rough shooting ground!) for the holiday period. It's become a bit of a tradition now to have a Boxing Day roost shoot (often just with airguns) on a piece of rough ground belonging to my parents that we all refer to as The Swamp. Though small and unkempt, The Swamp is home to a wide variety of game including the occasional woodcock and even a handful of ducks; perfect for those who love a mixed bag!

The trick with this location is to tuck oneself into a natural hide amongst the alder and ivy and to always observe the rule of holding fire until more than one target presents itself. The action begins in the last 30 minutes or so of light when one steps out of cover to begin a flight. The sport is always close and fast, and is greatly complicated by the extreme density of the undergrowth. This year, between two Guns, we managed to accrue two pigeons, a brace of pheasants and two grey squirrels (a favourite table fare of mine) all in the space of less than an hour. I found the short 28" barrels of my AYA well suited to the task and managed to only forget and pull the front trigger twice on one occasion...

As a hunter, I find that I never really bond with a gun (of any kind) until I've had my first successful

hunt with it; all the target practice in the world seems to have little influence on the connection I feel. However, things have played out differently in this instance. Before I ever put a cartridge anywhere near the chambers of my #4 a bond had already begun to form. Even if I hadn't had as much success on that first foray with it, I suspect the same glow of affection I felt for my first double barrel would still have been present as I cleaned and dried it post shoot. I can forgive it the wallop it delivers when I pull the trigger. I'm not offended by the large knot in the butt that the stocker didn't select out when building the gun. And perfectionist though I am, I don't even mind that the chequering on the hand was laid out slightly asymmetrically. I think too that the gun has proved forgiving of my meagre abilities. In short, I believe that the gun and I have come to understand and appreciate one another.

With little more work of any consequence to do to my AYA #4, a question arises over where to go from here. I would dearly like to get my teeth into repairing some lock work, perhaps even making a spring from scratch. I would also have liked to have been capable of engraving the initial shield on this gun but after some early attempts with a handmade graver I can see that I am many, many practice plates away from that!

The gun is now both serviceable and a pleasure to use, but the pitting in the left barrel makes it less appealing as a candidate for steel shot; although there is nothing preventing me from putting softer lead alternatives through it. In theory, the gun is now safer from the scrap pile

than it was, whether its future lies with me or someone else. Perhaps I have learned what I can from this gun and it's time now for an even greater challenge. The question is: is there room in my heart yet for the next project? ■



Phil looks very pleased with the fruits of his labour!

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WORKING TERRIERS IN THE FIELD

The idea of taking his terriers on a shoot day was very daunting at first, but Phil Moorsom has proved that they can make excellent dogs to shoot over

When we started the Rough Rovers, the simple idea was to find small walked-up days that were affordable and fun. Many of our original members were looking for a simple day in good company and even in the early days a huge part of the appeal of our days were that Guns could bring along their dogs – no matter how badly trained they were. We were all in the same boat and there was no real judgment passed when things did not go according to plan. There were many days when a team member would spend half a morning looking for their enthusiastic dog, swearing that they would never bring him or her out again. It is difficult, but not impossible, for an errant dog to do much damage on a small day. A wild canine often provides some entertainment and a good anecdote that can be recycled repeatedly by your friends in the future. Over the years, more and more of our members have appreciated the

pleasure and satisfaction that can be had from working your own dog out in the field. For many, the dog has become the focus of the day with the actual shooting taking a back seat. As the cost of shooting is set to soar, I think we all have to look at just how we can get maximum enjoyment on our days out and including a canine companion certainly adds a new dimension.

I know I should really have a ‘proper’ shooting dog such as a Labrador, spaniel or pointer, but I’m a terrier man and I can’t help it. They are fantastic all-round working dogs but are wilful, unruly and defiant and generally quite hard mouthed. However, they are loyal, brave, intelligent and full of character.

I was always anxious about releasing any one of my terriers on a Rough Rovers day for fear of embarrassment or potentially ruining the day for the rest of the team shooting. It was not until we

went shooting walked-up partridge on some dog training days in Worcestershire that I was given the confidence to risk the terriers out on a day. Our team of four or five Guns would shoot alongside a team of dogs, of dramatically different abilities, whose owners were keen to enter them in various Trials across the country and needed the practice. It was after one of these days that I sat down with the trainer and asked for her thoughts on introducing my terriers to the world of shooting. Her answer was very simple which was that pretty much any dog can be trained to flush and retrieve game but obviously certain breeds have more natural abilities, especially if their pedigree is added to the mix.

Now I knew there was no issue with the terriers finding game and flushing it. The main problems would be keeping them close enough to shoot over, them not running off into the distance finding every partridge or pheasant in the immediate

FLUSH AND RETRIEVE WORK

Phil’s terrier, Fig, has proved his worth on the game field many times over the years!



PICTURES: PHIL MOORSOM

vicinity, and finally when retrieving a shot bird to bring it back in one piece.

The first terrier I dared to take out in the field was Fig. She's still going now at 11 years old which is no age for a terrier at all. She is slightly less enthusiastic than she was in her younger days, and tends to focus on the retrieving part of a day, leaving the foraging and flushing to the next generation. She has always been great with recall and there has only been one occasion in her whole career when she was stricken with a sudden bout of deafness and caused havoc – ironically on a day hosted by the same dog trainer who had encouraged me to bring her along.

As I was running the Rough Rovers, it was easy to take Fig along to the majority of our days, and to begin with she spent most of the day on the lead watching the other dogs work. Over time she got calmer watching the birds being shot and retrieved and I gradually started to let her off the lead and she showed a remarkable affinity for marking birds and bringing them back almost to hand in one piece. Given the number of days that I go out on, she got a lot of practice and became steady and reliable bringing all sizes of game to hand, including a cormorant once (shot under licence of course).

This gave me added confidence to gradually introduce the other two terriers, Buster and Nugget to the field. They didn't initially show the same aptitude as Fig but in time excelled in their own way and have provided some of my most memorable and cherished memories whilst out shooting. My favourite was shooting a left-and-right grey partridge on a proper walked-up day in Gloucestershire. Bringing one down in front and one behind, the dogs split and brought one back each, to hand, and in one piece. There have been countless other moments of triumph over the years and I still get a huge kick seeing the astounded looks on the faces of some of the Guns (and pickers-up) when the terriers are out in the field.

Sadly, we lost Buster last year, but I now have two more terriers waiting in the wings, Nelson and Goose, who are already showing positive signs of natural abilities and I cannot wait to get them started although it will probably not be until the end of the season. The main point I want to get across is that it can seem a bit daunting introducing a dog to your shoot days. It can involve a lot of hard work and perseverance if you are training it yourself but there are plenty of excellent trainers out there to give you a hand and you will get advice a plenty from fellow gundog owners.

It is hard to convey the pleasure and pride one can achieve from shooting over your own dogs, but for me it is the perfect way to spend a day in the field no matter how many birds one shoots. A simple flush, shoot and retrieve can make a fantastic memory for a day, a season or even a lifetime. ■

Terriers aren't known for being soft mouthed, but that doesn't mean you can't make it work



Phil loves to see the looks on the faces of other Guns when his terriers join the throng of spaniels on the shooting field!



Having your dog with you on a shoot day is hard work – but very rewarding



ONE FOR THE POT



Venison Flatbreads

Bringing home the dough

Looking for some new ideas for the summer? This Middle Eastern-inspired venison dish from Chris Marney is packed full of flavour and is the perfect dish for sharing with friends

As we have always said, game presents great opportunities to try out some new recipes, especially when you are looking to add some spices such as in this month's Middle Eastern-inspired dish. To balance this, we have used the super fresh tastes of pomegranate and tzatziki.

In the GFA kitchen, we are lucky enough to have an outdoor pizza oven at our disposal, but this dish works just as well when baked in the oven on a pizza stone or even just on a baking tray.

With the season ahead looking a little uncertain

due to the avian flu issues, we have to ensure we make the most of all the great game meat we have. With the BBQ being fired up, the summer is always a great time to get game on the table, and I am sure over the coming months we will get some new recipe ideas.

And don't forget we will be doing a demonstration at the Game Fair which this year will be held at Ragley Hall on 29–31 July! Please look at our website or follow us on Instagram for further details.



'To balance the spices in this Middle Eastern-inspired dish, we have used the super fresh tastes of pomegranate and tzatziki'



VENISON FLATBREADS

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

VENISON MINCE

- ◆ 500g venison mince
- ◆ 1 tbsp olive oil
- ◆ 20g unsalted butter
- ◆ 1 large onion, finely chopped
- ◆ 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- ◆ 1 tsp chilli flakes
- ◆ 2 tsp ground cumin
- ◆ 2 tsp ground coriander
- ◆ 1 tsp sweet smoked paprika
- ◆ 4 tbsp tomato puree
- ◆ 400g (can) chopped tomatoes
- ◆ 4 tbsp pomegranate molasses

DOUGH

- ◆ 14g dried yeast
- ◆ 500ml warm water
- ◆ 800g strong bread flour
- ◆ 2 tsp salt
- ◆ ½ tbsp olive oil

TZATZIKI

- ◆ 350g Greek yoghurt
- ◆ 1 cucumber
- ◆ Handful of mint, finely chopped
- ◆ 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- ◆ 2 tbsp lemon juice

BAKING

- ◆ 2 tbsp fine semolina
- ◆ 2 small red onions, finely sliced
- ◆ 75g pine nuts
- ◆ 200g crumbled feta

SERVING

- ◆ Handful of parsley, finely chopped
- ◆ 50g pomegranate seeds
- ◆ Pomegranate molasses

METHOD

VENISON MINCE

1. In a large frying pan, heat the olive oil, butter, onions and garlic with a splash of water, put the lid on and gently simmer for 10-15 minutes until cooked.
2. Add the venison mince and fry until nicely browned.
3. Add all the other ingredients and stir to combine.
4. Simmer for about 20 minutes until most of the moisture is removed.
5. Set to one side and allow to cool completely.

DOUGH

1. Place the yeast into a bowl with the warm water, mix together, then leave for 10 minutes.

2. Place all the flour and salt into a bowl and pour in the water and yeast mix.
3. Mix by hand then turn out onto the work surface and knead for 10 minutes until the dough is smooth.
4. Put the olive oil into a large bowl and place the dough in.
5. Cover with clingfilm and allow to prove for 2-3 hours (or until doubled in size).

TZATZIKI

1. Peel and deseed the cucumber, then grate. Place this into a clean tea towel and squeeze to remove the excess water.
2. Place all the ingredients into a bowl and combine.

BAKING

1. Heat the oven to 220°C.
2. Once the dough has doubled in size, sprinkle the semolina onto the worktop.
3. Empty the dough out onto the worktop and divide into four.
4. Using a rolling pin, form your flat breads.
5. Divide out the mince, red onions, feta and pine nuts between the four doughs.
6. Place into the oven for 10-15 minutes until the edges are golden.

SERVING

Remove the flatbread from the oven, sprinkle over some parsley and pomegranate seeds, then drizzle over a good helping of pomegranate molasses and tzatziki. ■

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



Dust your surface with semolina when rolling out the dough



Once most of the moisture is gone, set aside to cool





Smallholding success

Deano is called in when a rogue fox goes on the rampage among the ducks, chickens and geese of a new neighbour. Can he rise to the challenge?

Last year, I was told that the people that had recently moved into a very nice property that sits on about 35 acres in the middle of my permission were having problems with foxes. The area is a haven for foxes, with three miles of water meadows, thickets of thorn, willows and little spinneys along the edge of the village. I shoot loads of foxes each year coming from this rough area onto the farm, so it was no surprise to hear the family had lost some chickens and ducks. Their phone number was passed on to me, so I gave them a ring and arranged to go down and have a look.

‘The lady told me she had walked down to feed her assortment of livestock one morning, only to be greeted by a fox killing the chickens’

Upon meeting the lady of house, she showed me where the damage was being done. The chickens were completely free-range with the whole paddock to wander around in. She pointed out that various hen houses had automatic doors fitted, which is fine, but with the paddock surrounded by cover, a fox could easily get in there and launch an attack at any time of the day. There is even more risk from spring time onwards when there are cubs to feed. The lady told me she had walked down to feed her assortment of livestock one morning, only to be greeted by a fox killing the chickens she had only just replaced from the last attack.

The first piece of advice I gave her was to build a big fox-proof pen and put an electric fence around it. It's a shame as it won't look very pleasing to the eye, but it will keep the chickens safe in the long term. I explained that I would be able to sort out the problem fox or foxes for now, but she would always have issues if she didn't take appropriate steps to protect them.

Long story short, after shooting a dog, a vixen and three big cubs in that area (two on their bit and the rest coming onto the field) the trouble stopped.

It worked out well for me to have access to that ground too, as it's right next to what is really our only proper pheasant drive. Being able to help out meant the family in question embraced the shoot, which was perfect because no doubt at some point during the season we would need to pick up shot game on their ground!

Spring into action

I didn't hear anything more from the family until this April, when first thing one morning my phone pinged with a message: 'Deano, we need your help again. A fox is killing our geese'.

I told the lady I would pop over in an hour if she was free. While I waited for her, I noticed they now had their chickens in a netted enclosure with an electric fence around them which meant they'd taken my earlier advice.

When the lady arrived, we walked over to where the geese were kept and she told me the fox had come the last two nights, killing a goose each time. I couldn't understand why it had eaten its fill and left the rest of the carcass rather than carrying it away. I was still weighing up the possibility that the culprit might not even be a fox

FEEDING THEIR YOUNG

Attacks on poultry are particularly common in the spring, when the foxes are feeding their cubs.



After several hours, the fox appears, darting through the paddock

PICTURE: MARTIN KOEBSCH / GETTY



Despite their aggressive nature, the geese proved no match for the fox

PICTURE: ALEXANDR KONDRATOV / GETTY

when I spotted some feathers sticking out of the ground. I pulled at them, only for a full goose wing to come up in my hand. That was the work of a fox, for sure. I told the lady I would return that night and see if I could get it. She couldn't believe the fox would take the geese on with them being so aggressive. But as I told her, foxes are top predators and a goose is nothing to them!

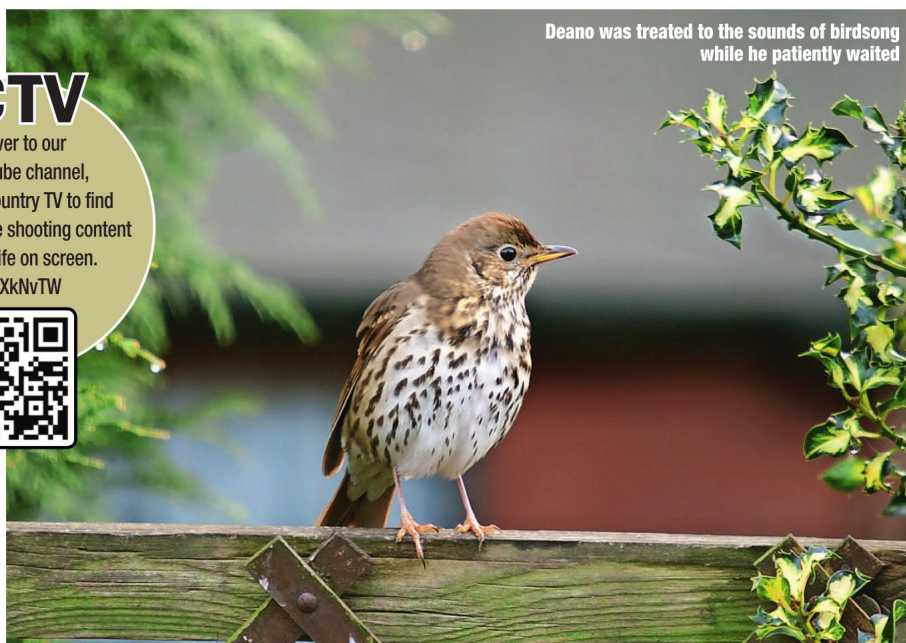
I felt I should get there early, as like I said the fox would most likely be nearby and not have far to travel. Now, this was an awkward place to sit and wait as the fox could come out from quite a few different directions, and there were very few places that I could actually get a safe shot. It probably wouldn't even be possible to shoot without getting on the back of my truck to give me that extra bit of height.

In the end, where I set myself up overlooking where the fox had left the goose and where it had buried the wing turned out to be perfect. I could only position myself about 80 yards away, which is a bit closer than I'd like but you have to work with what you have.

The evening was full of entertainment. Being near the little chalk stream that runs beside the property, I was treated to a good 30 minutes of a song thrush singing its head off. It was just starting to get dark and I was scanning all around me, when I suddenly spotted the fox to my right – and just behind me too, at a mere 30 yards away. I didn't have a shot and dare not even breathe! I needed the fox to go right around me so I could get a safe shot, but he must have already had my scent as he quickly disappeared back into the cover. Had I been out on the farm, I probably would have given up on him. But I figured this one

S&CTV

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Deano was treated to the sounds of birdsong while he patiently waited

PICTURE: ANDREW HOWE / GETTY

might be used to seeing humans and catching their scent, so I stayed put and waited.

Three hours later, after thinking many times that this was just not going to happen tonight, there he was, suddenly darting through the geese from my right. This time, however, he was in a safe place for a shot.

I slipped behind the rifle and checked again through the spotter to line him up, only to see him going under the fence. He hammered his way through the paddock, and not for the first time I wondered if he knew I was there. The geese were going mental, and I kept looking at the patch of cover he had disappeared into until a few minutes later I saw movement through the thermal spotter.

Out he came again, only to go straight back in.

My stress levels were rising as I really wanted to get this one tonight. The fox was so skittish I was thinking my chance had gone, but again it pushed under the fence. This time, the rifle was lined up perfectly and I quickly found it in my scope.

He started to turn, so I fired and heard the bullet strike, then saw him leap up in the air and dash back into the cover. Even so, I knew the shot was good. I walked over with my thermal spotter, and there he was just inside the cover. The shot was a little low, but he had only dashed about 10 yards. It was a big dog fox but obviously not with a vixen, as there has been no more trouble on the farm since that night.

I have had easier foxes than this one, but that's what keeps it exciting for me! ■



Last flight on the Solway shore

Rupert Butler casts his back to a wet morning spent wildfowling amid the stark beauty of a Scottish estuary – accompanied, as ever in those days, by his ever-vigilant springer, Otto

As you probably know from previous scribbblings, I spent some time rambling around the shores of the Scottish Solway in the hope that some wildfowl might present an opportunity. It took me a good few months to predict with any accuracy when and where such an opportunity may arise. But, if the truth were to be known, it was never about how many opportunities presented themselves on a given flight. Just being on the foreshore as dusk turns to dawn and the whole estuary awakens in front of your eyes was reward enough. I could sit amongst the reeds for hours on end watching wildfowl and waders drift to and fro, often hundred of yards distant. One cannot be disappointed returning empty handed after experiencing such a performance from the migrating masses. Every now and then everything will fall into place, probably more by luck than judgement, and some birds will be yours.

Sometimes I travelled further afield, to areas frequented by several fowlers, but if I am being honest I preferred the smaller bays where I was alone to watch the theatre unfold. Otto was my companion in those days, a black and white

springer of excellent lineage who was a wee bit on the unruly side to say the least, often chasing birds that were not even on the menu. I blame myself, a lack of training in his early days being the root of the problem. That said, he loved the foreshore as much as I did and the minute he would hear a floorboard creak during the wee hours he would hop down from his corner of the sofa to excitedly wait by the back door.

The week before I left to relocate down south, the weather gods decided to shine. Whilst watching the forecast that Sunday evening, I noticed a large depression was making its way down from the north, and coupled with some early tides, I decided that conditions would be ideal. That very Wednesday would be my last flight on this lovely foreshore.

Dawn chorus

On the day in question, sleep was at a premium because I wanted to take full advantage of the opportunity. I jumped from my bed an hour earlier than normal, taking even the ever-vigilant Otto by surprise. The short drive to a local

bay was tinged with sadness, for although a gale was starting to blow, I wondered if I would ever get the opportunity to return. A rabbit ran across the road in front of me and I had to stop Otto from squeezing out of the partially-opened window and giving chase.

Dawn was still an hour away as we positioned ourselves amongst the reeds, a strengthening wind starting to gust all around. A wigeon whistled somewhere far out to sea as I poured coffee from my flask. Otto heard it too, as his ears cocked ever so slightly whilst glancing in my direction, just to make sure that I wasn't raising my gun to intercept. I crouched lower and lower, trying to hide myself from the elements, with sleet now starting to fall apace.

For the next half an hour, I just sat and listened to the awakening foreshore, taking in the sounds and smells that abounded all around. A lone curlew called from high above, its haunting tones amplified even more by the prevailing conditions. I took my gun from its sleeve for I could now begin to catch the outline of some nearby trees. As if by coincidence, some duck rushed

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

Rupert makes one last visit to the foreshore he cherishes



The Solway Firth offers fantastic wildfowling opportunities



PICTURE: RICHARD P-LONG / GETTY

past but as yet I couldn't see them, the noise of their pinions alone betraying their presence. Otto chased after some osytercatchers that landed on the mud in front before returning, tongue hanging out, some minutes later. I used to berate him for little acts of indulgence such as this, but know it was of little use.

A gale was now blowing, but thankfully the sleet had stopped and as dawn started to streak across the eastern sky, a multitude of birds took flight to escape an angry sea. Several packs of wigeon passed inland to my right, too far out to offer a shot, but as I watched them, a party of teal scurried past. I toyed with the idea of moving, but knew from previous experiences that it's best to stay put. Next, a multitude of waders swept past, attempting to escape the ever-worsening conditions and find solace on some calmer inland waters.

A high mallard offered a chance as it briefly passes overhead, but I was woefully behind as it traveled inland, seemingly oblivious to my presence. Three pinkfeet were next to run the gauntlet, but mysteriously, right at the last

'For the next hour, wigeon and mallard pour inland, most of which are too high to offer a shot, but I do manage a couple that drop down'

second, veered off to follow the coast. I was just about to blame Otto when I spied a local farmer wandering about in the field behind. Perhaps he heard my shots and was coming to investigate.

My luck took a change for the better when I managed to bring down a pair of wigeon that attempted to land in the rising tide in front. After bringing the first bird back with little fuss, much to my annoyance Otto decided to parade around with the second, mainly because there were now several packs of wigeon on the wing.

For the next hour, wigeon and mallard poured inland, most of which were too high to offer a shot but I did manage a couple of drake mallard that,

having seen my decoys, dropped down to investigate further. Just as I was about to call it a day, I heard some greylags honking way out to my right as they battled their way laboriously down the coast to where I waited.

Just when I thought they were going to pass out of range, they swung straight over me offering the simplest of shots. Or so I thought. As I rose to intercept, I realise that I haven't reloaded and they went on their way blissfully unaware of any impending danger.

I will always have fond memories of my time here, and hopefully some day I will return to watch the migrating masses. ■

Rupert downs a pair of wigeon that attempt to land in front



PICTURE: DENJAI / GETTY



How to craft a tree trunk bench

Last time, Jonny Crockett showed us how to make a stool. This month, he is going a step further and showing us how to make a bench for your garden or DIY shoot!

Making a bench to accompany your stool only takes a few minutes to make and requires very few tools. In this case, all you need is a saw, an axe and a couple of metres of bailer twine or Paracord. You can probably count on one hand the number of shoots that don't have a supply of bailer twine.

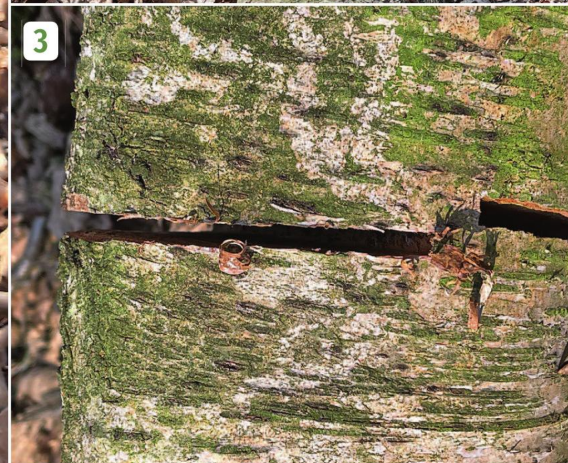
First, you'll need to cut through a thick branch or trunk to make a 5-6ft beam. It is preferable to use a source that has already fallen, so I'm using a silver birch that was a victim of Storm Eunice **1**.

This should last for a few years before rotting. The main part of the tree will be used for other purposes, but up near the top there is a section which is straight and between 8" and 12" thick. Trim any side branches to provide a clean area to work with. You'll need to remove these anyway, and they'll be used later in the process.

Remember the old adage of keeping a long stick as long as you can, for as long as you can. In this case, I've kept the bit of wood I want attached to the trunk as it provides its own saw horse that

way! Now, with your saw, make a series of cuts that go through from the top of the trunk to halfway through **2**. You'll need to keep checking that you haven't gone through too far, or not far enough. Get them as equal as possible. These will be your stop cuts, and will stop your axe from getting caught in the grain and giving you a lopsided bench.

It is now time to cut the beam from the tree. Start with cutting underneath at the thinner end, and get about halfway up. Then cut from the top



to meet the undercut. This will prevent the whole beam from splitting **3**. Now do the same at the thicker end.

The axe is your next tool. Pick up one end of the wooden beam and place it on the shoulder opposite to the side you hold your axe in. Now start to chop along the length of the beam until you have removed half of the thickness **4**. This will be the seat.

A leg up

We now have to make the legs. This is the easy bit. You'll need to make six straight sticks **5**, each about 2ft long and at least 1" thick. Make sure that they are strong and not rotten and try to find the straightest you can. If possible, perhaps you can make them from the side branches you've just cut off from the trunk.

Separate them into two batches of three, then place each batch parallel on the ground. Now, using bailer twine or paracord, you need to tie a loop around the first stick about halfway along and then weave the cord in and out and round the other end stick and back again **6**. I'm using about a metre of cord for each batch of three sticks. Tie off the ends securely.

Now, open the sticks up so that you have two tripods **7**. Place the seat on top of them and voilà, you have a sturdy bench that you can leave at the end of each drive **8**. After all, none of us are getting any younger! ■

'Voila! You have a sturdy bench that you can leave at the end of each drive. After all, none of us are getting any younger!'



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Don is a keen clay shooter and follows the country's top shots on the circuit



ANDY CROW

PIGEONS

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



DEAN HARRISON

FOXING

Deano is a lifelong fox shooter and keen countryman



JONNY CROCKETT

COUNTRYSIDE

Jonny teaches survival courses and other backwoods skills



WILL EDWARDS

SHOOTING

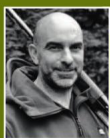
Will is an APSI-qualified shooting coach



TOM ESLER

LEGAL MATTERS

Tom is a partner at mfg Solicitors, providing services for rural sectors



MARK RIPLEY

SHOOTING

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

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QUESTION OF THE MONTH

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Every day in the woods?

Q Should we be spending every day in the woods or shooting every day?

A JONNY CROCKETT replies: This is all a question of balance. The woods I use regularly is not my home, but it is home to roe deer, badgers, foxes, rabbits, squirrels, and many smaller mammals. I've learned to live alongside them, and to a large extent they've learned to live alongside me. But like in all relationships, everyone needs some quiet 'down' time so I deliberately give the woodland

and its creatures time alone. Likewise with shooting, there are some occasions when we should just let the animals have a day off. Game birds and wildfowl have an enforced time out because of shooting seasons, certain days like Christmas, and the one hour before sunrise and one hour after sunset, but rabbits and vermin don't. To maintain a healthy balance, perhaps we should think about giving the environment some time to recover. When you're shooting rats or rabbits, you are also disturbing the other local inhabitants.



PICTURE: JIMROCK / GETTY

Hawking history

Q I am extremely interested in the history and background of hawking, and wonder if you have any information of a time when different ranks of owners and stations of life carried different species of hawks and falcons?

A TONY JACKSON replies: An emperor carried an eagle, a gyrfalcon for a king, an earl had a peregrine, a merlin for a lady, a goshawk for a yeoman, a sparrowhawk for a priest and a kestrel for a servant or knave. Among the birds usually hunted by hawks were partridges by goshawks and larks by a merlin. Long-winged hawks or falcons, including peregrine, merlin, and hobby, were reserved for only those of high estate, while those considered of a lower class had short-winged hawks such as kestrels, sparrowhawks and goshawks.

One of the earliest books on hawking which you might find of great interest is the *Book of Saint Albans*, a compilation of essays first published in 1486. It gives precise instructions and a great variety of terms given for the movements and habits of the birds... for example,



PICTURE: SQUINCH / GETTY

a hawk is never said to be 'ill' but to have 'ungladness'. I have a selected glossary running to over 100 terms which were used in medieval times, and a few are still used in falconry today.

Is a pump-action suitable for pigeons?

Q I am a female shooter and I have been given a .410 pump-action. Is this suitable for pigeon shooting or do I need a 12-bore or 20-bore?

A ANDY CROW replies: Absolutely you can use a .410 pump – and indeed I regularly do. Although I should mention

that I have a sound-moderated .410 pump, which I use when shooting in those more noise-sensitive areas.

You also do have to bear in mind that you'll be throwing a little less lead out. I use a 19g magnum shell in No.6 shot (as opposed to the 32g No.6 that I use when shooting my 12-bore). It might be worth spending a bit of time at the pattern plate to

understand what chokes will work best for you and keeping your shooting to sensible ranges until you are confident with it, but they kill very well even at distance.

A three-shot pump-action is a great option for pigeons, giving an extra bit of capacity when the birds are decoying well and being easy to load safely in the confines of the hide.



PICTURE: YSRANDOSUN / GETTY

Taking on a fox

Q A fox has repeatedly tried to get into my daughter's rabbit hutch in the garden. I own a pre-charged 12ft/lb air rifle, and I'd like to know if I were to shoot the fox with it would it be enough to kill it or just injure the animal?

A MARK RIPLEY replies: An air rifle is by no means the ideal tool for the job and you run a high risk of only injuring the fox. That said, at very close range (20 yards or less) a pellet placed perfectly from the side between the ear and the eye will kill a fox. A far better option, however, would be a .22 rimfire with subsonic ammunition, shooting from an upstairs window and utilising a safe backstop. There are plenty of pest controllers out there that can do it if you don't own a .22 rimfire yourself. Another option would be to deter the fox from coming into the garden with an ultra sonic emitter device or a motion-activated water sprayer, available from some garden centres or online.



PICTURE: DOWDLIFE / GETTY

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Some positives on social media

Several things I have seen on social media lately made me so proud to be part of the shooting community, and proved once again just how very wrong the 'antis' opinion is of what we are like as people. The common thought process of those opposed to fieldsports seems to be 'they shoot animals, therefore they hate animals!' Of course, you and I know this to be wrong, and that in fact the opposite is true. But it's so nice when proof is shared outside of our community – in this case, on social media.

One was a story about a very, very young red squirrel that had lost its mother. Whether she was killed by disease or predators is unclear, but the people who found it waited as long as they could to see if she would return before taking the tiny animal inside and contacting the nearest squirrel ranger for help. In case you don't know, squirrel rangers generally are shooters, controlling the greys as part of their vital work.

For weeks and weeks, the ranger and his partner hand-fed the tiny kit, which being so young looked unlikely to survive. But survive it did! The last update I saw, the little squirrel, now strong and grown, was released back into the woods and sighted a week later running around with another red.

The fact there are red squirrels thriving in this area is a credit to the rangers who work hard to control greys and conserve reds.

The second story was much simpler. It was a picture of a man's hand filled with birdseed, and a small garden bird taking seed straight from his hand. It was titled "shooters love wildlife!" and accompanied by a short piece of text explaining that he had been feeding the birds in his garden for years, and had gradually built up enough trust that this one would now feed from his hand.

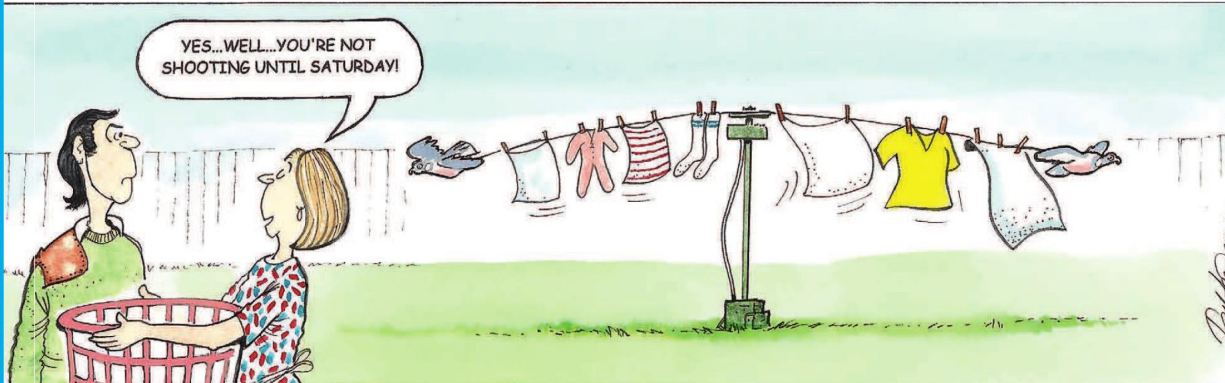
I have always thought that the 'antis' make a lot of noise while doing absolutely nothing to benefit wildlife. And here is solid proof that just because you shoot some animals, it doesn't mean you have a disregard for animal life. In fact, quite the opposite. I'm sure there are more stories floating around proving the same sentiment. I would urge you, where possible, to share these little stories so more people can understand that love for wildlife is equal to, if not greater than, those who oppose shooting.

Robert Wood, Yorkshire



PICTURE: MATTHEW LEESDIXON / GETTY

SNAP SHOTS



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Owling at the moon

I can't say I'm a keen twitcher, though I do sometimes enjoy gazing out through the window and watching the birds in the garden. I even started putting out food for them during the pandemic, something I hadn't thought of doing before. I know opinion is divided as to what you should feed them, but I don't go to much trouble or expense, I simply give them kitchen scraps like stale bread. It certainly increased activity. Anyway, several evenings ago, I happened to glance through the window and saw something I had never seen before. At first I thought it was a plastic bag caught in the tree. But then it turned to look at me and I saw it was a barn owl! Quite a large one, too, with light brown feathers and a big white face. It was definitely a mature adult. I know they are territorial creatures, so it's strange I have never seen it around before. Maybe he was lost. I watched him for a few minutes before he flew off, showing off an impressive wingspan of at least three feet. It was quite a sight, and I do hope he comes back to visit!

Craig North, via email



PICTURE: LANGDOFF / GETTY

Rabbiting with rimfires

I often read about how wonderful the .17 HMR rifle is for rabbit shooting in comparison to the more traditional .22 LR with its amazing flat shooting ability, accuracy and range, so I was rather intrigued when my shooting mate took the plunge and brought one.

I have to say I was initially impressed with the distance he knocked over rabbits with it. However, we soon found that despite its extra range, I was actually putting more rabbits in the bag shooting the near-silent .22, especially around the smaller paddocks. I also experimented with the drops on the rifle and found I could confidently shoot rabbits to 100 yards or so with the .22 using the mill dots on the scope for reference. I then also tried some high velocity ammunition in it and although this now meant it was just as noisy as his HMR, I could push out to 150 yards with ease! The ammunition also works out about a third of the price and is pushed around less in the wind, too. All things considered, I think I will be sticking with the .22 rimfire. At least for now!

Bob Newbury, Powys

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QUIZ QUESTION

Q OWL MR SOW is an anagram of which creature often mistaken for something else?

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MAY ISSUE WINNER

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The answer was SNOW GOOSE

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Answer published in the September 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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PICTURE: CONTESTY / GETTY



Heading south

Travelling to southern climes during the UK's summer close season offers itinerant wildfowler, Alan Jarrett, year-round adventures after exotic quarry on far-flung foreshores

The air was filled with tiny flying insects, and hawking this way and that was my first swallow of the spring. It was 26 April, and perhaps a tad late to be seeing the first swallow, although the relentless north-easterly winds had no doubt made things more difficult for such a long-distance traveller. It made me think of my own long-distance journeys, to the land which played summer host to swallows and the like. Since that first trip, I have travelled to South Africa many times in search of geese in the main, and it is a revisit for which I yearn.

As Covid-19 struck, my brother and I were scheduled for a real 'bucket list' trip to Argentina. Not to shoot the doves for which that country is so well known but to try our hand at the plethora of duck species to be found there. The trip was cancelled once, then twice, but this time it really could be about to happen. Hopefully, those will be tales for other days and other issues of *Sporting Shooter*. In the meantime, YouTube will have to suffice!

We had been to Canada and Iceland on other trips, and each

provided a special memory in their own way – the biggest drawback being that those trips took an unwelcome chunk out of our shooting season here. Then, a chance overheard conversation at a game fair with someone asking about a call for an Egyptian goose ensured that the germ of an idea came to life. Canada was off the list for the next decade, and it was to be the southern hemisphere for us.

This gave opportunities to hunt different quarry, over different and differing terrain. Doubly important was that we could do so in their winter, and hence our summer. This meant a nice addition to our wildfowl shooting, and we returned time after time – always to the Free State of South Africa, although not always to the same area.

The Egyptian is now becoming increasingly commonplace in England, but scarcely revered. In its native country it is an altogether different proposition: sharp-eyed, wily, capable of really violent evasive action when spotting danger, and if on the ground and wounded it can outrun all but the most athletic of hunters!

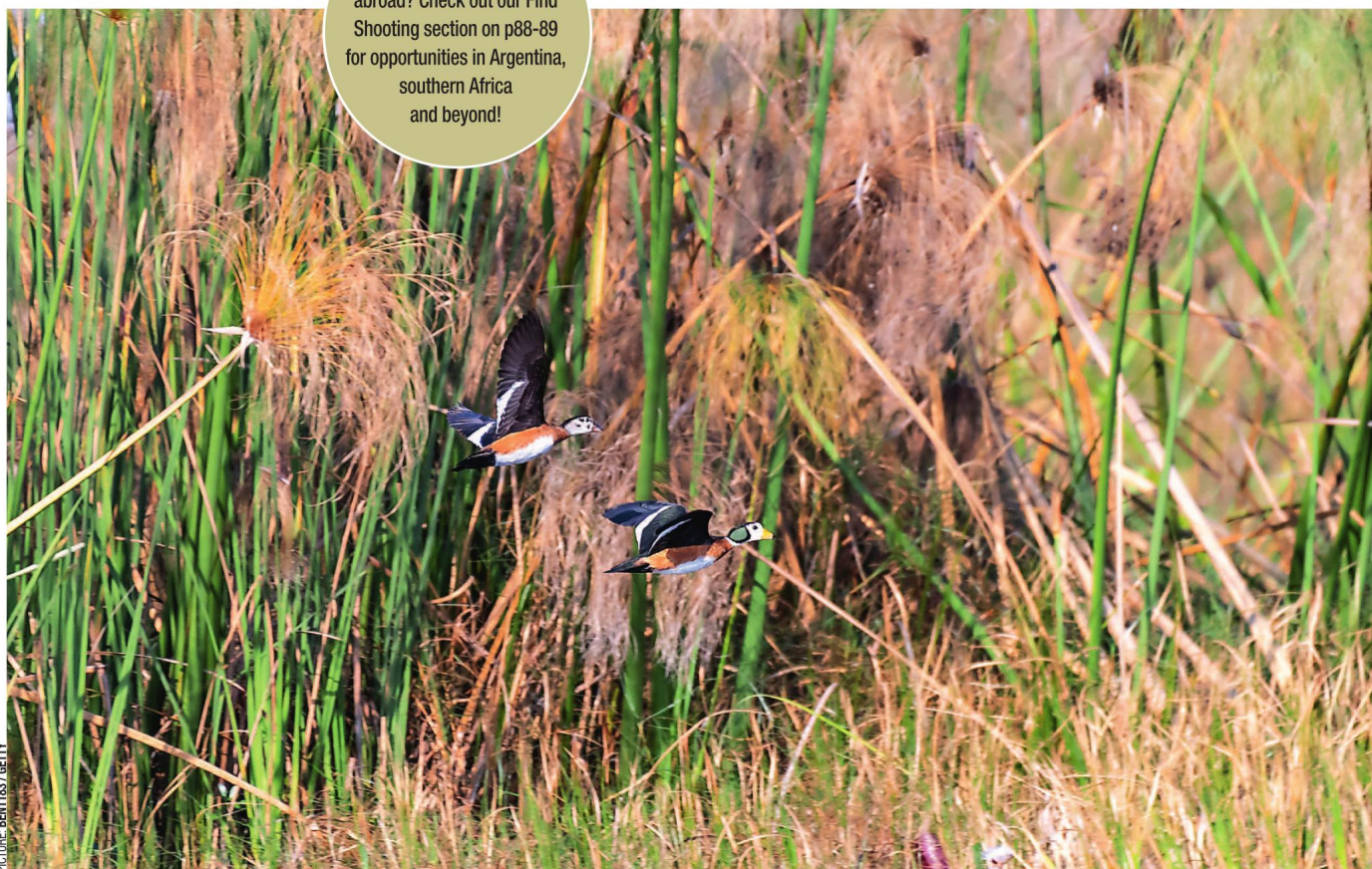
It is a completely different way of shooting for the foreshore wildfowler. Decoying over stubbles, usually sunflowers or maize, or on drilled wheat, is the norm; or at evening flight ambushing them as they return to roost on dam or lake. They are frequently joined by that giant of a goose, the spurwing, and it too can run like the proverbial greyhound. A wide variety of duck – none of which are to be found in England outside of a wildfowl collection – complete the picture, and provide the prospect of some fine and varied sport.

Raising spirits and voices

Astonishingly, it seems our last trip to South Africa was in 2018. In 2019, we returned to Canada, and after that Covid put a stop to all travel and we were left to dream of what might have been had we actually got to Santa Fe, Argentina.

As enjoyable as all those trips have been, that last one was a bit of an anti-climax for the destination we had enjoyed so much over the last few trips was no longer available to us. The alternative turned out to be no more than OK, with few geese in that area. The highlight was probably

Fancy a wildfowling trip abroad? Check out our Find Shooting section on p88-89 for opportunities in Argentina, southern Africa and beyond!



PICTURE: BEN HILL / GETTY

The group's bag of Egyptian geese – and one yellow-billed duck



PICTURE: ALAN JARRETT

a morning flight on the stubble of a sunflower field. There were still standing sunflowers, which was just right for building a low hide on the edge to give good cover from behind with a clear area to the front of the hide for decoying.

A misunderstanding between our outfitter and the farmer led to a shouting match carried out at high decibels in Afrikaans. We stood by and watched the sport, and although we couldn't understand a word of the conversation it was easy enough to get the general drift. Despite that, it had been a grand morning, and as daylight broke through, we could see we were well placed with geese flighting in from three directions. Some came from a dam no more than 500 yards away at the end of the field; others came from behind rising ground to my rear; whilst others still came from the left. Mostly they decoyed well, coming on stiff pinions with that guttural calling which warns of their approach. With these geese you keep down low until the last moment, and when you rise to fire they stand on their tails and with a harsh cussing alarm call try to go back the way they came. Sometimes it works for them, but sometimes it works for the hunter. In the end, my shooting was up to standard and a nice bag was being accumulated. That was before the angry farmer arrived on his quad bike to bring an end to proceedings.

The eventual bag of nine Egyptians was one of the best of the trip. However, the shot of the day was made whilst trudging out to pick a goose which had flown the length of the field before

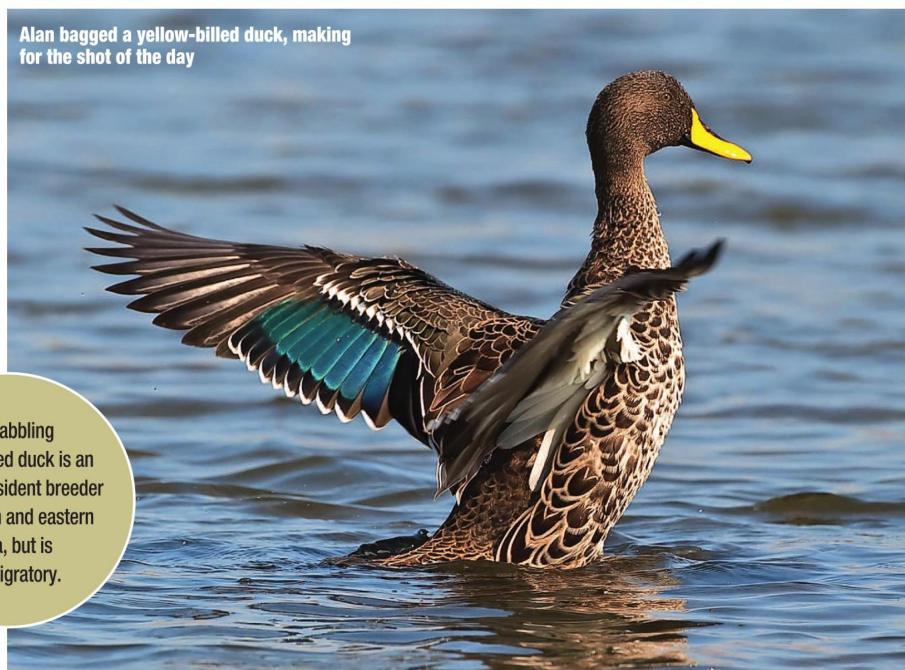
collapsing. A small flight of yellow-billed duck had passed over very high, and the foreshore wildfowler in me took over. A huge, fast lead was enough to pluck one of the birds out for to plummet to the hard ground with a satisfying thud.

The next day we gained permission to shoot on the field next door to intercept the flightline. This brought another furious response from the farmer, and another shouting match ensued accompanied by the high-pitched screeching

of the farmer's wife adding to the fun! No blows were exchanged, but it had been a close-run thing. This was the only problem we ever encountered on one of those trips, for the Afrikaans are a friendly enough people. But there is always one in every society!

So, Argentina here we come. Hopefully the farmers there will be better briefed and friendlier, even if we are going to be there on the 40th anniversary of the Argentine surrender of Stanley on the Falklands. Don't mention the war! ■

Alan bagged a yellow-billed duck, making for the shot of the day



PICTURE: RIANWUB/GETTY

The dabbling yellow-billed duck is an abundant resident breeder in southern and eastern Africa, but is non-migratory.

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Strictly come shooting...

This month has been a big one for Tony Jackson – not only has he been talking to the CIC about an unusual muntjac antler, but he has also taken to the stage for a rendition of Grease!

I am sure that many readers, apart from enjoying aspects of bird shooting, are also keen deer stalkers. As such, I would imagine that occasional strange and deformed antlers have been encountered. I recall being very disappointed to discover the first roe buck I had shot had a curious twisted antler, possibly a result of damage whilst developing, but not appreciating that this was a novelty worth retaining, I discarded it!

However, over the years I have retained several curious roe heads. Whilst in Ireland, for example, I shot a sika buck with an additional 8" antler with two points, giving the animal a total of 10 points. However, I have now encountered an extraordinary antler which has rather excited the experts at the CIC and is also first announced here in *Sporting Shooter*.

The antler has apparently been cast from a muntjac and is perfectly formed, but a mere three inches high! It is an extraordinary little antler and has been sent to Iain Watson, the Senior International Trophy Judge and expert to the UK delegation of the CIC. The little antler, he told me, is the first of its type seen by the UK Trophy Evaluation Board and it would appear to be unique.

It is, said Iain, a right antler from a mature muntjac in excess of 36 months, and the tiny antler shows a bifurcation of the main beam and does not appear to have a brow point. The

flattening or palmation, he says, is considerable and excessive, while the 'bend' to both points is unusual and may be indicative of some underlying disease.

Iain points out that a muntjac has a simple antler structure of two main beams which grow from long pedicles and, in addition, a small brow point is usually present, giving a four-point head – although the brow point may be indistinct and appear fused to the main beam.

In the UK, other than the case of the first set of antlers, the buck casts in spring around April and is clean of velvet by September. In the past decade, multi-pointed heads have begun to turn up and most have had an additional one, while others have had an extra tine from the main beam. Rarely, two extra points have been present, giving in effect a six-point head.

Generally, writes Iain, extra points are thought to be the result of some trauma caused to the growing antler when it is knocked towards the end of the growth and sometimes an additional tine

Muntjac usually present a simple structure of two main beams which grow from long pedicles, with additional small brow points.

A typical muntjac head

'Generally, extra points are thought to be the result of some trauma caused to the growing antler'





Tony's unusual muntjac antler

may develop around the site of the damage.

Now there is also a further mystery. I have not the slightest idea where the little antler appeared from! I only discovered it a few weeks ago in my house in a bowl of keys. I can only imagine that the tiny antler was left there by someone who knows me. If the original finder would be kind enough to solve the puzzle, I would be very grateful! Where, I wonder was the little antler found? Muntjac are now expanding throughout Somerset and Dorset and it would of interest to discover its origin.

What drama!

On another subject, I have been transformed into John Travolta for our local hunt, the Cotley Harriers. Recently, a few members were, heaven help us, convinced to take part in a fundraising dance to take place in the local town theatre! There would be a total of seven teams, each consisting of two partners. There would be seven weeks in which to practice, a professional dancer would act to help and advise each team, and the winner would receive £200 for their chosen charity. It seemed a harmless event and when I was asked to take part it seemed simple enough.

However, my partner and I discovered that we had to practise two days a week! To my horror, I then discovered that we were taking a part in the film *Grease*, specifically the scene when John Travolta sees the transformation of Sandie, played by Olivia Newton-John. Not only did I have to learn the steps and gesticulations, but also had to wear black trousers, a black shirt and a black wig. The only consolation was that we had the benefit of a professional dancer.

We were to be the second of the seven teams taking part, and I thought it would at least soon be over! There were well over 200 Cotley supporters packed into the local town hall, and we did at least receive a loud cheer when the music began as we entered, largely I think because my wig rather fancied the audience! I can only say that my partner was perfect at her steps and timing, but

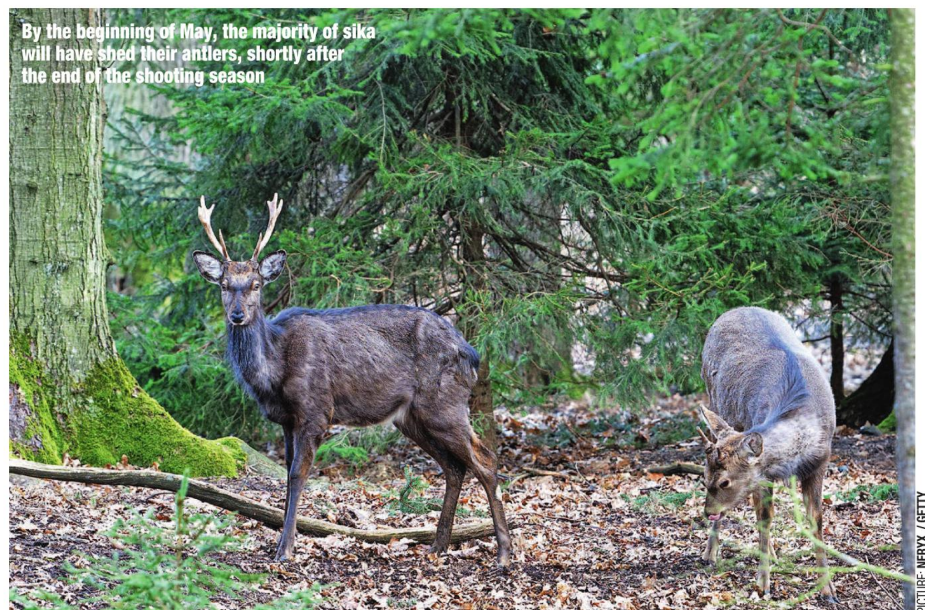


The team at the CIC's UKTEB assessing sika heads

for my part I can only recall staggering along while trying to remember my parts. I was vastly relieved when I was able to retire to the dressing room for a hearty whisky!

From this new vantage point, I was able to peek at the remaining pairs of dancers, all of whom

appeared astonishingly agile and energetic, jiving and spinning! No, I can assure you we did not win, but at least we both received an excellent token as a reminder of an evening which will be long remembered on my part, especially the black wig! ■



By the beginning of May, the majority of sika will have shed their antlers, shortly after the end of the shooting season



Fools' gold

The pigeons are feasting on Andy's flowering spring rape, and a sunny day in mid-May turns out to be the ideal time to deal with the problem

Summertime in England always makes me wonder why half the country chooses these most balmy months to take their holidays abroad. We spend the greater part of the year enduring the damp and the grey, and just as the hedgerows are coming to life with butterflies dancing among the white cow parsley, we bail out. England is the most beautiful country on earth during summertime, and for me, part of what makes it so are the endless fields of rape, stretching as far as the eye can see in a brilliant splash of yellow.

This year, Andy Crow has chosen to replace his usual pea crop with spring rape, and so adds his

'Gary and I both got some nice shots off, and weren't having to make a superhuman effort to pull them out of the sky as they flighted over'

own splash of colour to the landscape. The price for oilseed rape is high at the moment, making it a more profitable crop to grow than the peas. Sown in mid-March, the crop is in full flower by the end of May, and a tempting food source for the pigeons who have a hard time feeding themselves throughout April.

"The pigeons don't tend to get on the rape when it is first sown because there aren't any seeds left on top," explained Andy. "Sometimes they will feed on the rape as soon as it starts to come through, but they haven't done that this year. Often, they will disperse into the woods to feed on the buds during April and very early May, and everyone will be wondering where they've gone, but you can usually rely on them to return with a vengeance around mid-May, which is exactly what's happened on my ground. They've come back out and are now moving onto my spring rape."

Andy spends a lot of time watching his ground – being a farmer, he's out on it all day, every day – and he has been carefully monitoring the numbers of birds that have been gradually building up on the

rape. He has been using banger ropes to try and keep them off it, which are effective to a point; there are, however, two problems with bangers. Firstly, they only scare the birds off to another piece of ground, where they continue to make a nuisance of themselves. And secondly, the pigeons slowly get used to the loud, repetitive noise, learn it won't hurt them, and eventually ignore it completely. After a while, the numbers building up on the rape crop reached critical levels, and Andy had to act.

"After watching the birds build up to a level where they had to be shot, and then waiting for the right weather, I chose to have a day in the hide one Saturday in mid-May," Andy told me. "Pigeons tend to feed early in the morning, or late in the afternoon, and being busy in the morning with work we decided to head there around lunchtime to get set up for the afternoon action. The day was sunny with a gentle breeze, so it was nice conditions for shooting."

"We couldn't set up where we really wanted to, because the crop had been doing so well there and was so high that the birds wouldn't see the decoys, and we

TIMING TIPS

Pigeons tend to feed early in the morning and late afternoon, so be sure to time your visit and plan your decoying accordingly.

The beautiful English countryside in spring is a wonderful place to call your place of work!



PICTURE: KATE MORTON / GETTY





The day ended with 80 pigeons in the bag

wouldn't be able to pick the shot ones as effectively. Instead, we chose to shoot over a bit of heavy ground where the rape hadn't come through quite so well. It's a bit sparser and a bit more open, so they could see the decoys better and we could pick them afterwards."

Andy, cousin Gary and grandson Regan – who was delighted that Andy had chosen a day when he wasn't in school – carried the gear down the field to avoid damaging the crop with their vehicles. Travelling light, they took just one rotary between them and a couple of bags of

Sillocks decoys, which are light and stackable, making them ideal for carrying on foot. They built two hides into the hedgerow, one on either side of the area of poor rape. The Sillocks were scattered in front of the hides, and the rotary placed in the centre of the pattern to draw birds in from both sides.

"We were all set up and ready to shoot for about one o'clock," he said. "It started out very quiet, which I did expect as we were there before their usual feeding time. However, by about half past two to three o'clock, we started

to see some movement. There weren't loads, but we did have some drop into the decoys really nicely in twos and threes, meaning Gary and I both got some nice shots off, and weren't having to make a superhuman effort to pull them out of the sky as they flighted over. This carried on steadily for a few hours, but we weren't seeing the big numbers.

"Then, at around five o'clock, it really picked up. I think a lot of them had been sitting in the trees up until that point, and now they were coming in for that late afternoon feed I explained about earlier. We had some awesome shooting over the next two hours, with me and Gary working together to take out any that came in pairs or threes. We call to each other on radios and decide who will take which bird so the gunshot doesn't scare any followers away before the other one has had a chance to get a shot off.

"It was cracking day, with good weather, and the birds were decoying beautifully. We ended the day with just over 80 pigeons, which was well worth an afternoon in the hide. We're really looking forward to getting out for a few more days on the rape this year before harvest."

The pigeons are likely to stay on the rape until something better comes along, feasting on the flowers until the wheat starts maturing. At that point, they'll put their minds to munching the standing crop, any that's fallen in the tram lines, and any that's been flattened by heavy rains... so, in other words, no wheat is safe! Mind you, with Andy's deadly skill, you could say the same for the pigeons! ■



Rosa enjoyed a day in the warm, sunny hide

S&C TV

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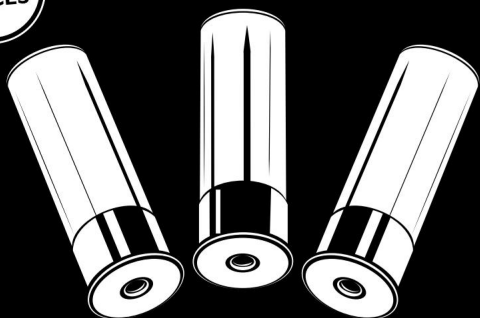
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Nothing to hide

Simon O'Leary explains what kit you need to set up in the field and bag a few pigeons and how best to undertake the task

Late springtime, my favourite time of year. New shoots, lush green leaves and the promise of hope and harvest. This time of year always feeds my desire to get back out in the field, thinking of early morning pursuits and nights under the stars. All of Mother Earth's roots start to flourish, with fish soon to be on the rise and lush green foliage in abundance. This is the time of year when most will look to get out and protect crops, but for the resolute, it is of course, an all-year-round task.

Winter and spring drills spread the load, but pigeons will attack crops all year. It is a full-time task, controlling this hungry bird. Their only purposes are to eat and breed, clearing tons and tons of seed and grain in the process. The management of this relentless task comes with its own challenges and requirements, certainly if you plan to try and make a dent. Of course, the pigeon is here forever, but little and often, as with most things in life, is a sure way to best manage the damage this bird can cause.

Now, apart from doing your bit, so to speak,

the additional upside is the food source that pigeons provide. Rich, fat-free meat, good for the body, and good for the soul. A meat that once was largely overlooked by the masses, except as a seasonal menu addition for the more select eateries. Pigeon breast is now thankfully enjoyed by many as its uses are diverse, providing the main ingredient in a varied selection of cultural palate requirements. Check out some cook books or some online recipes and there will be a wealth of choices of how to prepare and cook this delicious bird.

Apart from the obvious differences, I've always likened pigeon shooting to fishing, especially course fishing. This is largely due to the approach but more so due to the amount of kit required, albeit completely unlike the nimble, lightweight fly fisher. Positioning and set-up are very similar, allowing you, the shooter, to hopefully sit back and enjoy a good day's sport. So rather than blathering on about set-up

and fieldcraft, I'll run through the equipment required to get you off the ground and enjoying this skilful pastime.

Comfort is key and if you're a lump like me, you need to ensure freedom of movement at all times for smooth and safe gun mount. The need to have eyes in the back of your head is also important, so a swivel chair is superior. Now, I'm sure you will have seen all sorts of examples of field seating, from buckets to deckchairs, even an old office chair hidden in that special spot, ready for action. There is not so much a 'wrong' choice, as we are all different shapes and sizes, but consider your comfort and moveability. I do support the Idleback brand, or should I say it supports me! I am not sponsored by them; they don't even know they are being mentioned, as quite frankly the chair sells itself. But this product ticks all

boxes, with the added bonus of being adjustable, which is imperative on uneven ground. Unless you shoot from a seated position, ensure a

NEW TO PIGEON SHOOTING?

Make the most of your time in the field by getting some one-to-one tuition at the clay ground before heading out on to live game.

Pigeon shooting is a great way of introducing youngsters to the sport, being fast-paced with plenty of action



PICTURES: BEN WRIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

‘When choosing your camo,
think surrounding colours and
dress appropriately’



It's a good idea to have a range of different coloured nets for the changing seasons



smooth stance, coming up, out of the chair, for best mounting of the gun.

When looking at hide materials, a set of four to five poles with a couple of nets will be more than adequate. You will probably collect nets as you go along, having a few in reserve for differing coloured backgrounds. A choice for the middle of summer will be very different to autumn/winter.

If the budget is tight, then go for a neutral-coloured net and dress it up with natural materials collected from the vicinity. Do not, however, hack branches of established tress and hedgerow. Cut from suckers and overgrowth to blend your hide in to its surroundings. Cheaper poles can be an issue when dealing with hard ground. I have a robust twelve foot, so maybe I'm a little heavy handed (or footed!), but the normal design of foot plate on the lower part of the pole is insufficient when pushing/treading into harder ground. For a few quid more, why not check out Flightline decoys. They produce an incredibly strong product, almost unbreakable, allowing ease of set-up with the more stubborn substrate! Whatever your choice, try to obtain solid poles over hollow.

Decoys can be purchased in packs. Again, the starter set-ups will have 10 decoys as part of the kit. If budget allows, purchase 20 or more as a full pattern will have more weight. The simple half-shell or full-bodied will suffice; nice, simple, and effective. Again, there are many choices available and, just like fishing, you can catch a roach with one float, a hook, on a single rod and reel, with one type of bait. But more often than not, the angler will have an array of floats, hooks, rods, and all manner of other paraphernalia, of course, all hugely important and relevant to the job in hand. Start simple and learn the craft.

Once in the hide, you need to consider how you blend in. Drab clothing, army surplus, even dull tweed if that takes your fancy. Think surrounding colours and dress appropriately. A face veil can be good on bright days, along with thin gloves. Alternatively, make your hide higher and sit still, only popping up at the last minute to take the shot. Military surplus is great because it comes in a vast range of camo patterns and, bluntly... it's cheap! Rip a jacket on something sharp, repair or inexpensively replace. A hat is another must-have, breaking up your outline and giving some respite

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.

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on sunnier days. Overall, you are blending into your surroundings, in safety and comfort, with a clear visual of all that surrounds you, enabling complete visual clarity with your quarry and more importantly, anybody who may have wondered off-piste, and they will.

In next month's issue, I will take you through a typical day in the field, decoying for pigeons with the hope of providing a smidge of valuable knowledge, with of course a splash of humour, all captured by the wonderful @benwrightphoto (Benita) and her camera! ■

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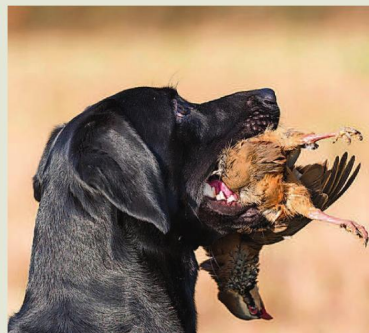


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Welcome to the Marketplace. In this section, you will find everything you need to know about what's on the market right now – from the kit you need for the coming season, to behind-the-scenes looks at the shooting world's much-loved brands, gun shops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



PRODUCTS 48



GUN TEST 50

MARKETPLACE

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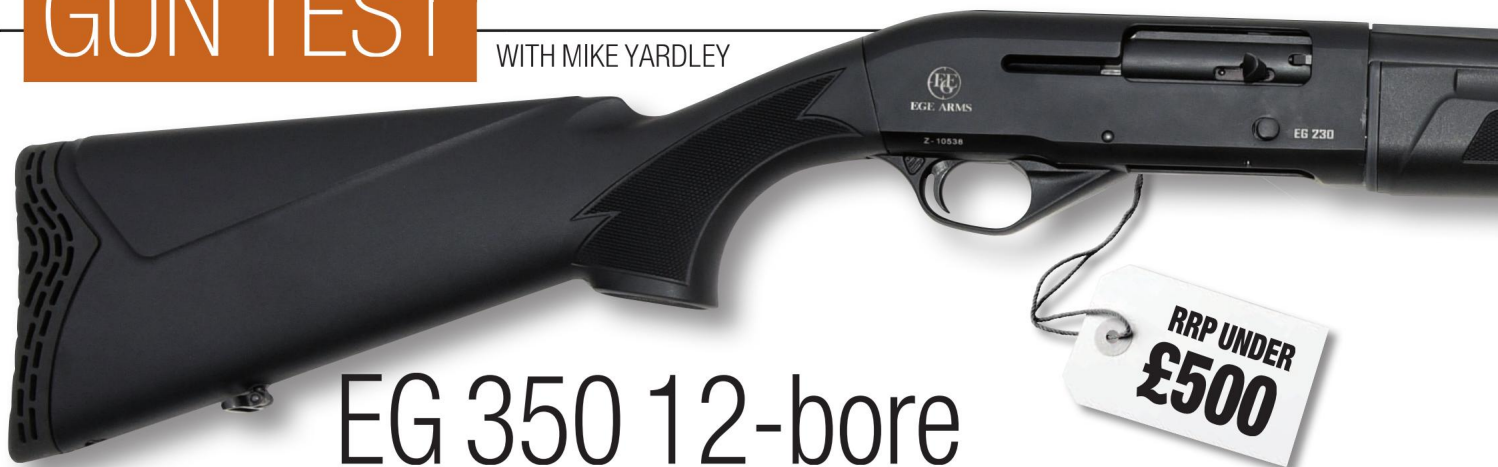
Utoka cooler boxes

These incredible camo-styled cooler boxes from Utoka could be just the thing for keeping you well fed and watered this summer. Packed with special features, they come in four sizes to suit every occasion from the handy Utoka 20 which is designed for everyday use and comes with a carry handle for easy transportation (we're thinking trips to the fishing lake), to the monster Utoka Tow 110 which has wheels, space to sit two, and can even be used as a table (ideal for transporting plenty of food to a pigeon hide with your mates – and handy for bringing the bumper bag home with you too!).

All the models can keep food and drink cold for up to five days and feature an integrated bottle opener, lockable lid, easy drain system and heavy-duty rubber closures.

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EG 350 12-bore

Mike Yardley gets to grips with a functional yet impressive steel shot-friendly contender from EGE Arms, which has been modelled along the lines of the legendary Benelli M Series

This month's test looks at a Turkish EGE semi-auto imported by ASI of Snape better known for bringing in AyA and Rizzini guns. The model under our spotlight is an EG 350. It is especially interesting because it is an inertia-operated gun like a Benelli from which it evidently draws much inspiration. The EG 350 has a stable-mate – the EG230 – which is a gas operated gun. Before considering the merits of the two systems, let's have a brief run down of the test 350.

It's a 'plain Jane' model with black plastic stock and no bells and whistles. It weighs in at 6.9lb with 28" multi-choked barrels chambered for 3" loads. It is steel-shot-friendly and supplied with three chokes

tubes. The sighting rib is 8mm wide, ventilated, and equipped with a red rod translucent bead sight. All standard stuff, but well presented.

The satin-finished receiver – which has a pleasantly streamlined profile much like a Beretta 300 series, or, indeed, an M Series Benelli – appears too anodised and is only decorated with the company name and logo. I've no problems with any of this. I prefer workhorse guns not to be blinged up.

The stock of the 350 is well done too, if a little short at 14¼" for length of pull. The basic shape is fine. I liked the grip as well, which is well-sized, quite tightly radiused, and provides good purchase without a palm swell. The comb is a

little low – as is often the case with Turkish guns – measuring up at 1⅞" to the front relative to rib axis and almost 2½" to the rear.

The fore-end is of the shorter style made possible by the inertia mechanism, and, again, well-shaped. It drops slightly relative to the magazine tube rearwards and offers better purchase because of it (Benelli do much the same thing with the M2).

Overall, you have to say that these Turkish guns have improved hugely in recent years. The only criticism I would make, other than the comb height as previously noted, is that the trigger pull might be tweaked. The presentation of the gun is excellent at the price

point, with neat engineering and good finish.

The real test, though, must be the test of time. The great thing about Berettas and Benellis, Brownings and Winchesters, is that they are virtually indestructible with moderate care, sometimes even with outright abuse. Nevertheless, the Turkish guns seem to have closed the gap with European and US manufacture now which is quite an achievement.

Gas versus recoil

Gas- and inertia-operated shotguns are essentially improved pump actions where 'the works' are cycled either by gas bled from the barrels – a system perfected for battle rifles in WWII and later applied to sporting



The EG350 makes for a reliable, low-maintenance workhorse – and at a good price too

Thanks
to Lyalvale
Express for the
cartridges used
in this test

UP CLOSE



This semi-automatic shotgun incorporates a rotating bolt-head, encased in a plain yet functional action



Although Mike found the trigger a little heavy, he quickly adjusted to this and got good results on the Skeet layout



The shorter style of the fore-end is made possible by the inertia mechanism and is well shaped



The barrel is chambered for 3" cartridges and is steel shot friendly; the gun is supplied with three different choke tubes

SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS

Cutting to the chase, I was pleasantly surprised by the 350. It shot well and functioned reliably on 28g Lyalvale test ammo. I had no malfunctions and hit all the easier birds on the Skeet layout routinely used for testing. I missed a couple of longer crossers because the trigger was heavy. Once I'd adapted to this by using the first joint crease rather than the pad of my finger, there were no issues.

The low comb didn't effect me much. What was notable was the lack of unpleasant recoil. Inertia guns can seem to kick more, but not this one. These Turkish repeaters have come a long way. This was significantly better than some previously tested. The gun had no real vices – the trigger pull might be easily addressed. The general design was sound, and the bottom line is very reasonable. Inertia guns are easy to clean, too. In summary, the 350 offers a lot of bang for the buck. It will appeal to keepers and anyone else who needs a reliable, low-maintenance workhorse without shelling out a fortune.

WE LIKE



- The price
- The inertia mechanism
- The sound design and engineering

WE DISLIKE



- The heavy trigger pull
- The comb is a bit low
- The stock could be longer

TECH SPECS

- Make: EGE Arms
- Model: EG350
- Bore: 12
- Chamber: 3" (76mm)
- Barrel: 28" (other options available)
- Chokes: multi
- Rib: 8mm ventilated
- Weight: 6.9lb approx

shotguns – or recoil energy.

Browning's famous A5 introduced circa 1900 was the first successful inertia-operated design. It employed a 'long recoil' system where the whole barrel assembly moved rearwards about 3" on firing.

Post WWII, Browning's son Val also developed a short recoil gun, similar in concept but with only 0.5" of movement. It was not a great commercial success. Light recoiling, gas operated guns became popular in this era with Remington's 1100 and Beretta's brilliant 300s leading the way. Benelli came out with their improved inertia design circa 1970. Early Benellis did not have a rotating bolt-head, but this arrived with the M1 in the mid-1980s and has been much imitated.

When Beretta acquired Benelli, they adopted the rotating bolt-head in some of their Magnum gas guns. Earlier Benelli inertia-action guns, the SL80 and 121, did not employ a rotating bolt, as noted. I like both the Benelli inertia systems (and the Beretta gas guns, for that matter). This type of mechanism is also seen in the discontinued Beretta ES100, not to mention the outstanding Breda Hermes 2000, which is one of my favourite repeaters.

Technical

The EGE test gun utilises a Benelli-like rotating bolt-head, as noted, attached to the main body of the bolt by means of a short, stiff, spring. The key concept in this type of inertia operation is that recoil energy compresses this spring on firing, but it does not unlock and begin the cycling process of the action until it is at full compression. In the meantime, the bolt-head engages into the barrel in the manner of a rifle bolt, but is only locked at the moment the gun is fired.

To complete cycling, there is a hinged 'rat's tail' to the rear of the bolt that compresses a tubed spring in the butt (some autos use larger coil springs around the mag tube). This provides the forward impulsion to load a fresh cartridge after the gun is fired and the first shell

ejected. The trigger assembly of the 350 is attached to a polymer chassis that slots into the aluminium receiver and is retained by a single large through-pin. Many modern repeaters have dispensed with metal for this component. ■

BANG ON THE BUNNY

If you are in a part of the country that has a too-healthy population of rabbits, Mark Ripley runs through some of the methods and gear available to us for tackling them

Over recent years, the rabbit population in many areas of the country has taken somewhat of a battering, not just from the annual cycle of bouts of MIXY (myxomatosis) but also from VHD (Viral Haemorrhagic Disease). This disease has a very high mortality rate in rabbits with few outward signs other than a possible bloody discharge from the nose and mouth, and has all but wiped them out in some areas where once they were plentiful.

That said, in other areas rabbit numbers remain strong and I have several farms that still have plenty of them, particularly on the hill farms as well as a golf course that I also look after.

Rabbiting in the summer is a good time to shoot a few three-quarter grown rabbits for the BBQ as these make the best eating, so you can make the most of the fruits of your pest control duties! Rabbit also makes a great addition to any stew or game pie, so there's no end of uses for the meat.

Sitting out on warm summer evenings or early

mornings can account for a good few rabbits and make for good sport, yet the most productive time for rabbiting is, of course, after dark.

You don't need any expensive kit to put a few rabbits in the bag; a lamp and rifle work just fine. If you wish, you can buy cheap night vision add-ons or dedicated scopes if you are planning on going out regularly, as rabbits soon wise up to the fact that a lamp spells danger. Lamps these days are a lot better than they used to be, with many shooters using high power LED torches that give a bright, concentrated coloured beam with no need for heavy, bulky battery packs.

When it comes to calibre choice, the modern pre-charged air rifles are hard to beat at close range for discreet pest control around buildings or roads. For longer-range rabbiting, you also have the .17 HMR, which is a devastatingly good tool although it does have quite a crack to it.

For me, I'm a fan of the humble .22 LR using subsonic ammunition. This calibre is almost as quiet as an air

rifle yet hits with a lot more clout, meaning a good head or chest shot will result in a clean kill without too much meat damage.

With a bit of practice, the little .22 LR is quite capable of taking out rabbits to 100 yards or more with subsonics and if noise isn't an issue, a fair bit further using high-velocity ammunition.

Although the popular .17 HMR will allow you to shoot out to 150 yards with little or no need to hold over, I feel the shorter-range .22 LR accounts for just as many rabbits due to its comparatively quiet approach. Ammunition is also a lot cheaper for the .22 LR, which is certainly a consideration if you're shooting large numbers.

One advantage the .17 HMR has over the .22 LR is the fact that the small, fast and light rounds fragment exceptionally well on impact, meaning that the chance of a ricochet is greatly reduced.

The exact opposite is true of the .22 LR so you always need a good, soft backstop.

Both of these popular rimfires

An early summer morning watching over a warren waiting for sunbathing bunnies can be well worth the early start!



Mark's permissions on the South Downs hold plenty of rabbits and he is often called upon by local farmers

‘With a bit of practice, the little .22 LR is quite capable of taking out rabbits to 100 yards or more with subsonics’

represent an excellent choice for rabbit control as they are more forgiving on shot placement than an air rifle, but retain adequate power and accuracy to use for closer-range fox control where bullet placement is more crucial.

A bigger bang

The other option for rabbits is, of course, the shotgun. The only problem here is the use of a shotgun may well raise issues with noise if you're out at night when the majority of the rabbit population will be above ground, as well as offering a more limited range than you would have with a rifle. Another disadvantage is the amount of shot that will be embedded in the meat, and this could prevent the sale of the animals should you choose to go down that route.

The ability to shoot rabbits on the run means the shotgun can be employed when flushing them with a dog from cover, or bolting them with ferrets, which can be carried out during the day.

Other than shooting, there are a few other options for rabbit control that could also be considered such as snaring or trapping, although this will require the traps to be checked on a regular basis. Often, the best way to control large numbers is with a combination of methods with shooting taking priority where appropriate.

Some older methods can also be effective when employed by a skilled hand, such as long netting. This is a form of trapping that involves running long lengths of netting on stakes just under a metre high. The net is made in various lengths up to 100 yards, and is walked out and pegged in a line when rabbits are out feeding further out in the fields. The net is positioned between the feeding rabbits and their burrows as quietly as possible, and the rabbits are then pushed back towards the net with a well-trained dog or by simply walking towards them. A long length of weighted rope can be dragged between two people through the grass which stops any rabbits from sitting tight.

The bolting rabbits become entangled in the net and can be quickly dispatched by hand, making a perfectly clean rabbit for the food chain.

Let there be light

I find by far the most productive form of rabbit control is shooting at night from a vehicle, which



Mark's usual rabbiting rig consists of a left-handed CZ 452 American using Winchester X subsonic ammo

The use of night vision is becoming more popular – particularly as the cost of units has fallen in recent years

SIGHT MARK



allows you to cover much more ground whilst providing a steady wing mirror to rest on. This is a discreet way of culling them and a lot less labour intensive than walking around with a roe sack of heavy rabbits on your back!

However, if you are shooting them on a golf course you will need to be on foot, unless you know the green keepers well enough to be allowed to borrow a golf buggy for the evening, which would be the ultimate luxury!

Many rabbit controllers are now moving over to thermal or night vision devices to maximise their results, and these tools certainly give you a big advantage after rabbits wise up to the lamp. Even

better, the cost of such units is steadily falling as more manufacturers enter the market and compete for sales. Units such as the Sightmark Wraith HD night vision scope or the Pard 007 NV add-on are a couple of brilliant low-budget options offering good performance.

For those with a bigger budget, thermal is the way to go as those units emit no light or anything else that might give away your position. By simply keeping quiet and using basic fieldcraft, it's easy to close in on rabbits and cull several from a group before they know what's happening. Thermal is also great for finding shot rabbits, which can save some time! ■



Reaching (for) the Summit

The impressive skills required to be a top biathlon athlete inspires Mick to convert his usual rabbiting rig into one comparable to those used in this discipline – and enjoys a fun day out

On a recent trip for more ammunition, to South Yorkshire Shooting Supplies (aka Rimfiremagic) in Barnsley, my attention was grabbed by a gorgeous-looking rifle in the workshop. It sat in one of my favourite stocks, the Magpul Hunter X-22, had a carbon fibre barrel, a straight-pull action and bore the name Volquartsen Summit. Inspired by the ever-so-popular Ruger 10/22 bolt action .22 LR, it looked magnificent. It is primarily a target rifle, but Roger started to think there would be a place for the Summit in the small game hunting market, and I totally agree.

I have hankered after a straight-pull after avidly watching the winter biathlon for years, and it was one of the reasons that had me in agreement about its hunting ability. The male biathletes ski for 20km cross country over five laps shooting four times in both prone and standing positions, while the ladies ski for 15km with the same

number of laps and amount of shooting. The targets are 45mm for the prone shot and 115mm for the standing and both are taken at 50 yards. Sounds pretty straight forward, doesn't it? Well, once you factor in the effort covering up to 4km at speed, then having to control your breathing and heartbeat to hit the target, it becomes anything but straightforward. I admire these athletes immensely for their fitness and exceptional kills, and although I consider myself a good shot and relatively fit, I would never make the grade for this discipline. But looking at what these biathletes can achieve with a nice lightweight straight-pull .22 LR, I thought it would be a great stalking rifle and I had just the place to put it to the test.

Step by step

First off, I had to build up the 'stalker'. It comes with an integral 20 MOA Picatinny rail for the long shots, but I didn't envisage anything over 100m

and my zero would be set at 55m. I had a spare Hawke Sidewinder lying around complete with some mounts, and my Magpul M-Lok bipod from the Air Arms S510 Tactical was swapped to the Summit. I have to say it fitted nice and snug and maintained the lightweight theme. With no sling studs fitted, I managed to fashion a fit for the sling, and with a few different brands of ammo and a handful of paper targets, I was off to get it zeroed.

I soon found that all was not well. In the comfort of the office, the gun felt right, with eye relief spot on and a nice cheek weld giving me a perfectly positioned view down the scope. But in the field and on the truck bonnet, it was a different story. The mounts were too high and the cheekpiece was too low. Only by fractions, but enough to spoil the zeroing. The groups were good enough for headshots on rabbits and squirrels, but not as tight as I knew they could be.

However, with some slight head position adjustment I had my first skinny that afternoon. Luckily, I had a spare cheekpiece for the Hunter stock from my 6.5 Creedmore and it was only a couple of minutes work to swap it out. A set of lower mounts replaced the higher ones – and after another zero check with a variety of loads, I was

'With a crack, the bunny fell forward – I felt like a gold medallist, but would have to make do with the single grey squirrel and the four rabbits'



Getting in close – the final part of the stalk

now set for the stalking expedition I had planned for the day.

In the field

A large woodland I carry out squirrel control on also has a good number of rabbits, but they are right at the far end around two miles away from the main squirrel activity. It was up hill and down dale, and with a full rucksack of squirrel feed I was glad of the lightweight Summit. The rabbits had been savaging the new saplings that had been planted to replace the ones lost to the recent storms, so the head woodsman had asked me to take care of a few, but I obviously had to check out the grey squirrel activity first. One of my trail cams had been showing a grey turning up early morning, and this was to be my first port of call.

I have just received the InfiRay FH35R Finder thermal spotter, and just when I thought things couldn't get any better than the FH25R this beauty has taken pole position for me. It is a larger unit than the 25 but the image clarity is outstanding, and to top it off it has a superb rangefinder built in. So with the unit in hand as I crested yet another steep bank, I immediately pinpointed a heat source on the feeder. The rangefinder confirmed a distance of 55m, and after taking a second to catch my breath the invasive grey was dispatched with a single humane headshot.

I was keen to get to the rabbits, and with no more skinnies showing up I started the trek over to the far side of the wood. Using the dry-stone walling as cover and scanning the target area, my eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. The scan showed six rabbits sat out in the sun, but I knew even with the almost silent sub sonic rounds that I'd be lucky to bag half of them. The first was taken from my position on the wall and the familiar crack of the round hitting the skull told me all was good. I had to reposition for the next couple of shots to keep a safe backdrop and a clear shot. Both dropped instantly. One fell into the burrow but was easily retrieved.

I was impressed with the Summit so far, but I was about to be further impressed. The decision to be satisfied with the three was reassessed when I saw a single rabbit sitting out by one of the saplings. It was further away than my 55m zero, the rangefinder giving me a distance of 94m. Giving it the right amount of holdover and knowing the shot was safe, I corrected my breathing and I felt like a biathlete (well, almost) as the Summit sent the Eley Hollow down range. With a crack, the bunny fell forward, kicked a little, then stopped. I felt like a gold medallist, but would have to make do with the single grey squirrel and the four rabbits.

The Summit had me hooked, and a further outing on the same land saw me take another three squirrels and seven more rabbits. It'll be a sad day when I go to the cabinet and reach for the Summit, only to find that it's gone back. ■



The Summit is definitely top of the class



Finding critters with the Finder



What a great sight – six sat out in the sun



Lead ban proposals go too far

Conor O'Gorman reviews proposals to ban lead ammunition for all outdoor recreational shooting in England, Wales and Scotland

In the last issue of *Sporting Shooter* I speculated on the content of the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) lead ammunition restriction proposals before they were published. On 6 May, the proposals were published alongside a six-month public consultation and it turns out the HSE has adopted a zero-risk approach targeting every type of live quarry and outdoor recreational shooting activity in England, Wales and Scotland.

The main proposals are as follows:

- A ban on the sale of lead shot
- A ban on the use of all types of lead ammunition for live quarry shooting including lead shot, shotgun slugs, lead bullets and airgun pellets
- A ban on the use of lead shot for outdoor target shooting with possible exemptions for licensed athletes at licensed ranges with appropriate environmental protection measures
- A ban on the use of lead bullets for outdoor target shooting with possible exemptions for

shooting at licensed ranges with appropriate environmental protection measures

The proposed transition periods for the above restrictions to take effect would vary from 18 months to five years. Buy-back schemes for shotgun cartridges and rifle ammunition have been mooted, but no details given.

What happens next?

The proposals are subject to a six-month consultation and BASC and the other shooting organisations are reviewing over 500 pages of findings and firming up agreed positions. In summary, many of the proposals are not evidence-based and go too far. Therefore, they will be challenged. This is especially the case for restrictions on the use of lead ammunition for target shooting. We will challenge proposed restrictions where there are no viable alternatives to lead, where socio-economic factors mean a transition isn't appropriate, and where lead can

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

continue to be used in settings that present negligible or no risk.

We have significant concerns about the short timeframes outlined in the dossier for transition away from the use of lead ammunition, which could be as short as 18 months. This is particularly alarming in light of current global supply chain issues. We will fight for timelines that are realistic and guided by the sector to ensure that the range of lead-free products and their supply can meet market demands.

Working closely with other organisations, we will ensure that the needs of both live quarry and target shooting interests are considered, and we will continue to oppose one-size-fits-all restrictions. Over the coming months there will be scientific scrutiny of the HSE findings and proposals through an independent panel of experts.

BASC has been approved as an accredited stakeholder by HSE and we will ensure that the proposals are robustly scrutinised and that any future restrictions are based on evidence and proportionate to identified risks. We will not accept disproportionate restrictions that unfairly disadvantage shooting activities.

A draft socio-economic opinion on the impact of the HSE proposals will follow later this year or early 2023, which will also be open to public consultation.

The review will culminate in recommendations being submitted no later than April 2023 to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for consideration. A legislative proposal will be likely thereafter subject to parliamentary scrutiny and consultation with devolved administrations.

If we have concerns that the resulting legislative proposals are disproportionate and will damage shooting, we will lobby for them to be revised. ■



HAVE YOUR SAY!

We have until

6 November to complete the online survey on the HSE website, so have a look at the BASC website for advice more information on the proposals and then please take your time to register your opinion.

COMPETITION

WORTH
£58!

WIN TICKETS TO THE GAME FAIR

We have five pairs of adult day tickets to give away to this year's fabulous Game Fair in Warwickshire

The Game Fair returns to Ragley Hall in Warwickshire from 29 to 31 July. Over the course of the weekend, more than 120,000 visitors are expected to attend what promises to be a fantastic celebration of fieldsports and country life, run again this year by Stable Events. The packed itinerary includes a wealth of exciting displays, thrilling competitions, educational demonstrations and plenty of opportunities to get stuck in.

Visitors can have a go at shooting, participate in competitions to win some superb prizes, and watch some fantastic demonstrations. BASC will be on hand providing one-to-one lessons and a 'Shooting Experience' for newcomers and there will be opportunities to test lead-free sustainable shotgun cartridges from brands such as Eley, BioAmmo and Joker. The CPSA will also be offering visitors have-a-go clay shooting with an instructor.

In addition to all the activities and browsing almost 1,000 stalls featuring some of the biggest names in shooting, you can enjoy a VIP experience at the Investec Enclosure with a bespoke game-based menu created by TV chef James Martin, visit the Falconry Village to catch some bird of prey demos, scope out some art and antiques in the LAPADA Pavillion, make your own ice cream with the Salcombe Dairy, or simply have a refreshing pint at Guy Ritchie's Bar!



PICTURE: GAME FAIR

ENTRY FEES

ADULT:

£29 in advance for one day or
£58 for three days

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£69 in advance for one day or
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£10 in advance for one day or
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FOR TICKETS VISIT:

thegamefairtickets.org/p/gamefair

HOW TO ENTER

We have five pairs of adult day tickets to give away. To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question:

Who is running this year's Game Fair?

Please send your answers to:
competitions@sportingshooter.co.uk

Closing date: 1 July 2022

Rearing fears

The price of wheat notwithstanding, there's a whole world of potential pitfalls and hazards between a hatchling and a high pheasant, as Adam Smith knows only too well

"Many a pheasant'll die just to spite yer, and there ain't nothing known to man as'll stop 'em, neither!" My old mentor Stan Button surely knew what he was talking about, because for all the care and attention you may provide, pheasants can be ungrateful critters.

If you rear your own birds from laying stock, you might watch the eggs hatch, perhaps even mothering some by gently easing a chick from the confines of its shell. As they grow and mature you'll provide them with warmth, food and protection from vermin and the elements as you guide them through the first eight or so weeks of their lives from brooder house to nursery run to rearing pen.

And assuming your husbandry is as good as it should be and you escape the major ravages of any diseases they can fall victim to, plus the vagaries of 'unseasonable' weather, you'll still expect to lose a tithe simply because that's nature's way. Quite apart from chilling, drowning and suffocation, such aberrations as cross-bill, spraley foot, wryneck and other oddities all tend to end in tears. Even one white wing feather can prove terminal for some, as his or her mates continuously peck at it out of curiosity or spite. And yet the real spite has played no part, so far.

It's often when they make the move to the release pens that the fun really starts. Not from major losses, the sort you might find when the

pen is deadly quiet as you arrive at first light and your sinking feeling is confirmed as you come across the first decapitated poult, followed by another, and another, since even such relatively rare disasters can be explained away. It might make you want to blast the last fox on earth into very small pieces, but this too is nature's way when any successful predator is presented with a huge and generously available food source. As a keeper, it's your job to reduce such accidental opportunities to a minimum.

But no, it's not the major hits. The sort of losses I'm talking about are minor, literally a bird here and a bird there, but their bloody-minded idiocy represents a slap in the face for all that care and attention you provided, all the nurturing from bumble-bee-sized day-olds to pigeon-sized poults. And these losses don't include the odd bird with the flesh nibbled and sucked off a thigh by a passing hedgehog, a body dragged out through a pop-hole by a rat, or head pulled off and breast feathers left encircling the body courtesy of a sparrowhawk strike. Annoying, yes, but still only nature's way.

The losses that really wind you up are all Percy and Prunella Poult's own work. Like the one you might find wedged and dead between the pen

mesh wire and an upright support post. How did he find his way into such a near non-existent space? Why hadn't he the wit to push all the way through, or pull back out to safety? What a stupid way to die, pinned in a personal, custom-built dead end.

And then there's the young hen, hanging upside down with one foot trapped between two crossed hazel boughs, wings hanging limp and useless. How did she manage that?

What freak combination of mistiming, wind gust and bad luck resulted in the end of her life?

Actually, these are quite inventive suicides since pheasant poults can also find the means to drown themselves in an inch of water, choke on a bit of string they must have thought was a worm, and even hammer a fellow fledgling cock bird's

brain out in a burst of macho pride, but each is perhaps an ultimate frustration of the job. You spend all the hours you're given to make sure the vast majority lead contented, cosseted and protected lives, and a few pay you back by finding the most obscure and unlikely ways to end it all. And it's not, like I said, the major, gut-wrenching losses from fox attack or disease that make you want to stamp and fume. They just make you see red. It's the odd, rare, and utterly unnecessary

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

Despite our best efforts, such as the provision of this fox-proof reentry funnel on a pen, pheasants still find a way to kill themselves at an alarming rate



death that makes you say: 'You stuuupid little b****! What d'you want to do that for?'

Yet despite it all, keepers are still politicians – cabinet level, some of them – when it comes to being 'economical with the truth' especially where numbers of birds reared and released are concerned. With this in mind, you might encounter the occasional expert who comes up with twaddle like: "You won't believe this, but I put x-hundred (or x-thousand) birds to wood a week and more ago and I've not lost one yet!"

He's absolutely right, I wouldn't believe it. What I would believe is that he's not walked the pen perimeter enough times, nor wandered around in the pen itself, not just the occasional saunter along the feed rides, but deep in the thicker cover patches. I'd put a fair bet on him being surprised by what he might find!

All that said, there's one particular gem from the Stan Button bible that hasn't stood the test of time. He told me when he retired, close to 60 years ago now, that shooting was on its last legs and I should make the most of this new job because I'd be redundant in a year or so.

"You hev a bit o' fun, booi, then goo back to bein' an artist," he says. (I was a designer when offered his job.) "There's a bliddy soight more money in 'un, thass a fact."

True, he was born in the horse-drawn era, before the days of tractors and chainsaws, and thought these inventions of the devil spelled the death knell of the keepers' way of life anyway, but I still coped for near enough the next 20 years and my eldest continues to follow in my footsteps.

And yet this season does seem to hold more than its fair share of fraught, not least the cost of feeding your birds. Yes, the sport continues to be popular and continues to cope with many of today's pressures, but a pretty high number of shoots, of all sorts of sizes, have folded over the past few years for a variety of reasons. And right now there's one factor that might tip the balance and persuade some to call it a day – the price of wheat.

Counting the cost

Last year, wheat prices peaked at around £150 a ton. This year, thanks to the potential loss of production from Ukraine, also known by many as Europe's bread basket, it looks as though the harvest might halve in volume and double in price. And that's looking on the bright side, according to some. Factor in that not very long ago, wheat was selling at around £80 per ton and that's the sort of reality which has begun to tip the scales against some shoots and may well increase the pressure on others.

And as if all this weren't enough, bird flu in France has dramatically cut the egg production and sale on which many major UK shoots depend for their day-olds and poults.

What's the answer? In world terms, to be honest, I don't have a clue, but in one little way we

If you can get your hands on tail corn, once the wheat has been cleaned, this will save you money on food – and give poults the opportunity to scratch for their supper



PICTURE: HENRY ARDEN / GETTY

should make more use of tail corn. Tail corn, for those that might not know, is the 'rubbish', the small, shrivelled grains, weed seeds and other oddments that fall through the sieves of the cleaners in the corn stores. Generally, it builds up in heaps under the winnowers where it simply attracts rats on many farms and gets bagged or fills a trailer or two on wiser ones. Standard practice is to dump the odd trailer load of this underrated food in heaps around the shoot for the birds to dip at when the fancy takes them – but to help keep costs down, try mixing it with full-grain wheat instead.

Of course, it will bulk out the feed which makes it go further. But better than that, it will add variety to the birds' diet. Don't dismiss the idea because you think it will simply reduce the feed quality. Pheasants are galliformes, members of the chicken family, and their instinctive feeding style is to scratch for their food. In fact, chicks start almost as soon as they hatch. So giving your birds

something to scratch for adds more than variety, it adds interest, and interested birds have less time to get bored and spiteful. Each and every little dried-up wheat, barley or oat seed, dock, fat hen, or any of the scores of weed seeds that mix with the tail corn, will provide a bit of excitement – and you've only got to watch birds scratching, kicking fat grains to one side in their search for what they see as more rewarding titbits to prove the point.

There are other benefits to a leaner diet. Fat corn, and most especially whole grain maize, puts weight on birds like burgers on bums and overweight birds don't make much of a job of high flying. Cut down the carbs, make your birds work for their welfare, and the results when they get airborne can come as a surprise. It's actually simple things like this that can transform a shoot, so don't think that feeding top-quality grub will always do your birds a favour; sometimes peasant fodder adds pheasant power. ■

A low-carb diet for the birds helps make them better flyers



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The beautiful game

Tim Weston looks at the mistakes made in other fields and asks whether more effective self-regulation in shooting sports could stop us going down the same path

Those of you who follow football will have seen that the government have committed to installing an independent regulator who will be looking over the Premier League. Those of you who don't follow football, please bear with me because there is some relevance to shooting sports. The government is planning legislation to implement the findings of Tracey Crouch's Fan-led Review of Football Governance. This calls for major changes in the way English football is run, with the government imposing an independent regulator (IREF) and mandating major changes to the way clubs are managed. It seems that for too long, football has been allowed to make up its own rules and effectively govern itself. Is that a bad thing? Well, no, I don't think so. Self-regulation is a really important part of showing and doing the right thing, something that football obviously has fallen foul of according to the Crouch report.

Shooting sports are at a similar crossroads with regards to regulation and self-regulation, though we are a bit different because there are a number of laws and regulations that affect what we do and how we do it. That goes from gamekeepers and shoot managers on large, small and even DIY and Farm Shoots to those of us who go out pigeon shooting, for example.

Most of us will be in possession of a shotgun or firearms certificate (or both) which are heavily regulated. Those involved in running shoots of all sizes have many regulations that they must know and adhere to, the Countryside and Wildlife Act, the Game Act, the Spring Traps Order, the Animal Humane Trapping Standards, Food Hygiene Regulations, to name but a few. There are also many codes that a gamekeeper / shoot manager should stick to, first and foremost the Code of Good Shooting Practice, as well as many others such as the Defra code of Snaring, the Game Rearing code, and others. Those of you who go out protecting farmer's crops need to know about and understand the general licence system and realise that there are obligations upon you as responsible people. But given the fact that we already have all these codes and laws, do we need to start to self-regulate?

Let's take another look at football. They had over 100 years of self-regulation and did some very good things. But as the game became more of a business, they seem to have lost their way a little. Is it starting to sound familiar? Shooting sports have a massive net gain for wildlife, wild

places, habitat and biodiversity, as well as human wellbeing and economic benefits to rural places and lives. However, it is the very few people who do not always adhere to the law or follow guidelines that bring us all into disrepute.

That said, it is the same for any sector. There are bad police officers, bad gamekeepers, and bad shop keepers, so it is up to us to show that we are doing things the right way.

Call in the professionals

If you are unsure of what you should be doing or what the shoot you are shooting on should be doing, the first place to look is the Code of Good Shooting Practice. This has been put together by the relevant bodies and consolidates all the legalities and codes into one place. However, if you want to be able to prove to others that your shoot or the shoot you are shooting on is doing what the code says and going a bit further, there are now two options available. The first is the British Game Assurance (BGA). The BGA are now going into their fifth season and are an organisation that use an independent auditor to look at your shoot from the top down and make sure that it is doing everything it should be. It looks at all of your processes and practices, and gives the buyer of the shooting (and of the game meat) an assurance that you have met the highest standards possible throughout.

Your second option is a new kid on the block called Trusted Game. Trusted Game is more of a health and welfare audit conducted by your specialist game bird vet. The idea of Trusted

Game is to show that the rearing, releasing, and care of your game birds is up to the strictest standards. I suppose it is similar to the RSPCA farming standards used in restaurants and shops. The BGA would be comparable to the Red Tractor scheme. Both are recognisable by consumers, and I hope that in the not-too-distant future both the BGA and Trusted Game will be just as familiar to those of us who buy shooting and game meat.

Why is it important that shoots start to look at schemes like Trusted Games or the BGA? Well, if we look back at football and the Premier League, they have had years of self-governance and not got it right so they will have regulation forced upon them. Both come at a cost. Self-regulation will cost money. Trusted Game is just £100 or £200 per year for a shoot and the BGA somewhat more, but the alternative could be much more costly in terms of both financial outlay and real legislative restrictions on what we can do. Examples could include being allowed to release game birds under license only. Trapping and conservation work could well go the same way, which will only have negative effects for wildlife in the long run.

I feel it is best that we all start to look inwards and at joining schemes that fit your shoot, or starting with something like Trusted Game where you will be working with your vet. If you don't have one you should, and it should be a specialist game bird vet no matter how large or small your shoot is. Let's all make a difference and start doing the right thing by getting on the road to self-regulation before it's too late. ■

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

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



PICTURE: REBECCA GREEN

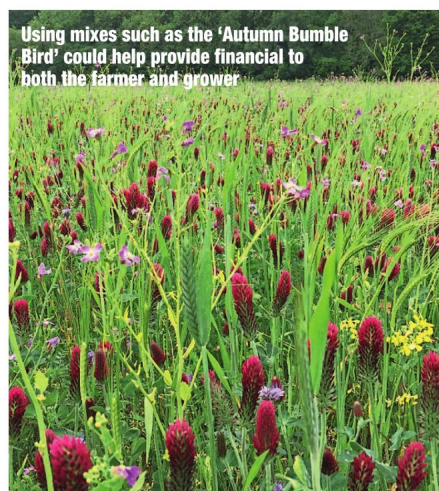


Carbon mitigation

We speak to managing director of Bright Seeds, Chris Bright, about how the lessons learnt through recent trials could help the shooting industry mitigate our carbon emissions

Why do you want to become carbon neutral before the government's target?

It's not really the case that we are trying to deliberately beat the government's target, or make a show of becoming carbon neutral before anybody else. Put simply, we want to become carbon neutral as soon as we possibly can – as should any business that has the potential to do so – and we believe we are well on course to achieve this before 2050, perhaps even before 2030.



Using mixes such as the 'Autumn Bumble Bird' could help provide financial to both the farmer and grower

For us, the purchasing of the farm, and building the new offices, presented an opportunity to become self-sufficient and sustainable. We previously rented our office space, and this was the first time we've been able to put money into something we've owned. With that in mind, and considering the environmental pressures and rising energy bills that we all face, we wanted to make the farm as green as we could.

Obviously, becoming carbon neutral has business benefits too, with many larger companies wanting to hit their own carbon targets by working with smaller, carbon-neutral businesses – often known as preferred suppliers. Furthermore, working towards a neutral target helps the long-term security of Bright Seeds.

What are you doing to mitigate your carbon?

The key for us, certainly as a starting point, was to make the building as energy efficient as possible – this includes the offices, warehouses, meeting rooms and the kitchen. To do this, we have 72 solar panels on the roof that power a ground source heat pump, running the underground heating throughout the building – which is by far the most efficient form of heating. It also heats our hot water.

Additionally, our electricity is

almost neutral, with the majority of it being offset by the solar panels. And, we are currently looking into using only electric forklifts in the warehouse.

We are also carrying out some exciting R&D trials on our cover crop demo site, having partnered with a high-end, independent research facility and a very well-known estate.

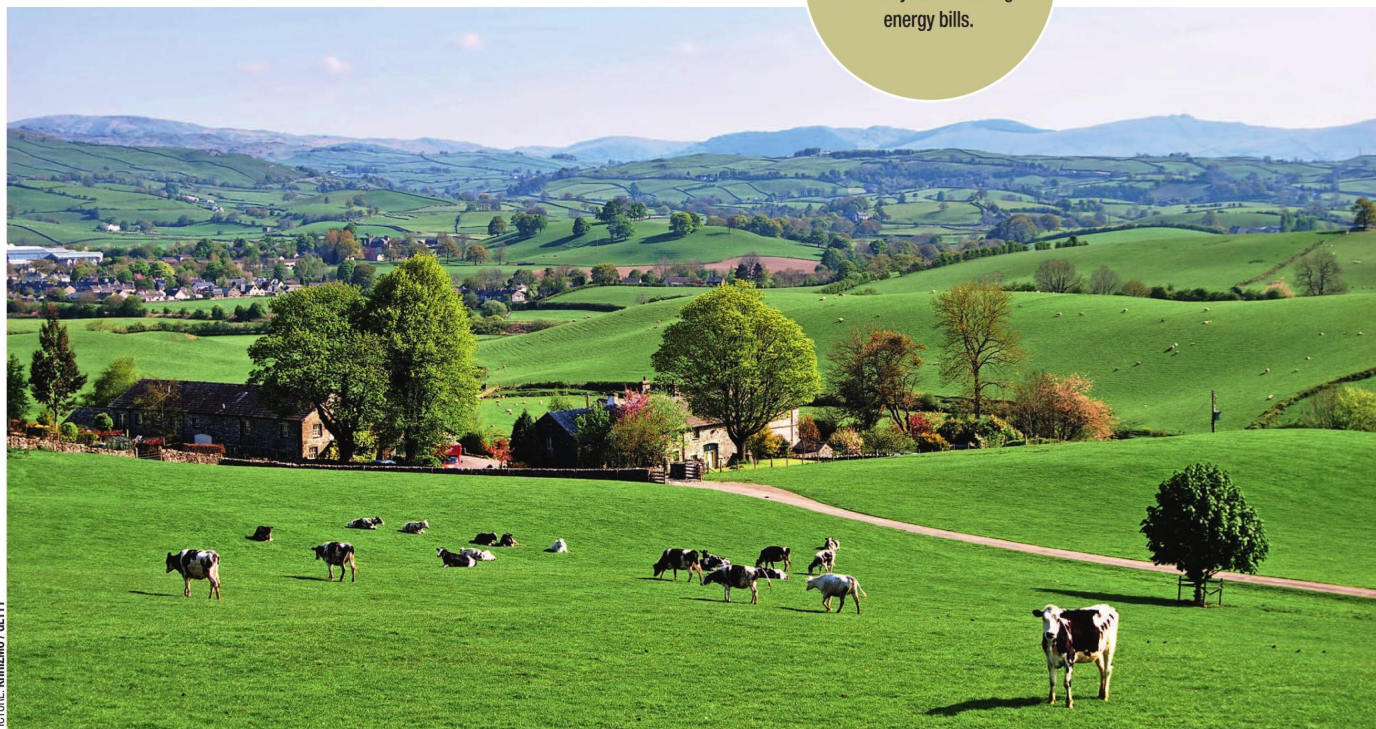
Can you tell us more about these ongoing trials?

Well, I can go into the basics of what we are looking at and what we are trying to achieve, though the results so far, and what they've shown us, are currently off limits [Chris laughs].

Fundamentally, we are looking at various agricultural and environmental crops and evaluating the carbon uptake of each individual plant. We are doing this for a range of stewardship mixtures – including GS4, AB9 and many more. We're also looking at the ability of wildflowers to take in atmospheric carbon.

With all of our stewardship mixtures, we already know that they provide a financial benefit to the farmer or grower, with the government providing funding for growing them, and they provide a wider environmental benefit – such as feeding wild birds or assisting biodiversity. But, if there is an

Making your farms as self-sufficient as possible could help reduce your escalating energy bills.



opportunity to show that a plant is absorbing more carbon than others, we can then start thinking about carbon credits and these credits becoming a very useful farm commodity.

The current situation is seeing farmers growing crops specifically for carbon uptake, with trees being a popular choice. However, if we can find crops that benefit the wildlife and the farmer financially through the creation of carbon credits, we feel this could be a real win-win.

Without going into too much detail, the research centre we are working with is looking to quantify carbon readings using satellites and then assessing these readings on the ground, helping them to calibrate the readings so they are accurate.

And can cover crops play a key role in this carbon reduction?

Yes, definitely. The majority of crops that we are using in this trial are cover crops to one degree or another. The most important things are, as mentioned, looking for multiple benefits in these mixtures and designing a tried and tested system that accurately judges carbon uptake and carbon levels.

A lot of the current carbon uptake work, though being somewhat useful, relies on guess work. If this remains, there is no sure way to precisely measure and therefore monetise carbon.

Are you involved in the Sustainable Farming Incentive?

Yes, as this is basically ELMS, and we do considerable work in growing seed crops and supplying these products to other farms and estates. So, you could say we are involved in a supply sense.

It's not a big farm we have here, and the way to advance is to grow high value products that we can utilise. Not every farmer can do it, but as seed merchants we specialise in it.

How can other farms or estates work to mitigate their carbon?

Well, I'm sure people reading this are already in the know on many aspects of this. But the one main point I would make is to ensure that every bit of land is utilised to its full potential. Ground left fallow or bare isn't good for anything – the more

‘Ground left fallow or bare isn't good for anything – the more that is growing, the greater the level of carbon uptake’



Research shows that the more ground that is used for growing, the greater the carbon uptake

PICTURE: CHANTAL2021 / GETTY

that is growing, the greater the level of carbon uptake.

Also, carrying out the minimal cultivation that works for each farm is helpful. This depends on ground, soil type and more, but less cultivation means less carbon released back into the atmosphere.

How can we get others interested in carbon? Can we bridge the gap between farms and consumers?

First and foremost, talking to people on the ground and educating them will help. And I don't just mean educating people on the wider issue – the general public are more aware than ever of their environmental footprint. I googled ‘How to reduce your carbon footprint?’ a few days ago, and food is the first thing that came up.

What I'm talking about is educating consumers on how food is produced, so they can realise

first-hand what needs to be done to cut carbon. In my opinion, the farm, and not just ours, needs to be used as a vehicle to bridge the disconnect between the carbon story and consumer purchasing behaviour.

It's also important that we help people understand, rather than making people feel bad or guilty. We work with several colleges and local schools and always take time to explain to this younger generation about carbon mitigation, stewardship crops and the biodiversity work that goes on – and speaking to this generation helps ensure a sustainable future.

Some of the latest research from The Carbon Trust found that two thirds of consumers think carbon labelling is a good idea. I think forward-thinking ideas like this could really help consumers comprehend what goes on – instead of just thinking that something like a vegan diet, for example, is the answer. ■



Installing solar panels on the roof of a barn is a significant investment, but could help safeguard your spending in the future

PICTURE: MANFREDY / GETTY

COMPETITION

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WIN TICKETS TO THE GWCT SCOTTISH GAME FAIR

To celebrate the return of this popular event, we are giving readers the chance to win one of five pairs of adult day tickets

The GWCT Scottish Game Fair returns to Scone Palace, Scotland, from 1 to 3 July 2022 and features an incredible range of displays, demonstrations, have-a-go attractions and exhibitions. With so much to see and do during the event, which is once again sponsored by NFU Mutual, visitors might need to make a list to ensure they don't miss any of the highlights. As well as the usual array of delights for foodies, Stirling-born celebrity chef and restaurateur Nick Nairn makes his debut at the fair, plus the

ever-popular Gunmaker's Row, where you can expect an enormous range of new and used shotguns, accessories and clothing from all the leading brands, is set to make another appearance. There will also be clay shooting experiences organised by Pentangle Shooting Services and Buchan Field Sports, with their teams on hand to offer expert advice throughout the weekend.

Another huge draw will be The World of Gundogs. As well as displays and experts

on hand to answer questions, there will be a range of competitions aiming to replicate the conditions in the field and test Gundogs on their hunting, marking and retrieving abilities, as well as their steadiness to shot. Categories already confirmed for this year include spaniel and retriever tests, junior handler tests and the ever-popular scurry as well as the Four Nations International, which sees spaniel and retriever teams from Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales compete head-to-head.



PICTURE: GEORGE GUNN

TICKETS

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or £56 for three

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£46

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HOW TO ENTER

We have five pairs of adult day tickets to give away. To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question:

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The essential guide to owning and working a gundog

with
Howard Kirby
Gundog Trainer

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EVERY MONTH IN SPORTING SHOOTER

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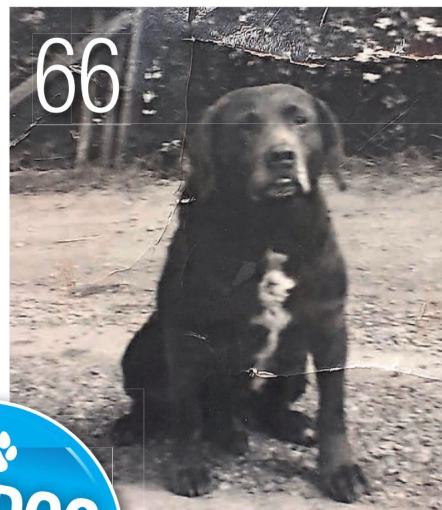
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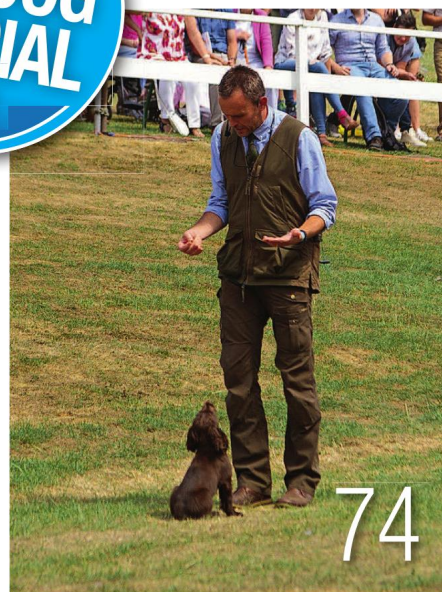
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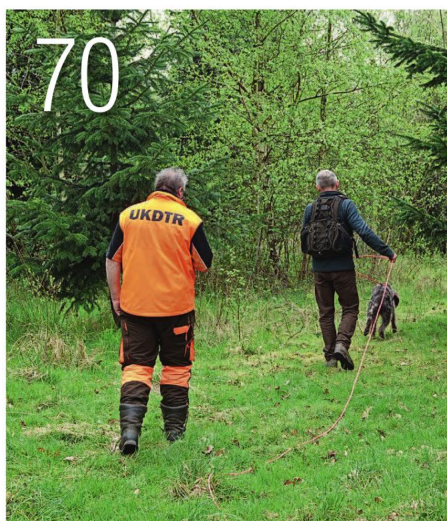


**HOWARD'S TIP
OF THE MONTH:**
Keep 'em keen!

Ensure you keep training sessions short and sweet... Leave them wanting more!



PICTURE: HOWARD KIRBY



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A dog called Fatty

Memories of our dogs are one of the many rewards of a lifetime spent shooting. This month our columnist recalls one particularly faithful Labrador who was certainly one of a kind

It was during the late 1940s that my dad went to a large farm for the annual 'trosh'. At that time he was foreman for a threshing contractor, and by sheer coincidence the gentleman farmer mentioned that his Labrador bitch had just whelped a litter of pups. The dam and sire had a fine pedigree lineage, but my dad was not unduly interested because in those days working men made do with working mongrels. Even so, the farmer insisted Dad take a look, and amongst the even litter was a large, plump, curiously grey-coloured dog-pup. It seemed that the 'blue' dog (he was similar in colour to a Weimeraner) with a white chest flash was a genetic throwback and the farmer wanted him gone before any of his upper-crust clique came to view the litter, lest they think the line was not pure. So, when dad left the farm at the end of the week he parted with a couple of quid and brought home the chubby pup, who we immediately christened Fatty.

We always had several dogs (most for shooting

or rabbiting, others as ratters which travelled to work with Dad) and most of the pack slept outside in kennels. The pup spent the day indoors and slept at night in the wooden lean-to porch/workshop/wood-store/boot-room adjoining the kitchen, and this never changed. By the time he was 12-months old we rarely bothered locking up at night for, despite his kind nature, Fatty was a sharp guard dog. Thinking back, the others out in the yard were pretty good burglar alarms, too!

The pup grew quickly, and as a result of spending so much time around people he had a calm, laid-back manner. His basic obedience in the yard was excellent, my dad only having to speak the dog's name and touch the peak of his cap to have him jog to heel. However, it was when dad introduced him to the shooting field that we realised he was something special.

I won't pretend my dad was a Field Trial standard trainer, but he always had useful working dogs. If they didn't make the grade for work, they

were soon rehomed as pets. Times were hard and dad's mantra of "might as well feed a good 'un as a bad 'un" always took precedence.

On the scent

Dad's true sporting love was rough shooting, and Fatty soon proved himself useful at flushing and was swift on the retrieve. Spaniel men used to claim that Labs walked around brambles, but this was only partially true of Fatty. As my dad often recalled, if Fatty got on a scent the whole hedge would shake as he barged through the thickest of cover – but ONLY if his nose told him game was present. He would have been eliminated from a Field Trial after the first shot because he habitually committed the cardinal sin of "running in" after any fallen bird, but in those days few rough shooters considered this a bad habit.

Although I now have immense admiration for the patience and skill of Field Trial trainers and handlers, I often think a hasty dog like Fatty actually put more runners in the bag than those well-behaved Trial dogs, at least when rough shooting in rough cover.

My dad farmed some parish land, and a few times each season his friend Harry organised shoot days with several other local farmers and smallholders with adjoining land. It was on one of these shoots that my dad shot at a cock pheasant that flew unsighted beyond a tall hedge. Despite dad's whistles, Fatty charged off in pursuit and he eventually returned two drives later carrying the dead cock pheasant that must have towered when out of sight. After that, Fatty developed a knack for following pricked birds.

One morning during the Christmas school holiday of 1951 there was a knock at the door and a local farmer told Mum that they were having a shoot and had six birds lost; could they borrow Fatty? I was about 12, so I took the dog along and found the Guns standing on the edge of a beet field watching some spaniels and a couple of mongrels wandering aimlessly about in the roots.

"Get them beggars out!" said a farming neighbour. "Fred's owd blue-dawg is here; he'll soon get 'em picked."

He wasn't wrong, either. Within 10 minutes Fatty had picked all the missing birds and the Guns gave me a couple of bob for my trouble.

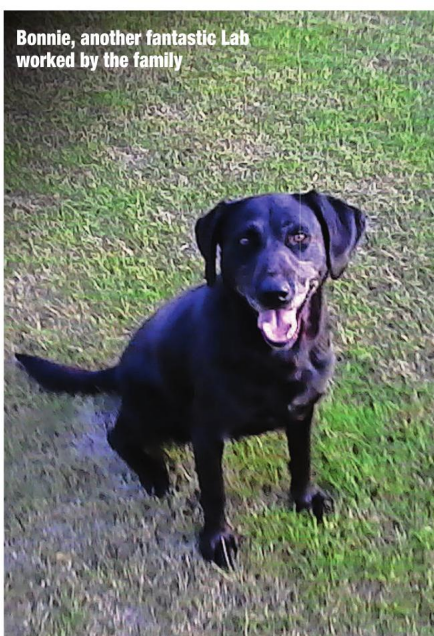
After a few incidents like that, Fatty's reputation went before him and Dad would often loan him out to friends who had weekday shoot invites. As



Fatty was a much-loved, and much-admired, member of the family

WRITE IN TO US!

We would love to hear about the dogs that you have loved and worked over the years. Turn to page 30 for details of how to get in touch.



Bonnie, another fantastic Lab worked by the family

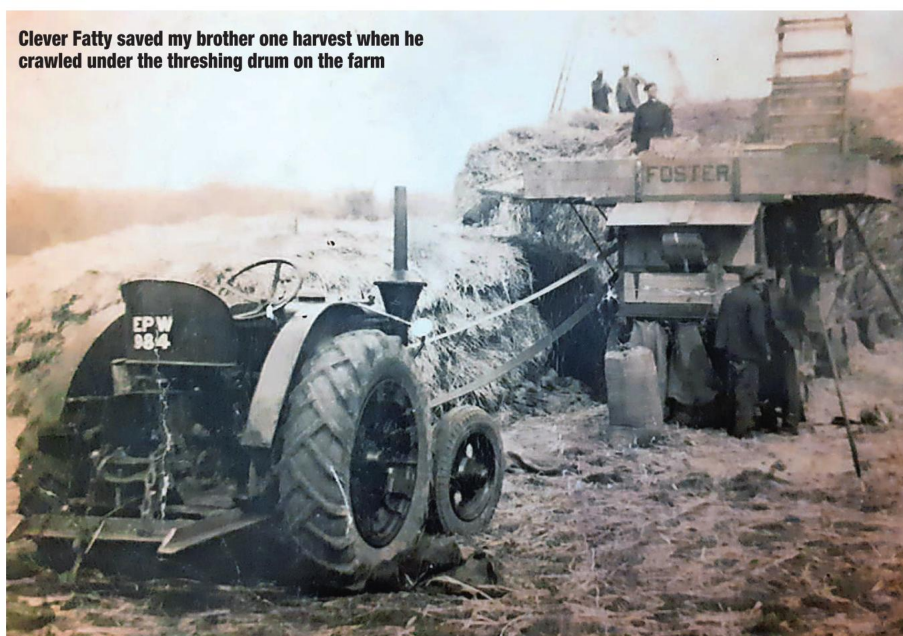
he got older, the dog would work for anyone he knew although he never lost his tendency to go self-employed on blind retrieves.

Fatty always had a soft mouth, and dad used this to his advantage. Whenever he was thinning out his flock of 50-plus free-range hens he'd simply point at an elderly hen and say "get it". Even if Fatty picked the wrong bird it didn't matter as the Light Sussex hen would hardly have a ruffled feather and he'd soon retrieve the right bird when corrected.

A funny part of Fatty's character was his faithfulness. One evening, Dad was repairing a broken Powell bailer on his parish land. When it was too dark to work, he came home. He thought Fatty was with him, but although we had a hunt around the yard there was no sign of him. As I had already had one dog stolen, I feared the worst but two days later we went down the common only to find Fatty sitting on the old tweed jacket that dad had thrown down while working. We often wondered how much longer Fatty would have gone without food before walking the mile back home.

When a threshing drum had a major breakdown, dad called in a specialist to fix it. The engineer had to crawl beneath the drum to complete the repair, and my tractor-mad four-year-old brother David decided to help. Fatty was David's unofficial minder, and when the toddler crawled under the drum the dog followed and began growling at the engineer who pleaded with my brother to go inside – he dare not move in case Fatty pinned him! Finally, my mum came outside to look for David and the relieved engineer was able to depart to his next job.

Weeks later, my mother was feeding the hens when she found an itinerant scrap metal dealer begging for help while cornered by Fatty in one of dad's sheds. It turned out he was "looking for



Clever Fatty saved my brother one harvest when he crawled under the threshing drum on the farm

scrap" when Fatty had bounded across and jumped up to hit the man squarely on the chest and knock him to the ground. For some reason, the dealer failed to return to give Dad a price...

On spring evenings, my dad would often take a drive around the farm tracks and regularly shoot a dozen rabbits from the car on the way. By this time, Fatty knew the routine and, when told, he would launch himself out of the back door window after each successful shot to retrieve the rabbit. It wasn't unknown for him to return the same way in his youth!

One publican had a sideline in game dealing and the sale of the coney helped keep father in beer money. Dad was enjoying a pint after such a jaunt when the village constable strode in and took Dad to task for leaving his .22 Martini-Henry rifle on the back seat of his unlocked car. Dad told the officer that if he could get the rifle then he would face the full consequences of the law and the cop confidently went outside to do so. A few moments later, he returned, looking ashen-faced. Fatty had been asleep in the back of the ageing Wolseley 6/80, ironically one of the famous ex-police specials', and had set himself at the constable as soon as he reached through the open window. Dad bought the constable a pint and got away with a stern warning. He did become rather more security conscious after that!

Royal ancestry

There is no doubt about it, Fatty certainly earned his keep during his busy life. He retrieved everything legal at the time, from jack snipe all the way up to greylag geese. I shared a lot of my early shooting adventures with that dog, who I have since come to believe was what is now known as a 'silver' Labrador. The white chest flash and Bolo pads on his feet have led me to romantically wonder if he was a descendant of Lady Home's

dual champion Banchory Bolo, a famous dog in the 1920s. Several of my subsequent black Labs have also had Bolo pads, allegedly still a sign of being a descendant of Banchory Bolo.

Despite Fatty's prodigious stamina, old age inevitably took its toll and after a long day in the field the poor old dog would hobble home. My mother always showed him great sympathy and allowed him to lie before the fire to warm his bones. Mind you, come the next morning I only had to reach into the corner behind the kitchen door, the habitual storage place for our guns in those days, and Fatty would join me, his tail wagging and his aches and pains temporarily forgotten.

My dad was a hard man who owned dozens of dogs during his life, but Fatty was the only one I saw him to be visibly upset about at his passing. Perhaps I remember Fatty through rose-tinted glasses but, if my musings have given you reason to reflect on one of your own past canine friends, then my trip down memory lane has been worthwhile. ■



Fatty had 'Bolo marks' on his pads – so may be a descendant of Banchory Bolo!



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Choppy waters

We all love splashing about in water with our dogs, especially during warm weather, but Vicky Payne urges us to be aware of dangers lurking beneath the surface

Summer will hopefully provide us with some warm, dry weather ideal for introducing young dogs to water, as well as providing the fun of a water test for more competitive types. But before you throw that dummy in, it is wise to consider some of the dangers that water poses to our Gundogs.

Submerged objects

Try to use water that you are familiar with for training. Unfortunately, some ponds have been used as dumping grounds and may hide sharp metal or lengths of rope under the surface. Even broken branches can cause injuries, especially if your dog likes to leap into the water. Avoid swimming your dog through water lilies as the stems can catch their legs and cause a panic.

Cold water

Although our dogs have fur which traps air a little like a wetsuit, they can still suffer from cold shock if they dive straight into deep cold water. Cold shock causes a sharp intake of breath followed by hyperventilation and shutting down of the peripheral circulation. This stops the muscles working, which means the dog can't swim.

Allow dogs to paddle before they do any swimming to help them acclimatise to the water

temperature. Hypothermia becomes a problem if dogs have been wet and cold for a long time, so warm and dry dogs quickly after swimming if the weather turns cold (and on shoot days).

Water and salt intoxication

Swallowing water is less of a problem for trained Gundogs making controlled retrieves than it is for pet dogs catching balls. However, there is still a risk. If dogs ingest large volumes of fresh water, it dilutes the sodium levels in the bloodstream. This causes water to flood into the cells which can cause tissue and organ damage. If the brain cells swell, brain damage and death can occur. If a dog swallows excess salt water this will initially cause vomiting and diarrhoea. If the dog doesn't have access to fresh water high levels of sodium in the blood can cause organ damage, muscle tremors, seizures, and death.

Keep water play or training sessions short with lots of breaks and ensure you take fresh water to the beach.

Blue-green algae

This is actually a bacteria called cyanobacteria found in freshwater lakes, ponds, reservoirs and slow-moving rivers. If the weather is warm and still,

large blooms may form, creating a green, blue-green, or brown foamy scum on the water. Some types of cyanobacteria are highly toxic to dogs. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhoea, weakness, confusion, drooling, and collapse. These signs can occur within minutes to hours. Without supportive treatment, dogs can die of blue-green algae poisoning. Look out for signs warning of blue-green algae and seek urgent veterinary attention if your dog is unwell after water training.

Drowning

Dogs are pretty good swimmers, but may get into trouble if they enter a fast-flowing river, rough sea, fall through ice, or become caught on submerged objects. Never leap into water to save a dog as human fatalities are common in these situations. Instead, encourage your dog to a safe exit point or use rescue equipment to keep yourself safe.

If your dog is conscious, get them warm and dry on the way to the vet. They may need treatment if they have inhaled water. If your dog is unconscious, start CPR to try and revive them. If you don't know how to do this, book yourself onto a Canine First Aid Course! ■

Always keep a canine first aid kit in your car and in your game bag on shoot days. You never know when you might need to use it.



Get your dog acclimatised to the cold water with a bit of paddling before sending him in for a retrieve

PICTURE: RYAN KAY

Deer tracking with dogs

Over the years, Alex Hatton has discovered that Large Munsterlanders don't just make great bird dogs – they can also be trained to track lost deer, an activity both invaluable and fun

I have been a fan of HPRs, and specifically Large Munsterlanders, since I first shot woodcock over one 16 years ago. The way the dog methodically worked the ground was pure joy to watch and the calmness they brought to the shot, by suddenly stopping on point, was wonderful. Not long after this experience, I took on my first Munster, Ilka, a pup from this bitch who was everything I wanted in a bird dog. As I got more into deer stalking, I discovered more of what she could offer – a real multi-tool of a breed!

Back then, there were few books to reference if you wanted to train your dog to follow wounded and lost deer. Trips boar shooting in Germany showed how far ahead the Europeans were. Ilka would certainly follow a hot scent and if required had the ability to hold a deer until I got to her, but her formal training was limited by my lack of knowledge. She was a great companion when looking for deer and her ability to point them before I had even spotted them was a very useful early warning system.

Not everyone has the time to keep dogs but

with deer numbers steadily increasing and the popularity of stalking on the up, a need for tracking dogs was identified by a number of people in the UK and so groups started to form, as per the European tracking model. One group I admired was the UK Deer Track and Recovery (UK DTR). What I liked was their inclusive mantra and no dog snobbery; their ultimate goal is to provide a free service to stalkers who do not have access to a tracking dog to recover their deer.

Starting out

Ilka left a big hole when she died last year, working for me right to the end in all aspects of my shooting. We had already put the wheels in motion to take on a new Munsterlander pup, and this time I decided to lean upon the UK DTR to get her to a standard that she could track for me. At first my aim was to simply train her for my own use, so I set my goals low – to have a dog that could follow a moderately old trail, when required.

Georgie was born in April 2021 and the advice we had was to get her nose on to deer scent as

early as we could. At four weeks old, I took deer blood, hooves (on tracking shoes) and some skin and dragged them across a field. It's handy when the breeder is also your friend! It was amazing to see how keen the dogs were to follow it, even at this age. We repeated the exercise every week until she came home with us at eight weeks old. Even at this young age we were triggering something in her mind and developing her nose. In these sessions, I popped a tiny harness on her so she associated it with tracking.

Once home, the training continued more regularly, but was kept fun. I laid tracks in much the same way – skin, blood and hooves. I left small treats along the way to encourage her nose to the ground and left her breakfast at the end – a winner if you have a food-orientated dog. We were building a picture in her head of what she needed to do to get the reward. Up until she could go out in the wide world at around 11 weeks, we kept it simple: 20m to 30m long, a slight turn, but with the overall aim of getting her to succeed. I laid the tracks, made a cuppa and then went back

Leaving treats along the scent line is a good way of keeping the dog's nose to the ground



PICTURES: ALEX HATTON

'I have been a fan of HPRs, and specifically Large Munsterlanders, since I first shot woodcock over one 16 years ago'



TRACKING WITH DOGS

outside and did them with her on the harness and a long line. As the weeks progressed, we increased the age of the track (the time between setting it and tracking it) and on other days we increased the length, but never the two at once. As soon as her vaccinations were complete, I moved the tracks to the wider countryside taking in many different vegetation types.

Upping the ante

At four months old, we were invited by the UK DTR to attend a training day. The day covered how to set tracks, what equipment we needed, tracking tips and some 'baying' practice. At the end of the day, we each did a three-hour track and received feedback afterwards. It was explained that one of the most important aspects was to set up your shot site. On our tracks we had a large square marked out and inside it, somewhere, was blood, hair and bone. The track then went from this out of the square. The importance of the shot site is that this is where the dog gets to know the smell of the individual deer that needs tracking, as in the real world it could have been in a herd.

We went away full of enthusiasm and a clear direction on aspects we needed to work on. There was a three-hour puppy test coming up two months later, and this gave us something to work towards. The test would involve a three-hour-old track set with hooves, 400m long, with two turns of between 45° and 90° and no more than 100ml of blood. The trail is not marked with tape, but the judges know where it is by following GPS. A dog can have three call-backs before it would fail the test if it strays more than 20m from the track. We worked up to this test and before we knew it, we were there – full



It's important to introduce young dogs to deer scent early on

of nerves! Georgie did well, requiring no call-backs and she was graded a 'first'.

Seven months from our puppy test was the 20-hour tracking test. At first I could not see how we would get there; it seemed an age away from the puppy test. I have spent the winter setting tracks, building up to the test standard of 800m, 20 hours old, 25ml of blood, 2 x 90° turns, and a small backtrack of 10m (where the track goes out and back along the same route, before continuing). We have surpassed 20-hour old tracks, just so that I know she can do older,

and we are setting tracks on all sorts of terrain, from woodland to open fields and mountains. We have a pre-test training day in a few weeks, and then it's time to see if we can pass the test and get on the UK DTR tracking dog register, so we can help others.

We are getting to a standard we never thought would be possible and the UK DTR have been very supportive. For those looking for ways to attain a similar standard, it's well worth pursuing. And for those who shoot deer and need help finding it, do not hesitate to get in touch with the UK DTR and find a tracker in your area ■

MORE INFO!

Visit ukdtr.co.uk to find out more about getting involved – and if you shoot deer, put the number of your local tracker on your phone's speed dial!



Using a long lead helps prevent the dog from following the track too quickly

PICTURE: EMILY DAMMERT

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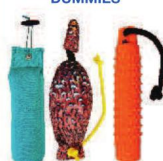
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A universal language

The proper use of body language when communicating with our dogs is an essential part of keeping our dogs connected with us at all times, as Ryan Kay explains

And just like that it's summer again! Summer for us here at Farlavale means gundog demonstrations! We've had to raise our game a bit this year as far as offering different and varied content is concerned – not only to keep our audience interested but to keep our cockers interested too! With over 20 displays to do throughout the country show season, we need to have numerous elements to draw upon from one

display to the next... just having one set routine would ultimately bore everyone involved.

We try to include scenarios that our own customers sometimes struggle with. Every so often we'll even change a set according to what occurs on the day. When we're not demonstrating in the arena, we're usually positioned somewhere nearby attending a gazebo with an adjacent fun over-the-bales scurry lane. The scurry and stall

allows showgoers to pop over with their dog, have a little go on the scurry and maybe have a chat about their current training problems or issues they've been having. These chats can genuinely determine what we decide to do during a display at that particular show, especially if we've heard the same problem or aspect crop up repeatedly before we're due to go in the ring.

Our most recent display was at Duncombe Park Country Fair on the outskirts of Helmsley in North Yorkshire. The show is very much a dog-friendly one, with terrier racing, fun dog show, terrier show, hounds display and of course the scurry and routine from ourselves. Our scurry saw a real variety of breeds having a go, from the usual Labs and spaniels to Jack Russells, poodles and even a papillon.

The issue

The most common problem we heard from people approaching the stall was a familiar one.... trouble with their recall. Or lack of it! We try to explain that the problem area often isn't their recall at all, or at least it isn't directly. It's how significant they, the handler, are to the dog in comparison to whatever interesting things they are competing against in the outside world!

It all starts with how much an owner interacts with their dog in the first place. It's no coincidence that those who train their dogs on a regular basis in an appealing and varied manner are undeniably more interesting and higher value to their dog than those that don't. It often amazes me how so many people miss this point. Cockers, springers,

Labs, flat-coated retrievers, Hungarian wirehaired vizslas, to name a few, are all very biddable breeds. That's to say, they're all breeds that are keen and willing to be trained. They look at you for communication from the word go!

However, that look, stare or quick check-in, will soon become less and less if they don't get a response from their handler/owner in their most informative learning period; usually the first year. The first line of communication a dog is looking for is body language; the universal language for all animals. Humans, it appears, can generally be pretty useless at communicating through body language - with anything other than another human anyway!

The solution

This year, we've introduced a set that involves body language only. That is, me controlling the dog silently, solely through my body movements



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

Most gundogs look to their handler for communication from the word go, says Ryan

The over-the-bales scurry lane provides the chance to have fun with your dog before having a chat with the Farlavale team



and shapes. It's a little daring and sometimes risky in some arenas, especially when sheep poo, horse poo and all manner of other things have been left in the ring before our arrival... any of which could prove to be an outranking factor over me and what I can offer! Nevertheless, at Duncombe Park, we went for it, guiding, hunting and controlling a young cocker through hand and body movements, with high-value food as the motivator.

That food of course goes out of the window when on the delights of game! But if you've worked closely enough with the dog and always interacted in places that are stimulating to him, then you've got a high chance of still having a connected dog when it comes to working in the shooting field. The trick, though, is to convince a hunting dog like a spaniel or an HPR that you are the provider of its quarry, and that convincing should be done through body language: a guiding hand coupled with a slight move of the shoulder – and perhaps a bending knee initially. Always over-exaggerate body movements with a young learning dog, then tone it all down to simple subtle movements as the dog learns and gets more confident with your actions.

The early learning with regards to how important you are (and indeed how much respect and attention the dog shows you) should start as soon as possible in the dog's life, in and around the home. Training exercises, such as you going through doorways first, are situations that ask the dog to think and to be in tune with what you're doing. These practices are traditionally described as teaching manners, with it being more of an inconvenience and irritant to us if the dog was to barge through. However, insisting that these actions happen provides the added benefit of the

dog starting to be aware of your body movements.

It may be hard for you to notice but there's a good chance that your dog does indeed know you very well, especially when it comes to how you move about. Even just the smallest of movements and adjustments. You could, for example, be cooking on the stove with the dog sat behind you in the middle of the kitchen floor. You decide to step back and move a pan over to the sink. I guarantee a dog that's in tune has just made adjustments accordingly. It may have just noticed your shoulder coming back as you moved and in readiness has shifted its weight to its hind quarters. It may have even taken a step back.

All this can be strategically linked to the recall. If ultimately your movements are of interest and that paying attention to them means it sometimes provides a reward, i.e. a find and flush when hunting together, then you yourself are important to the dog. You're a source and provider of something high value!

A perfect pair

I understand that it's a little strange to consider that body language will help with recall further down the line, but I see many examples of differing interaction from clients that come for one-to-one lessons. Say, for example, that a



The show sets must be varied in order to keep the interest of all involved: dog, handler and audience!



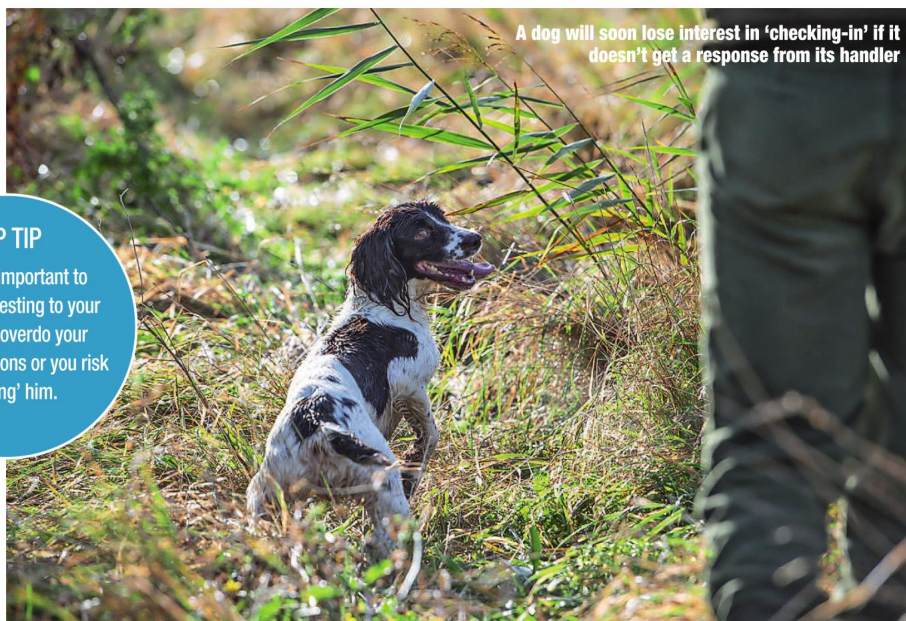
rather mild-mannered and simpering handler turns up, rather quiet and coy with their hands in their pockets. After asking them to let their dog off for a mooch about in the training paddock, whilst we discuss and go through a training plan, I will invariably notice that their dog is at the other end of the paddock or sniffing around the perimeter. Check ins from the dog are rare, or in the worst scenarios, never!

Now say on the other hand, that a jovial sort of handler turns up, gesturing with their hands whilst they talk, moving around theatrically whilst they describe past problems or what they want to work on going forward. More often than not, their dog is very close by and paying attention. It's barely bothered with a sniff about and instead keeps looking up at the handler for something to happen. In some cases, it may lay down near its handler's feet. This sort of person is usually an interactor. They're also perhaps someone who waffles on to their dog and natters away to them like they're another human. This dog will undoubtedly have a better recall in some situations than the owner of the former dog.

Now this sort of over-animated interaction will certainly be eye-catching for the dog and exciting during the first six months, but there is also a balance to be had, because this talkative human can inadvertently instigate a 'nagging' style of

TOP TIP

While it's important to appear interesting to your dog, don't overdo your communications or you risk 'nagging' him.



A dog will soon lose interest in 'checking-in' if it doesn't get a response from its handler

PICTURE: RAY HOOD / COUNTRY TRAIL IMAGES

communication that becomes something of an inconvenience to a dog – especially with breeds like cockers. Remembering that the number one thing on a hunting dog's list is to run and keep running, the recall to come in and stop prevents the fluidity; as a result the dog can feel badgered by overuse of the whistle. So, the key for this more upbeat style of handler is not to overdo that recall. Someone who interacts through body

language, supplemented with nicely toned verbal cues, will certainly hold a higher status and invite a more engaged response from their dog than those that just use verbal commands or a whistle. I say supplemented with verbal because as I said at the start, and I will always maintain, body language is unquestionably the first line of communication for a dog. Don't miss that chance to communicate in the way they want to! ■

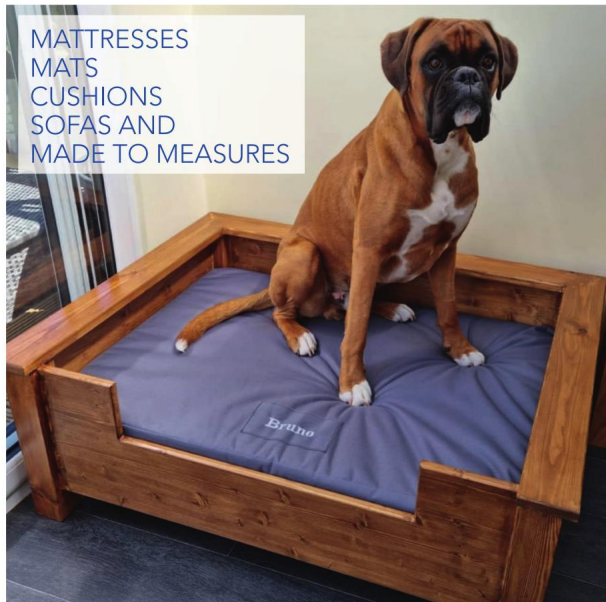


Over time, body language can change from over-exaggerated movements to something more subtle

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Out and about

This month, Lez and Emrys have been testing their training in different environments, some exciting, some not so exciting, but hopefully all helping Emrys mature into a steady gundog

Most of our walking this month has been with Dante, my eight-year-old Labrador, and Spud, my almost nine-year-old working cocker. I always move my older dogs onto the right side when I first start bringing a youngster out on the walks with us, so that I can focus on the novice dog, keeping him with me and walking to heel – my older boys tend to, for the most part, just pootle along nicely beside me.

We've walked mostly around the village where we live, with Emrys on his own or with the 'big boys' (although Emrys now towers above Spud), and this has involved crossing fields, walking through the woods and being distracted by the local wildfowl population on the little loch round the corner. He's been on lead, off lead, walking to heel, running free, doing Sit/Stays and posing,

both on his own and with Spud and Dante.

Having three dogs to take out can bring its own challenges, but it really comes into its own when you're training steadiness around other dogs. I'm not a fan of letting dogs hoon around with other dogs or letting my dogs run up to other dogs on the walks – you don't know if the other dogs are going to have a pop at your dog or if the other dog is nervous. The main reason though is that I want the walk to be all about me: me and my dog, and what we're doing together, rather than meeting other dogs being the highlight of the walk.

Same but different

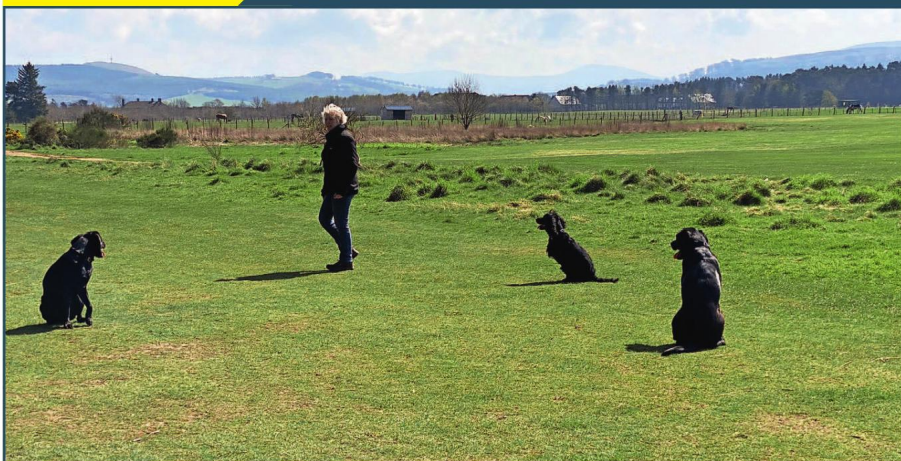
We headed across to Lanark Loch this month, which is a much bigger loch than my local one and has so many different terrains over a very

small area – the old gallops as well as scrub grasses, gorse, well-kept short lawns, hills and a fantastic dirt cycle trail running through the woodlands.

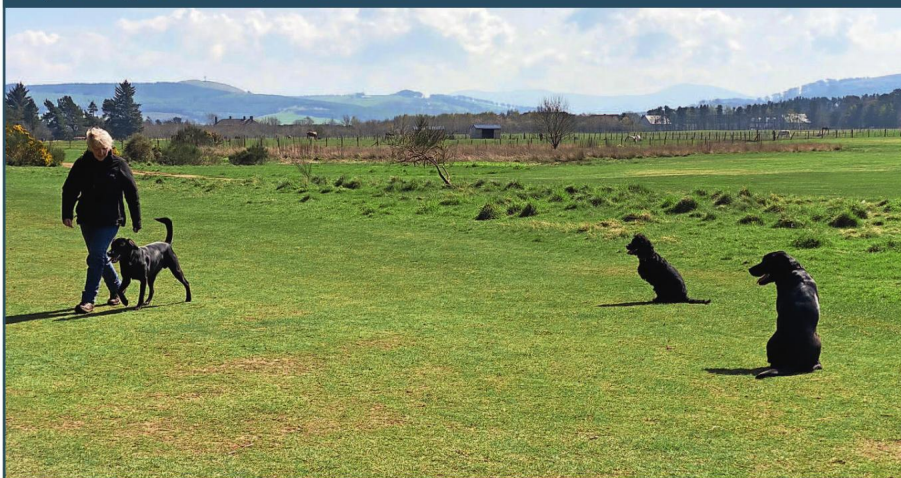
I started off just doing some simple retrieves with Emrys on the short grass then moved onto the hills which have a greater incline than the hill near me. I haven't wanted to introduce overly steep hills just yet as I'm very conscious that he's still a young dog and don't want to put too much pressure on his front end going down the hill or his hips coming up. His growth plates won't be quite closed yet, so after being really careful with his exercise in his formative months I don't want to mess it all up now – there's plenty of time to get him up and down the abundance of Scottish hills.

We then headed around the side of the woods

INDIVIDUAL RECALLS

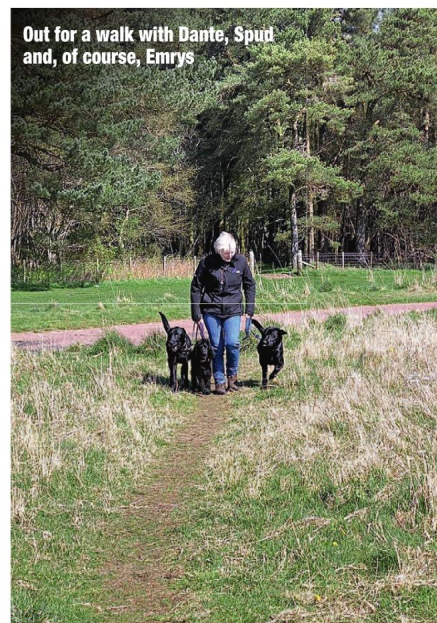


First, sit the dogs in a little circle, and walk around the outside.



Then, call one dog (the least trained) to walk to heel with you for a couple of paces.

Out for a walk with Dante, Spud and, of course, Emrys



LEZ'S TOP TIP

When going somewhere new or somewhere you haven't been to for a little while, take a couple of minutes when you get your dog out of the car to allow him to recalibrate his nose to the surroundings. In the way that we look around when we go somewhere new, our dogs need a chance to take in the smells of a new environment. By hanging around your car for a few minutes before setting off on your walk or your training session, you're setting your dog up to succeed, as he will have processed the new and exciting smells and will be able to focus on the task in hand easier.

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



Three dogs focused on Lez during some distraction training!

and onto the old gallops where I did a bit of steadiness training with the three dogs as a pack. As well as doing Sit/Stays, where I left the three dogs sitting together, I also did Down/Stays with them, leaving them reasonably close and then walking a circle around them. Down/Stays generally aren't trained in the gundog world, however all our Accredited Pet Gundog Instructors train them as part of the basic exercises in class, as I believe that training a solid down is a foundation that every dog should have.

One of the favourite things I teach my pack is to recall past each other and come into heel while I'm walking. Once the dogs have a good Sit/Stay in a group, I start to quietly call the youngest forward, leaving the older dog sitting. As with most of my training, I start this in the sitting room, then out in the garden and then on the walk. Once the dogs are steady recalling individually while I'm standing still, I start to introduce it when I'm out and about, leaving them a couple of paces

before calling one dog and then the other.

What I did here (see sequence images, left) with the dogs was to sit them in a little circle, walk around the outside and called one dog to heel. After a few paces, I did a whistle Sit and then called a different dog to heel... it's a great little exercise as it teaches the dogs to listen out for their own name, ignore the other dogs being called, and to sit steady when other dogs are running past them. ■

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



Retrieving in new environments builds confidence and steadiness

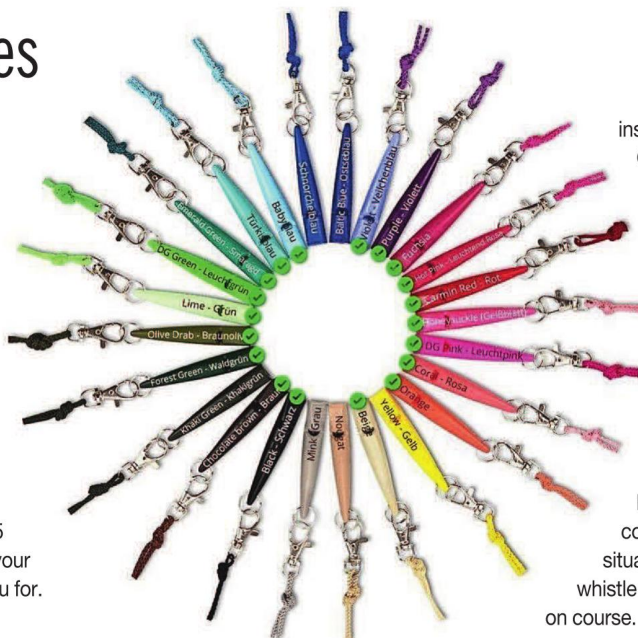
PICTURES: LEZ GRAHAM

Acme dog whistles

Choosing the right whistle for your dogs and the work you want them to do is key to creating the perfect partnership in the field. While every dog is different, here is a simple guide for beginner trainers to help you choose the right tool of the trade!

ACME 210.5: This versatile whistle makes sounds at a frequency of 6200Hz, which is effective up to 90m under ideal conditions. This range is perfect for working your dog at close quarters so is a great choice if you are going beating or rough shooting. The 210.5 is very quiet to the human ear, something your fellow beaters and pickers-up will thank you for. Often chosen by those working spaniels.

ACME 211.5: This option is designed to sound at a frequency of 5700Hz, which can be heard by your dog at distances up to 1.5km. While most gundogs will be highly unlikely to have strayed quite that far from their owner (and if they have, they probably weren't listening to the whistle!), this whistle is a good choice for dogs retrieving over long distances, as you can be comfortable in the knowledge that the dog will be able to receive



instruction while working away from you. Often the preferred choice for Labs.

ACME 212: Also known as the 'Pro Trialler', this whistle makes sounds at 5200Hz which cuts through thick ground cover, allowing you to communicate with your dog effectively while working, either in the field or at a Trial. This is particularly ideal when working pointers on rabbits, or when working in very thick undergrowth. This option also holds its frequency no matter how hard you blow, which means it is less confusing for the dog in those high-pressure situations when you feel required to blow your whistle hard to keep it on course.

All these options come in a huge range of colours, meaning you are less likely to lose your whistle in the field! For more help on choosing the right whistle for your dog, check out the advice on Acme's website.

From £7.49
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Lez Graham Retrieving Roll

In 2014, Lez Graham was faced with a reluctant retriever in the form of a red cocker called Foxy. A fantastic little hunting dog, she wanted nothing to do with retrieving and would run out, ignore the dummy and proceed to hoon around the field.

"We managed to get her to retrieve bags of Natures Menu treats and occasionally a prey dummy," says Lez, "but she thought it was more fun to just shake the prey dummy as the treats rattled around inside. What I needed was something that would hold treats but felt like canvas and could be used to help the transition from toys to dummies, as well as tap

into the dog's sense of 'what's in it for me?' I eventually came up with the Retrieving Roll, which motivates dogs to pick up a dummy, and helps teach them to deliver to hand and come back with the retrieve quickly."

Used by gundog trainers around the world, it is versatile enough to be used on its own or wrapped around toys, dummies and even pheasants. Plus, it's small enough to roll up and pop in your pocket.

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Le Chameau dog coat

TESTED BY:
JUMBLE

Over recent years, dog coats have become more and more commonplace in both the shooting field and at Field Trials – and for good reason. While some might look a little more ‘Hyde Park’ than ‘in the hide’, more and more gundog owners are seeing the benefits of quilting up their canines during down time.

It makes good sense to keep our dogs warm, comfortable and dry after shooting on wintry days – and to keep their muscles warm and ready for action after Elevenses! This is particularly important for older dogs, of course, who will feel the effects of the cold and wet – particularly if they are suffering from joint pain or other age-related illnesses.

The Le Chameau version features a soft fleece lining, which will wick moisture away from the dog’s coat, and help to cool your dog down slowly after working. Meanwhile, the durable, water-resistant outer fabric helps to keep the elements out while walking between drives in adverse conditions – although of course you would take it off again before working your dog.

The coat is machine-washable, and there’s a hole at the neck to allow those dogs wearing a collar to have the lead attached without needing to remove the coat. The jacket is adjustable and comes in three sizes: small (35cm), medium (47cm), and large (58cm). The correct size can be measured by taking the length of the dog’s spine from neck to tail, and Le



This coat comes in two colours: Vert Chameau and Bleu Fonce.

Chameau advise that the small size would suit terriers, the medium is ideal for spaniels, and the large would be a good fit for Labradors.

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Support for Ukraine

Most of the world has been shocked and saddened by Russia’s attack on Ukraine, which has caused the displacement of millions of people and marked the onset of what could be the largest humanitarian crisis seen in Europe for decades.

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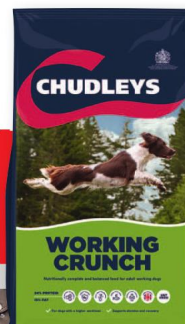
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Squeaky toy syndrome

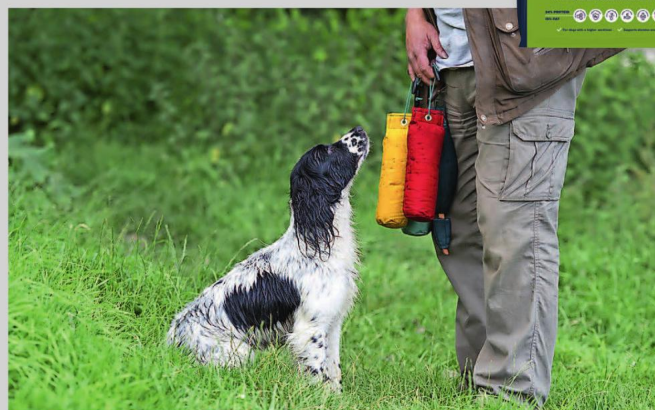
Q I have a six-month-old springer spaniel. She just started gundog classes, and the instructor says I'm not allowed to use a squeaky toy for retrieving. The trouble is, she's really not that fussed about retrieving and I can only get her interested if I use our squeaky toy. She only does retrieving indoors, and I've tried loads of other toys but she just is not interested in anything else.

A HOWARD KIRBY replies: As a general rule of thumb, we try to avoid using anything that encourages a young dog to bite down or chew on anything it's retrieving, which is precisely what dogs have to do to activate the squeak. This squeak will often improve their enjoyment of catching things and it taps into their natural prey drive.

Gundogs should have 'soft' mouths to prevent them damaging game. We need a dog to deliver tenderly to hand. Dummies are generally designed to be fairly inert to discourage a dog from wanting to shake or mouth it. Unfortunately, this can then go the other way and make them just plain dull. At the end of the day, it's a canvas bag full of sand!

Have a think about why your youngster isn't that fussed about retrieving. Lifestyle often contributes to this lack of interest. Too much of a good thing, such as free hunting, exercise, toy play, retrieving, will all contribute.

The game needs to be informal and exciting, short, sweet, with high



PICTURE: DAGELOD / GETTY

rewards. I know you're thinking 'we're back to the squeaky again!' Maybe we'll stick with the squeaky for a few more weeks, make adjustments. In a nutshell, make life a little more boring, then you rock up, throw the squeaky a few times and say "fetch" as she runs out.

Leave her wanting more, and hopefully we can condition her to get excited about retrieving again. Then we substitute the squeaky for a new exciting non-squeaky toy.

In short, try to avoid squeaky toys for gundogs. However, needs must!

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CHUDLEYS

Hip scores and breeding

Q I've just got my Labrador bitch's hip scores back and they are 14 (8:6). I am getting

conflicting advice over whether I can breed from her or not, with my vet saying she is over the breed average. But a couple of friends say up to 20 would be fine. What do you advise?



PICTURE: BIANCA GRUNENBERG / GETTY

A VICKY PAYNE replies: Hip scores can be complicated to interpret, and now we use the 5-year median, the 'average' score has come down rapidly in some breeds. Assuming the two sides are relatively even, 0-5 is considered normal/near normal, 6-10 borderline,

and 11-20 mild dysplasia. I prefer to look at this rather than the breed median and ideally all dogs we breed

from would be 10 or less.

But, we don't live in a perfect world and there can be many good reasons to breed from a dog with a score up to 14 (assuming there is no evidence of arthritis). If your bitch is an

otherwise excellent example of the breed and has the working qualities you want, look for a stud that has a lower score and preferably an EBV (Estimated Breeding Value) that suggests his offspring should inherit good genes. For more, have a look at the BVA CHS and Kennel Club websites.

Letting go

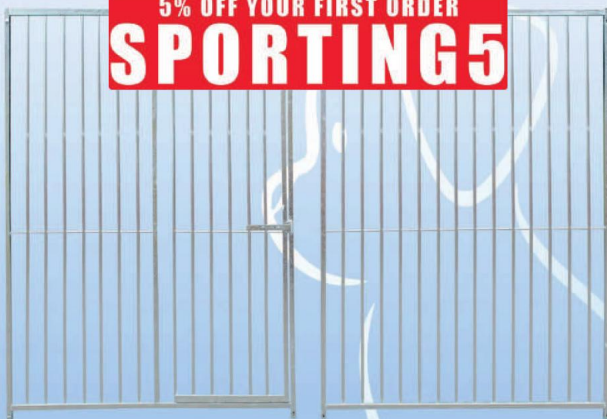
Q My lurcher retrieves okay, but then she won't let go of the rabbit! Help!

A JACKIE DRAKEFORD replies: Instead of confrontation, simply put a lead on her, and walk along with her. Presently, the rabbit will become too heavy for comfort and you will see her changing her grip, meaning she has to relax her jaw. Make a big fuss of her, then take a food reward out of your pocket but don't offer it yet – wait until she nuzzles you to ask for it. Then, holding the treat up with one hand, take hold of the rabbit using your other hand beneath her jaw. It may take a while the first time, but eventually she will relax her hold on the rabbit. Put the treat close to her nose so she can take it. As she releases the rabbit, neatly take it out of sight while offering a 'jackpot' series of treats as a reward.



PICTURE: SHEL HAWKER / GETTY

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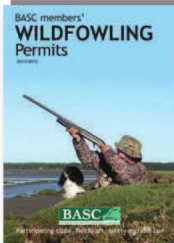
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Brainwave holds fundraiser shoot in Cheshire

Children's charity Brainwave has announced the second of two fund-raising shoots in 2022. For the 12th year, the Cheshire shoot will be held at Colshaw Hall Estate on Thursday 22 September. This is a fabulous corporate day enjoyed by both experienced shots and individuals of mixed ability with an instructor (at an additional cost).

Teams of four Guns are priced at £900 and the day includes breakfast on arrival, a safety briefing, mid-morning snacks and a 3-course lunch with drinks. There will also be a raffle, an

auction, and lots of competitions with prizes for winning team Top Guns and even a bottom ducks prize.

There will be a mix of clay targets and simulated game targets with some stands shot as a flush with the whole team shooting together, while other stands are shot individually. There is real variety making this shoot a huge draw and possibly unlike anything you have done before.

TICKETS

To purchase tickets contact Carole Headley via caroleheadley@brainwave.org.uk



PICTURE: BRAINWAVE

CREATURE FINDERS



WE FOUND ALICE ASIAN PALM CIVET ON PAGE 69 OF THE MAY ISSUE

Hilary Clark, Chelmsford • Brian Harper, Norwich • Natalie Matthews, Downpatrick • Brian Matthews, Downpatrick • Paul Leavey, Oldbury • Dennis Watling, Southend-on-Sea • Mike Rumbelow, Reading • John Ahearn, Ballinalack • Andy Philp, Angus • Aaron Lowe • John Loveridge, Cambridge • Andrew Spink, Blackpool • Steve Ingram, Hereford • Neil Sutherland, Inverurie • Peter Hall, Cambridge • Dave Lambourne, Northants • Andrew Routledge, Middlesbrough • Nigel McNeil-Smith, Freshwater • Rory O'Kane, Magherafelt • Liz Harper, Norwich • Steve Webster, Cleethorpes • Grahame Warrick, Brighton • Shona Morris, Kidderminster • Donna Collins, Innerwick • Ernie Booth, Cheshire • Kester Warden, Bradford • Philip Kent, Spalding • Evangeline Kibble, Burford • Gary Aitchison, Goole • Dan Elbro, Basingstoke • Svetlana Okladnykh, Manchester • Peter Rooney, Newry • Simon Dench, York • Richard Ormond, Eastleigh • Philip Gleave, Cheshire • Tom Jones, Carmarthen • Christine Short, Blackwood • William A Dickson, Chepstow



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