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FIELDSPORTS
PRESS

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First Words image: Mark Ripley
Cover image: Ryan Kay

It's a busy time of year for gamekeepers and anyone involved in keeping pest and predator numbers down on their permissions. Spring is nearly upon us and most shooters want to get a head start on controlling numbers before the crops get up.

That's exactly what Deano is doing this month, but instead of chasing Charlie, he's on a rabbit control mission [p40]. That's not to say he won't be dealing with any foxes that have the misfortune to come his way on the night... Likewise, Mark Ripley offers up a masterclass on spring fox control as he recounts the story of a particularly troublesome fox that was killing lambs on his permission [p12]. What these two legends don't know about fox shooting really isn't worth knowing!

Also imparting wisdom on his specialist subject is Mick Garvey. Whether it's rabbits or squirrels, Mick's the man you want to speak to about the gear and the fieldcraft to get them off the fields, out of the trees and into the bag! This month Mick's taking care of some problem rabbits, proving once again that time spent planning an outing and employing good fieldcraft always pays off [p20].

All three are using different guns for their target species. Obvious legalities aside, choosing the right gun for the quarry can mean the difference between success and failure, which is why this month we asked gun expert Drennan Kenderdine to talk us through his

essential pest control 'armoury' [p47]. If you've ever been in any doubt about what to take on your next rabbiting, fox or corvid control mission, this is the feature for you!

In keeping with our theme, there's also an update on the situation surrounding the use of snares [p24], a complex issue which BASC's Conor O'Gorman explains brilliantly, and a fantastic guide from bushcraft and survival expert Jonny Crockett on choosing the right knife [p34] – something every good countryman and woman needs.

Of course, we couldn't talk about pests without mentioning pigeons! On page 10, the legendary Crowman has put together some real gems of advice for those of you heading to the hide this month. If you want to be successful in the ongoing battle to keep on top of the grey hordes, you'd do well to read this!

We hope that this issue provides you with some useful knowledge and information to help you in the ongoing job of keeping pests and predators at bay!

Rebecca

REBECCA GREEN
Editor



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Lord Benyon, Minister for Biosecurity, Marine and Rural Affairs at Defra, wrote to rural organisations in early February confirming an interim administrative measure to reduce the Avian Influenza (AI) surveillance period from 90 to 30 days for all poultry and poultry products. This follows an earlier announcement that the EU Commission would be reducing the minimum surveillance period/restriction on exporting poultry out of the EU following a confirmed case of AI from 90 to 30 days.

Lord Benyon wrote: "This risk-based trade facilitative measure will enable safe trade to resume from AI-affected areas more quickly, whilst protecting GB biosecurity. This will be available to all of our trading partners if they can demonstrate that a stamping-out policy has been completed, and that surveillance has been carried out during that period and has demonstrated the absence of infection."

The change is welcome news for the shooting sector, potentially reducing delays to the import of

game birds from the EU. The aim is to publish the revised certificates in March (they should be available on the gov.uk website), with this interim measure remaining in place until legislative changes can be made.

The NGO are in regular contact with Defra Ministers and are working hard to engage with all those involved with the gamebird and poultry sector to ensure that its members can continue to do their jobs whilst maintaining the highest standards of biosecurity.

Any shoots or game farms that have not registered on the Poultry Register must do so as soon as possible; all game farms and shoots that release 50 or more birds are required by law to register.

A key factor in determining how quickly the required surveillance activity can be completed is the accuracy of the Poultry Register. Additionally, any shoot or game farm that finds itself in a disease control zone is likely to need a licence for some of their activity and this cannot be obtained unless they are on the Poultry Register.

Back in business

A leading supplier of country sports and outdoors goods, Fur Feather & Fin, will be returning to business as usual having relocated from the south-east to an all-new location in Teesside Airport, North Yorkshire.

Due to a substantial increase in rental fees, the business ceased operations in December 2022 as they searched for alternative locations. Financial director Paul Walton said: "This new facility offers great expansion opportunities with an increase in space available for holding stock, along with implementing an even more efficient and responsive ordering and fulfilment services."

In the last few years, Fur Feather & Fin has garnered a reputation for retailing the finest shooting, fishing, stalking and gundog products from top brands, including Yeti, Dubarry, Härkila, Rio, Beretta, Scott and Snowbee, to name but a few. The team has further plans in place to work with additional brands in the sectors they cater for, along with developing their own range of luxury leather goods and accessories.

Paul adds: "For the foreseeable future we will be focusing on online and mail order sales, though we are in the process of finding suitable locations for a replacement showroom so that those travelling north or from overseas to shoot, fish or stalk can take a look at what we have available before purchasing."



The full range of products can be found on the Fur Feather & Fin website: www.furfeatherandfin.com

Use of snares under threat in Wales

The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee's report on the Agriculture (Wales) Bill saw the majority of the committee's members vote for the prohibition of all snares in Wales.

The committee concluded that: "A clear majority of committee members are persuaded by the evidence supporting a total ban on snares. However, two members noted that a blanket ban removes any opportunity to use snares as a method of predator control for species restoration, including projects funded by Welsh Government."

Countering the full ban on snares, the British Association for Shooting & Conservation (BASC) has proposed a solution of legislating against the use of non-code compliant snares while allowing the continued use of code-compliant snares alongside regulated training measures.

BASC Wales Director, Steve Griffiths, said: "It is unacceptable to risk some of our most threatened species with an outright ban on snares, based on outdated and unsubstantiated evidence and public perception."

"BASC will continue to make representation at every stage of the Bill to ensure the right decision is made for the conservation of our most threatened species."



PICTURE: ISTOCK

Victory with venison in canape competition

Westminster Kingsway College student George Oakes scooped top prize at this year's British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) and Highland Game Colleges' Cookery Competition.

The third-year student impressed the judges with his show-stopping

venison anticucho with nori and puffed wild rice canape dish.

The competition saw more than 70 catering students from across the UK enter their original venison canape recipes, with the number of entrants whittled down to five students who cooked for the judges on the day.

George will now go on to cook the Peruvian street-food inspired canape for more than 250 people at the Eat Game Awards. He said: "It will be a great opportunity to continue creating food under pressure. The dish can be scaled up and I am excited at the prospect."

Judging the competition this year was food and drink broadcaster Nigel Barden; actor, singer, farmer and presenter JB Gill; chef and consultant Paul Gayler; chef, author and lecturer Jose Souto and BASC's head of wild food Annette Woolcock.

In announcing the winner, Annette praised all five of the chefs



George Oakes takes the top cookery competition prize



who made it to the final. She said: "With more than 70 entrants to this year's competition, the level of cooking and skills shown by the final five was unbelievably impressive and the final decision incredibly close."

"George perfected the brief and created a superb canape that highlighted venison's versatility and sensational taste. The canape will go down fantastically at the Eat Game Awards."

Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill passed

On Tuesday 24 January, the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill was passed by 90 votes to 30. It repeals and replaces the Protection of Wild Mammals Act, which was passed in 2002; in essence, the Bill restricts those hunting mammals in Scotland to the use of no more than two dogs.

A new licensing scheme will allow the use of more than two dogs in certain limited circumstances, for example, when using dogs to flush foxes from woodland or scrub to be shot.

Rabbits are included in the definition of a wild mammal under the new Bill, with implications for

those who use more than two dogs on mixed quarry rough shoots.

A shooter and their two dogs may flush their own individual quarry to be shot, provided that other shooters take reasonable steps to ensure that any other dog used in the activity does not join them to form a pack; it means that more than two dogs can be present at a rough shoot, provided there are not more than two dogs working per Gun.

Field trials do not fall under the scope of the Bill, providing no more than two dogs are actively working at any one time to flush rabbits. Game bird



PICTURE: ISTOCK

shoots are not affected by the Bill.

Tony Jackson will cover the new Bill in more detail in next month's magazine.

WIN A SHOTGUN SLIP

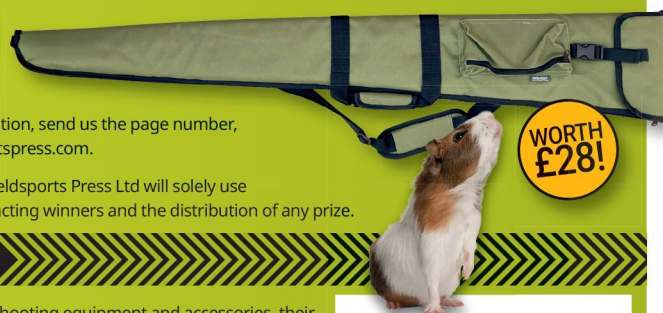
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Kindly supplied by UK Shootwarehouse, market leader in shooting equipment and accessories, their new shotgun slips are made from 600D Cordura in Field Green, and are fully padded with a half zip and an adjustable end flap. The padded hand carry strap & 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. For more information on the full range of products stocked by UK Shootwarehouse go to: www.ukshootwarehouse.com



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CONGRATULATIONS:

KIRSTY CROCKER who found SYBIL SNOWSHOE HARE on p82 in the February issue.

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* Please don't send entries by post due to office closures.

10-year moorland study shows benefits of heather burning

The mid-way findings of a 20-year study into moorland management, measuring carbon storage, water tables and species biodiversity on burnt, mown and unmanaged areas, have been published.

Researchers working on the landmark study into the effects of various moorland management practices have published the half-way findings, concluding there is no one-size-fits-all approach to moorland management.

The study, *Protecting our Peatlands*, found that although there was a small initial benefit in terms of carbon capture when heather is allowed to grow unmanaged, it causes the peat to dry out over time, and also provides a fuel load which increases the risk of wildfires. Wildfires themselves cause potentially catastrophic carbon loss as well as damage to the peat.

Researchers at York University recently published the 10-year findings with a note in the abstract explaining that: "Although Peatland-ES-UK has already continued for longer than nearly all other moorland research, it is important that the work covers at least the length of a complete management cycle. To produce

results that are robust and long-term enough to guide moorland management policy, we plan to continue the project for another decade."

The mid-way findings highlight the folly of knee-jerk reactions made by local governments, based either on short-term studies or the increasing pressure from activist groups. Researchers stated that: "Both burning and mowing release considerable amounts of carbon during [...] the first years after management, but this is counteracted by increased absorption later on... Heather management also seems to increase biodiversity and maintain higher water tables in the longer term, compared to areas of unmanaged heather."

Comparing these findings to an earlier five-year study by researchers at the University of Leeds again highlights the need for longer term studies. Effects of Moorland Burning on the Ecohydrology of River Basins found that "water tables were [...] significantly deeper for burned catchments than for unburned ones". If this study had run over a longer period, as *Protecting our Peatlands* did, they would have found that the water tables in unmanaged areas dropped

steadily over time, and that "seven to nine years after management, the uncut areas are the driest with water tables around 13cm below the peat surface, whereas both the mown and burnt areas have water tables around 11cm underground".

It is suggested that this could be due to the fact that in uncut/unburnt areas, the heather gradually gets larger, resulting in more plant matter above ground which must be supplied with water by its roots below ground: "Most of this water is lost to the air from pores in the leaves in a process called evapotranspiration".

If the goal of moorland management policy is to protect peatlands and maximise carbon storage in the long term, then it must be based on findings from studies that measure the long-term positive/negative effects of the various practices – including, as in this study, the effects on peatland of burning, mowing, and leaving land unmanaged.

Key report findings from the moorland management study include:

- The burnt plots had the highest species richness and diversity from around two years after management compared to those that were mown and those left unmanaged

HAVE YOUR SAY

We would love to hear your views on this subject. Please email us at rebecca.green@fieldsportspress.com and let us know your thoughts!

The study found that burnt plots had the highest species diversity after two years compared to those areas left unmanaged



■ Both burning and mowing reduce vegetation height compared to uncut heather, which is important for some ground-nesting birds; tall heather severely limits ground-nesting sites for those birds which prefer a more open situation such as golden plover

■ The nutrient content of heather shoots was improved after either mowing or burning, but was improved more and for longer after burning for some elements relevant to carbon uptake; this nutrient richness is also beneficial for grazing animals

■ Unmanaged areas, at the 10-year point, are predicted to still be a carbon “sink” (taking in but not releasing carbon), but are taking up less than half the carbon per year than at the start of the study – still slightly more than the cut areas, but less than half the absorption of the burnt areas each year

■ Despite a large release of carbon immediately after burning, the peat itself was not damaged, and the burnt area would be working as a carbon “sink” by around 5-7 years after treatment, even considering carbon losses from combustion

■ In terms of capturing and securing carbon into the ground long-term, charcoal (such as that left after burning) may play an important role; in comparison, brash left on the surface of mown sites will decompose and release more of its carbon to the atmosphere

■ In areas of unmanaged heather, water tables gradually dropped over the course of this study as the peat dried out and had the lowest water table by the end (high water tables improve carbon storage); in contrast, burnt and mown areas recorded the highest water tables seven to nine years after management

■ Uncut areas released by far the highest levels of methane

■ If you do not manage these systems they will eventually burn through wildfire, very likely during warmer and drier periods, with potentially catastrophic carbon losses. Management with prescribed burning or mowing reduces fuel load, but with the initial carbon cost of loss through controlled combustion or longer term from decomposing brash. Unmanaged areas presented the highest fuel load and driest peat, therefore

presenting the highest risk for wildfire

Amanda Anderson, director of the Moorland Association, said: “This valuable report shows there is no simple solution to the management of peatland. This report provides compelling evidence for decision-makers to embrace all land management tools to find the sweet spot of positive outcomes from our varied peatlands. There is no ‘one size fits all’.

“The debate around protecting and preserving peatland has long been too polarised and this report demonstrates that it is not in the best interests of conservation to demonise particular techniques. The time has come to apply this new knowledge to the previous blanket bog land management guidance from government and ensure it is fit for the purpose of restoring, enhancing and maintaining actively functioning blanket bog.” 

MOORLAND FACT BOX

- Heather moorland covers roughly 15% of the UK's land mass
- It is estimated that the UK might hold as much as 75% of the world's upland heather moorland
- There are over 30 species of sphagnum moss found in the UK; sphagnum mosses form the ‘carpet’ that covers our heaths, moorland and peatlands and is the key component in blanket bogs
- Sphagnum moss can hold up to 20x its weight in water, storing surface water and helping to prevent flooding, and also trap the carbon released from decaying plants/animals, preventing its release into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide

FIND OUT MORE!

Read the full published study here, where you can find more information on all the points covered in this article: <https://bit.ly/moorlandstudy>



Research showed that the nutrient content of heather shoots was improved after mowing or burning



‘This demonstrates that it is not in the best interests of conservation to demonise particular techniques’

PICTURE: XXXXXXXXXX / GETTY



Top tips for spring pigeon shooting

Spring is a busy time of year for pigeon shooters, with fresh drillings and juicy new shoots tempting in large numbers of the grey hordes; make the most of it with our top tips!

As we move steadily towards spring, the pigeons move out of the woods and onto the freshly drilled crops. Below, we have created a list of top tips to help you help the farmers to keep them off!

Reconnaissance

We've said it before, but we'll say it again; proper reconnaissance is the single most important element in a successful day's shooting. Not everyone can be out on their permissions every day, so staying in contact with farmers or those regularly on the land is always helpful. It also helps to know which crops the farmer plans to drill, when, and where – you can target those areas and make an estimate of when the birds will be getting onto the vulnerable young plants.

Keep a close eye on where they are feeding and at what time, so that you are ready to strike in the right place when conditions are right.

Flight lines are a vital element in planning your day; faced with a 20-acre field in which to place your little hide, it helps to know which bit of the field they are regularly crossing over.

Arrive early and spend time on the day watching again, as changes in weather can affect the birds' behaviour and flight lines.

Conditions

A medium to strong wind is essential for a good day's pigeon shooting – so much so that it's sometimes not worth the bother if the weather is very still.

Strong winds help the pigeons to hold stronger flight paths, and they like to land into the wind, so it can help you plan which direction most of your shots will be taken in, and set the hide up accordingly. Finally, a good strong wind helps muffle your shots, so you won't clear every bird in the area with the first bang of the gun!

Kit

Obviously, a good reliable shotgun is a must, and some pigeon-appropriate cartridges are a must too (Andy uses a Blaser F16 loaded with Gamebore Clear Pigeon 32g No.6 fibre).

Some camo netting, hide poles, and a bag of decent pigeon decoys are also essential, although you can use shot birds on sticks for decoys if you have enough to hand. UK Shoot Warehouse is the home of Sillosocks decoys, which are light and stackable for great space savings, and move gently in the breeze. There are tonnes of options out there so pick something that suits your style and budget.

Flappers and whirries are not essential but can

really help turn a slow day into a fast one! A1 Decoys is well-known for its excellent flappers, and again, UK Shoot Warehouse has a good range of options.

Setting the pattern

The goal here is to mimic a group of feeding pigeons as realistically as possible, so again, observe and learn! Set the pattern a little closer to the hide than where you ideally want to take your shot, so that any birds flaring away will still be in range when you pull the trigger. You need to leave enough gaps that the pigeons feel they have somewhere to land, so don't bunch your decoys closely together.

Placing whirries/flappers out to the sides of the pattern can help attract the attention of birds passing wider and pull them into the heart of your pattern.

Finally, if you are shooting across a large area and you notice some birds favouring a far area of the field, it can sometimes help to hang some white sacking over in the far area to encourage them to stay away from it and favour your end of the field!

Getting down to business!

When you're all set up, the most important thing is to stay still. Pigeons have keen eyesight and are spooked by the slightest movement. Stay well down in your hide and only pop up at the very last moment.

Do not shoot into large flocks of birds; you won't hit more than two (or three if you have a semi-auto), but you will educate the others, making them harder to shoot in the future.

Make every effort to pick all your birds – a dog always helps – and don't waste them! Game dealers will take pigeons, or take them home and enjoy them yourself. If you find yourself with too many, Facebook pages such as 'Giving up the Game' are fantastic for finding people to pass the meat on to, often without having to fully process the animal yourself. 



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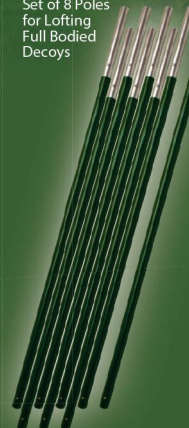
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CRAFTY AS A FOX

Foxes can be both cunning and bold when it comes to preying on livestock and birds. Mark Ripley talks us through some crucial springtime control tactics

A flicker of gingery red caught my eye amongst the otherwise still flock. The sun had just begun to peek over the brow of the hill, it's warming glow creeping slowly through the grass and haloing the ewes hunched together on the slope. A skylark rose and fell in the air, its charming melody only broken by the occasional cry of a young lamb to its mother.

I watched as the fox systematically checked each ewe as it passed through the flock, searching for a vulnerable youngster. One or two of the braver mothers stood boldly as the predator passed a little too close, a firm stamp of a hoof enforcing a message that she would fight to protect her offspring.

I eased the rifle tighter into my shoulder and tucked my fist under the butt of the stock, biding my time.

The fox was still several hundred yards from me, and although I was confident I could make the shot, there was no need just yet – it was working its way in my direction. I wanted to be certain of this shot as this, I felt sure, was the fox I had been

waiting for, the same fox that had already preyed on three of the young lambs over the past week.

With so many lambs born on the vast open downland, losses to foxes are inevitable, but once a fox gets a taste for this easy food source, those losses can quickly have a substantial financial impact on the farm.

Much of the time, foxes are simply drawn in by the smell of blood and afterbirth, as well as perhaps the feeble cries of the young lambs. Naturally, to a fox feeding on afterbirth, a newly born lamb or stillborn covered in the same, will seem little different if it is left unguarded by its mother, and thus a problem fox is created.

With foxes themselves under pressure during the spring to feed their own young, they will become particularly bold and regularly cash in on the easy food source day and night.

I'd already spent the two previous nights sat out in the dark to no avail for this fox, only for it to take another lamb by the time the farmer came looking the next morning.

The first evening, I'd shot a large dog fox in the bottom of the valley and had thought that success had come early, frustratingly only to see the losses continue.

The fox closed to within 200 yards before suddenly veering away from the flock toward a nearby patch of gorse. Scanning ahead of the animal I spotted for the first time what had caught its attention. A young singleton hunched close to the cover almost out of sight, neglected by its mother or simply separated during the night.

The lamb stood on stiff legs and began to cry at the approaching fox, unaware that it was in fact enticing the fox in further.

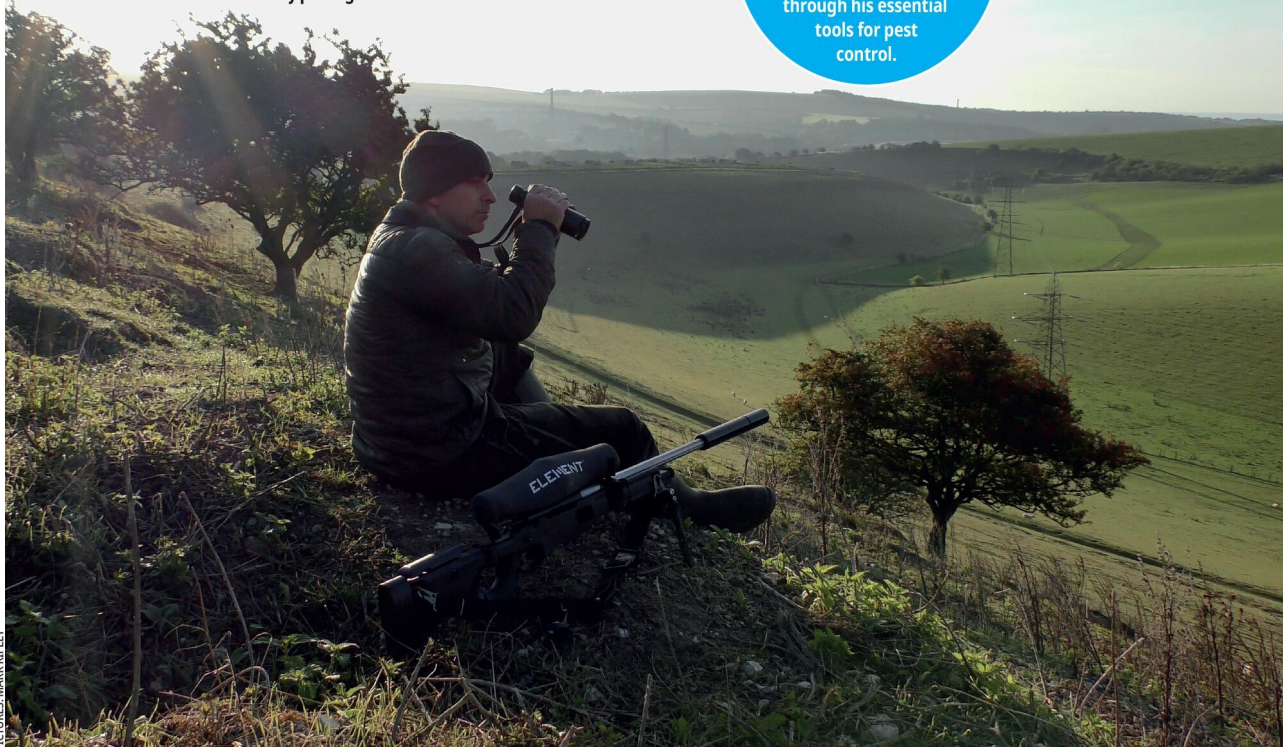
The fox by now, if it wasn't before, was clearly closing in on the lamb and at only 10 yards or so from it began to circle cautiously around it before stopping to sit and wait for a moment.

This was the opportunity I needed and sinking my cheek into the stock, my eyes quickly checked the scope's turrets were correctly set and the little scope level was showing the

GUN CHOICE

For help on choosing the right gun for the job, turn to page 47, where our expert Drennan Kenderdine talks through his essential tools for pest control.

The open landscapes of the South Downs farmland mean foxes are often on the lookout for easy pickings here



PICTURES: MARK RIPLEY

‘I watched as the fox checked each ewe as it passed through the flock, searching for a vulnerable youngster’



reticle was perfectly upright – not that it would make a massive difference at this range, but it was part of my checklist for every shot with this rifle.

My index finger eased the Remington's safety catch forward with a soft click and I leant forward on the bipod to help stop it skipping upwards with the recoil.

I edged the rifle round until the fox was in my scope and I centred the reticle on the fox's shoulder. The fox sat staring intently at the lamb as my finger increased the pressure on the trigger until it reached its 1.5lb pound breaking point, and the morning's tranquility was shattered by an unnatural crack.

In a split second, 143gr of bad news was travelling at around 2,800 feet per second on its way to spoil the fox's morning, and a fraction of a second later the little vixen lay dead in the grass.

Surprisingly, on inspection, this turned out to be a barren vixen and therefore unlikely to be feeding cubs, although occasionally other family members will assist another vixen to feed her cubs.

Call to action

Like all fox controllers up and down the country working sheep farms, the lambing season is by far the busiest time of the year with farmers quickly on the phone with the first glimpse of a fox, and throughout April (the first of April being the traditional start of the lambing season locally) I will often be out most nights of the week over several farms.

As a rule, I control foxes all year round on many of these farms, yet I also shoot over a couple of them just before the lambing starts which makes it difficult to effectively reduce the fox population in that area, before I'm needed elsewhere!

Another busy time for me can be shortly before the game birds arrive on the couple of farms that I

Some mothers boldly stamp their feet at an approaching fox



look after that also hold pheasant shoots. Young poulters are renowned for not being particularly bright and can quickly find themselves hoovered up by a crafty fox before they have had the chance to 'wise up'.

Of course, it's not just game birds; poultry and livestock can fall victim to a fox. They will also take quite a toll on the songbird population too, by devouring any small living thing as well as the eggs of any ground-nesting birds they find.

Opportunity knocks

Foxes are natural opportunists and will always take an easy option if they can or if they are bold enough.

Attacks on poultry often peak in the summer when the year's cubs begin to venture out to hunt for themselves. Due to their size, they will often get into places perhaps a fully grown fox couldn't fit, and their teenage boldness will often land them in

some sticky situations.

To find a cub stuck inside a chicken run or even Larsen trap is not uncommon, and invariably doesn't end well for the young tearaways.

This boldness leads to natural selection, and many cubs will die on the roads or walk in front of a gun, leaving those that do survive the initial harsh life lessons a little wiser.

Harvest is often a time when many farmers, keepers and foxers will head out to thin out fox numbers, once all the crops are off the fields. At this time of year, the ground should be drivable and shooting young, uneducated foxes on the stubble is easy work so a good number of foxes can be accounted for by an experienced fox shooter. One needs to be careful not to make too many mistakes though, as although these young foxes can be quite foolhardy, they very quickly learn to uphold the sacred tradition of being as crafty as a fox. [SS](#)

This vixen had got a taste for the young lambs, and the farmer was very keen for Mark to be out on watch



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ZERO TECH



SPANISH SURPRISE!

Missing the field already? Why not look into booking a weekend in Spain, where opportunities for once-in-a-lifetime partridge shooting can be enjoyed until the end of April

Shooting partridge in Spain is the reserve of the super wealthy, right? Only days north of 500 birds are ever available – sound familiar? There are a lot of mistruths surrounding this traditional centuries-old form of shooting. Many people dismiss Spain's winged game offering as too pricey. But with a little homework and some clever thinking, there ARE ways to make it more affordable, as a trip to Chinchón's arid hills proved.

For many game shooters, end-of season blues are an annual occurrence. However, the Spanish partridge season runs for an extra 10 weeks beyond the UK's winged game season. Furthermore, religious views allowing, shooting on the Sabbath is permitted. This means two days back-to-back can be arranged to take full advantage of a weekend with minimal disruption to the working week. Our trip included a modest formal driven day followed by a day of small rough drives over dogs.

March came around, and whilst the UK was in the grip of biblical flooding and many shooters were at a loss wondering what to do with

themselves, we jetted 1,000 miles south to Madrid for azure skies, alfresco dining and Rioja. The Guns in the team left work a little early on the Friday to meet at the airport. All told, with only a 40-minute transfer from the airport, we were in situ at the bar for vino tinto by 10pm local time.

Overnight we stayed in Chinchón, an area famous for its strong bullfighting tradition. The rooms in our modest hotel were typically Spanish, great value and the local restaurants were all within walking distance. The square around which many decent bars nestled turned into a makeshift bull fighting ring during numerous fiestas throughout the year.

The next morning, we headed to La Encinilla, a 1,500-hectare estate set across a spectacular terrain of gorges and valleys just 10 minutes from Chinchón. Hosted by the hugely affable Carlos Rúa, the family-run shoot is a relaxed but polished affair. Carlos learned to hunt on the plains of

Castilla La Mancha as a boy, trailing his father through Don Quixote country in search of wild partridge and ducks.

At 20 years old, he chose to follow

his heart and dropped his university studies to transform his passion into a business.

At breakfast Carlos greeted our team of eight Guns atop Sullivan, a stunning grey Andalusian stallion, which he uses to gently move the partridge from the hills to the shooting ground. This traditional, centuries-old way of 'dogging-in' keeps the indigenous game birds relaxed and is a highly effective method of blanking them in before the drive. Each Gun was assigned a loader and secretario just after breakfast, whose job it was to mark and keep count of fallen birds. Regardless of my inability to hable Español, the international language of hunting superseded.

The day was booked for 160 birds. The first drive saw the Guns line out facing undulating foothills punctuated by shrubby thyme and evergreen Iberian oaks. Set among olive and almond tree plantations, the morning sun warmed my shoulders. The hubbub of London seemed a distant memory. This was escapism at its best.

The beaters and Carlos's team of home-bred Labradors expertly drove our quarry, flushing them high against the cloudless Castilian sky. The

The partridge shooting season in Spain runs from 1 September to 30 April, giving UK shooters an extra 10 weeks in which to get their fix!



PICTURES: TWEED MEDIA

‘A dozen partridge
lifted, locking their
wings and leaving the
contours of the hills
far behind’



diminutive, acrobatic birds will challenge even the sharpest Gun so my eyes were firmly fixed on the horizon. My neighbouring Gun to the left wielded his pair of AYA shotguns with perfect precision taking three high curlers of his five-bird tally quite early on. Likewise the Gun to my right expertly brought an exquisite left and right to book, somersaulting the birds to terra firma from a dizzy height. The team displayed reserve and true sportsmanship selecting only the most sporting birds. After the drive, as would be expected, the team was beaming. I had also managed not to shoot too many as was my initial fear with so many

incredible birds on offer. It seems the entire line had attracted challenging sport. "There's a bird for everyone," explained Carlos proudly.

For the pre-prandial drive, the Guns were treated to yet more exceptional sport. The expeditious partridge raced high above the line from every direction. If you were lucky enough to shoot regularly during the UK season, then Spain is the place to put your perfected, honed skills into action and impress your peers.

Keen to make the most of the typically sunny weather, our al fresco snacks were an unhurried affair

with copious amounts of jamón and manchego. Spain's laidback attitude really is a much-needed antidote to the rat race back home.

For the last two drives, we headed north-west, less than a kilometre from the lodge. This was a cara y cruz, or reverse drive, meaning the birds were flushed from one direction, then the other. The Guns' eagerness and sheer excitement was palpable. Within seconds of quietly standing on our pegs, the first covey had flushed. A dozen partridge lifted from the shrubby carpet locking their wings and leaving the contours of the hills far behind as they rose as high as Devon pheasants. All 12 flew unscathed as the team was caught off-guard. In the distance, another three large coveys lifted and disappeared over the horizon. The Gun to my left was the first to bring down a bird. Without a glimmer of hesitation, he picked his bird and connected the muzzle to its flight line. "Buen tiro!" shouted loader Mateo Rúa, Carlos's son, as he congratulated his sharp shooting.

Before long, birds were streaming high over the Guns in rhythmic bursts. The topography lent itself to some of the most breathtaking and challenging wing shooting anywhere in the world. The presentation of the birds mirrored the British taste for high sporting targets.

We managed to keep to the bag and have one of the best day's shooting any of us can recount. We returned to the lodge for a three-hour traditional

Castilian lunch; endless barbecued partridge covered in a sweet sticky marinade washed down with decent Rioja.

**CHOOSE
A BIRD...**
...and stick to it! Good advice but hard to follow when presented with an overwhelming stream of birds.

Spain is the perfect place to put the skills you honed during the UK season into action!



YOU CAN DO THIS

■ Although this particular trip is no longer available to book, a quick look on GunsOnPegs will show up a range of Spanish partridge days, starting at around £1,400 for a 240-bag day.

■ Finca Casasola is an estate in the same area of Spain as this shooting weekend. It also offers similar smaller driven days and walked-up partridge shooting. For more information, visit: www.fincacasasola.com

Sunday sport

The next morning was a Sunday so it felt quite novel to be going shooting. The Guns gathered for our second day of sport – this time walked-up partridge over pointers and Labradors on the El Valle estate, just 45 minutes from yesterday's venue. Mateo was once again assigned as my loader. We had worked well as a team the day before so I was pleased to welcome back the always-smiling student. Less formal walked-up days offer incredible value for money and give Guns the opportunity to see even more of the stunning Spanish landscape. Dressed in blaze orange, the beaters and dog handlers walked between us Guns. The temperature was cooler today, but the sky was still a bright azure. With my borrowed AYA broken over my arm, I filled my pockets with Rio Especial Ojeo 30g cartridges, which are designed specifically for Spanish partridge. The first walk-up took us through a scrubby tree plantation with far-reaching views.

Walking-up the partridge made for superbly challenging sport and tested our reactions in a way that driven had not. The line was kept straight and unhurried by the ever-watchful eye of Carlos, who ensured every Gun received their fair share of sport. Although I have been fortunate enough to shoot driven partridge in England on numerous occasions before, I had not ever walked-up this quarry. I was intrigued to find out how they flushed and how quickly they accelerated in flight. Be under no illusions, this pocket-sized, nimble bird provides plenty of difficult sport.

No bird was left unpicked, the team of gundogs were kept busy constantly flushing and retrieving. As well as his first-class partridge shooting, Carlos is known for his line of Labradors. His dogs are noticeably heavy set, more akin to the UK's show type, but they are agile and have a fantastic work ethic, hunting out every last fallen bird. Trained by Carlos's business partner Miguel Angel Gomez, the dynamic duo have won numerous awards and national championships.

Just an hour later and we were back at the airport. Given the UK's close proximity to Spain, it really is the ideal destination to recharge your batteries and satisfy your itchy trigger finger. My original illusion of Spanish partridge shooting being out of my reach had been pleasantly shattered. SS

The topography of the ground lent itself to the presentation of some superb high birds



Carlos uses a stunning grey Andalusian stallion to gently move the partridge from the hills to the shooting ground





Shooting the breeze

The rabbits have been burrowing under some timber buildings and damaging the foundations, so Mick Garvey braves the gusting winds in search of a calm place to set up for the evening

Weather conditions affect all our shooting activities, whether that be rain, snow, frost or even sun, but the worst is wind. I can easily work around the others, but wind, especially gusting winds, really mess up what could be a red-letter day. So, a recent outing during the stupidly high, gusting wind had me looking at ways to combat these 'dis-gusting' conditions!

A breeze or even a slight wind can be our friend when out rabbiting or foxing and my last foxing

foray paid testament to this. The forecast said that the rain would instantly stop at 9.30pm and the wind would die to a breeze, and true to its promise it did just that. I worked the breeze into my face to account for two troublesome foxes – the slight breeze was not enough to affect the trajectory of the .243 round as the foxes appeared in the spotter just as the rain stopped.

However, the wind on the night in question was incredibly strong and gusting well over the

estimated 47mph stated on the Met Office app, so strong on occasion that when it hit me face on it took my breath away and on a couple of occasions bits of debris hit me on the head – nothing substantial but enough to make you think. I actually thought about wrapping up before even starting (for a millisecond), but I had been asked back by the landowner and I had a deadline looming so onwards it was. A bottle of vino was dropped off with John and Maureen the landowners and after the obligatory chat I was back in the gale force winds, but at least it wasn't raining.

Unlike the large .243 round I had used on the foxes, smaller rabbiting rounds such as the .22 LR or airgun pellets require additional thought and planning. The permission I was on is one where I regularly thin the rabbits out as they are starting to worry the surrounding property owners due to them burrowing through the "rabbit-proof fencing" (if there is such a thing). The properties are timber

construction lodges and the foundations

become a weak point of the buildings when the rabbits start to undermine them, so I spend quite a bit of my time there and always make sure to chat with as many of the owners as possible for updates on sightings and to report to them how the rabbit control is going.

It was certainly not going to be a night to stand out in the open, as the subsonic round would simply end up somewhere unintended or worse still wound the rabbit. The end of John's garden led to a large grassed area with several new saplings planted, vegetable patches and a couple of sheds that had already succumbed to the rabbits burrowing. The whole area was surrounded by tall conifers and hawthorns and was set slightly lower than the main pasture land that encompassed it and apart from a few breaks in the treeline it was almost wind-free... perfect for my needs and the three established trees would

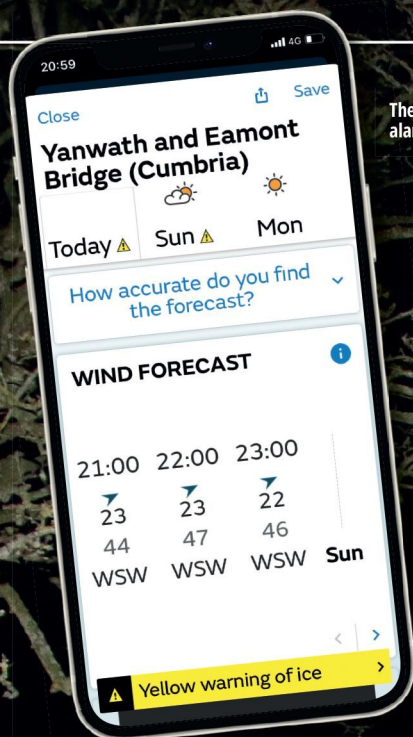
'The permission I was on is one where I regularly thin the rabbits out as they worry the surrounding property owners'



There had been some extensive burrowing since Mick's last visit

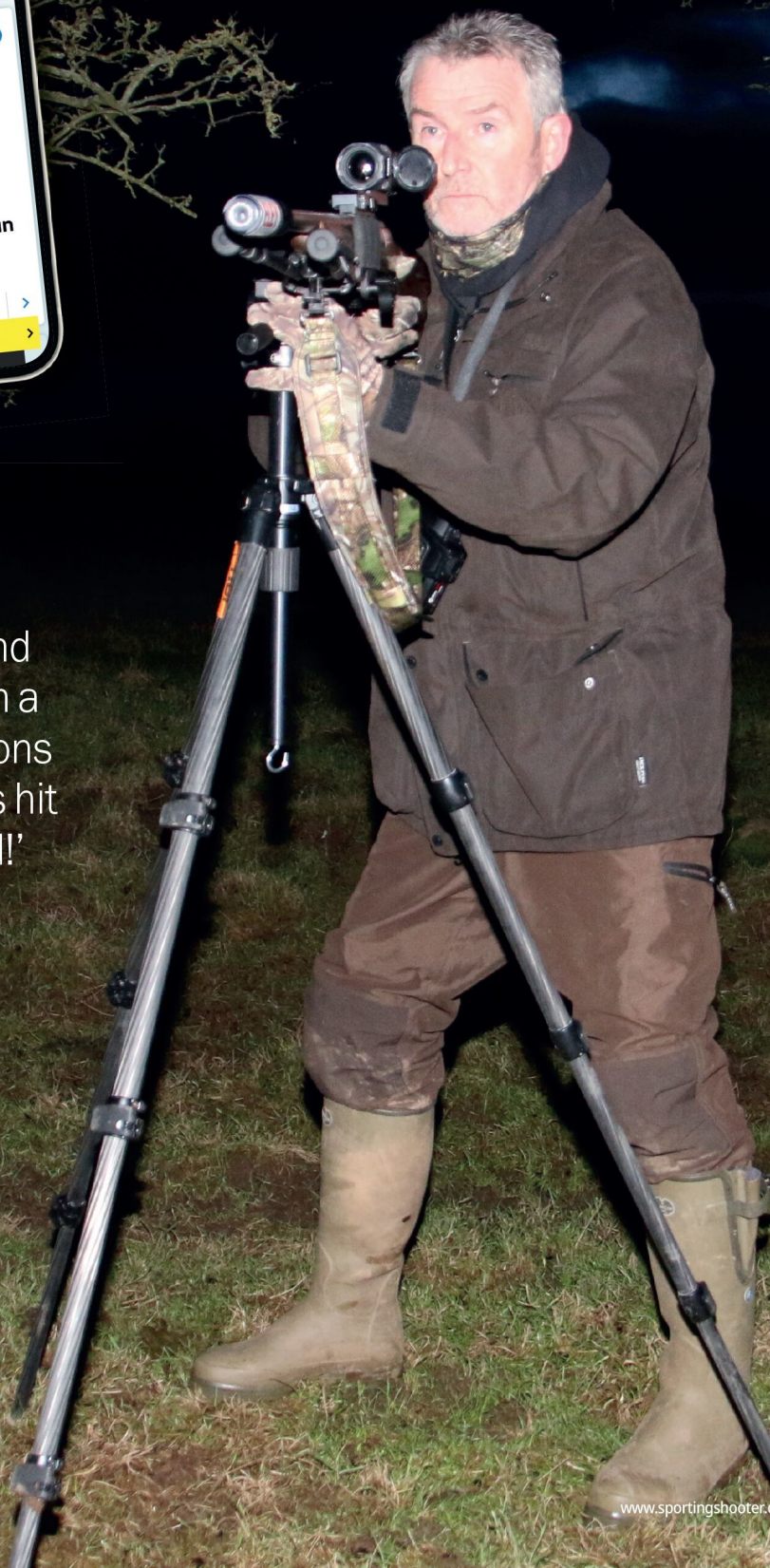
WANT TO READ MORE LIKE THIS?

Turn to page 40, where our usual fox shooter, Deano, has this smaller pest species in his sights for the night.

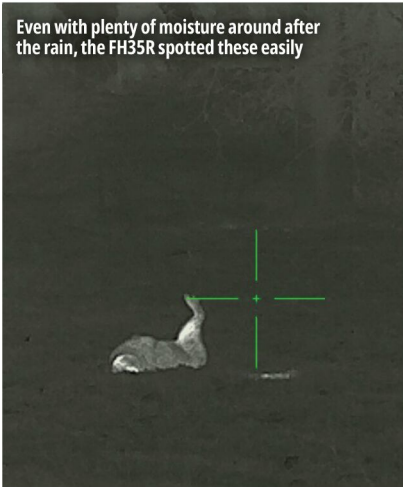


The weather app showed alarming numbers

‘The gusting wind was so strong on a couple of occasions that bits of debris hit me on the head!’



Even with plenty of moisture around after the rain, the FH35R spotted these easily



provide a little subterfuge for myself and the rabbiting set-up to blend into.

The set-up for the night would be the CZ 455 .22 LR rimfire with the InfiRay SCT35 SCT Saim thermal scope, FH35R Finder thermal spotter, KJI K800 carbon fibre tripod with the reaper grip and as always, the excellent Eley hollow subsonic rounds.

Rabbits will sit out in the wind totally untroubled by it and a breeze should be used to our advantage to get within a respectable distance by keeping it into your face. A good handful of bunnies can usually be expected to be seen grazing here but tonight was different with just a couple sat out – the flying debris and the rattling of shed doors and roofs must be keeping my quarry underground tonight. The two sat out were taken at a respectable 50 and 35 yards. Nothing more revealed itself in the following 30 minutes, so these were scooped up and stashed in the rucksack.

Once more, the thought occurred to me that I should wrap up and go home, but it was still early and the two rabbits were not enough to satisfy my hunting desires. So, with the gun and tripod on my shoulder I made my way round the treeline in the main grazing field, desperately looking for some sort of cover from the wind. The top of the field was split by mature hawthorns which had been burrowed under by the rabbits and there were several sat out in the open. I had to resist the craving to have a go at these, but I was having trouble simply trying to keep steady on my feet let alone take a shot, so I moved on looking for that elusive cover.

The wind was coming from the west-south-west and straight over more lodges, and I knew these properties have more conifers on their boundaries that would provide some cover. Once I was close enough, the gusting gale was almost unnoticeable – the treeline provided about 800 yards of cover with the odd gap where the wind managed to blow through, but I had found my



The SCT35 Saim is lightweight, small and suits the 455 superbly

cover and I would have to make the most of it. An adjoining paddock was home for a single Shetland pony and it always has a good head of rabbits, but I don't have permission for this land. All is not lost though as they do make the journey out of this paddock into 'my' field and from my new vantage point I would see them coming through the spotter – it would just be a case of being patient. The difference in conditions here, in comparison to just a few hundred yards away, was unbelievable - and if I ventured out into the open, then just 50 yards would mark the line not to be crossed.

The rabbits were running around chasing each other in the paddock when one strayed too far and came right though the wire fence. It came to a halt a couple of yards through the fence to take on some sustenance and once the crosshairs on the Saim were set it came to a more permanent halt. The crack of the subsonic round was lost in the howling wind and before long another popped through the fence, coming to a stop a bit further out but into the hard gusting wind hit area. The KJI provides an awesome, stable platform to take

shots from and if I could wait for a drop in the gusts then I should be able to get the shot. It took some time and a couple of times I was just about to send it when the wind reappeared.

Patience eventually paid off and a clean 40-yard headshot brought the fourth rabbit to the bag. At this stage, I was thinking four is a good result for the conditions but I'll give the garden area another look. The cover here was superb and a couple of our furry friends had ventured out, luckily one at each end of the grassed area, so there was no chance of the first shot spooking the second pest. Positioned under the established trees the shots were the same distance, 45 yards, and the absence of the troubling wind meant numbers five and six were added to the tally.

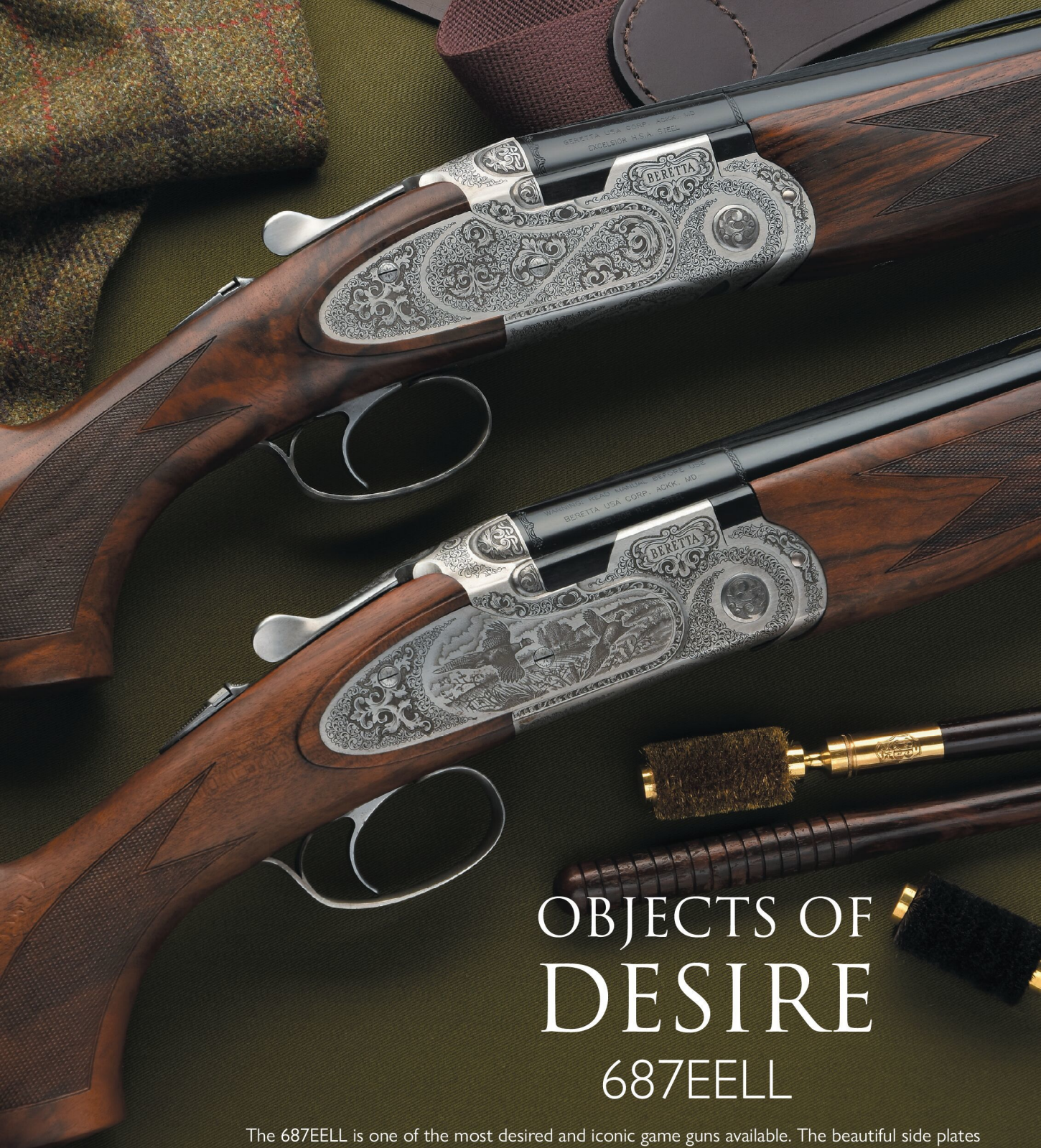
Scanning the fields, I could see plenty more sat out and although the temptation to have a go was high, discretion was employed and I decided I'd be back as soon as possible. Six in these conditions is a good result and proves that if you spend enough time and effort in employing the fieldcraft, a successful evening can and will follow. 



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The final tally was six – and a hard-fought six at that!





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What future for snares?

As pressure mounts for a ban on snares, Conor O'Gorman considers the case for their continued use

Firstly, let's be clear, snares are holding devices (self-locking snares have been banned since 1981), but in the wrong hands snares can cause severe injuries to both target and non-target species.

The risks of injury increase significantly when older snare designs lacking safety features are used and graphic imagery of animals in snares have fuelled campaigns for a ban by several animal welfare charities.

The focus of debate has been on fox snares, but a complete snare ban would also prohibit the use of snares to catch rabbits.

Let's look at rabbit snares first

Romanticised in country folklore and demonised in *Watership Down* it's perhaps surprising to learn that the use of rabbit snares has been a marginal control method for over 70 years regardless of the size of the national rabbit population.

Pre-myxomatosis, the British rabbit trapping industry relied on gin traps to provide some 40 million wild rabbits a year for their pelts and meat and with a government committee reporting in 1951 that snares were used "to

obtain an occasional rabbit for food".

Fast forward to modern times and shooting, fencing, gassing and ferreting are the main rabbit control methods with a 2009 survey reporting rabbit snares being used on only 1.2% of landholdings in England and Wales,

So, would it matter if rabbit snares were banned?

Yes, I think it would matter because in the right hands rabbit snares are a humane and traditional method of harvesting a wild game resource and that option should remain.

Moreover, there are situations where a locally abundant rabbit population is causing damage and there are limited options for shooting, gassing and ferreting and this is where an experienced rabbit snarer can save the day.

The book *Professional Rabbit Snaring* by Glenn Waters is a recommended read and underlines the importance of correct snare design and use, with respect for quarry at the forefront throughout this 'snarer's bible'.

However, in the wrong hands rabbit snares cause unnecessary suffering to rabbits and non-target species alike. As such I do wonder if the myriad survival shows and YouTube rabbit snaring videos, combined

with the wide availability of all sorts of rabbit snares to buy online, is contributing to the irresponsible use of rabbit snares?

In Scotland, changes in snaring law have been implemented that are aimed at reducing bad practice, and whilst there was opposition to the changes when first proposed, an outright snares ban was avoided. I will come back to this later, let's now look at fox snares.

Fox snares

In 2016, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) reported that 97% of snare use in the UK targeted foxes with roughly equal numbers of gamekeepers and farmers using fox snares.

The use of fox snares became prevalent in the 1960s after small diameter flexible steel cable, manufactured for bicycles, aeroplanes, etc., became available for snare construction.

Campaigns to ban fox snares target older snare designs that are self-locking and already unlawful to use, and modern fox designs do not self-lock and have several other safety features built in as follows. Firstly, each snare has a 'stop'. This is a small wire crimp positioned on the snare wire at a predetermined length, which prevents the cable from ever closing beyond a certain point so it cannot overtighten and 'strangle' a fox. In addition,

HAVE YOUR SAY

Visit basc.org.uk/snares to find out more. If you have any queries or suggestions on our fight against a snares ban please email me at ogorman@basc.org.uk



Using a snare requires hands-on training to ensure their effectiveness and reduce the risk of the wrong species being caught

an animal such as a hare can back out and deer can remove their feet.

The wire the snare is made of is of a specific strength, which means it will not break before a breakaway eye or weak link, and this is incorporated into the design. Therefore, should an animal stronger than a fox, such as a badger, be caught, it can self-release without risk of the restraining wire breaking first.

Two strong swivels allow the snare to rotate freely, preventing it becoming kinked, unravelled, or overwound, thereby risking breakage.

Lastly, a fixed anchor is used to hold the snare in place. There are different designs and types, but all have the purpose of holding the snare in place so that it cannot be moved.

As with rabbit snares the use of a fox snare requires hands-on training to ensure effective use of time and effort in catching foxes and reducing the risk of non-target species being caught.

Fox snares can be an effective control method in addition to shooting when protecting ground nesting birds such as grey partridge, capercaillie, grouse, lapwing and curlew.

Space does not allow me to detail the use of snares for brown hare other than to say that situations do arise where snaring is effective and humane, and that option should remain lawful. However, whilst it is currently legal to snare mink and rat, the GWCT recommends other control methods.

On shoots, learning how to use a snare has traditionally been through mentoring of the apprentice under the watchful eye of an experienced gamekeeper.

However, best practice training courses and accreditation have also become important as continuous personal development for keepers young and old.

In the face of calls for a complete snare ban the quandary for BASC and other rural organisations is whether to argue for the status quo or to find a compromise that avoids a ban.

The situation in Scotland

And now let's return to Scotland, where for many years there has been a concerted campaign by animal welfare charities for a ban. In 2010 the law was changed to introduce various new legal requirements, including how snares are set and how often they are checked - which were already part of a voluntary practitioner's guide.

In 2012, the law changed again, requiring all snare users in Scotland to have achieved approved accreditation and received a personal ID number from the police, with every set snare having an identification tag attached.

In 2013, record-keeping became a legal requirement whereby snare users need to record

Fox snares can be an effective control method alongside shooting when protecting ground-nesting birds

GET IT RIGHT

The GWCT produces a best practice guide, which covers everything from the legalities of snares to how they work, where to set them and how, plus checking them and dispatching foxes. You can download it here: bit.ly/3x8ANtn



'In the face of calls for a complete snare ban, the quandary is whether to argue for the status quo or to find a compromise'

the location of every snare currently set, and the location of every snare set in position by the operator within the previous two years.

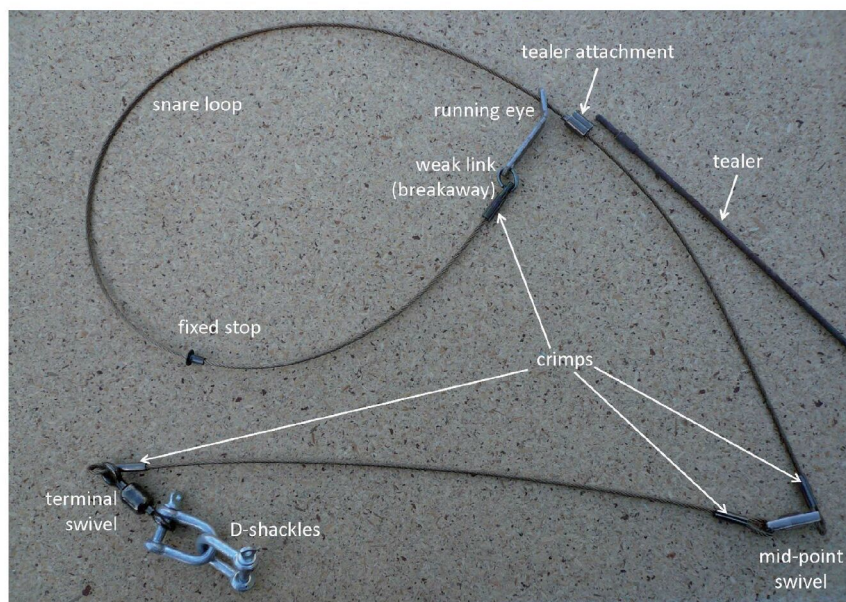
The Scottish snaring system has now been in place for a decade, but the threat of a ban is never far away, the latest example being attempts to use the Scottish Wildlife Management (Grouse) Bill as a vehicle for a snare ban, which we will oppose.

In Wales we are fighting proposals for a complete snare ban. We are arguing for the use of Welsh code-compliant fox snares (also known as 'humane cable restraints') to be permitted

alongside regulated training measures, having said that we would like the Welsh Government to explore the option of a licensing system.

In England, the Westminster government has committed to a call for evidence on snares and if that goes ahead, we will need your help in submitting case studies.

There is no doubt that scrutiny on the use of snares will continue but those that use these holding devices can help by continuing to follow best practice and not giving the anti-ammunition for a ban. [SS](#)



PICTURE: GWCT



A never-ending battle

Bright Seeds' Arthur Barraclough looks at the constant challenges of keeping pests and predators at bay – important not just for crops but also for conservation

Historically, controlling pests has been a big part of the gamekeeper's remit – and modern-day game management is no different. Not only is it important for crop establishment, it is crucial in order to complete the 'three-legged stool' associated with successful conservation projects.

Crop establishment

The loss of some insecticide products in recent years has added to the challenge of successful crop establishment. This has been particularly the case with noenicitinoids, used for years in the battle against flea beetle on brassica crops; but with ongoing research blaming them for the decline in bumblebee populations and that of other pollinators, their days became numbered.

Whatever your stance on insecticide use, the upside of noenicitinoids was their ability to provide species-specific protection; with their use no longer an option, growers are now often forced to spray the crop post-establishment with a broad-spectrum insecticide which can damage a whole host of non-target species too.

Maize establishment has also become more challenging, as two seed treatments, Mesurol (a bird-repellent) and Sonido (a wireworm deterrent), have been phased out over the last two years. Despite the reservations of some gamekeepers as to the effectiveness of the replacement products, we are fortunate to still be able to supply maize seed that is treated with bird-repellent and wireworm treatment. Korit – the new bird-repellent – does a good job in protecting newly drilled crops from rooks, although this too will soon be off the table (2024 being its last year). The current treatment for wireworm is Force 20, used mainly when maize is grown following a long-term grass ley, which is when the problem is most threatening.

Amidst all the change and uncertainty, working closely with European seed breeders to develop better alternative solutions is a top priority for Bright Seeds.

With fewer chemical control options available, husbandry that permits good crop establishment is paramount. Uppermost is to get the plant growing as quickly as possible;

plants that have temporarily stopped growing at an early stage are most vulnerable to predators.

There are many ways to accelerate establishment: conserving moisture in the seedbed is perhaps the main one and certainly one we never tire of mentioning. There are several approaches to achieve this: an option which works well for maize is to hold-fire until you get to the desired drilling date, then plough, power-harrow and drill the seed in a very short space of time. This can capture moisture in the top layer, so it is available to the seed immediately.

For smaller seeded mixtures, growers tend towards a minimum-tillage or direct drilling methods because fewer cultivations will minimise moisture loss. Soil temperature is another significant factor: most seeds used for game cover and conservation mixes need a consistent soil temperature of at least 8 °C, so delaying drilling until this time is advantageous. Drilling too early can lead to slower establishment.

Bright Seeds has done a lot of trial work on kale establishment, and we have seen very successful kale crops planted from May right through until

GET IN TOUCH

For more information and advice on getting your cover crops off to the best possible start go to: brightseeds.co.uk or call 01722 744494



Predator control continues to be an essential part of the gamekeeper's remit

September. Again, looking specifically at kale, it has been proven that growing a suitable companion crop alongside the kale reduces the impact of pests. Kale on its own is notoriously slow to establish and can get hit hard by pests, particularly flea beetle and pigeons. Growing kale within a mix of faster growing species seems to work well as the smaller kale plants are protected. We have found that crops like mustard, phacelia and buckwheat nicely fit this scenario. Similarly, more diverse brassica mixtures such as Grass Buster spread the risk and tend to produce a pleasing leafy and winter-hardy crop.

Sorghum is a useful crop when pests are known to be an issue. It grows in a similar way to maize, except sorghum is toxic during the initial growth phase, meaning pests such as hares and deer do not graze the young plants. Sorghum is used a lot when deer are present in big numbers, with herds of fallow having the potential to wipe out entire crops of maize and brassicas.

Although it sounds obvious, it also pays to use visual deterrents too. Game crops are generally relatively small in comparison to larger arable fields, so things like flags and banger ropes certainly have their place in reducing pest damage.

Predator control

Although Bright Seeds focus mainly on the habitat side of conservation, predator control is another essential piece of the conservation puzzle. The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust developed the analogy of the three-legged stool, in which – as mentioned in our last article – three aspects of land management carry equal weight in creating a favourable farm environment.

1. Providing habitat
2. Providing a food source
3. Predator control

This comes back to the argument of how pivotal shoots are in the conservation effort within the countryside. The three points above are all implemented by game shoots across the country.

The predator control element of conservation is becoming more appreciated at government level too, with indications that funding within countryside stewardship will now also be tailored towards predator control. This was announced by Defra on 3 February 2023 and has been welcomed by BASC who stated that the news is “incredibly exciting and potentially monumental for nature recovery”. It is pleasing that estates are finally going to be rewarded for self-funded work that has been carried out for generations.

The success of our crops in encouraging game and wider farmland wildlife is a constant theme for Bright Seeds. We must not forget that most shoots are already managed with conservation at their heart, with a crop rotation which includes a combination of annual seed-bearing mixtures and

Sorghum is toxic during the early growth stage, so is rarely touched by deer and hares



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perennial mixes for cover – along with this are beetle banks, grass margins and hedgerows to provide wildlife connectivity across the landscape. Coupled with legal predator control, this can lead to success for red-listed species such as the grey partridge and yellowhammer.

The constant stress caused by predators and pests will not retreat; but there is plenty that can be done to reduce the risks. From a cover crop

perspective we still have some chemical options to help reduce pest pressures. I think these, combined with a more intricate approach to crop establishment, will help land managers produce successful crops that are undoubtedly beneficial to a huge array of farmland wildlife. Predator control plays a hugely important part too, and the potential for funding to help with the costs is welcome, and a signal of its importance in the times ahead. 

Brassica crops are vulnerable to flea beetle attack, particularly at the cotyledon stage



EAST ANGLIAN GAME & COUNTRY FAIR

The popular family game fair returns to the Euston Estate this year, and we have a great giveaway for *Sporting Shooter* readers...

TICKET INFO:

Advance discounted 2023 tickets are available to buy online at ukgamefair.co.uk or by calling the ticket hotline number 01263 735 828.

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Discounted ticket offer valid until midday 17/04/23. After this time tickets are available to buy on the gate at the 2023 on-the-day rates. Under 5s are free and car parking is free for all.

For more information, visit ukgamefair.co.uk

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The East Anglian Game & Country Fair will take place on Saturday 22 & Sunday 23 April 2023 at the Euston Estate, just off the A11 at Elveden, home to the Duke & Duchess of Grafton.

World-class events and attractions form the basis of the show each year. Main Arena displays confirmed for this year include The Tigers Army Parachute Display Team, The Squibb Freestyle Motorcross Show performing breath-taking jumps and stunts mid-air and, returning due to popular demand, the Horseboarding UK Championships where speed, agility and bravery are all required!

Other events across the weekend include the much-loved British Scurry and Trials Driving Championships, Lowestoft Dog Agility Display Team, Gundog displays, Fishing demos with World Champion Fly Caster Hywel Morgan, the hilarious Sheep Show, Traditional Ferreting Demonstrations

with Simon Whitehead, Live Craft demonstrations and much more!

Join in and 'have a go' at a range of country activities including clay shooting with John Bidwell's High Lodge instructors or enter the 40-bird re-entry shooting competition for men, women and juniors. There's fly-fishing and coarse fishing on the Black Bourn River, ferret racing, archery and axe throwing. Try the air rifle range, enter your dog into the pet dog show, join in with your dog at the K9 Aqua Sports pool or watch the Land Rovers take on the off-road 4x4 course.

There are over 350 shopping stands with a wide variety of products from fashion and footwear to gunmakers & fishing products. Children's activities, traditional fun fair, food and drink hall with Game Fair Country Kitchen, craft and gift marquees and much more. [SS](#)





To see a video encapsulating what a fun family day out the show is, go to: <https://youtu.be/ejPoo3qy9dA>



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Going green!

This year, I have decided to try and manage my cover crops using sustainable methods. This will mean giving up ploughing, which will mean my ATV-towed Spider drill will not work. So, I will possibly need a slot seeder of some description that I can tow behind the ATV. My neighbour has one but it is far too big for my small areas. I hope one of your contributors or readers can come up with a solution.

Ian Haddon, Somerset



PICTURE: ISTOCK

Breath of fresh air



I have only just started reading this magazine, having been a lifelong reader of a couple of other shooting publications. I must say that I am very impressed by the authentic styles of writing which really let the individual shine and the spread of subjects is very good. Rather than picking an issue or problem and making it all be about that, you have the same content but different adventures. I feel like I'm there with the Rough Rovers or foxing the next morning with my coffee. I think I'll stay with *Sporting Shooter* because it seems to genuinely be written by shooters for shooters. Keep up the good work!

David Anglesee

Brought a tear to the eye

I am sure I'm not alone in feeling emotional on reading Deano's moving tribute to his Labrador, Saxon, last month. It's the hardest part of owning a gundog, saying goodbye, but it's something we all must do.

I hope Deano is able to take comfort from the fact that he gave the dog a great life doing what he was bred and designed to do. Our sport would be a sorry place if it weren't for our dogs. I'm sure for many of us, that's what got us involved in the first place. Don't lose heart Deano.

Verity Hughes, via email



SNAP SHOTS



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Edge: Plain
Steel: 8Cr13MoV
Finish: Bead Blast
Thickness: 0.10" (2.64 mm)

Weight: 2.10 oz. (59.53 g)
Overall Length: 5.63" (142.88 mm)
Handle: G10

RRP: £54.99

TAIL BONE

Blade: Length: 2.13" (53.98 mm)
Edge: Plain
Steel: 8Cr13MoV
Finish: Stonewash
Thickness: 0.15" (3.91 mm)

Weight: 2.00 oz. (56.70 g)
Overall Length: 6.31" (160.35 mm)
Handle: Cord-Wrapped Carbon Steel

RRP: £49.99

TUNA

Blade: Length: 3.22" (81.81 mm)
Edge: Plain
Steel: 8Cr14MoV
Finish: Stonewash
Thickness: 0.15" (3.68 mm)

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Pick a knife, any knife...

... but which one? Jonny Crockett takes an in-depth look at what factors to consider when buying a knife

Buying a knife can be a minefield of decisions and dilemmas. There is no 'best knife in the world' and what one person admires and cherishes, another will ignore and not look at twice. Buying a knife is similar to purchasing a car. While many serve the same purpose, such as carrying a family of four from A to B, some others are designed for racing, carrying heavy loads or are cheap for the first-time buyer.

Before starting out on a knife buying expedition, you should firstly make sure that it is legal to do so. Knife law is black and white and the government website (gov.uk) is easy to navigate around. The next clarification should be what the knife is to be used for. A knife is not just a knife. What are you

‘Like many outdoors people, I often carry more than one knife in the rucksack, especially when I’m out for a week or so’

going to be cutting? Some knives are suited for cutting meat and skin (skinning and gralloching knives), while some are designed for use with wood. Other knives come with a plethora of additional uses. Just think of a multi-tool or the ubiquitous Swiss Army knife.

Another aspect of knife purchases is the price you’re willing to pay. Two similar knives, one costing £15 and one costing £150, will do the same job. Work out what you want to pay and why the knife you’re looking at is worth the price it is sold at.

When you purchase a firearm, it usually comes in three distinct parts: the metal bits, the wooden bits and something to carry it in. The same goes for knives. You should consider the blade, the handle and something to carry it in, namely, the sheath. Let’s examine each of those parts in turn.

The blade

The blade generally comes in one of two materials: carbon steel and stainless steel. Both materials will do exactly the same thing, and there are pros and cons to them both. Carbon steel is generally softer and requires sharpening more often, however, it is easier to sharpen. Stainless steel, being harder, lasts longer and so potentially gives you a full day’s use before sharpening is required. You can also find some wonderfully ornate

Damascus blades. These look similar to the glorious metal work on your shotgun. Damascus blades are made in an elaborate way that takes many hours to produce, and so you’ll pay for it, often hundreds of pounds.

Another aspect of choosing the right steel is the weather. I have a carbon steel knife that goes rusty if I just mention Scotland, or rain. Stainless steel is just that, ‘stain’ and ‘less’. It is not rust proof, it merely takes a lot longer to rust. Choose the right steel for the right environment.

Now it is time to work out how big you want your knife to be. You can go for a 5cm ‘neckier’ knife which hangs round the neck, or something a little larger for processing wood. Long knives are cumbersome when making fine and intricate cuts. Small knives are not desirable when splitting wood or working on larger projects.

Like many outdoors people, I often find myself carrying more than one knife in the rucksack, especially when I’m out for a week or so. When in Scotland for a week, I’ll use a short skinning knife with a 10cm long blade for general work, and a 20cm bladed knife for splitting wood.

As not all blades are the same length, they also don’t have the same profile. Generally speaking, there are four shapes. The first on my list is possibly the most popular in the UK and that is the



Consider the length of the blade when selecting a knife – large knives can be cumbersome and small ones can be fiddly

KIT BAG

Carrying a knife when out in the field means you'll never be caught short, whether you need to gralloch a deer or cut some twine!





Plastic sheaths and handles are ideal for food preparation as they are easy to clean

Scandinavian grind. The flat blade is ground to produce a bevel. The angle of the bevel is part of the design and is often linked to the thickness of the blade (more on the thickness of the blade later). It is probably the easiest to sharpen and is a good all-round utility blade.

The second on my list is a flat grind. This is ideal for carving meat and slicing through hides and skins. Think of a kitchen knife and you're on the mark. It is most suitable for a thinner blade.

The third style of blade is a concave blade. When you look at it from the point end, it looks Eiffel Tower-shaped. This usually comes with a secondary bevel and requires careful sharpening with a stone, but is more often sharpened with a specialist tool.

The fourth style is the opposite of the concave blade and is known as a convex grind. It looks similar to an axe profile and is ideal for exploding material apart. It is also very tricky to sharpen correctly and evenly.

I said that I'd return to the thickness of the blade... there are some comically thick blades,

which seem to be more about machismo than practicality; 2.5mm to 4mm is plenty; 5mm and over is going to limit the jobs you can do with your knife. If your knife is on the thinner side, you'll find carving wood and animal preparation a cinch. Try thinking about your knife as a long triangular piece of metal. If it is too thick, the profile will be inherently blunt. The thinner it is the sharper it is. Beware though, as too thin will provide you with a weak blade.

It is also worth looking at the shape of the blade from a side-on perspective. Some people like the Bowie knife lines with the raised point, others like a drop pointed end to the blade. It is a matter of taste and one that is very personal. There are also blades that fold back on themselves. These are often used in opening packing crates as the cutting edge is not outward facing. They are also common in the gralloching and skinning world. They are very job-specific, but it's worth obtaining one if you do this sort of activity often.

The length of the blade through the handle is also worth considering. If the tang of the blade runs right to the end of the handle, then it is known as a full tang. If it only runs halfway down, then it is known as a half tang. The fuller the tang, the stronger the knife – worth careful thought if you are going to split wood with it.

The handle

The handle is perhaps even more personal than the blade. They range in materials from rubber to plastic, wood to bone, metal and antler and everything in between. The important factors here are that they are comfortable to hold and that you like the look of it.

The cheaper knives often have the rubber or plastic handles, making them effective as knives but not necessarily that attractive to look at. Generally, they are bullet proof, and so cheap that if you lose or break one then it isn't that big a deal. As a

rule of thumb, the plastic and cheaper handles have a half tang blade in them. One exception to the rule is the Fallkniven knives. They have a rubbery plastic handle and have a full tang. They are about as tough as you're ever going to find.

Halfway between those knives and the wooden handled counterparts are the knives with a Micarta handle. Micarta is often made up of layers of textile, fibreglass, paper or carbon fibre set in a thermosetting plastic. Micarta is a brand name. As the thermosetting plastic is often transparent, you can buy weird and whacky coloured handles that make an LSD trip seem tame. If you're adventurous in your choice of knife, or you fear putting it down and losing it, then perhaps Micarta is the way forward for you.

No article about knives would be complete without talking about wooden handles. Each

HI VIS!
If you're prone to dropping or losing things, a brightly coloured hi-vis handle might be a good move; it'll show up clearly on the ground!



Thin blades are ideal for intricate jobs, while thick blades are suitable for splitting wood



Flat grind blades are easy to sharpen



Two knives, in a similar size and design, but £250 apart!

species of wood has its own grain. I bought a knife a couple of years ago with a bizarre yew handle. It looks like the grain moves when you tilt the knife in the light; it is extraordinarily beautiful.

It really is a case of picking the wood you like. Curly birch is always popular, while more traditional buyers may go for oak, hawthorn, or one of the fruit woods like cherry, plum, apple or pear. There has been a trend recently towards the more exotic woods such as cocobolo, olive and even mahogany. When you approach a knife maker, ask to see the scales of wood before purchasing (even via photos on email). It'll give you an idea of how the knife will look. Have a look on the internet for how you want the scales to be attached to the blade. You can have a variety of bolts that push through and tighten, in a range of colours, metals and ornateness.

In the past, I've had knives made of antler and bone. They are a treat to work with, but I've often felt that they are too good to treat roughly. I also have to consider where the materials have come from. Have they been ethically sourced? Despite all this, they do look very special.

Metal handled knives are usually the preserve of the military; think commando daggers! They do tend to make the knives heavy and also very cold to the touch in the winter. I tend to avoid these, but that's a personal choice.

The sheath

The sheath should not be overlooked. The choice of material is important as if you choose plastic or kydex, then you could be locking moisture into a small area against the blade, inviting rust. However, they are easy to clean as you can put the sheath in the washing machine.

Canvas is another that I've seen recently, but I'm not a huge fan of it. It is a trust issue – I'd always think I was cutting through the sheath.

Leather is where it's at, though. If you get it tailor-made (and there are hundreds of seriously talented leather workers out there), you can design it yourself. The sheath would need to be made around the knife, so you may need to give it up for a few days. You usually get the choice of black or brown, but the brown can be light tan, chestnut or dark brown. Often, you'll find a loop which will take a fire lighting fire steel. Very useful. Leather sheaths are usually polished on the outside but rough on the inside. This does mean that the

'The thinner the blade, the sharper it is – if it's too thick, the profile will be blunt. Going too thin, though, will result in a weak blade'



sheath can harbour dirt and debris. You'll need to remember to clean your knife before returning it to the sheath – there is no easy way of cleaning it otherwise. You'll also find that if the leather gets wet, you'll have to leave it to dry thoroughly before resheathing the knife.

You should consider some sort of belt loop or lanyard holes so that you can keep it on your person. At this point, you can opt for left- or right-handed. I do have a knife that loops around my neck and hangs upside down. There is a magnet in the sheath to prevent the knife from falling out. A neat trick, and it looks good too.

Folding knives

I've discussed the pros and cons of sheath knives but not really mentioned folding knives. They are becoming more popular, as those without a locking mechanism, and a blade less than three inches, are legal to carry. They are commonly known as

every day carry knives (EDC for short).

The EDC is most often a single blade, hinged at the hilt end of the handle allowing the blade to fold up into the handle. This hinge is a point of weakness in the knife materials, but generally speaking they are strong enough to cope with most tasks, although I'd avoid splitting wood with them. Penknives, as they used to be called, are still worthy of serious consideration when selecting a knife. All the blade styles, handles and sheaths are still available, and they are ideal for carrying on a shoot, cutting bailer twine, making pegs and a million and one other uses. They are also priced around the same or cheaper than sheath knives.

In a nutshell, when selecting a knife, choose according to budget, proposed use and aesthetics. You can spend thousands of pounds on a knife, but you can do the same with one costing 15 to 20 quid too.

Above all, enjoy your knives and keep safe. 



ONE FOR THE POT

Cream of Pheasant & Apple



CONTACT

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

Leftover lunches

One of the joys of cooking a roast on Sunday is that it provides the basis for some tasty meals over the following days. Here are some winning ideas from the GFA kitchen

For us here in the GFA kitchen one of the best meals of the week is the Sunday roast but that is not just because it is great chance to sit down and have a fantastic meal with game at the centre of it, with family and friends, it is because we always make sure we cook far too much so that we have some great meals for the next few days.

When you have roasted a pheasant or partridge,

there is always plenty of meat left on the carcass, and this is perfect to be stripped to make both of this month's leftover lunches.

Make sure there are too many vegetables as well, as this is a great chance to make some tasty dishes like roast potato gnocchi or just a simple fry up with some poached duck eggs – recipes for both of these can be found on our website www.gameforanything.co.uk.

In one of this month's recipes we have made the cauliflower cheese puree from scratch but of course this is a great chance to use whichever left over bit from the Sunday lunch that is still in the fridge on Monday evening!!

In the other recipe, we have taken the chance to use one of those things we all have in the store cupboard but in a slightly different way, we are using your standard shop bought stuffing as a great coating rather than in its normal form of that perfect Sunday side dish.

Then last, but definitely not least, we need to make the stock with the carcass. We will save up the roasted birds in the freezer until we have half a dozen then get them in the stock pot.

Please do visit our website or follow us on Instagram for further details about some of the things we are up to.

If there are any recipes or game meats you would like to see us use in the months ahead, please do get in touch.

Cream of Pheasant & Apple with Rice & Peas

Serves 4

Ingredients

Cream of Pheasant & Apple

- ◆ 300g cooked pheasant meat, diced
- ◆ 200ml water
- ◆ 1 chicken stock cube
- ◆ 1 vegetable stock cube
- ◆ 250ml apple juice
- ◆ 2 cloves of garlic, crushed
- ◆ 2 shallots, finely chopped
- ◆ 2 eating apples, cored and diced
- ◆ 100ml double cream
- ◆ olive oil for frying

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:

Chris Marney: chris@gameforanything.co.uk
Mark Robson: mark@gameforanything.co.uk





GAME FOR ANYTHING

Rice

- ♦ 300g long grain rice
- ♦ 50g frozen garden peas

Method

Cream of Pheasant & Apple

1. Place the water, 200ml of the apple juice and the stock cubes into a saucepan and bring to the boil, then reduce by half
2. Place the olive oil, with the chopped shallots and a splash of cold water, into a frying pan and gently heat with a lid on
3. Cook the onions until softened but try not to let them take on any colour
4. Add the crushed garlic and diced apple and fry for 2 minutes
5. Add the cubed pheasant to the pan along with the stock reduction and the remainder of the apple juice and the cream
6. Bring to the boil, ensuring it's all combined

Rice

1. Place the rice in a sieve and under a cold running tap to wash off the starch – you can stop once the water is running clean.
2. Bring a pan of salted water to the boil and drop in the rice and pop the lid on. Cook for 5 minutes
3. Strain the rice in the sieve
4. Add some boiling water back into the pan then place the rice in a veg steamer over the pan, place a lid on and steam for 8 minutes
5. Add the peas to the boiling water for the last two minutes of steaming the rice strain and mix into the rice

Sage & Onion Partridge with Cauliflower Cheese Puree

Serves 4

Ingredients

Partridge

- ♦ 300g cooked partridge meat
- ♦ 2 eggs, beaten
- ♦ 100g plain flour, seasoned with salt & pepper
- ♦ 150g sage & onion mix

Cauliflower Cheese

- ♦ 1 medium cauliflower
- ♦ 50g unsalted butter
- ♦ 50g plain flour
- ♦ 150ml milk
- ♦ 100ml double cream
- ♦ 200g grated mature cheddar cheese

Method

Partridge

1. Heat up the deep fat fryer to 180°C (or use a deep frying pan)
2. Take off the leftover partridge meat from the carcass in strips and set to one side
3. Place the eggs, flour and sage & onion mix into 3 separate bowls
4. Toss the partridge strips in the seasoned flour
5. Place into the beaten egg, then coat in the sage & onion mix
6. Fry for 3 to 4 minutes until nicely browned then remove from the fryer and place onto some kitchen paper to remove any excess oil



Cauliflower Cheese

1. Turn the oven on to 180°C
2. Bring a large pan of water to the boil
3. Remove the outer leaves of the cauliflower and cut the florets into bite-size pieces
4. Place into the boiling water for 15-20 minutes until cooked (test this by pushing a sharp knife into the centre – it is cooked when the knife goes in nice and easily)
5. Once cooked, strain from the water, place into a pie dish and set to one side
6. In a large saucepan, melt the butter then whisk in the flour. When it is all combined, add the milk
7. Keep whisking to avoid lumps. When the sauce starts to become thick, add 150g of the cheese and keep whisking
8. When the sauce is smooth, pour over the cooked cauliflower and sprinkle over the remaining grated cheese
9. Roast for 45 to 60 minutes until the top is browned
10. Place the cauliflower cheese into a blender and pulse until smooth



PICTURES: CHRIS MARNEY



Mission impossible?

Shooting rabbits on a frosty, still night isn't ideal, but sometimes you've just got to get a job done. This month, Deano explains some of the other pest and predator control he's involved in

As I write this, we are going into our second week of sub-zero temps. This is perfect weather for sitting out over bait and calling; you are taking advantage of your foxes getting very hungry. When it comes to foxing, there are pluses and minuses to all seasons: cold weather is perfect for hunting, but it's bloody chilly for those of us that are there sat out in it!

Like most of us involved in predator control, with game shooting coming to an end, thoughts start to turn to getting on top of the vermin that has built

up on the ground we control. And with this issue being the pest control special, I thought I would mention some of the other aspects of pest control that I am also involved in.

You all know me as a fox shooter and we will get back to that in a bit, but over the years I have been involved in all sorts of vermin control, from the days of the big hare shoots when you'd shoot 300+, to the vermin shoots that would happen in February, driving out the woods to the standing Guns, who would be under strict instruction only to shoot at foxes until the gamekeeper would blow the horn. Once the gap closed up with the walking Guns, any foxes would have hopefully already bolted, although occasionally you got one that had sat tight and would catch everyone out when they had already swapped their BBs for lighter loads, ready for the jays or magpies. On these shoots, the walking Guns would make their way through the cover, all the time keeping a look out for pigeon, squirrels or any other vermin that come into range. They used to tease me even back then, calling me 'the magnet', but it did seem to happen a lot and I would be the lucky one that the fox came to.

I can look back and remember every single one I shot on those shoots as far back as 43 years ago when I shot my first, as a walking Gun (not yet one of the chosen ones to be a standing Gun!). We were pushing a really thick wood through when a fox broke out of some brambles to my right and crossed some open ground in front of me under a couple of beech trees. I swung the old side-by-side shotgun I had then through the fox, and will never forget that feeling as the fox crumpled over. Everybody would have heard just how pleased I was! When we got to the end of the drive and I very proudly showed off the fox I had shot, it was one of the best feelings you can imagine for a young lad, in front of a right old team made up of gamekeepers and helpers... I felt on top of the world. It was that moment that hooked me into this lifelong commitment that I have for hunting foxes. I doubt I will ever feel like that again, but they still are the quarry I enjoy hunting the most.

Rabbit mission

Like I said earlier, it was a very cold week and the farmer contacted me, saying we must get out and

'Our plan was that as soon as they reacted I would tap the top of the truck, Joe would stop, and I would take my shot'

Whether you're lamping foxes or using thermal, you've always got to consider whether driving on the fields is going to do more harm than good!



PICTURE: NICK RIDLEY

shoot some rabbits. I explained that it wasn't the best conditions to be going out as the frosty, still nights meant we wouldn't get anywhere near them. He protested that once the frost had gone we would not be able to drive on the crops. He had a point and with what we do, you just have to make the best of it sometimes.

Now, I am old school and still use an old .22 rimfire with a normal scope set up on it, and if it's cloudy and a bit windy it's still a very effective way of controlling rabbits using a lamp, but in these conditions I wouldn't have stood a chance of getting anywhere near them, so plan B was needed. I suggested to Joe that I borrow his .17 HMR. He has a thermal scope on top so at least we would be able to get a few with that.

We met up and he suggested that I stay in the truck and shoot out the window so I wouldn't get so cold; but if you are going to do a job then do it properly, so on the back of the truck I got! As we went into every field I would check all over it, firstly to see if there was a fox about, then to spot the rabbits and guide Joe in. Mind you, after about 30 minutes I was starting to think I should have sat inside, as I was hardly able to feel my fingers when reloading the magazine!

Our plan of attack was that I would watch them and as soon as they reacted to our approach I would tap the top of the truck, Joe would stop, and I would take my shot. I was right – they were very jumpy and we were lucky if we got to within 80 yards of them! The .17 is just perfect for this job though, and we were managing to get a few shot.

Always ready for a fox

It wasn't until we got to the last field that we spotted the first fox. Joe had to open the gate as I watched the fox crossing a good 300 yards away. He was heading towards the fence line we intended to drive down. We approached steadily... Making a good distance, I tapped on the top of the truck and we stopped. The fox looked at us, but kept coming across the field. When he got a few yards from the fence line, I shouted and he came to a perfect broadside position. I took aim and squeezed the trigger. The fox acted like a heart-shot deer, kicked out its back legs, darted forwards 10 yards and dropped down stone dead. We drove down and, sure enough, on examination it was shot straight through the heart. At last I felt warm! The buzz of getting the fox had done the trick! We carried on, shot a few more rabbits, and called it a night.

The cold weather was going to be with us for a bit, so it was back to the foxes again. Even though we did not see many that night I have started to bait over the other side of the farm, and have seen some action on the bait stations. We also left a few of the rabbits we shot in selected areas for me to drive round and check first thing in the morning to see if any had gone. I did drive round and check in the morning, and two had gone in different places... a reminder that just because you don't see foxes, doesn't mean they're not there. 📸

Deano finds that using a .17 HMR with a thermal scope is perfect for getting into rabbits on still, frosty nights when you can't get too close



PICTURE:ISTOCK

This heart-shot fox darted a mere 10 yards before dropping to the spot



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Hawke Frontier LRF 8x42 binoculars

TESTED BY:
**PAUL
AUSTIN**

It was a long time coming but Hawke have added LRF (laser range finder) binos to their Frontier line. It was an obvious step as Hawke are already well known for traditional range finders. However, it's a tough market to crack when you combine expensive production costs with the innate snobbery associated with the LRF bino market.

Until fairly recently Leica, Swarovski and Zeiss had something of a stranglehold on the market, at least at the entry level, but Steiner, Delta and now Hawke have thrown their hats in the ring at around the £1,000 mark. That's less than half what the big boys are asking for their flagship offerings, all of which weigh in at around £2,800.

The acid test for me with any LRF is the sheep shed! Not just any sheep shed, the one that sits conveniently high on the mountainside towards the end of the adjacent valley wall opposite my house. Straight out of the box, and with the CR2 battery safely installed, it was my first target.

The first ping reported 1,230m, which is spot-on based on my previous tests, so a promising start. As shed hunting isn't really my thing, I then turned my attention to the sheep peppering the hillside for some real-world ranging tests.

Although the specs quote 1,800m as the maximum ranging distance, that's likely to be based on a sizeable and reflective

target. On the adjacent sheep-splattered grassy hillside the maximum reliable pings topped out around 1,260m, which is still impressive and certainly keeps pace with the Steiner and Delta LRFs I've reviewed recently.

If you need more ranging distance, you will need to take a look at the big boys, but before shelling out a small fortune you do need to ask yourself if it's bragging rights you're after or a real-world shooting aid. I can't think of any situation in which I'd even consider a shot, other than on steel, at anywhere near 1,200m.

Setup & build

The initial set-up phase is done in seconds. First, sling in the supplied CR2 battery into the bridge-mounted battery compartment, close your left eye and tap the right-side power button to ping a target. Using the OLED display, adjust the right dioptre to focus the display, then use the main bridge-mounted focus dial for a pin-sharp image. Next, close your right eye, open your left and use the dioptre on the left barrel to set focus for that eye. That's it, you're done.

With the OLED display active you can use the menu button to cycle through the modes with a short press on the power button skipping through the six brightness levels. The layout is clear and will be instantly familiar to anyone who's used a range

finder in the past.

Modes include Distance/Scan, Horizontal Distance, Angle, Rain, Hunt, and Near, all with an auto shut off feature. The Frontiers also offer THD or true horizontal distance (HD), which when combined with the angle gives you all the information you need to make the necessary ballistic calculations prior to taking on a shot at extended range.

The Frontier range is Hawke's premium line, whether that be scopes or binos, and as you'd expect, the build quality is excellent. It has a nice ergonomic design with a textured finish and it's not overly heavy given all the additional electronics tucked away inside.

The various dials and adjusters are nicely weighted and overall it feels like a quality product. In addition to the binos themselves you also get a selection of extras, the highlight of which is an included bino harness as well as a standard neoprene neck strap.

The harness is fairly basic but it's a great fit and keeps all that expensive glass nicely padded and secure when climbing gates and also means you'll avoid clanging them against the bodywork, bonnet or flatbed of your truck when you need to take a quick shot. It's a really useful addition to the overall package that neither the Delta or Steiner LRFs provide.

In terms of the glass, again there's no

LASER RANGE FINDERS

This is essential tech when you need to dial in at distance. LRF binos offer true horizontal distance, which can often prove invaluable when shooting on steep inclines.

Simple and sensible ergonomics that really deliver at distance





The perfect partnership – the Frontier LRFs with their included harness

complaints: bright, sharp with nice contrast and no chromatic aberration. You will take a slight hit in terms of light transmission, due to the additional hardware within the barrels, but that's a very small price to pay for the ranging abilities that an LRF provides. In typical daylight shooting scenarios you'd struggle to notice any real difference.

Hawke are clearly confident with the build quality and are offering a lifetime warranty (mechanical and optical) and 2 years for electronic components. They're IPX7 waterproof and fog proof, so in terms of longevity we appear to be in safe hands.

8x42 or 10x42?

With only £100 between them, it's perhaps tempting to opt for the bigger number, but the fact is there's no bad choice here. The decision should really be based on your shooting style. If you shoot over large areas of open country the 10x42's might be the better option. Essentially, there's always a trade trade-off between the two.

The 8x offers a wider field of view at 7.5 as opposed to the 6 degrees of the 10x model – plus you do save a little weight with the 8x. Basically you can scan more ground more quickly with the 8x at the cost of slightly less magnification. For me, there's very little in it but I'd probably opt for the 8x42 primarily for the added FOV, as that better suits my style of shooting.

The bottom line

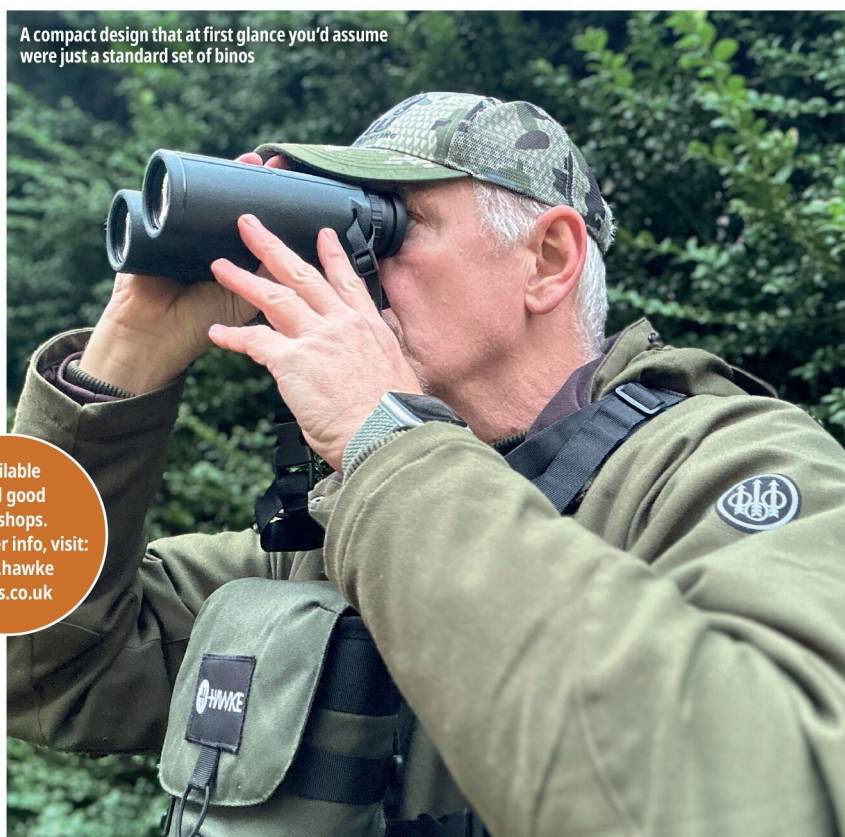
These new LRFs fit perfectly into the Frontier line-up – it's Hawke's premium line and has made real inroads in the market with serious shooters embracing the Frontier scopes in particular. The new LRF binos are a well-made, nicely engineered product that performs exceptionally well in terms of both image clarity and ranging performance.

Any complaints? No, not really. If you're a serious shooter who's more concerned about the ability of a product rather than the brand, the new Hawke LRFs are a great choice that reaffirm the Frontier line's place in the market. Highly recommended.

8x42: £999

10x42: £1,099

A compact design that at first glance you'd assume were just a standard set of binos



Available in all good gun shops.
For further info, visit:
www.hawkeoptics.co.uk

TECH SPECS

- Optical System: System H7
- Magnification: 8x
- Objective Lens: 42mm
- Colour: Green
- Lens Coating: Wide Band / Anti-reflection / Fully Multi-Coated Lenses with Water Repellent Coating
- Field of View: 393ft @ 1,000yds (131m @ 1,000m)
- Field of View: 7.5°
- Apparent Field of View: 60°
- Eye Relief: 16mm
- Exit Pupil: 5.3mm
- Interpupillary Distance: 2.2-3" (55-76mm)
- Close Focus: 33ft (10.1m)
- Prism Type: Patented Prism System with Beam Split Coating
- Eye Cups: Twist-Up (Replaceable)
- Diopter Type: Left Eye
- Tripod Mounting Thread: No
- Height: 165mm
- Width: 115-138mm
- Weight: 999g
- Modes: Standard // Horizontal Distance // Angle // Rain / Near // Hunt
- Display: OLED
- Range: (m) 10 to 1,800
- Accuracy: (m) ±1
- Angle Range: 90°
- Battery: 3V CR2
- Waterproof: IPX7

£2,479

The X-Bolt... but better

With its carbon-fibre stock and various bells and whistles, the Browning X-Bolt Pro is a step up from its namesake, and Mike Yardley is impressed

This month, after our editor told me it was a special pest and predator control issue, I thought I would look at something close to my own heart – a rifle! Although my work with shotguns is better known in the UK, I have a long history with rifles which began, like it did for many of my generation, with a smoothbore .177 pellet (and darts) gun. I caught the bug and moved on to .22s, rimfires, and, once I had become a member of the 11th County of London Rifle Club in the Vauxhall Bridge Road (I'm not kidding Mr Mainwaring), .303s. My very first fullbore FAC rifle was a Sako

lever-action 'Finnwolf', a marvellous bit of kit with a geared, very quick, short-travel action including a rotary bolt (and I still have it almost 50 years later).

All of which brings me, after the usual digression, to the subject of this month's test: a Browning X-Bolt Pro in .308 with a carbon-fibre stock and various bells and whistles. The .308 Pro is an attractive, modern bolt rifle, an evolution of the A-Bolt, and, like it, a push-feed design. It hits the scales at 6lb 9oz bare, 7¾lb as tested with a Nikko Diamond 3-12x56 scope – an excellent stalking weight (and that is without a

moderator, for which the gun is threaded). My opinion, for the record, is that many stalking rifles have become far too heavy; you don't want to be on the hill with anything over 9lb all up in the real world (people are often over-scooped which contributes to load burden).

First impressions of the Pro, meantime, are very positive. I like its looks and general form. We all love good wood, but the carbon-fibre aesthetic here is to my taste as well (more so than plain black or green plastic). Carbon-fibre is stable too

(although to be precise the Pro has a high-density foam core reinforced, not just wrapped, with carbon-fibre), and this X-Bolt further benefits from glass bedding to the front and rear of the action.

All metal parts are grey Cerakote finished which is attractive and practical. The barrel is fluted (and hand-lapped), as is the bolt. I also liked the fact that the crown is slightly recessed from the muzzle and thus less subject to damage.

The Pro comes, usefully, with four screws per base 'X-Lock' scope rings. These were neat but I had an issue with one of the threads in the receiver.

The action of the X-Bolt is relatively short and benefits from a 60 degree lift, making it easier to cycle the action and allowing more room for the scope. The bolt has three lugs and may be removed with the tang safety on. There's a useful cocking indicator from the back of the bolt when the rifle is cocked. At the other end, ejection is achieved by a small sprung plunger typical of push feeds. The extractor, positioned on the side of the bolt, is designed to throw the spent cases slightly upwards as well as sideways.

The X-Bolt has a detachable 4-shot rotary mag (the .300 Win Mag and 7mm Rem Mag versions are 3 shot). This proved OK but is made from polymer like so many others are now. If I bought a Pro, I would probably order a spare mag – they're not that expensive (£37.95) and my experience is that plastic mags don't wear as well as metal ones.

My thanks to David Stapley of International Sports Brands – UK distributors of Browning, Miroku and Winchester – for supplying the test gun.

Fitted with a Nikko Sterling 3-12x50 scope, the rifle weighs 7¾lb, which is ideal for stalking



BROWNING X-BOLT PRO CARBON

UP CLOSE

SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS

The stock is a parallel comb design which is intended to reduce felt recoil and raise the comb to the scope axis. It has quite a thin comb profile but it's all well-conceived. The forestock is big enough to be useful but not so bulbous as to spoil the elegant lines. The Pro is a trim rifle. The length of pull is 13 $\frac{5}{8}$ " but easily extended to 14" with the two 5mm spacers supplied. The butt is finished off with an efficient Inflex II recoil pad. My only criticisms are that the grip is quite small for a full-bore gun and quite short. It also has a palm swell. My preference would have been a little bigger and longer with a slightly more open radius. The stock form, like the rest of the rifle, is still better than most.

Technical

The X-Bolt traces its lineage via the very different, heavy but good BBR made from 1978-1984 (a bit like a Remington 700 but with a particularly strong 9 lug bolt similar to a Weatherby). The completely redesigned A-Bolt arrived in 1985 to replace it. This had a 60 degree bolt handle, 3 lug lock up, and a top tang safety. Like the BBR and Remy, but unlike the classic Mauser 98 and its derivatives, the A-bolt was a push-feed design, rather than a controlled feed one. It had an integral magazine (changed to a detachable mag in some later guns) and a relatively high action profile compared to the latest X-Bolt.

The trimmer X-Bolt, launched in 2008, as noted, came from the start with a rotary box polymer mag and an efficient Inflex-II recoil pad as used in the firm's shotguns. It also boasted an improved SF (Super Feather) trigger mechanism. The 3 lug bolt was retained, as was a plunger ejector as in an A-Bolt, but the location of the lugs were altered to reduce receiver depth. There is some visual similarity with the A-Bolt, but the X-Bolt has a different receiver and bolt (although bolt-handles are similar). There is also a new A-bolt 3 now – a budget model – and, like all

I have some experience with X-Bolts; I regularly shoot one in .223, and have been very happy with its performance. It's a handy, accurate little rifle but still heavy enough to be controllable.

The .308 version tested is a little weightier but still lighter than most rivals. I've put a variety of ammunition through it, and with 150g bullets I was consistently touching 1" at 100 yards. The gun might do better, but I am not overly obsessive about accuracy these days. Once I get to 1 MOA, I know I may stalk to 300 yards without issue. It's always a confidence booster to know a field rifle will do the inch – and most rifles are better in this regard, more accurate out of the box, than they used to be.

I liked the form of the Pro, the shapes of the stock are sound and promote natural pointing (never to be ignored in a working rifle). This X-Bolt Pro model isn't cheap now at £2,479, but it is good. Other X-Bolts start at a very reasonable £1,000.

WE LIKE



- The look and form
- The specification
- The carbon fibre reinforced and finished stock

WE DISLIKE



- The grip is a bit short

TECH SPECS

- Make: Browning
- Model: X-Bolt Pro Carbon (as this goes to press a very similar X-Bolt Pro Carbon 2 is being launched with spiral fluting to the barrel).
- Action type: push-feed bolt
- Calibre: .308 (with options in the Pro of 6.5 Creedmoor, 7mm Rem Mag, 30-06, 300 win mag).
- Weight: 6lb 9oz
- Mag: detachable
- Threaded for moderator: yes
- Price: £2,479 (standard X-Bolt with black composite stock £1,000)
- Contact: International Sports Brands 01491-681830 www.browning.eu

the guns discussed, made for Browning by Miroku in Japan but with input from Browning engineers in the US and Belgium. **SS**



The use of carbon-fibre is not limited to just the exterior; there is a high-density foam core which is reinforced with it



All metal parts of the X-Bolt are grey Cerakote finished, which is attractive and practical



The action is relatively short with a 60 degree lift, which makes it easier to cycle and allows more room for the scope



The X-Bolt has a detachable 4-shot rotary mag, but Mike would advise buying a spare at minimal cost

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ESSENTIAL GUNS FOR PEST CONTROL

Drennan Kenderdine lists the types of guns he considers essential tools for general pest control, with notes on the favourites he currently has in his own cabinet

Horses for courses! The age-old saying relates as much to pest control as it does to racing, and there are definitely specific guns better suited to specific tasks. I have left air rifles off this list since I do not personally shoot them that often, but they can of course be a great tool for rats, rabbits, squirrels, feral pigeons, and even the odd crow if you know how to use one!

Also missing from this list are larger calibre rifles for deer; I do not consider deer a pest on my own permissions, and I wanted to focus this article more on the smaller, more common species that I expect more of you will have need to control at one time or another in your shooting lifetimes.

TYPE: Lightweight semi-automatic 12-bore shotgun

IDEAL FOR: Pigeon shooting (roost shooting, flighting and decoying); corvids; general rough shooting

MY GUN OF CHOICE: Beretta A400 Upland semi-auto 12-bore

It's no secret that I'm a huge fan of semi-autos and I've more than a few of them in my cabinets! However, for general rough shooting, pigeon decoying and corvid control, I'll most often find myself reaching for one of my Beretta semi-autos, and the choice is very likely to be the gas-operated Beretta A400 Upland.

There are many reasons I tend to choose this gun out of the array on offer, and the main reason is that it is one of the lightest. This makes it a breeze to carry through the woods for roost shooting or a spot of rough shooting on my permissions, and if you've a bit of a walk from the car to where you want to build your hide, it helps not to have to lug a hefty gun along with all your hide poles, decoys and other kit.

The A400 Upland also offers great recoil reduction thanks to the Kick-Off Plus technology incorporated into the wooden stock, and this allows for easy, comfortable shooting all day long... if you're shooting high numbers of pigeons or corvids, this is



There are a number of great options for shooting corvids, from the lightweight semi-auto to the short-range .410

PICTURE:ISTOCK

an important factor in the gun you choose.

I have also found this gun to be reliable, and it will cycle a variety of loads from 24g to monster shells. It's proofed for steel and has a 3" chamber, so you are safe to shoot most cartridges through this one, making it a great all-round shotgun to have in your cabinet.

I won't lie that the nicely engraved silver action and smart

wooden stock and fore-end also make it an attractive thing to have with you for the day!

**BERETTA A400
UPLAND
SEMI-AUTO 12G**

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MORE INFO,
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EN.BROWNING.EU



**BROWNING MAXUS II
CAMO SEMI-AUTO 12G**

TYPE: Synthetic semi-automatic 12-bore shotgun with 3½" chambers

IDEAL FOR: Goose shooting (both decoying and flighting)

MY GUN OF CHOICE: Browning Maxus II Camo Semi-Auto 12-bore

The gas-operated Browning Maxus II comes with a 3½" chamber, so it's a no-brainer for me to grab this one when I know I require big cartridges for my shooting; in particular, this would be my gun of choice for goose shooting, which on my permissions is most often flighting Canadas.

The gun has a synthetic, waterproof stock finished in RealTree 7 camo, which for me is a must when shooting waterfowl.

I love the weight of the Maxus II – it is heavy and has an atom of bulkiness to it, which is brilliant because it allows a good, smooth glide, making it ideal for those longer shots where a steady line is required.

The thick rubber Inflex II recoil pad, combined with that gas-operated system and the slight bulk

of the gun, really takes the sting out of magnum steel loads, and it also has a nice soft-touch covering on the cheekpiece and fore-end, which make it comfy and easy to grip, even if you get stuck out in weather meant only for ducks!

TYPE: .223 rimfire rifle

IDEAL FOR: Foxing

MY GUN OF CHOICE: Remington 700 Stainless Steel in .223

This is a no fuss, does-what-it-says-on-the-tin kind of rifle that has never, ever let me down. Nearly everyone has heard of the Remington 700, and it is probably one of the most commonly used rifles in the world, from law enforcement right through to



pest controllers like myself; and when something is this popular, there's usually a good reason!

It has got a synthetic stock which is very durable and which means I don't have to worry about getting it wet. I use mine exclusively for foxing with a variety of bullets from makers such as

Fiocchi, Sellier & Bellot, and Hornady. Oddly, it performs absolutely brilliantly with both Fiocchi Match 73g and Hornady 55g polly tip. I love it because it's unfussy, and I know it won't let me down when I've been sitting out for a fox in the cold for hours on end.

The .223 in general is a great foxing calibre, with little to no recoil; it's nice and flat shooting for great long-range performance.



**REMINGTON 700
STAINLESS STEEL
IN .223**

FOR MORE
INFO, VISIT
SPORTSMK.CO.UK

TYPE: .22LR rimfire rifle

IDEAL FOR: Rats and short-range rabbits in areas where noise is an issue

MY GUN OF CHOICE: Remington 597 in .22 LR (semi-auto)

Probably the most 'Marmite' .22 rifle of all time, but I tend to lean towards things that attract negative comments from the masses... perhaps I'm just contrary! To be honest, this rifle came to me from a customer who needed to sell it and again, being completely honest, I would never have gone and bought a 597 off my own bat. Nevertheless, I ended up with it, and I've come to appreciate it as something a little different.

The magazines Remington supply could do with an upgrade so I slotted a banana mag into its belly, and for the last 10 years this rifle has not let me down. I have it set up for night shooting bunnies at close range, but it has also brought hundreds of smiles to the host of people on the farm that I've allowed to have a plink with it. It really is fun to shoot!

But on a serious level, this semi-auto can go through rounds at breath-taking speed, as long as you feed it with good ammo. I pretty much use nothing but hollow point ammo through it.

Where it really comes into its own is in how light,

**REMINGTON 597
SEMI-AUTO
IN .22 LR**

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small and agile it is to use, especially out of vehicles like a Land Rover or Polaris. I'd say this is the next best thing any golf green-keeper can have on his golf course at night in the hands of a good shot. It's no longer in production, so you'll have to hunt around on the secondhand market to get hold of one.

.22 LR rimfires are the perfect choice for shooting rats where noise is an issue, although they can suffer from ricochet

Of course, the semi-auto is not for everyone, and a decent .22 is a great tool to have in your pest control arsenal for shorter range rats and bunnies, especially in areas where being quiet is a necessity – feed it with subsonic ammo and you won't disturb anyone! Just make doubly sure of safe backstops and bury the bullet every time, as .22s can be a bit of a bugger for ricochet.



The Remington 700 in .223 is Drennan's choice for all his foxing needs

PICTURES: ISTOCK

TYPE: .17 HMR rimfire rifle

IDEAL FOR: Longer-range rabbits; rats; corvids (see description!)

MY GUN OF CHOICE: CZ 457 in .17 HMR

This, without question, is my most used rifle. I can control pretty much anything and everything that I need to with it on the vermin side of things. I use it predominantly for daylight work, and it's a calibre that just keeps on giving and giving. I have dropped a Schmidt & Bender scope onto its back, which is one of the best makes of scopes out there in my opinion – the clarity is simply superb.

This rifle has brilliant handling, is light to carry and has fantastic longer-range performance, and for me it comes into its own when I'm decoying corvids... sounds strange, right?! I'll generally use one of my semi-autos to shoot corvids – either the Beretta or the Browning – but anyone who's shot them will undoubtedly have experienced the following scenario. You've hit one hard, but being tough birds with armour-like feathers, it's wounded it – you think fatally, but it gets up and runs with the legs of Usain Bolt! However, it doesn't matter how fast our black winged terror is, it will never outrun a bullet. This is where the .17 HMR comes out of the tool kit, and I will zero in on it and place a polymer tipped bullet right into the central mass; thus, its sprinting days are over!

Some may say why not send in the dog...

well, dogs' eyes are as vulnerable as a lamb's, and we've all seen the damage a crow can do in this area.

A wounded corvid is an angry, aggressive corvid, so why risk the dog's eyes and put it off retrieving forever when a bullet brings a far faster and more lethal result?

I've also shot a few foxes with the .17HMR but much prefer my .223 for that. In general, as a nice flat-shooting round for longer distance bunnies, this round and rifle does the job with ease. It's probably why it's so popular!

TYPE: .410 shotgun with silencer (Hushpower)

IDEAL FOR: Squirrels; feral pigeons; pigeons/corvids in confined areas

MY GUN OF CHOICE: Mossberg 500 .410

If there's one pest control tool I see in many hunters' cabinets, and one I most often hear people are



CZ 457
IN .17 HMR

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desperate to get hold of, it's the pump-action Mossberg .410 with a Hushpower silencer on it;

conversely, I also hear a lot of people slating the .410 as a weak gauge! Take it from me, these are no fairground toys, and they are absolutely brilliant at what they were intended to be used for, which is vermin at close quarters, especially if you don't want to make too much noise.

At our home, there are/were several squirrels around the farm buildings and the house. A 12-bore was too much gun, and a rifle would be like a sledgehammer cracking a walnut. The

Hushpower was perfect for this particular task because the cartridge has enough killing power to do the job, without damaging property or scaring the life out of any livestock. Actually, it's unfathomable how the combination of the Mossberg 500 and the little 3" Magnasonic cartridges from Lyalvale Express managed to pack such lethality into such a small package!

What do I love about this little gun? Well, it's easy and safe enough to use in my garden without waking the pigs and chickens up early in the morning; it's such a snug-fitting little gun and you know it's just going to work time and again. [es](#)

‘.410s are no fairground toys – they're brilliant at shooting vermin at close quarters, especially if you don't want to make too much noise’



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500 .410



The Remington 597 semi-auto has brought a smile to many a face, including Drennan's young daughter's!

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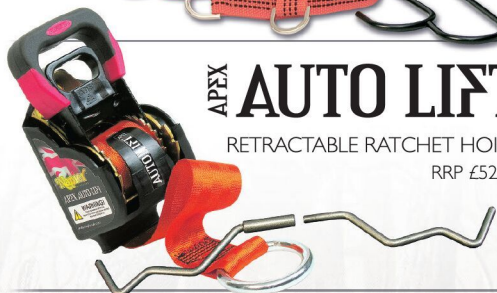
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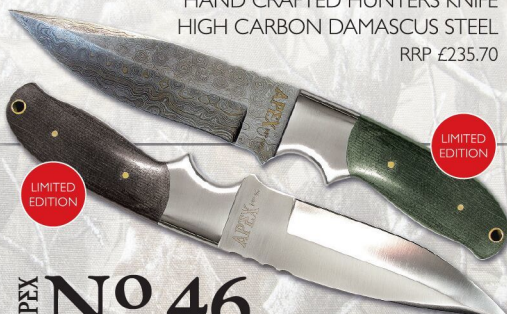
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PASSION FOR PARTRIDGE WHAT NEXT?

In the last of three articles, Conor O'Gorman considers what a sustainable future might look like for the grey partridge in Ireland

It was a filthy wet night in Boora bog, the last refuge for the critically endangered native Irish grey partridge. The treeless open landscape offered no respite from the squally rain, driven even harder by an incessant and merciless wind. With watered eyes we took up position on the right side of the gales and waited. This fox was different, one of those harder-to-get, lamp-shy ones we've all encountered. And smart enough to evade our network of strategically set fox snares. From the paw prints, we had figured the direction of his daily journeys, one of which included visits to the core partridge territory. This was not going to be easy.

We took refuge in a pile of 5,000-year-old oak limbs, exposed to the elements after the peat harvest, gathered by machines and discarded – bog ivory. Not many fox hides like those! Not long after hunkering down, we spotted him, a ghostly granular shape, drifting from the forest to the peaty moor. We were only 80 yards away.

By divine intervention, the rain stopped and from the broken cloud a half-moon emerged, and beads of water glistened from the barrel of Kieran's

rifle. Slow breathing. Patience. Our quarry moved slowly and nosed cautiously, all the time tasting the wind for any signs of trouble.

Kieran took aim.

Just for a moment, this wily fox paused, probably from the sound of a distant otter barking. A second later, the Charlie crumpled as the gunshot reverberated around the bleak black landscape. That was one less thing to worry about for the nearby wild partridge, as we were fairly sure that one hen was incubating eggs, whilst another had recently hatched her chicks.

A bigger enemy

However, as we learnt more about their biology and ecology in the years ahead, we would come to understand that untimely cold and rain rather than foxes were the partridges' most formidable enemy.

Over two decades ago, our immediate concern was the imminent extinction of our last grey partridge population. For despite all our conservation efforts including community

engagement, habitat provision and targeted predator control, the spring count hung stubbornly and frustratingly at 4-6 wild pairs from 1998 to 2001.

And what about those Prague partridges? They featured in my last article, where inexplicably the population was booming, with many times more wild birds in one field than the entire island of Ireland, despite no management measures in place. We will come back to them later.

As a child, a favourite family hill walk was only a few miles from my grandparents' home in County Sligo – up Kesh mountain to visit the amazing caves. Legend had it that one of the high kings of Ireland, Cormac mac Airt, had been raised in those caves on all fours, adopted by wolves. And in a twist of fate many years later, searching for clues as to the origins of the Irish grey partridge, it turned

out that the Kesh caves were one of three places in Ireland that grey partridge bones had been discovered, dating back 10,000 years.

HOLISTIC APPROACH

This project reinforces the message that conservation is a balancing act, managing predator control, feed sources and habitat management.

New blood

Back in 2001, whether or not the Irish grey partridge was 'native' was a bit of a hot potato as discussions ensued about whether to boost the last population with wild birds from abroad – with the pragmatists arguing that it was better to save some of the Irish blood than to lose it altogether. The pragmatists won the day and from 2002 to 2004 a number of wild birds from Boora were captured and allowed to breed as naturally as possible with some wild origin birds from France. In 2005, wild caught birds from Estonia were introduced to the project.

Every year, the resulting young family groups were then released into various locations around the project site to imprint the young to come back to those places. The amount of time and effort that went into this captive conservation breeding programme was massive and there were some successes and many failures.

This is all documented in a detailed 2012 research paper entitled 'Every partridge counts, successful techniques used in the captive conservation breeding programme for wild grey partridge in Ireland', which can be found online.

However, the outcome for the wild living

Meadow mix at Boora bog



population was profound and by 2010 there were over 50 spring pairs in the wild and they were breeding successfully not only around Boora bog but for miles around and with over 50% chick survival rate and producing average covey sizes of over 10 birds. On the communications front, we tried to make everyone that was prepared to listen aware that this was not a game farm rear and release project of partridges – birds that would never breed successfully in the wild.

We downplayed the amazing breeding successes we were achieving with the wild birds we recaptured each year from Boora for captive breeding and focused in our reporting on the end objective – the number of spring pairs year by year in the wild and their subsequent breeding success year by year.

The initial reason to start the captive breeding programme was to simply boost the wild breeding population. But in fact, we were ultimately addressing two key issues.

Firstly, the oases of breeding habitats on the cutaway bogs, natural or created, were never ideal for grey partridge chicks foraging for the right insects at the right density. It's just that these places were much better than the habitats on farmland managed to the requirements of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, where partridges had become extinct.

Secondly, untimely cold weather and rain on the cutaway bogs (these areas accumulated peat over thousands of years for that very reason) were a frequent occurrence just when the partridge chicks needed to have high temperatures and dry weather to survive and thrive. And no quality of habitat or predator control could prevent high chick mortality rates for those events.

Weather is crucial

And this is where we return to Prague. The population I had studied in 2000-2001 was just a moment in time. The temporary habitats created by a massive motorway project through intensively managed cereal fields were perhaps no better or worse than in Boora. However, they were blessed with perfect summer weather when it counted. All the disturbance and predation mattered not when it came to chick survival rate and covey size going into their freezing winters. But those motorways are now built and the partridge no more.

So, back in Boora bog, as it bedded in, the wild bird captive breeding project was in effect giving a proportion of the total wild population an insurance policy against the frequent untimely cold and rain. The impact of temperature and rain on partridge in Boora is documented in a 2021 research paper entitled 'Coexistence without conflict, the recovery of Ireland's endangered wild grey partridge' available free online.

However, the proportion of wild birds protected annually from the elements was becoming alarmingly big – reaching 67% in 2010. There was a danger of us being victims of our own success and losing sight of the ultimate objective – self-

This work couldn't have been done without Val Swan, Brendan Kavanagh and Kieran Buckley, photographed by the Partridge Godfather himself, the late Dick Potts



sustaining populations of wild grey partridge in Ireland. Added to that was that we had all our eggs in one basket at Boora bog.

Also, the conservation project was becoming hugely labour intensive and costly due to the requirements of annual wild bird captive breeding and releasing, predator control and habitat provision.

There were other Irish conservation projects competing for limited national budgets and there was a degree of jealousy and even contempt for what was once a 'skid row' budget for a few 'game birds' rising to become the gold star conservation success story it was becoming and attracting national media attention.

Despite all this, the Irish government's National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has stuck by the project through and satellite projects using translocated birds from Boora have been taking place across the country.

The future

The question now is how many of these projects, including Boora bog, are actually viable in the long term – are we counting the number of released birds as success or the number of birds naturally produced in the wild? The Irish grey partridge conservation effort is now overseen by NPWS regional manager Padraig O'Donnell and these are the tricky questions he has been considering.

In 2021 there were an estimated 80-100 pairs of grey partridge breeding in the wild across approximately 17sq/km. If questions continue about public money being spent on Irish grey partridge conservation perhaps a wild grey partridge shooting estate model could be trialled – whereby a proportion of wild greys are shot by paying guests to pay for the conservation of the population as a whole?

In closing, I think we can all learn from this conservation project for our own efforts in the UK. 

A covey of partridge at Boora





Wonderful Westray

Rupert Butler's annual trip to the Orkneys does not disappoint, with Westray's dramatic scenery once again providing a backdrop for some spectacular shooting and a chance to enjoy the craic too!

Far out to sea, a burning sun dips ever lower, painting distant horizons a fiery red before sinking into the sea. Just as the light starts to fade those whistling battalions can be heard descending from the heavens. I slip off my safety just in time as a large bunch of wigeon dive in to dine. For the next half an hour, the sky is alive with duck and one has to be careful on occasion as some shelduck as well as a couple of stray long tail duck attempt to sneak in with their cousins. Waves pound against the nearby shoreline, sending clouds of froth into the night sky, and still they come. The sky turns that dark steely grey, which makes it nearly impossible to now pick out one's targets, relying solely on birds that drop in close by. Just as we are about to call a halt to proceedings a lone greylag calls somewhere far out in the gloom, to be quickly followed by some like-minded souls. We fumble for some heavier shells as seven large shapes hover overhead. Four are

dispatched as one or two of our group that haven't been able to switch quickly enough utter a few unmentionables to themselves.

We are back once again on the lovely Isle of Westray, as guests of Pete and Eve White of North Isles Shooting. It has been worth the wait. Two flights and a ferry from home, we land at the Pierowall Hotel just in time for some dinner. Having consumed several drinks on mainland Orkney whilst waiting for our boat to depart, it goes without saying that the banter has well and truly started. Before you say anything, we have allowed ourselves a day's grace at either end so the effects of a heavy night have plenty of time to dissipate. Pete arrives to say hello and give a quick rundown on the week ahead before joining in the merriment for an hour or so.

After a restful Sunday, Monday morning arrives quicker than expected as we bundle into a few jeeps to travel to our chosen field. I

am delighted to see that the drain we will call home for the next few hours is well concealed on both sides by some wispy grasses.

We haven't to wait long when a single goose dives in out of the gloom. Luckily enough I am first to react and dispatch it with minimum fuss. Annoyingly, the wind changes slightly, resulting in the geese travelling up the drain rather than sweeping in from in front. A couple of flocks of golden plover pass high overhead, their speckled bodies glistening tinsel-like in the early morning sun. As with all greylag shooting, the birds eventually start landing in several fields and this is our cue to pack up and return for a hearty breakfast. Everybody has managed to bring down a few and the mood is jovial.

It seems like my head has only hit the pillow for a wee siesta when it's time to brave the elements once again. This time we are shooting a loch on one of the higher hills on the island. With some cliffs not 40 yards to one side, it's not a place to go for a wee ramble in search of wounded birds. As

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Based on Westray, a northerly isle in Orkney, North Isles Shooting offers bespoke wildfowling holidays in the Orkney Isles. Visit www.paddlesdown.co.uk for info.



PICTURE: SHUTTERSTOCK



A couple of flocks of golden plover pass high overhead in the morning sunlight

we scramble higher an ever-strengthening breeze greets our arrival.

As with most evening flights on Orkney and the surrounding islands, birds tend to travel later here than at home, making shooting somewhat challenging at times. As we were walking up, Pete told me that the last group that he brought up here didn't like the conditions and decided not to stay. How anyone would travel such distances and decide not to shoot is beyond me!

A few small flights of wigeon fly past but even though they are not inclined to sweep in, we do manage to pluck a couple down. As the sky gets ever darker I'm starting to wonder if our luck has taken a turn for the worse, when out of the night sky loom 20 or more large shapes. We all manage to release a barrel or two as six greylags are added to the bag. For the next half an hour geese pour in, to be accompanied on occasion by some small flights of wigeon. I concentrate on trying to take birds that have been fired at and are attempting to escape with the wind in their tails. Why, you may ask? The reason is simple. I find that the faster they are travelling the less inclined I am to start poking my gun. I'm glad our vehicles are waiting downhill on the return journey because these greylags are bloody heavy.

Like all holidays they are over before you realise, but the anticipation of our next trip will always be with us. Westray is a beautiful island with fiery sunsets and pounding waves. Not only does it hold

'The sky is alive with duck and one has to be careful as some shelduck and long tail duck attempt to sneak in with their cousins'

a vibrant population of graylags but a multitude of duck species also call it home during the colder months. Pete and Eve leave no stone unturned in their quest to put you amongst the birds at every turn. Surprisingly enough there is also a vibrant population of snipe on the island, but being from Ireland where they abound at every turn we did not twist his arm for a shot or two. The staff and owners of the Pierowall Hotel also looked after us exceptionally well.

As we make our way towards the ferry we spy several flocks of greylags dropping in to surrounding pastures to dine. I also spy a flash that is holding upwards of 200 wigeon, one I must put in the memory bank for further expeditions.

As our ferry weaves its way through several islands en route to Kirkwall I start to daydream about lazy summer days island hopping and how much fun it would be. But for now it is back to the grindstone with memories aplenty. 



Everyone in the group had a good morning's shooting, including Rupert's brother Paul

A royal affair

A pair of Best guns made to celebrate our late Queen's silver jubilee, and built in the style of a H&H Royal, lands on Diggory Hadoke's workbench

The first thing you see when you pick up one of these guns is the gold inlaid motif on the underside of the bar. It is a crown, flanked with laurels and '1977' above a scroll banner engraved 'Queen Elizabeth II'. Above it all, the script reads 'Silver Jubilee'. The gold work is first rate, with perfect lettering and carved detail to the crown that gives it a three-dimensional quality.

It does not require the powers of Hercule Poirot to conclude that the original purpose of the commission was to commemorate the first 25

'The gold work is first rate, with perfect lettering and carved detail to the crown that gives it a three-dimensional quality'

years on the throne accomplished by HM, the late Queen Elizabeth. I remember it well.

I was 10 years old and we had a village fete to mark the occasion. I insisted on entering the fancy dress competition as Adolf Hitler. My mother altered one of her dinner jackets and some of my father's old military dress uniform to create a very realistic Hitler uniform, with full Nazi regalia, all historically accurate, with badges in the right places.

Back then, people still had a sense of humour and there was no outraged hand-wringing, though the dowager handing me the prize for second place referred to me as 'the St John's Ambulance man', for the sake of decorum.

Forty-five years later and the guns are still in very good order, having been used a few times each season and been well cared for. They represent the work of some of Britain's finest gunmakers and are badged by another, also well-known but with no actual connection to the customer or the order.

A princely gun

At the time, David Dryhurst was working 'for the trade' as it is commonly termed. He was building guns primarily (but not exclusively) for Holland & Holland. A customer who knew of David's reputation sought him out and asked if he would make a pair of guns to commemorate the Jubilee.

David agreed, but as a somewhat anonymous figure, not then in the public eye, it was felt that his name on the gun would not be quite right. The customer wanted the guns to carry 'a name'. Fortunately, at the time, David Dryhurst had a good relationship with Ian Crudgington.

Ian owned the rights to the Bristol firm of George Gibbs and agreed to allow David to build the guns under the auspices of Gibbs and put them in the record books as such, as well as engraving the name on the locks and barrels.

So, the build was undertaken as a pair of Best-quality 12-bore George Gibbs side-lock ejectors. Given that David was building guns for Holland & Holland, it is no surprise that he used the 1922

CONTACT

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



These guns remain in excellent original condition



patent Holland & Holland self-opening system as the basis for this pair.

It is probably the simplest, most reliable, most straightforward-to-maintain side-lock ejector known to the British gun trade and David had made plenty before so had all the access to materials and machinery necessary, as well as the experience and skills to be confident the guns would be peerless.

In style and characteristics, the guns are, to all intents and purposes, Holland & Holland Royals. They are typical of the type, with acanthus foliate scroll engraving, 28" barrels with concave ribs, and straight-hand stocks (with 14¼" LOP), rolled-edge trigger-guards and two triggers. Each gun is cased in its own lightweight leather case, in English tan.

There is more gold on the gun: a crown on the top-lever, inlaid lettering to the 'SAFE' and a gold oval for the customer's initials.

Each gun weighs 6lb 10oz, which is ideal for a standard medium-weight game gun. The style is very much what one might consider the epitome of the fullest development of the English game gun of the 20th century: elegant, robust, perfect for covert shooting, as most game shooters would have encountered it from 1900 to the present day.

The wood is French walnut, a material almost entirely exhausted today. David had a couple of blanks stashed away and this order gave him the perfect opportunity to use them.

By 1977, many gunmakers were proof-testing their guns for 2¾" cartridges and a higher proof pressure of 3¼ tons per square inch, even though most game shooters were still using Eley Grand Prix cartridges, made for the standard 3 tons per square inch (2½" chamber) proof load.

The longer cases were becoming increasingly popular and many sportsmen were gravitating towards these 'modern' specifications. As a result, these guns

were proofed in London at the higher pressure.

What happened to David Dryhurst? He went on to re-form W.W. Greener, alongside Graham Greener and Richard Tandy. As a team, they have, by many accounts, built the finest guns to leave these shores since the start of the WWII.

I defy anyone to examine a Greener gun of the period and find fault with it. Their clientele has been almost exclusively American collectors with a

great eye for detail and a very deep pocket.

This, then, is a pair of Best-quality 12-bore game guns in superb condition, having never been re-worked. They were made by some of the best gunmakers of their generation and remind us of an event that still lingers in the memory of Generation X, though it took place in a very different England, when The Battle of Britain seemed as recent to our parents as the millennium now does to us. **RS**

The Gibbs pair has the look of the classic Holland & Holland 'Royal', and the gold inlay makes them unique



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Leading the way

Gamekeepers are at the forefront of predator control and habitat management, delivering results for all vulnerable wildlife, not just game birds, but we need to get that message across more effectively, says Tim

Predator control is without doubt one of the most important parts of wildlife conservation and game management. All around the world, responsible, pragmatic land and animal managers look to control common predators of the species that are most at risk, not just game birds.

Historically, gamekeepers have been at the forefront of predator control, and in modern times those in the uplands along with certain wild game bird keepers have been leading the way. The results speak for themselves, with the success of the rare and endangered species that thrive on shoots and grouse moors.

With the advent of new technologies such as the Perdix and DOC traps for stoats, and things like the new breakaway humane cable restraints, gamekeepers are showing that they are moving with the times. Making the traps more efficient and more humane is the way the sector is moving. Much of these advances have been thanks to research by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust who, since the 1980s, have published over 150 scientific papers considering the effects of predation and predators on other wildlife. The overall results show that in many areas, pressure from predators can depress numbers of game and wildlife, especially those that live or nest on the ground. Reviews of other scientific papers also show that high predation pressure can halt the recovery of declining wildlife species. That is why well-conducted predator control is so important.

According to the GWCT the control of predators is only justifiable if it removes enough predators to

be effective, but there is no need to see a return to the levels of predator control that was seen in the 19th century. A much more targeted approach is required and that is the common theory and practice of gamekeepers.

Tarred by the same brush

The legacy of that Victorian intense removal of all predators still resides today in the minds of the general public and the media, causing many so-called conservation bodies to wrongly reject it outright. A policy for conservation that doesn't include the control of predators is doomed to fail, and that is why organisations such as the RSPB do kill foxes, crows, mustelids and rats. They spin it up in their own communications that this is only ever done when backed up by science, but as the GWCT have proven, and gamekeepers up and down the land know, targeted predator control produces results for wildlife.

Holistic approach

However, we must also consider that just controlling predators in isolation will not have the overall desired effects if it is not paired with habitat management. Generally speaking, game managers understand this, and that is why general wildlife species do so well on land properly managed for game. Good quality habitats, which includes farming and sporting activities, are essential to wildlife and, combined with predator management, are key to building sustainable populations of wildlife. If a gamekeeper, or any land manager for

that matter, has created a good and connected habitat and undertakes sufficient predator control, this should improve the survival and recruitment of those key species that they are trying to protect.

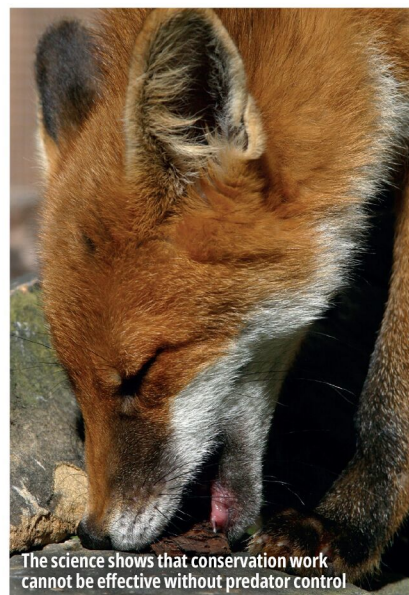
Habitat and predation control, as we have seen, are key, and gamekeepers, no matter the size of the shoot they are on, are in a unique position to influence both of these and make a real difference to the wildlife in our countryside. If the UK government wants to improve biodiversity and species decline, they need to embrace the work of game managers. Game shoots across the UK are doing much work to improve habitats and the key species that live within them. On the moors this will encompass a range of waders and invertebrates. In the lowlands many small farmland birds, game birds and once-common birds such as the lapwing, that are steadily declining elsewhere, will benefit.

All shoots – from the very largest with a team of full-time gamekeepers to the very smallest part-time or DIY shoot – can run a targeted, robust, humane predator control programme that is tied in with habitat maintenance and creation. Doing our bit to help improve the lot of small mammals, waders and other birds is key to demonstrating that game management is an effective way of getting more diversity and better species recovery.

If shooting estates collectively record and measure the good work that we are doing, it will show to those bodies who don't necessarily recognise our efforts for the good that we all do and the results that we can produce. 📊



Gamekeepers have been at the forefront of predator control for centuries



The science shows that conservation work cannot be effective without predator control

Putting our training into practice

Tony Jackson and his new enthusiastic little Lab from Scotland have had a season full of adventure, even if it did get off to a tricky start

Some readers may recall, a few days before last Christmas, my yellow Labrador had to be put down as the result of a split spleen. He was only nine years old and had worked magnificently on many shoots picking-up. I have owned several Labradors, each of them yellow, and was determined to have another Labrador. I tried to find suitable animals at a sensible price until I eventually discovered a black Labrador bitch from Scotland – four years old and called Breagha, the Gaelic of ‘lovey lady’. She had been well trained

‘She flew over the bank and plunged into the water and, before I was able to reach the bank, she emerged with a dead hen duck’

and was regularly picking-up at local shoots. To cut the story short, she has been a year with me and seems ideal!

In the run up to Christmas last year, the little dog choked severely during a meal. In fact, it was so severe that I had to call my local veterinary centre, even though it was two days before the holiday. I was instructed to take her in immediately for examination and it was fortunate I did so. She appeared to have swallowed something that was causing her severe trouble. In fact, she had to have a major operation. The item was removed from her throat and it appeared that I was the cause of the problem! Several days before I had bought a dried pig’s ear which I had assumed she would like to eat. This proved to be the item at fault. My vet told me that the dog had somehow caught part of the item in her throat and it was jammed.

I was advised not to give any similar items to the dog and will certainly avoid them in future. This lesson cost me £900. Fortunately, we have insurance and the company involved paid immediately. Remember, major veterinary operations are extremely expensive and I would

advise all dog owners to ensure they have cover. Meanwhile, my vet advised me to avoid the last two days of picking-up. This is sad as the little bitch has greatly enjoyed her days picking-up but my vet said she must avoid any further possible problems with her throat.

It was worth the wait because the start of our shooting season was remarkable! I had taken the little dog for her first day’s picking-up with me. For several months, she had been working with dummies but now the real work was in hand. In the past, a bag of around a dozen or so birds in the bag might be picked just on the first drive but a new gamekeeper had taken over and what a difference! Instead of just a trickle of birds, dozens of high birds now streamed over the Guns. I stood behind two Guns and the little black bitch could scarcely believe her eyes. She brought me seven birds, most dead but a couple which I had to kill. It was obvious she was enjoying every moment of the day and she was surpassing herself in terms of her picking abilities so I was very happy.

When the whistle for the first drive was over, the bag was the highest ever achieved in this drive,



Breagha performed well, including an enthusiastic retrieve from the lake

coming in at 46. The next drive of the day involved duck. I have seen ghastly duck shoots, involving birds which are far too low and frankly, appalling. Here our birds invariably fly and swing once or twice high round a moderate lake, before departing. I invariably stand 40 or so yards behind a Gun and on this occasion the duck rose swiftly and made two or three high passes, allowing quick action.

Two ducks fell behind our Gun and Breagha collected them, then a single bird was shot and fell into the water. The little dog never paused. She flew over the bank and plunged into the water and, before I was able to reach the bank, she emerged with a dead hen duck, pausing only to spray me with water. I was absolutely delighted!

Later, I congratulated the gamekeeper. I am aware that he has to run the shoot, alongside a normal day's work. Frankly, I don't know how he can keep a full-time job whilst managing a game shoot so successfully. At the end of each day's shooting, he is still smartly turned out, alongside a row of hanging duck and braced pheasants. The Guns each take a brace and there are usually birds left for the beaters and we pickers-up are often able to take some as reward.

Already, I am thinking ahead for next season. There will be able plenty of dummy work for Breagha during the summer months and I may even take her out to the local country fairs where she might be able to test herself against some dummy work, at the high speeds she so enjoys. 



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Tony and Breagha are looking forward to putting Breagha's speed to the test with some dummy work at the local fairs



The second drive of the day was a fantastic duck drive, where the birds fly over the Guns before departing over the lake

PICTURE: ISTOCK



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WET AND WILD!

Mother Nature isn't looking kindly upon day two of the Rough Rovers' Anglesey trip, but the team adds a few more well-earned species to the bag and everyone leaves happy

Following the first exhausting day of our early January trip to Anglesey, we had opted to treat ourselves that evening and booked into The Freckled Angel, a relatively new restaurant in Menai Bridge that our hotel owner had generously recommended and managed to get us a table. Writing restaurant reviews is not part of my remit for *Sporting Shooter* but it was brilliant and a welcome change from some of the more traditional hostelrys we have visited in the past so if you are up on The Island I do suggest giving it a go.

While at dinner, we finally agreed that we would commit to an early start, get up early and head out for a flight to try and bag a goose or two as they had successfully eluded us the previous day. One of the party, Dennis, had car trouble and was adamant that he was going to forego the second day's shooting and get him and his car home. He would not be convinced to travel back on Sunday but I explained that he had to come on the goose flight as we would be back at the hotel for breakfast by 8.30am and he could call the AA then and get the process started.

Close, but no cigar!

So we gathered at 6.15am in the car park, clad in an array of various

warm, wet weather gear as the forecast wasn't particularly enticing. We picked up the keeper and sidekick and headed to the lake we had shot the previous morning. We split into two groups and set out in different directions in order to encircle the whole lake. I put four Guns out with clear instructions to try and stay hidden as it got lighter and to try and be patient and allow the geese to come into range before pulling the trigger. I found myself a spot under the lee of a tall hedge about 20 yards off the edge of the lake. Nothing happened for a while. I could hear geese honking away in the distance but it sounded as if they were settled in a field some way away. The wind picked up and of course it started to rain and we endured 10 minutes of wondering why we had got up so early only to stand in the wet and the cold shooting at nothing. Suddenly, there were two shots at the far right end of the lake followed by a welcome splash and then a single mallard came round on my left, highlighted perfectly in the breaking light. One shot and down it came, landing in the shallows just beside me. There then ensued some steady shooting from all of the Guns. I had a lovely left and right mallard followed by a high, single bird that I was extremely pleased

with. As time passed, there was still no sign of any geese and Steve, the keeper, reckoned they would come in at about 8.30am. They had obviously been delayed and mindful that we had promised to get back to the hotel no later than 9 o'clock we decided to pack up and head back to the cars with six mallard, two wigeon and a gadwall; a respectable start to the day. Then to continue the curse from yesterday, just as we were moving off and closing the gate, a skein of about 40 greylags appeared and touched down on the lake, having flown over just where we had been waiting.

We had a quick Full Welsh breakfast and agreed the plan for the day, which was to target mostly snipe and woodcock. I had mislaid my walkie-talkie so was sent off to search where I was standing the night before on the woodcock flight whilst the others headed off to shoot some thick willows that always holds a few birds. Sadly I didn't find the device and by the time I met up with the team they were on their way back with two snipe, a woodcock and a careless pigeon.

Full circle

We then headed up to my favourite piece we shoot on the island, mainly because we leave the cars, pack a snack and drink and then walk a massive

POSITIVE ID

Being able to correctly identify your quarry is crucial when shooting a variety of species like this.

The weekend's sport concluded with a productive evening duck flight illuminated by the nearly full moon



Just as the group leave for breakfast, a skein of greylag fly over – typical!

PICTURE: ISTOCK



circle, taking about three and half hours. We lined up either side of a long, deep, wide and soggy gully full of briars, gorse and willows and started a slow trek. All one could hear was the dogs eagerly combing the cover, the occasional reprimand and then an enthusiastic shout identifying a species of quarry that had got up. I was at the front because I knew the route for the others to follow. I could also head off any birds that were put up early and made it through the gauntlet of Guns surrounding them. My first involvement was to pick an excellent pigeon that Matt shot to my left. He was then presented with a terrific driven cock pheasant that I was sure he hit, but he wasn't so sure. Then an almost identical high woodcock came straight over him and we both agreed he definitely didn't trouble that one. There were not a huge number of shots and it was clear that a good proportion of the woodcock had moved off the island. We emerged from the gorse valley with two pheasants, a woodcock, a magpie and a pigeon just as heavy rain set in, driven by the now strong westerly.

Two Guns headed off in the deluge with the beaters to get into position for shooting a long and wide snipe marsh. The rest of us hid under the lee of a huge protruding rock until it was time to get into position. Four of us stood at the end of the marsh behind a tall hedge whilst the other two Guns, Matt and Nick, walked up the flanks. Now, snipe shooting is not the easiest of skills to master; in fact, luck, patience and persistence are more valuable especially in the Force 10 gale coming straight at our faces. We had hoped to see five or six birds come out of the marsh but as the beaters and spaniels combed every pool and tuft of grass, snipe were lifting everywhere with the majority of them peeling out over Matt on the left. He had about 30 plus birds

over him, and the continual calls of "Over" were not helping his reloading speed. God knows how many shots he had but he came away beaming, having shot his first ever snipe. The front of the line was treated to a similar display and I had nine shots for a single bird, but oh what a bird. Simon to my left did manage to shoot another woodcock which he really should have left for another Gun as it was not particularly sporting and he had shot a couple over the weekend already. I did make my disapproval known I would have been the other Gun but I think he realised that! We then shot a long gorse bank that showed three woodcock, none of which were shot (two were unsafe and one

was missed) but we did manage to find the cock pheasant that Matt had shot at earlier.

We now started our long return back to the vehicles. We were all wet and the rain showed no sign of abating. Our route to sanctuary wasn't pretty: we walked a few grass fields, soggy fields of stubble turnips and muddy fields full of inquisitive and rambunctious bullocks. Nick added another woodcock to the bag which was great as he had not had much luck during the day. The team was generally tired, hungry and thirsty and three blank pieces at the end did nothing for enthusiasm levels. Once we were back at base though a late lunch and a few well deserved drinks quickly roused our spirits again and we said our thanks to the departing beaters who were heading for home rather than coming with us for the final evening duck flight.

We arrived at the pond a little late but a nearly full moon provided some welcome illumination to see anything that came in. Not much happened for about 20 minutes and the clouds had come in to obscure the moon, but some teal started to drop in and a few mallard too. We all had a couple of shots but it was relatively quiet and we finished off with three teal, two mallard and a gadwall. When it got just too dark we packed up and headed back to the keeper's house to divide up all the game, distribute various tips and bid our farewells until the following season. Overall, it had been a bit quieter than previous years (we had shot 51 head of game over the two days) but we had some very challenging, varied and exciting shooting and we all agreed it had been a fantastic couple of days enjoying the wild birds and weather in great company and all committed to come back again next season. [ES](#)

The Rough Rovers is a roving syndicate created to seek out the best walked-up, mini-driven and driven shooting on different estates across the country at a sensible price.



The route to sanctuary wasn't easy: lots of soggy, muddy fields on tired legs. Once there, lunch was very welcome!

PICTURES: PHIL MOORSOM

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A wild goose chase

Alan Jarrett, our great wildfowling hero, is under pressure to fulfil a very specific Christmas order!

Suddenly the phone rang: "David has promised a client a goose for Christmas and is desperate. Can you get him one? I told him you were the best person to ask!" No pressure then! As it was, my diary had been cleared for two days (22-23 December) with a goose/duck hunt in mind. But shooting a wild goose to order is another matter altogether! Hoping to get a goose is one thing; being expected to get one is something quite different.

As the gloom of an early morning began to clear, the strident honking of Canada geese was heard from the river. It sounded like an entire army of geese approaching, but when they arrived there were only three. My shots had no effect, and for all I know those birds are still flying!

Somewhat chastened by such a horrible missed opportunity, the car was headed for other parts. Even when plans are firmly set – as much as they can be when hunting wild geese on the foreshore – it is always enjoyable to reconnoitre the local area, for inspiration if nothing else. Fortunately, I still had three flights left to come, giving me plenty of time to fulfil the order.

There by the roadside, spread across three fields of muddy harvest was a mass of pink-footed geese numbering thousand upon thousand. As I watched from a discretely parked car more and more came, even when it seemed the fields were full to bursting point. Plenty of geese here, but how best to get a shot at them when the shore was so

far? My original plan was abandoned, instead deciding to head 10 miles east in the hope that the geese would head out that way to roost. My thinking was aided by a big flight-time high tide, which could encourage the birds to head out that way. Experience told me I was in with a chance.

So it was to prove, for with the tide lapping over the top of the saltmarsh, the first distant yelping of the pinks could be heard approaching. When they came they were too high for a shot, to be expected in such windless conditions. But if you cannot have wind then have fog instead. A mist had hung about all day, and with the failing light, it thickened to such an extent that soon the air was filled with the calls of geese. Wave upon wave of them came down towards the shore.

A couple of desultory shots brought no reward, but then a shot at a bird leading a great wave of geese brought the desired result. Better still the second shot also connected, with both birds plummeting to the saltmarsh behind me – mission accomplished. Later, in the lights of the car that second goose was earmarked as a small, young bird which would in all probability make good eating on Christmas day.

But still the geese came, and before the clamour had fully died away two more fine birds lay beside me on the saltmarsh. For all I knew that could have been the flight of a lifetime in terms of spectacle.

Three days later we were at the dinner table,

enjoying succulent morsels of that young goose. It was delightful to think back to those days when I had visited the home of the pinkfeet. There in the desolate fastness of their mountain home the clutches of goslings – mostly no more than a few days old – were scattered as far as the eye could see.

I had made a promise then to see them again, and now the circle of life had been completed: from the balls of fluff which the goslings represented; to the high flying yodelling skeins; then transformed to a meal as good as any to be taken from any wildfowl.

The next morning the fog, aided by a couple of sharp notes on the call, brought another pink to the bag. The fog was slow to clear, so a greylag and a couple of teal also accompanied me home.

The geese were still gorging on the harvested sugar beet, and at least as many as on the previous day. Could my luck hold good for another day? But the hope that burns within any true wildfowler sent me trudging back out to that same ambush point. The day before, the mallard and gadwall had flighted during the early afternoon, and everything was prepared for a repeat performance. But no large duck were to be seen; instead parties of teal kept me entertained for an hour or so, and another two ended up in the homeward bag.

In the first of the gloom, a vast pack containing thousands of geese came down from the fields and for the next 30 minutes or so, two more masses were joining them. They had all dropped short, and their chorus of calls came clearly through the gathering fog-aided gloom.

Then the first skein came, and they were let go in the hope the next were lower and more shootable. This is exactly what happened, except they did not come in skeins – but great shouting packs numbering hundreds at a time. The air was filled with their calling, at first joyous as they flighted but then in alarm as the shots reached out for them.

There were geese in front, geese to my rear and geese on all sides, often stretching out into the gloom only to be lost from sight in the all-enveloping darkness. Four of the fine birds were brought to hand, and still they came as a veritable blizzard of geese the like of which not only surpassed the previous evening but surpassed anything I've ever witnessed before.

Such were my thoughts as the meal was consumed, knowing how fortunate this particular wildfowler had been to experience the real marvel of nature. As the plate was set aside, my mind wandered to my diary – see you soon, pinkfeet! 



FOOD FOR THOUGHT
Sustainably harvested meat, shot in the field by yourself and enjoyed with the family – what greater joy can there be in life?!

‘It was a veritable blizzard of geese
the like of which surpassed anything I’ve
ever witnessed before’





Old-school rabbiting

A tasty off-season gamekeeping perk – a bit of rabbit shooting – provides fond memories for Adam Smith

You could say I'm a bit out of touch because, although much of what follows was first aired a dozen years ago and more, I still don't know if my memories are a reality in the keepering world of today. I suppose, logically enough, it depends on where you live and in particular if myxomatosis continues to take its toll of the local population – but back in my days, in Hampshire, rabbit shooting in February and March was sometimes highly organised and always huge fun. Not just the thrill of matching reflexes with an elusive target, but all the 'crack' and banter to go with a peer group at play.

At other times it could be even more casual: in fact one of my woods – mature larch with knee-high bramble cover – offered some brilliant bunny bopping for just me and a couple of springers. A demanding scenario, it involved standing still and letting the dogs work the surrounding ground cover, taking out the rabbits as they tried to sneak past, weaving through the low-growing but dense brambles.

More commonly, informal rabbit shooting involved two or three Guns and a few dogs, a mix of spaniels and terriers. And there, by the way, hangs one of a keeper's perennial problems: expecting your dogs to be steady paragons in the line from October to January and then to flush rabbits with expertise and enthusiasm for the next two or three

months. Mine coped, after a fashion, but I think they had rather more hunter than pointer in the blood, so many an allowance had to be made for the doggyish equivalent of teenage behaviour.

At the top of the tree, every now and then organised rabbit days involved quite a bit of forward planning, perhaps a dozen or more Guns and at least as many dogs, a midday meal down the pub and, vital to the success of the whole enterprise, several days' preparation.

For a start, ideally you'd need a good mature conifer with nice round cones – the tapered ones are much easier to find but won't behave the way you want. So, you look for a tree with a litter of ping-pong ball shaped cones lying around, pick up a good sackful and tip them into a 40-gallon drum half full of creosote, Renardine – a pungent proprietary product created to deter foxes – and diesel. These smelly spheres will form the first stage of a successful day's rabbit shooting. Others might prefer the simplicity of little balls of newspaper, but they need rather more on-site preparation.

And yet, having said all that, maybe I should go 'off piste' for a while. It occurs to me that the days I

remember, like so many aspects of the shooting scene today, are perhaps a part of history. Lamping and night vision in the dark by one or two on foot or small teams in 4x4s has probably overtaken the daylight days. In terms of logistics, it's equally true to say that a good trio of driver, lamper and air or rimfire rifleman – or whatever hi-tech combination applies – will achieve similar or even bigger bags.

What they'll never regain though is the sheer fun of it all, with a bit of graft thrown in for good measure.

It took a few decades for the rabbit to bounce back from the effects of myxomatosis which near enough eradicated the species in the 1950s – and as a boy I can remember walking across fields covered, and I do mean covered, with dead and dying rabbits. But bounce back they did and

although at first a successful colony would be decimated by an outbreak of the viral killer almost every year, more and more built up immunity until today in most parts of the country rabbits are once more plentiful. Not, perhaps, plentiful compared to 19th century numbers, when the record books show that 5,086 were shot at Rhinlas in Wales on one day in 1885, a record beaten by the 6,943 at

WRITE IN!

If you have a story from the peg that you would like to share with other readers, email us at rebecca.green@fieldsportspress.com

Back in the day, organised rabbit days required quite a bit of forward planning from the keeper



Blenheim on a later day in 1898. That heated up some barrels in the process on both occasions, I'll bet, along with filling a good few stewpots and dropping the London market price for a few days too, no doubt.

So, although the Victorian spectacle must have been memorable, the sort of rabbiting days I remember were lower-key affairs, with bags of anything between a few dozen to a hundred or so depending on the ground covered and size of the estate. Much depended on that pre-shoot preparation – which brings me back to those cones.

What you did, after a few days in which the fir cones embraced all the subtleties of their marinade, was to scoop out a couple of bucketfuls and, clad in suitably old clothes and a pair of thick red rubber gloves, high tail it for the woods. Once there, you looked out all the rabbit holes you knew of and as many new ones as could be found. Since a fair number of these would be deep inside bramble bushes and the like, it helped no end to have another willing pair of hands with a slasher – not as fully curved but most like a heavy sickle blade on a long handle, previously popular with revolting peasants – to create the access. Once exposed, each hole had a pungent little cone rolled or flicked as deep inside as possible – hence the round ones being best – before moving on to the next.

Incidentally it's wrong to call all groups of rabbit holes 'warrens'. In fact, the correct term is 'bury', 'burry' or 'burrow' – the spelling varied from county to county – because a warren is an artificial bury. Usually created on an easily ferreted open bank and managed by a warrener, who provided tatty carrots, swedes, bolted (gone to seed) lettuce and so on as food and policed against poachers, rabbit warrens were a cheap, easy and on-site means of providing a sustainable source of protein for estate workers.

Back to cone rolling and, as you can guess, having a burrow stinking of a renowned fox pee substitute, Renardine, spiked with creosote and diesel, persuaded most of the sitting tenants to sit elsewhere, above ground – which was just what the noble and historic process of 'stinking out' intended.

The timescale was: stink out, which could take a couple of days; leave area quiet for two or more days – depending on the weather forecast – and then assemble your team of professionally trained marksmen attended by a selection of elite FTCh working dogs. Well no, not really.

Keepers are an odd bunch. All sorts of 'characters' are to be found within their ranks, from hardcore grumpy to cheerful Charlies with many variations in between but one thing they tend to have in common is an ability to take snap shots, almost as quick as a blink. It goes with the territory because most of what is classed as 'vermin'

While lobbing toxin-soaked fir cones into rabbit burries was less than wise in hindsight, those days out with friends and dogs still offer wonderful memories for this retired keeper!



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doesn't oblige by standing still for very long or fly in nice straight lines. So taking your chances as they arrive is very much part of a keeper's approach to shooting – and that suits rabbiting to a T.

As suggested earlier, another attribute to be found among any choir of keepers (new collective noun for you) is the ability to extract various degrees of michael or take the urine, so when you assemble such a meeting of minds you have to expect some chat. Some of this will inevitably reflect on shooting ability and some on quarry

recognition but, in general, genetic background will form the basis for most discussions. Whatever, it makes for a lively atmosphere and one in which straight shooting while absorbing all manner of slings and arrows is always challenging.

The ultimate problem with rabbiting on, of course, is that it fills time and space without getting round to covering the actual subject. So next time I'll tell you some tales of the guns, their dogs, the techniques and tittle-tattle of those rabbit days, 30 and more years ago. 

It wasn't always easy for the dogs to transition from beating line steadiness to bolting-rabbit chaser!



Sporting Gundog

with
Howard Kirby
Gundog Trainer

The essential guide to owning and working a gundog

**SPECIAL
GUNDOG SECTION**
EVERY MONTH IN SPORTING SHOOTER

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Controlling the rabbit population on his land provides Ryan Kay with food for the pot and valuable training for the dogs

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How do I react to a puppy that has started to growl at family members?



HOWARD'S TIP OF THE MONTH: *Do nothing!*

Be patient, stand still, do nothing, wait for your dog to offer the behaviour you are looking for. This can sometimes work for sit, quiet, focus and delivery to hand. Good luck!





A word to the wise on parasites

Prevention really is better than cure. Here is Vicky Payne's guide on how to ensure you give your dog the best and most efficient protection from puppy to peg

I found myself standing in the dispensary last week looking at the bewildering choice of anti-parasitic agents and wishing for the simpler days when I was training – when the only options were cans of flea spray, worming powder for pups, and tablets for adult dogs.

Things have moved on because the old products weren't always effective and contained ingredients found to cause health problems. Sadly, we face more parasite threats now than in the past. The trouble is, gundog owners are now faced with a lot of products in very different price ranges, and it can be hard to know which products will suit your needs best.

Vet, pharmacy or pet shop?

UK animal medicines have to be authorised for sale. Parasite control products can be:

GSL Meaning they can be sold anywhere. These are usually older products with a wide safety margin. Pack sizes can be limited and these may not be the most effective products.

POM-VPS These can be sold by vets, pharmacists, and 'suitably qualified persons' who have passed a course on their safe use. These are usually newer products than the GSL ones and can be more effective. They have been around long enough to be considered safe in most dogs though there may be precautions which the seller should explain.

POM-V These can only be obtained from a vet or with a prescription. These are normally the newest and most effective products but can include some older products which must be used carefully in certain breeds.

The question for many gundog owners with multiple dogs will be: do I really need to buy the newest and most expensive stuff from the vet? My answer is maybe not, but you do need to establish the risk to your dogs and choose products and a dosing interval which ensures protection. Speak to your vet or veterinary nurse to design a programme which works for your kennel, but there are some general points to consider.

Adult dogs

These have the lowest internal parasite risk because they do develop some immunity. Dogs with limited access to grass and in colder parts of the UK may only need roundworm and tapeworm treatment once every three months. Flea treatment should be carried out year-round for most dogs because both heated kennels and houses provide a breeding ground for fleas, even in the winter. You may choose to give tick treatment all year if you are in a high-risk area, otherwise treat between late spring and early autumn. Be aware that some products need applying more often to control ticks. Sadly, lungworm is a growing problem in the UK with

infection causing a variety of symptoms from chronic coughing to bleeding disorders and even death. Spread by slugs and snails, dogs with outdoor runs are at elevated risk, though any dog can be affected. Ask your vet about prevalence in your area and use a treatment monthly if concerned.

Breeding bitches

Traditionally we would give fenbendazole from day 40 of pregnancy until two days after whelping. This will reduce the number of roundworms passed to puppies through the placenta and the milk. However, if a bitch has been regularly wormed prior to mating this may not be necessary. Some POM-V multiwormers are safe to give during pregnancy, but do read the label carefully.

Pregnant bitches and puppies do seem more prone to flea attacks so do ensure mum is covered with a product which is safe to use when nursing. Make sure your vet, pharmacist or SQP knows if you intend to breed from your dog or bitch because some products are not advised.

'Make sure your vet or pharmacist knows if you intend to breed from your dog or bitch as some products will not be advised'

Puppies

Puppies will get some roundworms from their mother no matter how well you worm her, but infection can be life threatening. Puppies should get their first worming at 2-3 weeks old, then every 2-3 weeks until rehoming. After eight weeks, worming once a month is advisable along with flea treatment. Puppies are at higher risk from lungworm infection so ensure the product you use covers this. Tapeworm control is not usually needed until puppies are six months old unless they have access to raw meat, dead rodents, or have had fleas.

Travelling dogs

Dogs that travel overseas have additional parasite risks. Returning to the UK only officially requires tapeworm treatment but it is highly recommended to speak to your vet to prevent your dog coming home with more than you bargained for!

After he's eight weeks old, Vicky advises that you worm your puppy once a month



PICTURE: NICK RIDLEY

Remedial training

If you and your dog didn't shower yourselves in glory this season, don't worry. Howard Kirby is here to help, starting with a lesson in finding and 'training' a good partner – a priceless addition to your regime!

The shooting season almost seems like a distant memory now. How was it for you? Importantly, how did the dogs go? I sincerely hope that you had a really nice time and that your gundogs repaid all those hours of training that you spent on them during the spring and summer of 2022. That retrieve that you pulled off in front of the Guns, which left you walking away thinking, ohhh yes, who's the daddy?! That piece of hunting that left both of the judges thinking, this lady is going to be in the results, or maybe that your dog sat on the peg, off lead, without moving a muscle. Priceless moments. Take a minute now to savour all of those high points.

Unfortunately, for some of us there will have been occasions when lavish praise, judges' awards and moments of joy were not the order of the day. In the real world, anxiety, embarrassment and moments of despair will be burned into your soul. How do I know that? Easy really, because I know you chose to be brave, or stupid enough, to slip the

lead off on a supercharged, half-crazed gundog on a shoot day. Are you insane? For the record, I take my hat off to you.

So, there's probably some remedial training to be done before the next shooting season, which, by the way, will be on us before you know it. Steadiness, recall, stop whistle, directional work, noise... there is a long list of problems that can creep in. With the clocks changing, daylight hours lengthening and, with a bit of luck, some nice weather, it's time to gather your training bag, dummies, whistles and if you're really lucky a training partner and dummy thrower.

Training the Training Partner

I'm going to use this article to discuss the importance of a person whom for the purpose of this article, we'll refer to as 'the dummy thrower'. I appreciate that in modern times this person might prefer a different title, perhaps training facilitator or projectile launching engineer? On one particular

wet and windy February morning I optimistically said to my partner: "Do you fancy coming out to throw some dummies for the dogs?" In a soft but slightly menacing tone, she replied: "Do I look like a mug?" You'll understand that in the future interest of maintaining a long-term relationship, this is not a name I've chosen to use! Good training partners and 'dummy throwers' are priceless.

Training a young dog to retrieve is something that can easily be achieved on your own – in fact, it's often best done that way as a second person in the classroom can serve as a distraction. But as distances increase, a training assistant can be really helpful. It is, however, extremely important that your assistant is aware of your objectives and how the things they do can affect the outcome of a training session. In short, they need to be trained. A word of caution here. Before you rush off to educate your partner as to the do's and do nots of dummy throwing... getting it wrong could well lead to domestic disharmony. Put a lot of thought into your chosen training partner.

With the skill and knowledge of your projectile launching engineer in mind, here are a few suggestions that can help them to help you.

The noise

When throwing marked retrieves for a young dog it's really important that the dummy thrower knows and has practised how to make the noise that will catch your dog's attention and alert it to the fact that they are about to throw a dummy. Tapping the dummy on their opposite hand, making a noise, brrrrrrrrrr, or iiiiiiiiii, are the most common noises used. Pay attention to this noise and get it right as this will be the universal language used by dog training groups, clubs and at working tests.

Starting pistol

Using a starting pistol or a blank firing shotgun requires some really important knowledge and understanding of the safety implications before you let them loose. Your assistant must be aware

Remember, correct dummy placement is key to your dog's success and your ongoing relationship with your partner!



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Your partner should understand that allowing the dummy to get caught in something will make the dog's job harder

that inappropriate use can lead to a fear reaction from the dog and could be devastating. Male dummy throwers will maintain their interest in helping you for longer if you allow them to use a blank firing pistol or gun.

Location

Agree with your partner where you wish the dummy to be thrown. Be precise, go to the area and pinpoint the location. "Just at the base of the tree, please." Explain the importance of dummy placement, that with this young dog we need to make it as easy as possible. When the youngster 'makes the distance', we want an easy find to ensure the dog is successful and gets a reward. With a more experienced, confident dog that will hold an area, we can make things more difficult. Explain how allowing the dummy to get caught up in a bush or dropping it into the mouth of a rabbit hole can make things almost impossible and lead to the dog not finding the retrieve. On the flip side, the careful placement of a dummy in a bush or in a depression in the ground might help to build your dog's understanding and experience. A simple marker post will often avoid confusion and costly mistakes.

Make your mark

Help your dummy throwers to understand that this is a marked retrieve, so it's essential that the dog sees the flight and fall of the dummy. Consider the backdrop: are you throwing a dark-coloured dummy against a woodland or high hedge? Maybe use a white dummy as this gives a contrast. Where possible, throw the dummy high enough to break the skyline. Be aware that when you deliberately try to get height in a thrown dummy it's difficult to maintain accuracy.

An obvious target

One of the plus sides of using a visible dummy

thrower is that the dog will learn to use the human figure as a target: "the dummy's always by the really bored looking fella that makes funny noises". Your dog will quickly learn to rely on this, so as the dog grows in confidence, use the same target area but ask the dummy thrower to hide or move away after placing the dummy. The same applies when setting a blind. Many dogs are made to be frightened of dummy throwers that have been encouraged to charge down a disobedient dog; don't let them do this.

Correcting mistakes

A well-schooled and conveniently located dummy thrower will immediately spot that your dog has

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Using a starting pistol or blank-firing shotgun is fun for your helper, but must be handled carefully and correctly

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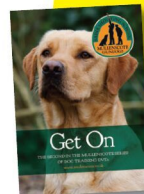
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run-in. If they quickly pick the dummy up before the dog reaches the area it will not find the dummy and subsequently not receive the reward. Once the dog has been recalled back to the handler, which shouldn't be attempted until the dog has exhausted its efforts to find the dummy (there are exceptions to this) an experienced dummy thrower might choose to 'flatten out' the noise and energy they put into dummy throwing, reducing levels of excitement and helping to increase the likelihood of the dog remaining steady.

Whilst this article was aimed at encouraging and developing a training assistant, if you are new to gundogs then some of the ideas and tips might help as you plan your next session.

In conclusion, quality 'training facilitators' are hard to find and even more difficult to maintain. As long as you keep in mind that standing in the middle of a windswept field throwing bags of sand whilst being shouted at, will never be 'sexy', and as long as you continue to love, cherish, value and ensure you cross their palms with silver, cake, gold and affection, (where it is deemed to be appropriate), then you will have half a chance of keeping them.

As always have fun, enjoy your dogs and keeeeeeeep training. 

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Those pesky wabbits!

They certainly are a nuisance when it comes to tree damage, but controlling the rabbit population on his land is a love/hate affair for Ryan Kay, as they also provide food for the pot and valuable training for the dogs

I've been writing articles in *Sporting Shooter* for around eight years now and I've always tried to do two things: align the subject with current issues out there in the gundog world and not repeat myself... too much! Looking back, I think it was about five years ago when I approached the knotty subject of 'correction', so the area is definitely due

a revisit. I am currently in the process of researching the topic, focusing more on what can be achieved via positive reward-based methods in order to try and help the working gundog arena shake off the heavy-handed tag it's carried around with it for such a long a time. The nature of the subject means I'm at risk of getting a bit bogged

down with it all, as I try to explore different viewpoints from resources everywhere. To my rescue, then, came our editor Rebecca Green, with an email suggesting that I write about rabbit shooting this month, which will kind of align with the pest control theme in this edition. Gladly! The aforementioned subject can be put aside for a future issue (soon, I promise).

The rabbit theme is actually good timing because with the season now at an end, February is a chance for me to look at maintenance jobs that need doing around the place this month and next. Trimming hedges, planting bare-rooted trees and transplanting cover whilst everything is still dormant are all on the priority list. Added to that is the process of clearing out as many rabbits as possible from our land. This is something we've done every year since we've been here; a necessity that helps limit the amount of damage they cause. That damage is also more apparent during the leaner months, especially on young trees and grazing areas in the horse paddocks. Anyone with horses knows the risks that a rabbit hole can bring to a paddock and a running horse – a perfect hoof-sized hole offering the chance of a pulled tendon or even a broken leg.

With regards to tree damage, saplings and even some mature trees are nibbled back as the rabbits go to town on exposed trunks. We do fit tree guards around all newly planted trees but this can merely focus their nibbling elsewhere. During a windy spell this year, one silver birch had the tree guard blown from its base and before I had the chance to resecure the guard back around the tree (less than 24 hours), the damage was already done! It's akin to the one night that you forget to shut the door to the chicken hut and the fox gets in; total opportunists! My eldest son Fred and I usually keep tabs on where the main hideouts are,

'From a training point of view, I'm ultimately looking for the complete sequence: hunt, flush, sit and retrieve'



Young Fred Kay has taken up rabbiting duties for some of the neighbours that don't shoot

BARK FOR DINNER

Ryan has an issue with rabbits nibbling the bark of the young trees on his land. Each spring, his focus turns to population control before the breeding season starts.



Fred and Jimmy work together, with a rabbit successfully brought to hand and in the bag

and which hedgerows the rabbits run along and retreat to. I say hideouts because the burrows are now completely obsolete at this time of year on our land. Having heavy clay in a comparatively flat area on the outskirts of York, near to where two rivers merge, means the fields hold water at this time every winter, pushing the rabbits from their burrows and requiring them to adopt a 'seat' at night. Because of this, we do, in fact, get to see a very true picture of the rabbit population as practically all the bunnies can be counted, and because there's no hiding, it makes February the perfect time to cull. Plus, there's the added bonus of it also offering great training, as one dog could flush the same rabbit several times until it reveals itself in order to provide a safe shot.

The appeal of the rabbit

Those that enjoy rabbit shooting over spaniels out on the moorland edges know just how good hunting this pesky quarry can be. Every year, trucks appear down little lanes out on the North York Moors, and the Yorkshire Dales, filled with a small army of spaniels and retrievers, ready to be shot over. When I describe this type of shooting to my 'driven-only' shooting friends, who are more accustomed to standing at a peg on a highly organised outing served with oodles of hospitality, there's sometimes a dismissive look behind the eyes. How can shooting rabbits over spaniels be more exciting than driven pheasants?! Oh, but it can. And if you appreciate working hunting dogs, it most certainly can!

The flat land in the Vale of York doesn't quite have the same appeal as the rolling moorland of a national park, but the objective is the same. The window to eliminate rabbits effectively in this way from our land is very small, because as soon as the ground starts to dry up, the holes become accessible to the rabbits again, and as soon as that happens, breeding quickly ensues.

Although this ridding of rabbits does serve a purpose in terms of dog training and provides

some delicious meat (we always eat what we shoot), it can also feel a little thankless, as we're the only neighbours to do this culling. The land of five neighbouring landowners run up to our borders and not one of them controls rabbits on their land. This has led to an extension of our culling range, with three of the neighbours allowing us to walk over the borders in order to thin the population on their side also. But no matter how rabbit-free we try to make it, I guarantee the hedgerows will be



Rabbits will nibble at mature trees and can kill a sapling in a matter of days



In Ryan's eyes, shooting rabbits over working dogs is just as thrilling as a day on a driven peg



Despite being a pest, the rabbits on Ryan's land provide invaluable training opportunities for the dogs

For this type of shooting, Fred leaves the heavier, larger bore guns in the cabinet. Instead he uses a Yildiz .410 with a 19g load of no 6 and ¾ and full chokes. This gets the job done.

repopulated come the end of summer. By winter, they're everywhere again, and we've even had them running about outside the kennel doors!

I decided Jimmy was the dog of choice to get some invaluable experience on rabbits. Jimmy, also known as 'Little Jimmy', is about 20 months old and has really shown his natural ability during the second half of the shooting season, whilst out beating. He's even about ready for trialling but that will have to wait until the late summer rabbit trials (perhaps). Shooting over him now, in this kind of situation, is an ideal hunting and flushing lesson that he can get under his belt before chilling out and enjoying his part in our gundog demonstrations throughout the summer.

Off to work

Fred and I decided to take it in turns to work Jimmy as we kicked off down a neighbour's hedgerow, and it wasn't long before a loose bunny was bowled over along the path in front of Jimmy for him to see. A great start and a crucial lesson. Promptly steady, Jimmy sits and waits. Fred snaps his gun open and waits a short while before sending Jimmy for the close retrieve. I'm ultimately looking for the complete sequence from a training point of view: that of hunt, flush, sit and

retrieve. Back over the fence onto our land and Jimmy gets just that, followed by two more loose running rabbits, making the total four.

There's more to come and we'll get a few more little outings over the next month, giving other youngsters a chance to learn and progress.

I find that these sorts of lessons don't need repeating too often for the natural hunters; rabbits can be such high value (especially to a spaniel), that once a dog has followed the line of the flushed scent a few times, the lesson is so great and of so much importance, that it sinks in very quickly. Rabbit shooting is a great example of why we train for, and require, a very sharp 'Stop whistle' command. I try to keep the dog in my vision the whole time, and if it moves or I get a glimpse that it starts to move, even fractionally, before the shot, I'll not pull the trigger! Getting a safe shot off is absolutely paramount, but also from a lesson point of view, I don't want the dog getting its reward for running-in and subsequently picking the rabbit without being sent on command! However, some dogs get so good at stopping themselves to a flushed bunny that they can sometimes become a little sticky, with some occasionally starting to 'point' as they pre-empt the next stage of a bolting rabbit.

I do of course realise that I'm very lucky with this situation that has become a love/hate relationship – a situation necessitating the suppression of rabbits, yet admittedly, I'm also quietly grateful they manage to re-populate each year. And I'm sure that our young cockers are pretty pleased with the deal too! 



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Keep calm, carry on

Lez Graham examines two ways in which we can alter the behaviour of a dog that is acting out or playing up as a result of being overwhelmed

HOW TO // Leave distractions on lead



Coming across distractions while on lead is a common occurrence, and keeping your dog's attention can be tricky. In this set-up, Lez keeps walking and rewards Emrys when he is back by her side and focussed on her.

Last month, we looked at how simple things can flip a young or inexperienced dog into overwhelm and how, when a dog struggles with self-control, it can, like the old-fashioned pressure cookers letting off steam, display itself through barking, whining, panting and so on.

It's so important to get on top of it as quickly as you can as it won't take long for it to become a learned behaviour, and you can end up with a dog that drops into overwhelm or over-excitement out of habit.

Change starts with us

Whenever you want to change your dog's behaviour, first of all you must change yours and how you're handling the situation (or not!). As the

saying goes, if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got; so change has to start with us.

Depending upon the degree that we need to change our dog's behaviour, we'll either be looking at desensitising him or counter-conditioning him. The former is changing his behaviour to a neutral response, so in Emrys's case it would be to ignore the excitement of dogs retrieving and chasing toys. The latter is about passing through neutral response and changing the emotion to something else, and for Emrys that means focused attention on me and what I want him to do. I don't want him to be indifferent in the face of a dog getting a retrieve; rather, I want self-control and focus on me when retrieving is taking place.

'Behaviour doesn't take long to become learned, and you can end up with a dog that drops into over-excitement out of habit'

HOW TO // Turn away from a distraction



One of the options to help your dog learn to ignore distractions on-lead is to keep turning and walking away until your dog realises he's not allowed it.

HOW TO // Lure your dog away



Using a treat to lure your dog's attention back to you can be effective, but ensure you are not rewarding the unwanted behaviour! Put the treat on the end of his nose (don't let him lick it!), and only give it to him when the desired behaviour has been displayed, for example, heelwork.

Distraction v correction

To distract or correct... that is the question, and for me it's a bit of both, and it all depends on what the dog's reaction is to the thing that caused the overwhelm initially.

I may say "no" or "ah-ah" or "enough" – or any of the words that I would use around the home to interrupt my dog's behaviour. I would then, depending upon the situation, and depending upon whether my dog was on a lead, silently turn away from my dog and start walking; then, when he caught up with me, engage with him by talking and giving him a food reward. I would walk a circle back if possible, or turn back towards the thing that created the unwanted response/ caused the overwhelm and keep repeating this process until I could approach without my dog getting over the top.

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

back, I can work him out of it; if he starts getting over-excited and heading back into overwhelm then I can do a verbal correction or nudge on the lead to mentally bring him back to me.

Using a lure on the end of the dog's nose to 'snap them out of something' can be tricky as it's important not to turn it into a reward for being overwhelmed/barking, etc. The key is not to let the dog have access to the food until he displays the behaviour that you want, and for me, it was good heelwork. Although I used the food to lure him back to me, the 'reward' wasn't forthcoming for a good few minutes.

The other end of the lead

It's so easy to get discouraged when you've worked hard to train your dog and all of a sudden all of that self-control and good behaviour goes flying out of the window.

Rather than look on it as a failure and let your energy dip, or get angry with yourself and your dog, try to see it as a challenge and something to work on with your dog to take your training to the next level; a chance to increase his focus, attention and his working bond with you. 

The fine line between lures and rewards

Alternatively, I could get my dog's phenomenal nose to work for me by putting a treat on the end of it and, without letting him have it or lick it, use it to get his mind on me and off whatever has caused the safety valve to go. Once I have the connection

ABOUT LEZ GRAHAM

Lez Graham is author of *The Pet Gundog* series and is a canine behaviourist and gundog trainer. Training gundog trainers via the Accredited Pet Gundog Instructor programme, which is now in its sixth year, Lez also supports and mentors owners in The Pet Gundog Club.

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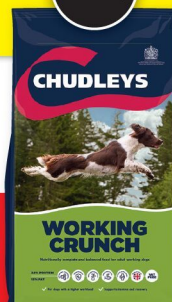
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SUCCESS! // Master the focus on you, not the distraction



Whichever approach you choose, you can keep repeating it until you are able to approach the 'distraction' without your dog getting overwhelmed or over the top, as Lez manages to do with Emrys in this sequence, thus ending the session on a positive note.



QUESTION OF THE MONTH

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Better safe than sorry

Q Our five-month-old cocker has started to growl at me when she is sat on my wife's lap. If I walk up to the sofa she starts growling. I don't get it, as she's really friendly with me the rest of the time. I was told that I should try to distract her using a treat, but if I offer her one of her favourites she just growls more. The closer I get the worse it is.

A HOWARD KIRBY replies: This problem has arisen in several private consultations that I've done recently. It's likely that she is claiming your wife for herself. This is a behaviour that is repeatedly rewarded, albeit inadvertently. Inevitably if the dog growls, people back away. In the early stages the person on whose lap the dog is sitting will also reinforce the behaviour by being passive. There are a few ways to approach this. The belt and braces, and safest approach to this, is to simply not allow the dog on your wife's lap. Teach the young dog to lay in either her bed or a crate. If you wish, there's no reason why this bed can't be in the same room as you guys. The bed or crate should be a place of security and sanctuary, a place that she's been taught will bring rewards, but in due course be obedient enough to stay in. The crate simplifies this process as you are able to close the crate



door. The danger comes from underestimating just how serious this behaviour can become. The risk is that it escalates and the dog starts to bite.

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PICTURES: ISTOCK

Breeding for the wrong reasons?

Q My mate says that if I breed from my bitch she'll be even more keen to hunt. Is this true? She's two years old.

A JACKIE DRAKEFORD replies: It's an idea based on a bitch with pups being eager to hunt food for them, and retaining that keenness even when they have gone to new homes. Like many 'old kennelman's tales' there is a grain of truth in that while the pups are still dependent, but this is not a good time to let your bitch hunt as her body is still recovering from the stresses of pregnancy, birth and lactation. Breeding a litter is hard on a bitch, and also on you if she and they are looked after properly – it's a lot of work and expense, plus the difficulties of finding suitable homes for the pups.

How much keener does she need to be? At two, she is only just coming into her full strength. I've bred from some bitches and not from others, but they were all extremely committed and effective hunters.

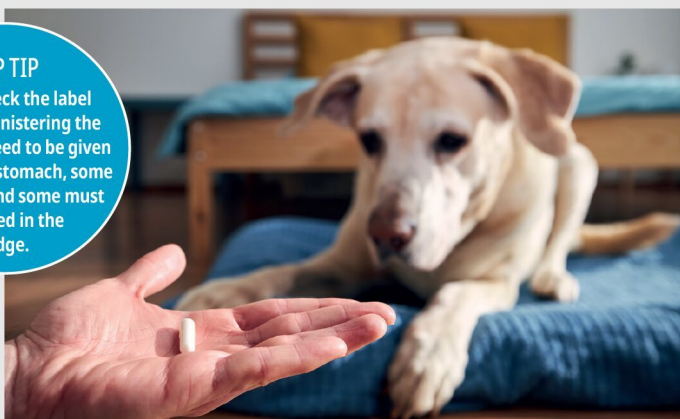
Trick with treats!

Q Help! My dog has been prescribed antibiotics but he won't take them in his food – he manages to eat the kibble and leave the pill! I've tried adding wet food and mixing it in, but he still knows it's there! Is there anything else I can try?

A VICKY PAYNE replies: If it's a tablet, you could try the 'trick with treats' method. This works best with tablets you can insert into a lump of meat or cheese. Have three treats, with the tablet in the last one and throw them one at a time for the dog to eat. He might taste the first one suspiciously but few do anything other than gobble up treats two and three... and the tablet! Good luck!

TOP TIP

Always check the label before administering the pills. Some need to be given on an empty stomach, some with food, and some must be stored in the fridge.



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3

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Our English Sporting layout is open Wednesday through to Saturday from 9am, for practice, tuition, groups, stag & hen do's. Pre-booking recommended.

Tel: 01264 810 312
www.spitfireshoot.co.uk



7

Kibworth Shooting Ground

Whether you are a beginner looking to take your first steps and 'Have-a-go', a seasoned shooter looking for some practice or just for that something different for a special occasion.

Tel: 01162 796001
www.kibworthshootingground.co.uk



8

Eriswell Lodge

Eriswell Lodge Shooting Ground is set in the heart of Suffolk, offering high quality facilities and targets for its customers to enjoy!

Tel: 01638 534045
www.eriswell-lodge.com



9

Dovey Valley Shooting Ground

Situated high above the Dovey Valley in Central Wales, our 400 acre estate and wooded valleys provide the ideal setting for our exhilarating Simulated Game Days and Clay Ground. With up to 600 possible sporting stands, DTL and Skeet setups, there is enough to keep you entertained all weekend. Call us for info and bookings.

Tel: 01650 511252 www.doveyvalley.com
www.simulatedgame.co.uk



13

West Midlands Shooting Ground

Gun Room: Tues: 8.30am - 9.00pm. Wed-Sat: 8.30am-5.00pm. Shooting Ground: Tues: Apr-Sept 3.00pm-9.00pm / Oct-Mar 10.00am-4.00pm. Wed-Sat: 9.00am-4.00pm. Tues is Open Practice for shotgun certificate holders. Wed-Sat all shooting is by appointment only.

Tel: 01939 200 644 | www.wmsg.co.uk



14

Sporting Clay Shooting in Surrey

With an impressive 76 Traps featured over 30 Stands along with a High Tower, Crane and 9 Grouse Butts, this is the ultimate Sporting ground for the novice or experienced shooter.

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK FOR LESSONS, INSTRUCTOR PRACTICE, CADDY & GROUP SHOTS. PRE BOOK IN ADVANCE.

WWW.BISLEYSHOOTING.COM
Tel: 01483 797017



15

North Devon Shooting Ground

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

Tel: 01598 711967
www.northdevonshootingground.co.uk



18

Thimbleby Shooting Ground

Large variety of sporting stands (inc high tower) and popular sportrap. Open Tuesday - Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays. Friendly ground set in beautiful surroundings. Lessons for all abilities and popular simulated game days.

Tel: 01609 883401
www.thimblebyshoot.com



19

Essex Shooting Ground

The biggest practice layout in Essex, 60 traps over 14 stands including 4 x 8 trap sporting stands. Skeet & DTL available to pre-book. Claymate solo delay on all layouts. No membership fees. See website for latest booking requirements.

Tel: 07768 742117
www.claypigeonshoot.co.uk



20

Lady's Wood Shooting School

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

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



23

Ian Coley Sporting

Award-winning Shooting Ground and Gun Shop. Pay & Play practice for licence holders and tuition for all levels of experience. Ideal venue for corporate hospitality. Gun fitting a speciality.

Tel: 01242 870391
www.iancoley.co.uk



24

Beretta Shop-in-Shop Clay Sporting Layout Group & Corporate Shots Shooting Lessons Guns wanted cash paid

OPEN: Tuesday to Saturday
Tel: 01603 860436
www.norfolkshooting.co.uk



25

Crabtree

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

07818 080841 www.crabtreeclayshoot.co.uk

To have your ground featured here,
contact Sharon on **07501 226711** or
e-mail: **sharon.simmill@fieldsportspress.com**

Find a ground near you
online by visiting
www.sportingshooter.co.uk




JJ's
CLAY SHOOTING CLUB

4

JJ's Clay Shooting Club
Opening times: Wednesday, Friday and Saturday 10:30am till 3:30pm /e/ Sunday competition day 10am till 2:00 /e/ Dartford in Kent (near blue water shopping centre). Lesson and corporate days.

Tel: 07771 507 851
www.jjscsc.co.uk



High Lodge

5

High Lodge
Open 6 days a week all year round & some Sundays, fully automatic clay traps, instruction, Practice clays, All welcome.

Tel: +44 (0)1986 784 347
www.highlodge.co.uk



WESTLANDS
COUNTRY PARK

6

Westlands Country Park
Scotland's biggest and most current shooting ground, open 7 days a week.
Welcoming all parties, featuring 140ft high tower and much more. Call us today!

01461 800370
www.westlands.co.uk



ASHCOMBE
ADVENTURE CENTRE

10

Ashcombe Shooting Ground
Open for clay practice 5 days a week – please book through our website. Skeet and DTL, 25 Bird Compact Sporting, 100 Bird Sporting, ABT, Double Rise, Bolting Rabbit & 150ft High Tower. Advanced and novice tuition available by appointment. Wed to Sat: 10am – 5pm, Sun: 10am – 1pm.
Tel: 01626 8666766
www.ashcombeadventure.co.uk/day-shooting-grounds



CHALKY HILL CLAY SHOOT

11

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

Tel: 07909 786272
www.chalkyhill.co.uk



Hownhall
SHOOTING

12

Hownhall Shooting
An award winning shooting school, nestled in woodland on the beautiful Cowdray Estate in West Sussex. We are a centre for excellence in shooting tuition, catering for the novice to the experienced gun.

Tel: 07867 422847
www.hownhallshooting.com

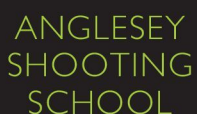


Polowood
Shooting Ground

16

Polowood Shooting Ground
Saturdays for 50 bird sporting. Alternate Sundays 9:30 – 14:00 for Sportrap Shoots. Tuesdays from April to September 12:00 – 19:30 for Sportrap Shoots. Now open on Thursday for a 50 target sporting shoot 10:00 – 16:00. Corporate events available.

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



ANGLESEY SHOOTING SCHOOL

17

Anglesey Shooting School
Set within the beautiful Presaddfed Estate. We offer a wide variety of sporting clays, skeet & simulated game days, to suit all abilities.
Find us on Facebook.

Tel: 07891 669965
www.angleseyshootingsschool.com



West Kent Shooting

21

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

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



Willow Farm
Shooting Ground

22

Willow Farm Shooting Ground
In the heart of the Kent countryside near Tenterden, open 6 days a week for Sporting, Skeet, Compact & DTL, Tue-Sat for practice/lessons. Sporting Competition every Sunday.

Tel: 01233 758 703
www.willowfarmshootingground.co.uk



DOVERIDGE
CLAY SPORTS

26

Doveridge Clay Sports
Open Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sundays
Practice on Sporting, English skeet, Olympic Skeet, Olympic Trap, DTL, ABT and High Towers

Tel: 01889 565986
www.doveridgeclaysports.co.uk
Email: info@doveridgeclaysports.co.uk



Royal Air Force Odiham
Clay Pigeon Club

27

RAF Odiham Clay Pigeon Club
We are a RAF 'Self-Help' Club which also allows up to 50 civilian members. Shooting alternate Sundays, we have Skeet, DTL, and ABT ranges +100 Bird Sporting capabilities

Tel: 07801 712948
www.rafodihamcpc.co.uk



Orston
SHOOTING GROUND

28

Orston Shooting Ground & Gun Shop
53 Acre Premier Plus Facility. Pay & Play Practice, 25+ Sporting Stands + ESK DTL & STR. Professional tuition, Game Arena & High Towers for dedicated driven game practice/lessons, Gun Shop & Large Clubhouse, Corporate & Party Specialists. Open Monday-Saturday 9-5pm

01949 851181 www.orston.com



NEWDIGATE
SHOOTING GROUND

29

Newdigate Shooting Ground
100 Birds Sporting, 50 Clay Sporting experience & Have-A-Go Stand. Felt Wads only. Cartridges available on site. Catering all day. Every other Saturday – see website for dates.

07943 952 009
newdigateshootingground.co.uk

SHOW TIME!

Unmissable things to see and do at the Northern Shooting Show this May – the event where you CAN pull the trigger!

Organisers are set to welcome 25,000 visitors to the annual Northern Shooting Show when it returns to the Yorkshire Event Centre in Harrogate on Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 May. BASC members will enjoy complimentary entry and guest discounts

Gundog demos are a show highlight



on advance bookings and, new for 2023, there's free parking for all courtesy of Browning. With the tagline 'what's a shooting show if you can't pull the trigger?', the hugely popular event will draw people from all over Britain as the nation celebrates the coronation of King Charles III.

Alongside have-a-go stands and demos focusing on clay shooting, airguns, rifles, gundogs, gunmaking and airsoft, the bucket list event will showcase wares from hundreds of shooting and countryside-focused exhibitors from around the world, for a truly unique shopping experience.

1. THE E.J. CHURCHILL CLAYLINE

Award-winning shooting ground and gunmaker E.J. Churchill will be running the clayline, offering clay shooting novices to seasoned experts alike a hands-on chance to get involved across the weekend. The E.J. Churchill clay line is set to include have-a-go stands, a 50-bird English Sporting competition, a 25-bird Sportrap competition and The Coronation Cup which is a one-time, open-entry competition to commemorate the Kings Coronation. The competition boasts a £1,000 cash prize for the High Gun and further generous cash prizes up for grabs for Ladies, Juniors and Veterans.

2. THE GUNDOG FIELD

The Gundog Field, hosted by popular gundog trainer Darren Kirk of Kirkbourne Spaniels, will showcase exciting demos and thrilling competitions for handlers of all levels. The competitions, which last year attracted over 200 dogs, include the long retrieve, the scurry, a junior handler class and the extremely competitive working test. Darren and his dogs will also be appearing in the arena three times a day, so don't miss the chance to see them in action.

3. WORLD HUNTER FIELD TARGET CHAMPIONSHIPS

Aimed at elite airgun shooters, 240 competitors from all over the world will shoot two 40-target courses, made up of four standing targets, four kneeling and 32 prone, on both days of the show. The overall winner will go home with a specially commissioned trophy and there are medals for the top three in each classes – Open, Veterans, Ladies, Junior, .22, Springer and International Team.

4. THE AIRSOFT EXPERIENCE

Head to the Airsoft Experience to learn more about this fast-paced combat game. Have a go at airsoft for the first time, browse the latest equipment and

Charlotte Hill from CJ's Birds of Prey with Jura, a crowned hawk eagle





There are plenty of shotguns for sale to browse through at the show

INFO

- The Northern Shooting Show is being held on Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 May 2023 at Yorkshire Event
- One day adult tickets cost £20. Weekend tickets cost £28. Child tickets (15 and under) are free courtesy of BASC when accompanied by a paying adult.
- BASC members enjoy complimentary tickets to the show, all they need to do is pre-register using their valid membership number.
- Car parking is free courtesy of Browning.

accessories and chat to experts from local clubs to learn more about the sport. New for 2023, the Xsite Practical Shooting Club is organising a level three, IPSC Action Air Match with 12 stages to be shot on either day of the show, open to anyone with a Short Gun Competition Licence from the United Kingdom Practical Shooting Association.

5. THE BASC HUNTER'S KITCHEN

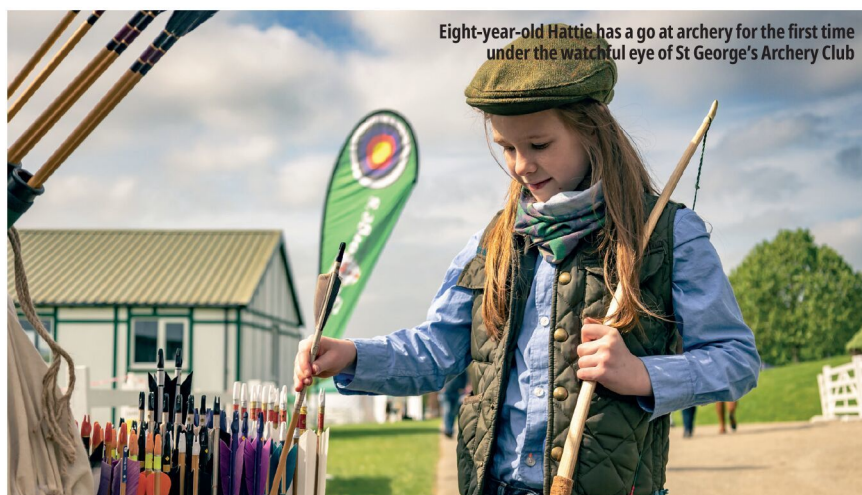
Whet your appetite with cooking displays from some of Yorkshire's best game chefs as they create imaginative dishes using nature's larder. Chefs already confirmed include Simon Whitehead of Pakefield Ferrets who will be creating a tasty rabbit dish, chef Cai Ap Bryn giving a deer butchery demo and Sophie Bagley with her moorland to microwave business Glorious Game.

6. THE OPERATION TELIC DISPLAY

Visitors will be treated to a thrilling twice-daily military re-enactment display titled 'Operation Telic, the invasion of Iraq', located outdoors next to the food concessions. The 20-minute show has been created by a team of professional armourers to the television, film and living history industries and will be performed by enthusiastic re-enactment actors, including British veterans, with modified real firearms.

7. PRACTICAL SHOOTING, INCLUDING MINI RIFLES

Fancy having a go at practical shooting? Magload will be running a Practical Shooting stand giving newcomers of all ages the chance to try out both Mini Rifles and Practical Shotguns! The UKPSA (United Kingdom Practical Shooting Association) will also be there to help answer any questions people might have about the sport and how to start in practical shooting. [SS](#)



Eight-year-old Hattie has a go at archery for the first time under the watchful eye of St George's Archery Club



John Hodson of St George's Archery Club eyes up a rack of bows!

TICKETS
To buy tickets,
visit
[northernshooting
show.co.uk](http://northernshootingshow.co.uk)

CLAY GROUND

Find your local ground for practice, competition or instruction

LONDON & S.E.

BEDFORDSHIRE

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

BERKSHIRE

FOUR COUNTIES CTC
nr Newbury. Sporting, DTL, Fitasc, tuition. Tel: (01635) 201657
www.fourcountiesctc.co.uk
ROYAL BERKSHIRE SHOOTING SCHOOL
Pangbourne Tel: (07000) 410410
www.rbsc.co.uk

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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

HORNET SHOOTING GROUND
nr Long Crendon. Sporting, Fitasc. Tel: (01494) 883715 www.adventure01.com/hornet

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

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

HAMPSHIRE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WALLERS ASH GUN CLUB
Alresford Drive, Winchester Tel: 0710872875 email:travellingclays@btinternet.com Practice, tuition, sporting, all abilities catered for
www.wallersash.co.uk

HERTFORDSHIRE
BROOMHILLS SHOOTING GROUND
Markyate. Tuition, gunshop. Tel: (01582) 842280 www.broomhills.co.uk
CODICOTE BOTTOM CLAY TARGET CLUB
Codicote Bottom Farm, Kimpton road, Codicote, Herts SG4 8SR. Sporting, DTL. Alternate Sundays 10-1. Tel: 07768 714774 or 01438 814749
www.codicote-bottom.org

CUPID GREEN SKEET & ABT CLUB
Hemel Hempstead, Skeet & ABT Every Weds & 1st & 3rd Sat of

month. Felt/fibre wads only Tel: 01582 849382

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

NUTHAMPSTEAD SG
Sporting DTL, OT, tuition, shop. Tel: (01763) 848172 www.nuthampsteadshootingground.co.uk
PARK STREET & DISTRICT GC
Tel: (01923) 677 294

ISLE OF WIGHT

ISLE OF WIGHT GUN CLUB
near Godshill. Sporting, Skeet, DTL, ABT. Tel: (01983) 567330

KENT

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

GREENFIELDS SHOOTING GROUND
nr Canterbury. Practice, tuition, have-a-go days.
Tel: (01227) 715222

www.greenfields shooting.co.uk

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LONDON

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

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

OXFORDSHIRE

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

SURREY

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

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

CATERHAM CLAYS
off Caterham bypass. Sporting. Tel: (01883) 622656
GATWICK CLAY SHOOTING SCHOOL

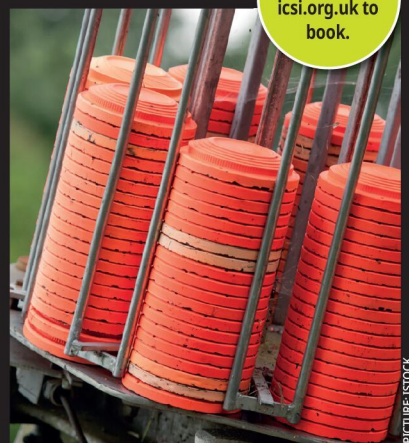
Development workshops and clinics

The Institute of Clay Shooting Instructors is holding a series of workshops at grounds around the UK this spring. Coach and Instructor Development Workshops take place at Kibworth Shooting Ground, Leicestershire on 3 April.

An Observational and Interpretational Development course is being held at Oakedge Shooting Ground Staffordshire on 6 March.

And finally, an Olympic Skeet Coaching Workshop is being held at East Yorkshire Target Centre on 13 April.

At a recent Development workshop at Oakedge, participants worked with tutors both in the classroom and out on the ground, having travelled from around the UK to attend. One commented that the course was "inspirational".



PICTURE: ISTOCK

Go to: www.icsi.org.uk to book.

Skeet, SKD, DTL, Sporting Tel: 07769 701842. www.gatwickclayshooting-school.org.uk

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

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

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

SUSSEX

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

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

OAKESFIELD SPORTING GUN CLUB
Compak, Sporting, tuition and corporate Radgwick, West Sussex Tel: 01306 740537 / 01737 222998
SOUTHDOWN SPORTING GUN CLUB
nr Worthing. Sporting, Skeet, Fitasc, Sportrap, DTL, ABT, tuition. Tel: (01903) 877555
www.southdownsgc.co.uk

EAST

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

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

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

GRANDSEN AIRFIELD SG
Tel: (01767) 627663 www.grandsen-shootingground.co.uk

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

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

ESSEX

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOUTHDOWN GUN CLUB
nr Rochford. Tel: (01702) 219395

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

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

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

NORFOLK

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

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

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

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

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

NORTH WEST

CHESHIRE

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

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

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

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

CUMBRIA

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

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

ISLE OF MAN

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

LANCASHIRE

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

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

KELBROOK SHOOTING SCHOOL
nr Foulridge. (01282) 861632

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

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

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

SOUTH WEST

CORNWALL

CART RIDGE SHOOTING CLUB
12m east of A38 btwn Landrake & Tidedford. Sporting, tuition.
Tel: 01752 851262

COUNTY GUN CLUB
Imerys Gun Club 01726 823895

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

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

DEVON

ASHCOMBE SHOOTING GROUND
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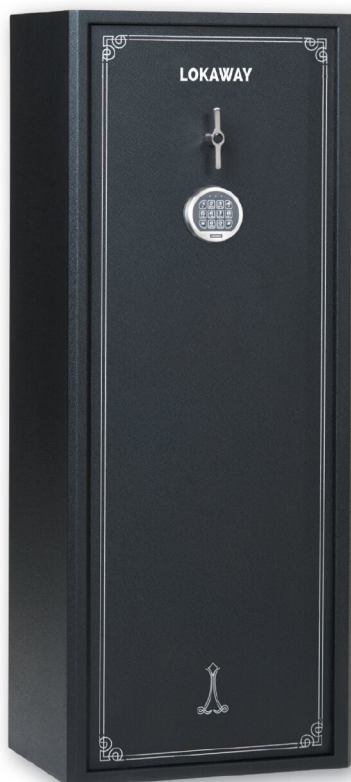
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