

PIGEON SHOOTING: IS IT MORE TESTING THAN GROUSE?

SHOOTING TIMES[®]

29 SEPTEMBER 2021

& COUNTRY MAGAZINE

Since 1882

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What the average
Shot looks like today

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Why you
should join
a club

NEW ERA

Will the end
of lead change
gun design?

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PARTRIDGES**

*How to do your
bit to save
them*

FUTURE



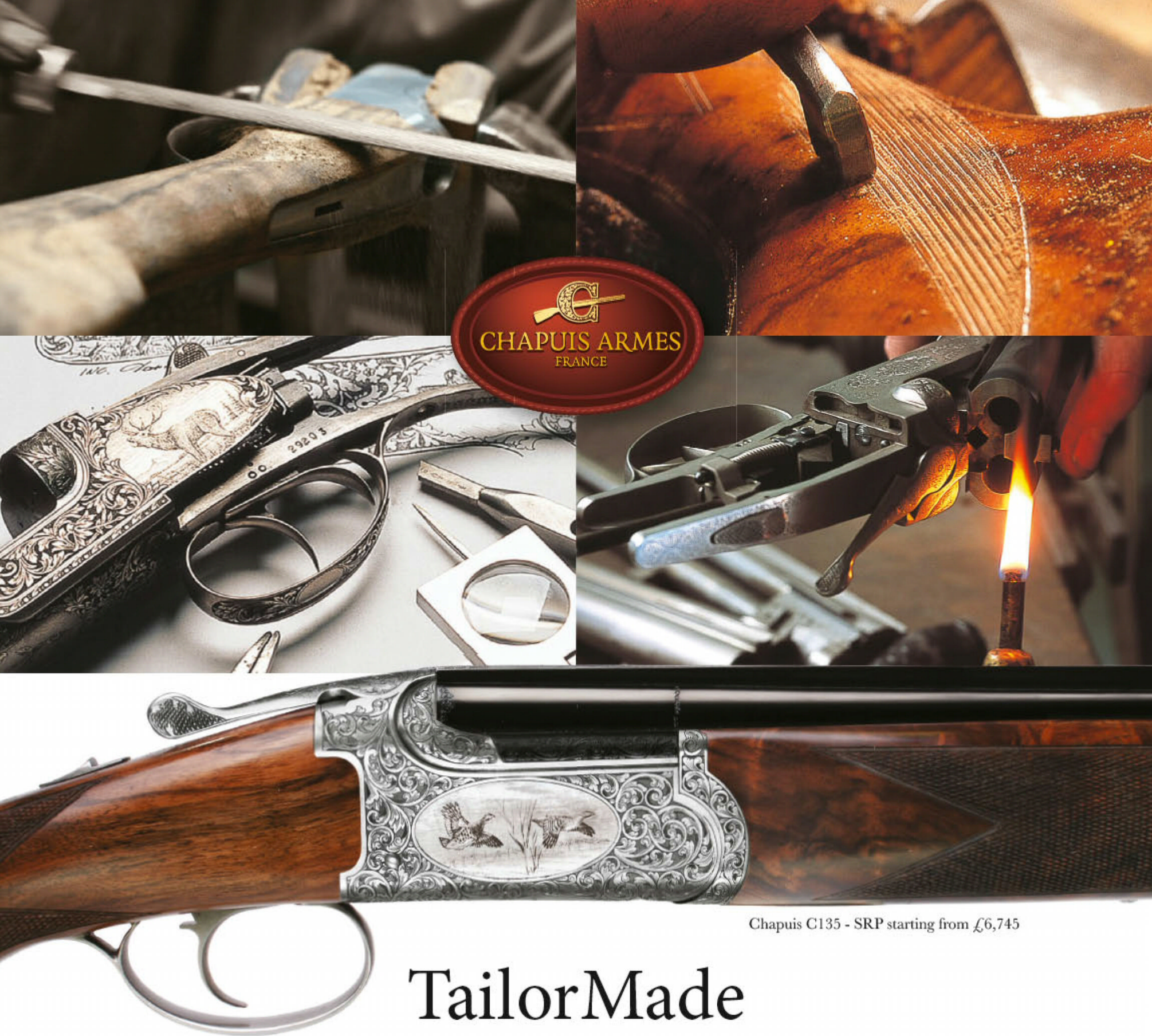
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SKINNER'S

BORN TO BE OUTDOORS

DOG OF THE WEEK



Goose

Goose has more than lived up to his name as a fowling dog. He is mature for his years, six going on 60, but he is always thrilled to be out on the marsh on a cold morning.

Owned and photographed by Tom Sykes

SHOOTING TIMES

Learn, then judge



I was interested to read about an imminent ban on snaring in Wales (p6). There will be lots of people who are delighted by this news. After all, the consensus among the public seems to be that snaring is a cruel and outdated practice.

A couple of years ago, I realised it wasn't something I knew that much about. So I was really pleased a short time after to drive around a wild bird shoot with a gamekeeper who took me through every part of the process. He showed me, in intricate detail, how he seeks to minimise suffering and explained why snaring is a vital tool for keepers and conservationists who are trying to save grey partridges and ground-nesting birds.

I fully appreciate why those who know nothing about it might find the idea pretty unpalatable. But I wonder how many of them would rethink their position if they had the privilege of spending a morning with that keeper. No matter where we stand on issues surrounding the countryside, I truly believe we should all ask ourselves if we really understand them before we take a strong position for or against.

Patrick Galbraith, Editor

Follow Patrick on Twitter
@paddygalbraith

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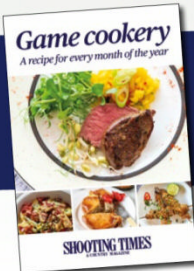
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SALE



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Three methods, three results



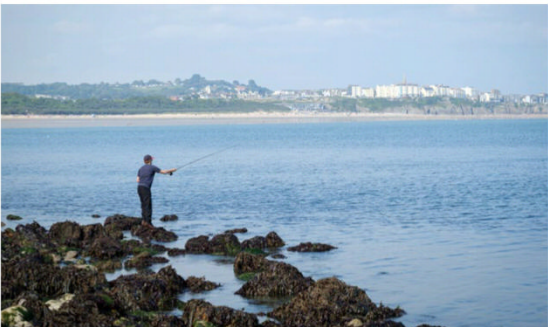
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ANTICIPATION



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Despite a well-researched code of practice for the use of snares, Wales is now to ban them



Wales is set to ban a ‘vital tool’ for conservationists

Having worked with keepers and countryside groups to develop a code of practice, the Welsh government is now planning to ban use of snares

The Welsh government has announced a plan to ban snaring. The move, which will place further pressure on the country's already struggling ground-nesting bird populations, was afforded a single sentence in a newly issued policy document.

There had been signs that the Welsh government might make a move to restrict the use of snares when it issued a consultation earlier this year which said that "it is the Law Commission's view that, in the future, the operation and inspection of snares may benefit from additional regulations prescribing how relevant

snares should be operated and inspected".

Shooting and countryside groups have worked with the Welsh government to develop a code of practice on snaring. There is now anger that all that work has been discarded in favour of a ban.

“The snare is a tool that works 24/7; it’s there when we are not”

BASC Wales director Steve Griffiths said: "The code offers a means of controlling the use of snares in Wales while seeking to deliver the highest animal welfare standards and minimise risk to non-target species.

"We are unaware of any new evidence that leaves the code out of date or requiring further legislation.

"We oppose the proposal to ban snares in Wales and will continue to stress their importance to politicians across the country. We are working

with partner organisations to ensure this vital management tool remains at the disposal of farmers, conservationists and land managers."

Among those who have been working within the snaring code

is north Wales gamekeeper Geraint Jones, who told *Shooting Times* why the snare is a vital tool for gamekeepers and conservationists.

"It's a tool in the battle against foxes, but unlike the other tools we have, snaring is a tool that works 24/7. When we have birds in pens and when sheep are lambing we can only be on the ground for a limited time, but the snare is there when we are not," he said.

Mr Jones expressed concern that banning snares would mean "more work, more hours to find something else to replace that tool with, but I can't see what that will be".

Matt Cross

The first in-season pinkfeet have been seen over Fair Isle



Pinkfeet arrive in Scotland

The season's first migrating pink-footed geese have been spotted off Scotland's north coast. The birds, which breed in Iceland and Greenland, have become an increasingly important part of the winter's sport for wildfowlers in the northern parts of the UK and particularly on the east coast of Scotland.

Shooting Times's network of wildfowlers

noticed a relatively small arrival of the birds in the late summer, with a number of fowlers speculating these were birds that had failed to breed.

Now, the first in-season arrivals have been spied passing over Fair Isle. The island, which is halfway between Orkney and Shetland, is often the first place where winter migrants are spotted as they come in.

The skein of around 24 geese was heading into a south-easterly wind and the larger arrivals, which usually come in mid-October, will probably wait for a north-westerly to speed their progress.

Increasing numbers of teal and wigeon have also been spotted over the Island, suggesting that the winter duck migrations are now getting under way.

Weekend Twitter poll

What's your favourite format for lunch during a shoot day?

14% A piece in the heather

10% A casserole indoors

52% Pie in a barn

24% I'd rather shoot through

follow us @shootingtimes Respondents: 131

To do this week



SHOOT

Practise your gun mount. The

game and wildfowling seasons are now in full swing and one of the best things you can do to hit more birds is to practise your skills. Draw the curtains and repeat your gun mount 20 times in front of the mirror.



DEER

Tune into your senses to locate

rutting stags. When the red rut gets under way, the easiest way to find stags is to listen for their roar, but when you learn to recognise it, the smell of a stag can be just as helpful for finding them in woodland. Learning to spot wallows can provide another useful clue.



Hunters protest in France

Thousands of French hunters, many wearing their orange hunting vests, have taken to the streets to protest against changes to the law.

In Mont-de-Marsan in south-west France, police counted more than 13,000 people taking part in the protests, which marchers marked by setting off firecrackers and blowing traditional hunting horns.

The immediate cause of the protest has been a series of decisions by France's top court, which has banned or restricted traditional practices such as glue trapping and turtle dove hunting.

However, speaking to France24, Eric, a 47-year-old from Gascony, suggested it had deeper roots. "I'm sick of seeing my culture fall to pieces. They've already

eradicated my language, Gascon, now it's the traditional hunts," he said.

Another protester told the online paper: "Let the urbanites leave us alone."

UK hunters reacted with a barrage of supportive comments. Shooter and activist Neil Fox was typical of many in response to news of the protests when he said: "Good on them. That is what we need to do in the UK."



With many wearing their orange hunting vests, 13,000 people marched to protest about new laws



The SGA has restated its opposition to the five-year voluntary phase-out of lead ammo for live quarry

Scottish gamekeepers oppose ban on lead

The SGA remains unconvinced by the evidence when it comes to how humane and safe non-toxic loads are for wildlife management

The Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) has restated its opposition to a transition away from the use of lead shot.

The SGA was the only shooting or gamekeeping organisation not to back the five-year voluntary transition away from lead. Now, in a message encouraging members to engage with the Health & Safety Executive's lead ammunition consultation, the association has reiterated that position.

The message said: "Some countryside shooting organisations, led by BASC, have publicly declared they are behind the phasing out of lead over five years and are working with the UK Government. The SGA was asked to sign up for this position but did not do so. The SGA remains unconvinced by present evidence, particularly on how humane and safe lead shot alternatives, currently in development, are when it comes to wildlife management with welfare in mind."

The SGA's continuing opposition to the transition has attracted a measure of criticism but overall has proved popular. An existing BASC member, who asked not to be named, said: "If the SGA is the only organisation that will stand up against

As well as surveying 18,000 shooters across the EU, FACE commissioned a report that looked closely at the evidence being used by European authorities to justify the ban and highlighted what it believes to be serious flaws. These include testing lead levels

"If the SGA is the only group that will stand up against this nonsense, I will be joining"

this nonsense, then I will be joining when my membership comes up for renewal."

The SGA's announcement follows the news that a quarter of Europe's hunters could quit the sport entirely if proposed EU rules banning lead ammunition are introduced. A survey by FACE, the European hunting federation, found that 25% of Europe's hunters will give up the sport and 30% will hunt less frequently if lead ammunition is banned.

in meat around wound channels, but not from other parts of the carcass and overestimating the number of shots fired by hunters.

FACE president Torbjörn Larsson said the report shows that the European Chemicals Agency has underestimated the socio-economic costs of the proposed ban, adding that the report's approach is conservative in some areas, considering that some firearms do not have accurate enough non-lead ammo.

Matt Cross

**THEY
SAID
WHAT**

Who said it:

Social media star,
Arie Mollie

"My dog is a vegetarian by choice"

Tell me more: Bonnie was offered a choice of green salad or 'gross' meat-based dog food on camera. In a choice as surprising to her owner as it was predictable to everyone else, the salad was left untouched.

Is pandemic puppy price boom finally at an end?

Hopes are high that the lockdown-inspired gundog puppy price bubble may finally be deflating.

A surge in demand for puppies to keep children entertained and to provide company for homeworkers has been widely held to be responsible for rapidly rising puppy prices. Last autumn cocker spaniel puppies were selling at £3,000 each, with labradors achieving a similar value. But increased supply

and reduced demand now seem to be having their inevitable effect and puppy prices appear to be falling.

Major puppy-selling websites such as Epupz and Gumtree are carrying many adverts for cocker and springer spaniel puppies priced between £1,000 and £1,500. *Shooting Times* was able to locate several sellers of working spaniel and labrador puppies asking for between £1,000 and £1,500

for well-bred Kennel Club-registered animals.

While the drop in puppy prices will be welcomed by those looking to replace shooting dogs, the reduced demand for dogs has had tragic consequences. A vet in Wales reported putting down five healthy dogs in a single day as shelters struggled to cope and police raided a 200-dog puppy farm where animals were found with flystrike and rotten teeth.

Puppy prices skyrocketed during the Covid lockdown



Game canapé fit for a Queen

HM the Queen may have been among those enjoying a pheasant scotch egg canapé after the RHS Chelsea Flower Show made a late change to include game assured by British Game Assurance on its menu.

Attendees at the top horticultural event were offered a chance to enjoy the mini scotch egg canapé and a main course of pheasant Kiev served with a "foraged feast of broccoli, celeriac, black garlic and pickled mushrooms".

The man responsible for bringing game to the flower show was Sodexo Prestige's head chef, Ian



Page, who explained: "When we had to change our plans because of Covid and I realised the event would be happening right in the middle of the shooting season, I immediately thought of how we might be able to incorporate game into our menus. On the opening gala night, we will welcome around 4,300 guests, including HM the Queen — so it would be wonderful to see them all enjoying the pheasant scotch egg canapés."

The game on the RHS Chelsea Flower Show menu was assured by British Game Assurance

NEWS IN BRIEF

Salmon anglers hope for rain

Many of Scotland's smaller salmon rivers are facing a season with little or no fishing unless the weather takes a dramatic change for the worse. An exceptionally dry summer, which has extended well into September, has left many rivers at too low a level for fish to run them.

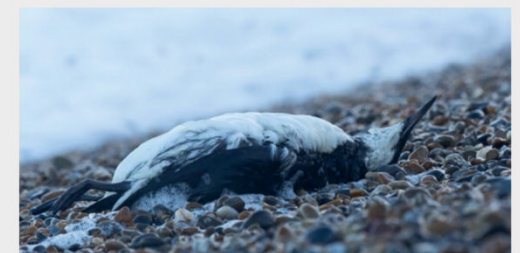
The end of September is the closing date for some of the smaller west coast rivers, while most will continue until the end of October. Anglers will be crossing their fingers and hoping for significant rainfall before the end of next month to give them a chance to wet a line.



'Starvation' causes mass seabird deaths

Mystery surrounds the mass death of seabirds in the North Sea. Large numbers of dead guillemots and razorbills have been washing up all along the east coast, with smaller numbers of dead puffins and kittiwakes also appearing on beaches. Post-mortems have ruled out bird flu as the cause.

One theory has linked the bird deaths to a huge algal bloom off Scotland's east coast. However, many of the birds were severely underweight and starvation is thought to be the most likely cause.



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SHOOTING TIMES
ISSN: 0037-4164
& COUNTRY MAGAZINE

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International licensing and syndication
Shooting Times is available for licensing and
syndication. Contact the licensing team
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Innovator (for loose and bound-in inserts)
020 3148 3710
Can't find ST? 020 3148 3300
Back issues 01795 662976
support@mags-uk.com



Shooting Times is the official weekly journal
of BASC and the CPSA. BASC, Marford Mill, Rossett
LL12 0HL, tel 01244 573000; CPSA, PO Box 750,
Woking, GU24 0YU, tel 01483 485400
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THIS WEEK'S COVER IMAGE WAS CAPTURED
BY ANDY HOOK



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LETTER OF THE WEEK

Let's make shooting really sustainable

Though about five years behind
the curve, I suspect that the
accumulative brain power
amassed within Aim to Sustain
knows it needs to address
the issue of the small market
for large numbers of dead
gamebirds. Surely the starting
point towards sustainability
must be to reduce the number
of birds trying to find a market?

If we assume this is the
single most important step,
then we need to reduce the
total UK bag while ensuring
the financial viability of the
game shooting industry and
its employees.

I have a simple solution,
and to make the maths
easy, driven pheasants

on a commercial shoot should
be charged at around £70 to
£80 per bird with a target bag
of 75 to 100 birds. This would
generate a reasonable income
for the shoot — £5,250 to
£8,000 a day — and reduce
the UK bag by at least 50%
at a stroke.

Appreciating that many
readers may have fainted by
now, I should point out that
this is less than many people
are prepared to pay for driven
grouse shooting, so there is
already precedent.

There would also
be benefits for the
Guns, with more
time to appreciate
their surroundings,

their friends' shooting, dogs
working and other wildlife
spectacles without needing
to pull the trigger every few
seconds as if they were
at Rorke's Drift.

This would put game into
the market at a level that
would make it a high-value
product. Not, as it is now,
an inconvenient and largely
unwanted by-product.

**John Gough,
Worcestershire**



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chosen, email ollie.harvey@futurenet.com to claim your prize.

LEAD IN WHEAT

Regarding lead shot
contaminating wheat (News, 15
September), the problem is when
the wheat is growing in the field.
I am a farmer and we were growing
wheat near a local clay shooting
club. We fed the wheat to our own
pig unit and ground the grain
through our milling process.

I was amazed to find the
stone trap on the mill full of lead
shot. It never happened when
we grew barley on that land.
I am pretty sure it is the upright
nature of the wheat head that
was catching the falling shot.
Along with the help of the
National Farmers' Union and
local council, we were able to
get the clay club to shoot in
the opposite direction and
the problem went away.
Michael Barker, by email

TOO EARLY?

The annual question has arisen:
should we be out wildfowling on
1 September? The answer should



Our story about shot contaminating wheat has struck a chord

be left to the individual and their
location, quarry and conscience.

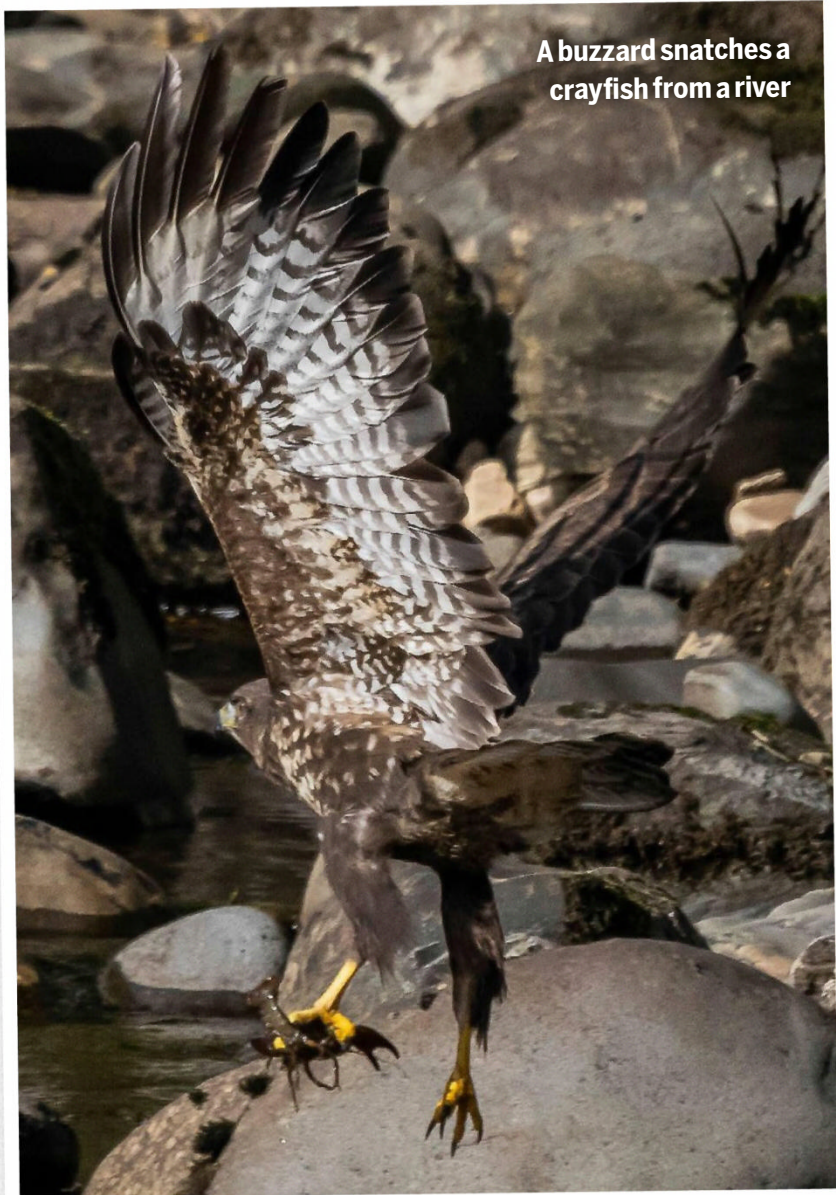
After all, the end of the
season was set to allow the
ducks to settle down and start
breeding, so the powers that
be are unlikely to lengthen that
end of the season. And the
antis would love to be given the
ammunition to whack us with,
so the likely outcome would
be a shorter season.

However, in the Orkney
Islands, a cull takes place during
the close season. Canada geese
are in such numbers that they can
be shot under the general licence
should conditions and needs
allow. Geese and some duck
numbers have been controlled by
a number of estates, the Wildfowl
& Wetlands Trust, the RSPB
and the like in the past by oiling
the eggs — which stops the

TAKEAWAY MEAL

Thought you might like to see this picture of a buzzard catching crayfish in the river. It is surprising how unpopular species can at times be beneficial. At one of the ponds at home, herons, crows, otters and even pine martens are eating crayfish.

Val Gall, by email



A buzzard snatches a crayfish from a river

embryos hatching — during the breeding season.

Yet some still think that we have to make the opening date later. How about you can go out and if in your area there are lots of young mallard, don't shoot them, but if there are lots of Canadas, aim for them instead. On 1 September, I saw a young mallard brood waddling along a tidal brook and they were still there when I left.

Wildfowling is largely self-regulating. There aren't armies of rangers, Natural England agents or Environment Agency spies out watching our every shot. The fowler is trusted to know that if they take all the birds now, there will be none to shoot, not only this year but in following years as well.

Look again at the quote from King George VI at the bottom of this page.

Nic Ling, by email

LISTEN TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Deep joy. I was beginning to think there were no shooting people out there any more who thought the way I do about the various fieldsports organisations and, among other issues, the ban on lead ammunition.

Why are we supporting those people who should be fighting our corner but at almost every turn appear to capitulate to the vocal PC minority? We fill their coffers with our subscription money

and donations in the (apparently vain) hope of them actually doing something about the challenges we face to our sport and to our way of life.

We've seen an increase in organisations purporting to promote shooting, but here's a simple question for them all... are you actually listening to your membership?

The biggest — but not the only — problem we currently face is the ban on using lead ammunition, shot as well as bullets. Yet without a vote, any sort of consultation or indeed science, the organisations that should be fighting tooth and nail against the ban capitulate and agree to it. When were the members asked about their views on this?

Not only that but, among other 'excuses', we are conned into thinking there will be an upsurge in the market for game

shot with non-lead alternatives and we who need to do so will receive a better price for our produce. Absolute nonsense.

I'm willing to bet the market will not take off, the British public in the main will not take to eating lots more game and the game dealers will not be paying any more than they currently are, which is an absolute pittance or nothing at all.

Wake up, chaps — if shooting goes so will your jobs.

Nick Elsdon, Suffolk

IT'S OUR RIGHT

I am currently having a discussion with fellow shooters on whether holding a firearms certificate is a privilege or a right.

I have always believed it to be a right to hold a certificate.

Is it the same these days or has something changed?

John Giles, by email

“The wildlife of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.” King George VI

NEXT WEEK IN SHOOTING TIMES

SAY PULL

Does shooting clays make you a better game Shot?



LESSONS FOR LIFE

Why gundogs need to be kept in training for all their working days.



FUTURE PERFECT

Essential tips: how to be a better wildfowler.



ALL FOR ONE

Why everyone should think about buying a single-barrel shotgun.



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PVS-14

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Why keepers are switching to it & how you can buy one legally

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Choice of image-intensifier tubes include: Gen2, Gen2+, Gen3, Gen3+, Echo, Echo Elite & 4G
Each available in green or white

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Jamie Blackett

Country Diary

The people spreading mistruths about grouse moors should instead marvel at the bright moss, bottomless peat and the array of insect life

“Don’t step out of the back of your butt to pick-up or you will disappear. Enter and exit from the side.” My host’s advice might have included the words: “And don’t forget to put some midge repellent on.” Fortunately, Mark, my long-suffering loader for the day, had some, though, despite applying it liberally, we were both itching while we waited for the first covey to appear. My eye kept being caught by a wide variety of flying insects, which, for a nanosecond, I took to be grouse every time.

I reflected that if I were granted a wish right then, I would opt to make certain high-profile media personalities sit there for a couple of hours, minus gun and midge repellent. Then they could make a close inspection of the blocked ‘grips’ and the wet patches of bright green moss atop bottomless peat. And they could marvel at the rich smorgasbord of insect life on a wet grouse moor and understand how it supports all those lapwing, curlew and golden plover chicks.

It would do them some good to reflect on the deliberate untruths they spout about grouse moor drainage causing floods in Yorkshire’s towns and cities, and atone for them by itching dreadfully.

Fortunately, there is an excellent book called *Moorland Matters* by Ian Coghill (Quiller, £25), which goes through the

distortions of the truth told about grouse shooting with a fine-tooth comb and patiently dispels them in plain English that even the most frothing-mouthed of them could understand. I urge everyone to read it and buy copies for their MPs.

Looking across a patchwork of bird-rich habitat managed by decades of burning, you can appreciate the care that goes into maintaining that part of the Peak District for wildlife. The keepers and loaders were worried about the risk of wildfires now that it is no longer permitted to burn firebreaks,

“The keepers were worried about the risk of wildfires”

let alone the small ‘cool burn’ patches needed to give grouse territories a variety of habitats.

They are all veterans of firefighting when they have stood shoulder to shoulder with the fire brigade battling blazes on moorland that has not been managed to reduce the fuel load. Technology has come partially to the rescue with a machine that mows and mulches, but the regrowth didn’t look as good as on burned patches and there is still flammable material left.

It was great to be in action again, a little slower up the hill and my reactions perhaps

not as sharp as they were, but I was grateful for the opportunity and the chance to meet up with old friends I have known for more than 40 years.

All went blissfully until the last drive, when a covey crossed in front. I fired, missed and swung faster, confident of bringing down the lead bird with my second barrel, but nothing. Not even a click when I pulled the trigger. The next time I changed back to that gun, the same thing happened. With growing dismay, I realised it was probably the spring rather than a firing pin.

Fortunately, Barry the wizard of Upper Nithsdale can mend it. Without his skill as a gunsmith, my grandfather’s old guns would have packed up years ago. I am going to have it mended in the hope that the cartridge manufacturers will come up with a viable solution to the ban on using lead, when it comes. I have yet to see any science that proves that the ban is really necessary. However, the countryside bodies seem to have rolled over on the issue without a fight.

Modern over-and-unders appear to be more robust, so I fear gunsmiths like Barry will have less work. But dentists will no doubt prosper from the repairs to broken teeth after they have bitten on steel shot. 🐦

∞ Jamie Blackett farms in Dumfries & Galloway and is author of *Red Rag to a Bull*, *Rural Life in an Urban Age* (Quiller).



The grouse territories of the Peak District are a perfect patchwork of habitats, created by careful management

Just another bloke on the Gun bus

George Browne crunches the numbers as he tries to build up a realistic pen portrait of the ‘ordinary shooting person’

There’s a phrase that I’ve come across on social media that has always given me pause for thought – the ‘ordinary shooting person’.

It is usually used in the context of bemoaning either the cost of shooting or some perceived failure of the shooting organisations – shooting is becoming too expensive for the ordinary shooting person, or the organisations have forgotten about the ordinary shooting person.

I suspect that when people use the phrase, they have a very clear picture in their head of what this person is like, the kind of places they shoot, how much money they have, how often they shoot and how much they spend on it.

What is meant by the phrase and does this ordinary shooting person exist? Shooting is a far more diverse community than its detractors would have you believe, or than the stereotypes would suggest, so is it possible to paint a picture of the

ordinary shooting person (OSP) and would you or I qualify for the title?

Would that even be desirable? When I was about eight years old, my form mistress had a motto at the top of her blackboard: “Don’t be ordinary, be extraordinary.” It is a phrase that has stuck with me as a great piece of advice.

This year’s Game Shooting Census, carried out by Guns on Pegs and Lycetts, with the support of BASC, the GWCT and the Countryside Alliance,

“Shooting is a far more diverse community than its detractors would have you believe”

is as good a place as any to try to get a handle on the topic. The census, taken annually since 2013, is completed by thousands of people and offers a yearly snapshot of the shooting community’s habits and opinions.

So I’ve been examining this year’s results to see if we can draw out a picture of this elusive OSP. Given the

context in which I see the phrase used, basing our pen portrait of the OSP on expenditure is justifiable.

The first thing to say is that I’m disqualified from the ranks of ordinary shooting people because I don’t pay for my shooting. I’m in the rare and fortunate position of doing most of my shooting on our little private family shoot, supplemented by the occasional kind invitation.

Also, with a mortgage and 18-month-old twins, I’m not in

a position to spend money in the pub, let alone on something as self-indulgent as shooting. According to the data, around 80% of Guns part with some of their hard-earned cash for at least some shooting, either through a syndicate membership, or buying let days or pegs. The average number of days a Gun plans to buy

this year is nine and the average that people plan to spend is £6,000, but this is where we run into a bit of a statistical anomaly.

These figures are perhaps a little less than representative of the OSP, since they refer to the mean and are skewed by those people who spend huge amounts and shoot a great deal. Harking back to my vaguely remembered GCSE maths, the ‘mode’ or most common figures are more helpful in this instance. Looking at these, we learn that the most common number of days bought is only two and that the most common amount to spend is £2,000.

The OSP belongs to a syndicate – 70% of Guns report that they will be part of one next season, while about 40% of them say that this represents the majority of their shooting. Most likely, this syndicate will cost them less than £3,000 for their full gun, which is in keeping with the £2,000 quoted above.

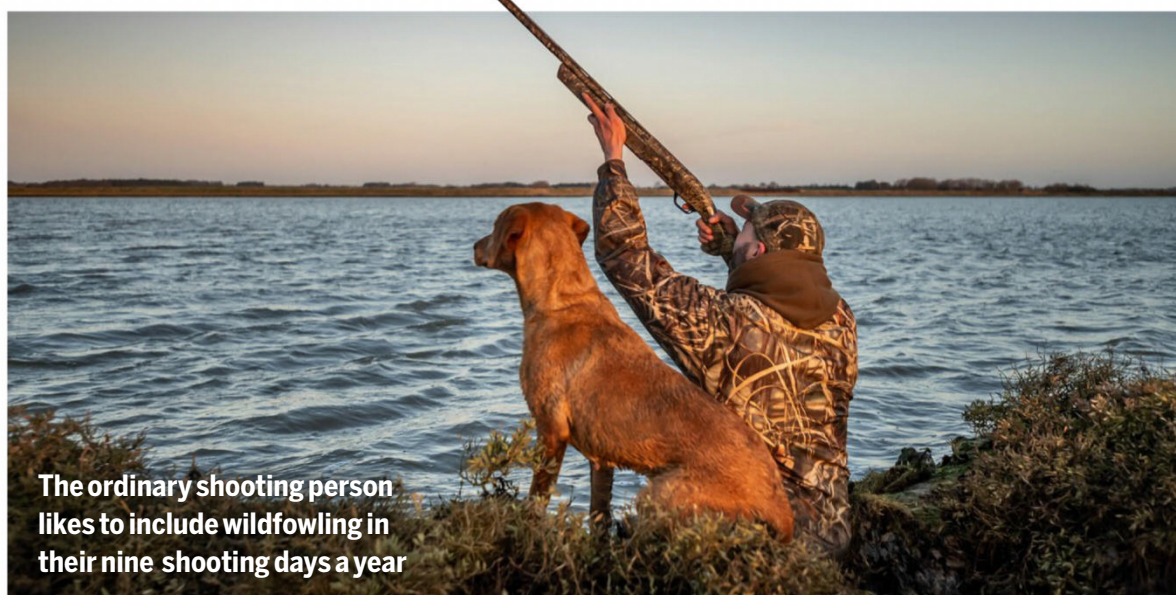
Rural lifestyle

Our OSP is most likely to be male, aged between 55 and 65, and living the rural lifestyle in a village. There’s a good chance that he has already retired, but if he is still working he is most likely in a managerial occupation. There’s a good chance that one of his female family members is involved in shooting, perhaps as a beater, picker-up or as a Gun.

He enjoys driven shooting and shoots on days with an average bag of 85 birds. Such are the benefits of paying for shooting – we can only dream of an 85-bird day on our shoot. He shoots nine game days a season, probably including some walked-up shooting or wildfowling. In addition to this, he might also do a spot of pest control or deerstalking. He doesn’t shoot grouse but would if he could.

The chances are that our man uses a Beretta or a Browning over-and-under, though if he’s a traditionalist he might be using an AYA side-by-side. Either way, he dreams of owning a gun made by one of the heritage London gunmakers, Purdey or Holland & Holland.

When it comes to cartridges, he’s probably not fussed about which brand he uses, though he’s most likely to use Gamebore’s Black Gold. Though the OSP hasn’t yet tried a non-lead eco-wad cartridge, he’s pretty relaxed about the move to steel and would



The ordinary shooting person likes to include wildfowling in their nine shooting days a year

still buy a day at a shoot that said he couldn’t use lead. This being said, he’s dead against the use of plastic wads for game shooting.

On shoot days, he wears breeks paired with a good set of wellies, though he toys with the idea of trousers. He favours a Gun bus to get around a shoot and prefers pheasant shooting to partridges. He is not especially bothered about when the meal is taken, though he is partial to a drop of sloe gin or port to warm the cockles after a day in the field. At the end of the day, he prefers to take home a brace of birds in the feather, though dressed birds would be acceptable.

His shooting is important to him and if there were any doubt in his mind as to how important it is to his mental health, last season’s COVID-19 interruptions drove the point home. Despite the psychological cost of the past 18 months, he feels pretty good about life, reporting his “overall

feeling of personal well-being” as an eight out of 10.

Positive impact

Given the importance of shooting in his life, it is hardly surprising that the OSP is concerned for the future of the sport. He supports self-regulation to avoid restrictions on shooting in the long-term, as well as being willing, if not thrilled, to pay a 50p levy to help promote the consumption of game.

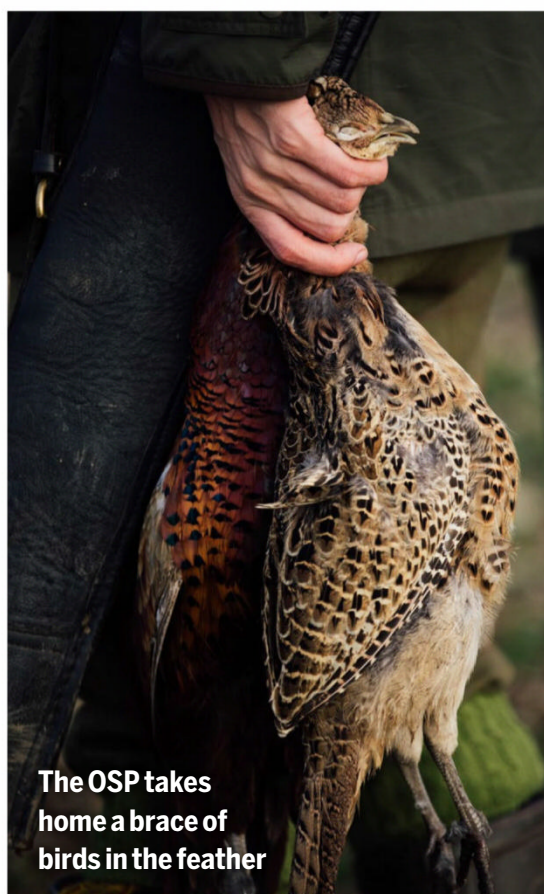
He would like it to be easier to know whether a shoot follows best practice and that a shoot has a net-positive environmental impact.

In addition to being disqualified from being an OSP because I don’t pay for my shooting, I also don’t belong to a syndicate. I’m 20 years too young and, until recently, I was that most loathed of all Guns – the London-dwelling Gun. However, much of the above rings true for me, as I suspect it does for many, especially on shoot standards and self-regulation.

I suppose that this illustrates my point. Even in a pen portrait composed of the most commonly held views and habits, there’s no way that it can be representative of everyone. What’s more, I suspect that when people use the phrase, they’re really trying to divide more than unite.

My contention, in contrast, is that you can be an ordinary shooting person whether you belong to a grand roving syndicate that shoots bigger bags or if you belong to a walk-one, stand-one shoot that would be happy with a bag a 10th of the size.

When the boots are drying and we’re relaxing by the fire after another fun-filled day in the field, we are all shooting people, but hopefully we are all ‘extraordinary’ in some way. Shooting would be a dull world if we were not. 🐦



The OSP takes home a brace of birds in the feather



Anyone fancy coney carbonara?

Cooking rabbit well can be a real challenge but with some expert advice our aspiring chef reckons he's cracked it

WRITTEN BY JAMIE TUSTING
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGUS MURRAY

After a cold end to August, September came back with a bang; hot sun and no rain. The warm weather prompted me to get on with some grass seeding I had long been putting off and some time spare at the weekend meant I could get it done. The problem, however, was that whenever I plant anything new in the garden, the army of rabbits living under the shed march boldly forward to thwart the advance of any young shoots pushing upwards through the soil.

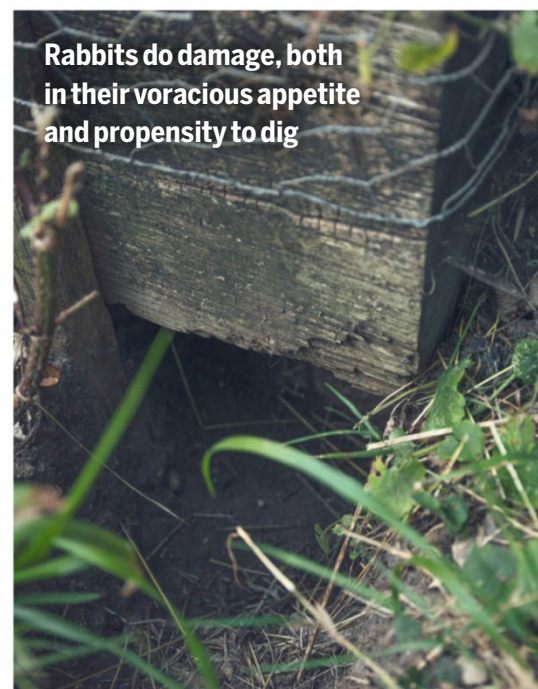
This time I was determined not to let them win and extensive rabbit netting was deployed. I also decided that it was about time the problem was resolved more comprehensively,

“An army of rabbits marches forward to any new shoots”

so I installed an advanced line of defence in the form of some rabbit cage traps. Cage trapping rabbits is a skill I have long since mastered, having spent many hours as a child catching them all around our farm. Over one particularly fruitful school holiday, my brothers and I caught more than 100.

I borrowed a few traps from the gamekeeper and carefully positioned them around the garden. As I baited them with carrots, my spaniel Millie looked on with interest, wondering whether the carrot slices were for ➡

Rabbits do damage, both in their voracious appetite and propensity to dig



Jamie and Millie the spaniel set out the traps that are intended to catch dinner



The trio on test: roasted, deep-fried and slow cooked for a rabbit carbonara

her or not. Over the next few days, my trapping bore fruit and several rabbits were caught. Curiously, they all had black fur.

I have been warned of the bad luck killing a black rabbit could bring, but I decided to take my chances and soon had a handful hanging in the shed. More importantly, though, with a bit of watering and a few more days of sunshine to warm the ground, the grass seeds began to grow.

Delicious

Later in the week, I happened to be out for dinner in London; a little Italian restaurant off Sloane Square called Manicomio. While their cocktails and wine list were excellent, it was something else on the menu that caught my eye: rabbit carbonara. I couldn't recall the last time I had seen rabbit on the menu and was thrilled to order it. Compliments to the chef on that one, because it was simply delicious. The rabbit was tender, rich, flavoursome and worked surprisingly well in a carbonara.

While I have no doubt the rabbit used would have been farmed, the evening made me wonder whether I was overlooking the potential of the rabbits hanging in the shed. While I am by no means a chef, I know my way around the kitchen and was willing to try some experimental

cooking. What was the perfect way to cook a rabbit?

Thankfully, I had a chef's number in my phone book and Tim Maddams was willing to give me some pointers over the phone. I had suggested to him that the main variable in my little experiment was going to be length of time in the oven. I wanted to cook one rabbit for as long as possible, one for a medium length of time, and one as quickly as I could.

Tim explained that in order to make it a fair trial, I would have to try to remove as many other variables as I could. Rabbit meat, he clarified, could vary immensely depending on

cooked would be tough on the outside but tender on the inside. And the one in the middle wasn't going to be worth eating at all.

The first dish needed a bit of planning and some preparation in advance. Carbonara is a recipe that is quick to cook, but I wanted to ensure that the rabbit element cooked for as long as reasonably possible. So a rabbit, coarsely jointed, was added to a pot with some onion, garlic, carrot and fennel, covered with water, seasoned and put on a low heat in the oven for four hours.

When I came back from an afternoon in the office, I was greeted

“The rabbit was tender, flavoursome and worked surprisingly well in a carbonara”

the age of the rabbit, its sex, how long it had hung for and the fat content. Tim reckoned my best bet was three animals from the same litter.

I was pleased to hear this, as I was sure the rabbits I had caught fitted this description. The length of time they had hung for varied by a day or two but, overall, I had three bunnies of roughly the same standard.

Tim also made a prediction; the rabbit that was slow cooked would be tough in the middle but tender on the outside. The rabbit that had been fast

by a rich but mellow smell of rabbit. After it had cooled, the meat simply dropped off the bones and it was tender throughout. It was also delicious and full of flavour.

After my pasta had cooked for eight minutes, in went the egg yolks, chives and a bit of the stock from the afternoon's endeavours. Once that had been stirred through over a low heat, in went the rabbit, before being topped with a lavish helping of Grana Padano cheese, some more chives and a generous level of seasoning.

Carbonara can be quite a delicate dish, but the strong flavour of the rabbit didn't overpower it. The soft meat seemed to pair well with the pasta and allowed the other flavours to come through. All in all, I was very pleased with how it turned out.

Main ingredient

The second dish I wanted to try in my little experiment was rather simpler in its construction. But I hoped it would be equally delicious, allowing the rabbit to stand on its own as the main ingredient. So I simply roasted a couple of legs in the oven at 180°C with a drizzle of olive oil and some salt and pepper.

Tim had advised that all of the meat wanted to “be touched by heat” and then to let it rest. A fine balance had to be struck therefore and I kept a close eye on the legs throughout the cooking. It was a bit of guesswork, but I brought them out to rest after about 25 minutes. They were served alongside some cherry tomatoes and rocket but, in truth, the salad was the yummiest part of the plate.

The rabbit legs were as tough as old boots and almost completely inedible. I'm not quite sure if this was operator error, overcooking or the rabbit itself, but I certainly can't recommend this method.

So with that, I moved on to my third dish. This one was to be cooked as quickly as I possibly could, so I figured that deep-frying in oil would be the best way forward. I dipped the legs of the rabbit in egg followed by flour. They were then coated in breadcrumbs and parmesan, and plunged into hot rapeseed oil.

The front legs went in for nine minutes and the back legs, being slightly bigger, were cooked for a total of 12 minutes.

While they were bubbling away, I whipped up a herby mayonnaise. Artichokes and capers, along with some garlic and parsley, were blitzed in a food processor and then mixed in with a good dollop of Hellman's.

Once the legs had cooked and cooled a little, it was time to dig in. Tim's prediction of being a little tough on the outside was right, but they

were nowhere near as tough as the roast legs. They were easily edible and when you got through to the middle, they were tender, juicy and delicious. The herb mayonnaise was the perfect accompaniment, bringing a bit of zing to the proceedings.

While my experiment wasn't foolproof, I feel I reached some reasonable conclusions. Rabbit, it seems, benefits from being cooked for hours, or barely a few minutes. A cooking time somewhere in the middle didn't work for me.

It also seems that rabbit as a flavour can be mellow – when put with quite a light dish such as carbonara – but can also pack quite a punch when it is alongside such strong flavours as artichoke and caper. Perhaps there isn't a recipe out there that can boast to be the perfect way to cook a rabbit, but there are plenty of options to give it a good showing.

I think the main conclusion, though, is that if you are prepared put the effort into the catching and preparing of a rabbit, the results really can be outstanding. 🐰



Rabbit legs are dipped in flour, beaten egg, then breadcrumbs and parmesan



Into the oven go the rabbit legs to roast



Frying the coated legs in rapeseed oil proves to be far more successful than roasting them



The front legs get nine minutes, the back legs about 12



The best bit: Jamie compares the results

How ‘new’ models go back to the future

Diggory Hadoke looks at the revolutionary advances of the 19th and 20th centuries, and wonders why little seems to have changed since

Arguably, all new gun designs are evolutionary. They retain the essential parts of lock, stock and barrel that have been with us since the first hand cannons emerged.

Subsequent development has been the process of making each of those components better and making the gun perform its function faster and more efficiently.

In the 19th century, there were huge changes from the firearms carried by our sporting forebears and they ran alongside developments in ammunition.

So while we can argue all developments are evolutionary, some step changes affected the trade sufficiently to surpass anything made to that point, rendering the previous methods obsolete. We can point to some of these important points and trace from them the emergence and consolidation of the guns we use today.

A brief list of such British guns would

include pinfire in the form of the Lefauchaux breechloader, introduced by Lang – not seriously influencing British guns until about 1863 – which brought the percussion muzzle-loading era to a close. The 1861 patent Daw centrefire marked the start of the truly modern era, with guns and cartridges of a type we recognise and still use to this day.

Next comes the 1875 Anson & Deeley boxlock, the gun that proved the future was hammerless, then the 1880 Purdey/Beesley spring opener, the pinnacle of ‘Grand Complication’ and matchless build quality, marking

1931 Superposed and his Auto-5 (patented in 1900) as instigators of the movement towards mass-produced over-and-unders and semi-automatic sporting guns respectively.

The mid-20th century brought the Italian over-and-under, typified by the Beretta 68 series, but originating with the S55 in the 1950s. That about covers it. Most of what gunmakers build today stems from those concepts.

If that is true, how do gun companies launch new models to tempt us? Are they offering anything truly new or are new guns merely the repackaging of old ideas?

“Are they offering anything truly new or are new guns repackaging old ideas?”

the self-opening sidelock ejector as the best of the best. These designs were truly revolutionary and groundbreaking, changing the look, manner of operation and component parts of the guns people used.

To those we should add the 1880 Dickson round action as one with its own distinct lock arrangement, marking a clear departure from the boxlocks and sidelocks. It represented a third lock type, the trigger-plate lock, which is employed – in much modified forms – today on most over-and-under guns.

Into the early 20th century and we should acknowledge the 1912 Woodward over-and-under, alongside the 1908 Boss, with their hugely influential locking systems that drastically reduced the height of an over-and-under action.

However, we must also look to the US and Browning’s

‘Back to the future’ as a concept is what both Westley Richards and Rigby have largely based their rejuvenation and current success upon. Each company decided that, in its archive, it had models and styles that epitomised the brand and appealed to modern customers, as they did to historic ones.

Back catalogue

From this recognition, Westley Richards began building Best-quality Anson & Deeley-action double rifles and shotguns, Mauser-action rifles of traditional Westley Richards type and calibre, and hand-detachable lock doubles. All these stem from patents and pattern books in the archive and are instantly attributable to the firm.

This mirrors most of the output of Purdey, Boss and Holland & Holland this century. Their Best guns are essentially the same as those they were building a century ago.

Rigby started making a slightly modernised version of its Mauser-action bolt rifles from the World

The 1875 Anson & Deeley boxlock, on this WW Greener model, is a clear glimpse into a future of hammerless firearms

War I era. Once that was successful, it revisited its famous double rifle and shotgun action, the Rigby and Bissell patent rising bite (vertical bolt) action.

These were built to the highest modern standards and proved immediately successful. They are, however, entirely 19th-century technology, though uprated to cope with modern loads and calibres.

These firms essentially revisit their vintage back catalogues and have been making new versions of the rifles and shotguns from them. New models are actually old models, though small adjustments will be noticed in a direct comparison.

Subtle changes

Stocks, for example, will now often be higher-combed to facilitate a scope, whereas the original may have been stocked for iron sights. Modifications to the safety catch of the Mauser may be applied, or not, depending on the customer's preference.



Rigby revisits its Rigby and Bissell rising bite action for its new double rifles and shotguns

When Westley Richards built its prototype mountain rifle this year, with stainless steel parts, injection-moulded stock and thoroughly modern image, it was modelled closely on a traditionally built Mauser-action rifle and it comes across as every bit the thoroughbred that the wood-stocked, blued-steel models are – and almost as expensive.

This was no budget rifle concept, more an exercise in seeing how a rifle

built to Best standards using the most modern materials would look and behave. However, it is the materials that have changed rather than the mechanics.

When Purdey decided to add an over-and-under Sporter to its range, it brought in a model that was totally unlike the classic Purdey over-and-under, patented by Woodward, which had been its house model since the 1940s.

Instead, it refined an Italian-designed gun, with removable trigger mechanism, from Perugini and Visini, with whom it collaborated. Purdey wanted a proven, reliable platform that would appeal to modern clay shooters. It then worked to design in some crossover appeal by giving ➔



The Purdey Sporter uses a refined version of the Perugini and Visini removable trigger mechanism



the gun aesthetic and design features that were more English than is usual in continental guns.

The introduction of a new model these days really involves manufacturers looking at the options for each part of the gun that already exist then deciding which ones they are going to use.

Trusted mechanics

The Longthorne Hesketh shotgun, for example, made a locking mechanism by basing it on Boss drawers and wedges, with Woodward stud pins. The one-piece steel barrels are not, in fact, a Longthorne novelty, but an idea first put on to a gun and sold in England in the 1870s by Sir Joseph Whitworth.

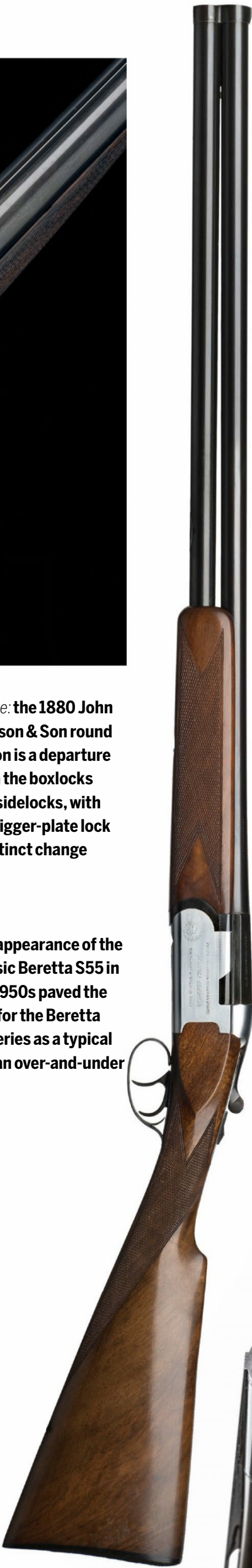
New Browning and Beretta models use the same platform that has proven successful in their past. They may redesign the cosmetics – the shell, if you like – but the mechanics remain largely the same.

New thinking may affect the proportions, for example the wide Opti-bore concept Beretta applied to its barrels a few years ago introduced barrels with wider bores, longer forcing cones and longer choke cones intended to improve patterns, reduce recoil and facilitate the use of steel shot.

None of those ideas were new nor revolutionary then. They were

Above: the 1880 John Dickson & Son round action is a departure from the boxlocks and sidelocks, with its trigger-plate lock a distinct change

The appearance of the classic Beretta S55 in the 1950s paved the way for the Beretta 68 series as a typical Italian over-and-under



existing knowledge applied to a new model to reflect modern thinking. The 686 and 687 models remained the bifurcated trunnion/conical bolt classics that we all know so well.

Steel challenge

Thinking back to the 2007 Purdey Sporter and the Perugini and Visini detachable trigger-lock mechanism that was used, it should be pointed out that it is basically the Perazzi MX8, which also manifests itself in the guns of Kemen.

We can go back to Hill & Smith's patent of 1908 for the first fully detachable trigger-plate lock mechanism of which I am aware. I have seen only one example of this, made by Thomas Bland.

When appraising new models today, it is generally the execution that draws comments from the reviewer – how well balanced the gun feels, how well it tames recoil, how smoothly it swings and how nice it feels to shoot and operate.

Rarely do we read of truly new ideas. They are merely old ideas repackaged or reinterpreted to be rebled into a package that makers think will appeal to a modern shooter or succeed in a particular modern shooting context.

We are likely to see new models hitting the showrooms in the future. For game shooting, the challenge of making guns that will handle well, yet prove strong, stable and pleasant to shoot with superior steel loads will be one that makers strive to meet. It is unlikely these models will be radically different in the operating systems they employ.

The adjustments will manifest themselves in proportions and materials, rather than patents and ground-breaking ideas. 🐦



The Beretta 687 remains true to the classical mechanics that have been employed for years

For the future.
For them.



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IMAGE: CHRIS WARREN

JACKET TEST

Your best friend for a foreshore foray

Wildfowlers will be venturing out in all weathers over the next few months, so Richard Negus puts four of the best jackets to the test

It is 4am in mid-January. The Shipping Forecast warns of meteorological Armageddon from Gibraltar Point to North Foreland. Sleet like spittle taps the windows and a gusting north-easterly is making up its mind whether or not to remove the shed roof.

In conditions such as this, mere mortals draw their duvet to their chin

and return to blissful slumber, glad they are not abroad at this hour. Not so the wildfowler. Storms and gales and general nastiness are the conditions of choice for marsh and foreshore.

There is a hint of the masochist about every wildfowler, but we are not so daft that we would venture to the coast at dawn garbed in the natty attire seen on a driven day.

Things have come a long way since the days when shore gunners ventured forth dressed in military greatcoats stuffed with a lining of straw.

My friend 'Deadly' Darren Sizer and I trialled four modern-day coats that the makers profess are able to withstand the elements, lengthy route marches and the challenging terrain that is the lot of the wildfowler. 🦅

Jack Pyke Wildlands Hunters jacket, tested by Richard
RRP around £74.95
jackpykeshop.co.uk

This coat has been my constant companion on the foreshore for five seasons. During this time, it has been doused in sea water, covered in estuarine mud and endured torrential downpours.

First, the outer polyester, brushed tricot shell with its laminated membrane is truly waterproof. Admittedly, it doesn't breathe like more expensive materials, but it retains its seal-like properties when

covered in mud and responds well to a machine wash in Nikwax. The two-way main zip is chunky and near enough indestructible. Colouring is chameleon-like, perfectly mimicking the biscuity Norfolk reeds of winter.

Cartridge pockets are large and can comfortably accommodate more cartridges than I ever fire on a foreshore foray. The hand-warmer pockets, however, aren't very warm. Over the years, I have discovered that it is best to employ a dog poo bag — unused for preference — as a liner in the pockets, or your cartridges will

get damp. The hood is pathetically small, but it does tuck away into the collar and makes for a fine neck rest as you stare yearningly skywards.

There are elasticated, popper-fastened shrouds on the inner wrists and a strong Velcro outer-wrist strap, which stems the worst of rain ingress. As a standalone coat, it isn't that warm. However, I bought it a size too big, which allows me to layer up underneath, depending upon the conditions. The sleeves are arguably cut too short, meaning that when gun mounting, your wrists are exposed.

**Ridgeline Monsoon Classic,
tested by Richard**
RRP around £143.99

highlandoutdoors.co.uk/ridgeline

The New Zealand brand has gained a great reputation thanks to its hard-wearing smock. The Classic also carries the smock's long cut that hangs down at the tail, covering your backside. The three-layer laminated shell is 10,000 H2O waterproof and boasts a 5,000 MVT breathable membrane.

Although I am no great fan of hoods for shooting coats, this one is sufficiently large to work — perfect for hiding your face from an oncoming skein. The sleeves are well cut and allow free movement at gun mount. Sadly, they do not have an inner storm shroud, but the outer Velcro straps are robust and strengthened. It is not a standalone warm coat,



more of a top layer, which means you will not be sweating after a lengthy trudge across the mud.

The colour is described by Ridgeline as 'dirt camo' and the silent chequerboard material seems to melt into the coastal landscape. There is, however, something of an Achilles heel to this largely excellent design and that stems from the zip. It is a single, meaning you can only access a cartridge belt worn underneath it by unzipping the garment from the top, exposing your chest to wind, rain and sleet. Add to this oversight the absence of specifically designed cartridge pockets and it becomes a fiddle and a fumble to access ammo or any inner pocket.

This may be overly picky and a long-term trial could prove my fears to be unfounded, because there is a lot to like about the coat for the money.

8
/10



The Ridgeline Monsoon Classic jacket is well cut to allow free movement



8.5
/10

It is long enough that you can kneel in a gutter and the heels of your waders rest against the coat rather than your backside.

It is cheap, effective and utterly workmanlike. After five years of abuse, it keeps coming back for more. Unless you are obsessed by snazzy labels, this should be on your list of coats to try.

The Jack Pyke Wildlands Hunters jacket is a rugged, workmanlike budget option

**Sasta Mehto
Pro 2.0 Mossy Oak,
tested by Darren**
RRP £569

outwearltd.co.uk

I have waxed lyrical about the Mehto Pro in the past, stating there is no finer stalking kit on the market. I passed the job of assessing the Finn's suitability as wildfowling wear to Darren. His first observation was that the coat is short and quite snug for size. Despite feeling very lightweight, the Gore-Tex lamination, covered by silent, brushed 100% polyester, is remarkably warm.

From experience, this combination keeps out the harshest of winds and only requires a thin underlayer to cope with most British weather. I have worn this same pattern on the wettest of Westmorland mountains and stayed dry all day. The short body length does mean that a high-waisted waterproof trouser or waders are required to avoid a wet bottom. The hood is voluminous, with a stiff peak. The collar is generous and makes an effective barrier against the elements. So, too, the cuffs, which are slightly elasticated, reinforced with Kevlar then fastened with Velcro.

The absence of cartridge pockets reveals the stalking heritage of the kit and, while large enough to accommodate cartridges, gloves and other paraphernalia, you do feel somewhat underfed. Sleeve length and cut allows easy gun mount and the double zip is strong, well sealed and allows access to your underlayer. The colour is light enough to camouflage the wearer. Darren said the Mehto Pro was 'too good' for the foreshore. Wildfowling is a filthy habit and the thought of snagging it on a rusting jetty is enough to bring a tear to the eye.

If you are after an all-round hunting coat, look no further, but as a wildfowling coat, the Mehto Pro is perhaps too smart.

Sasta Mehto Pro 2.0 is an extremely smart jacket



8.5
/10

JACKET TEST

Deerhunter Mallard, tested by Darren
RRP £215.99
deerhunter.eu

I wouldn't want to get into a fight with Darren, but I fear I would have to if I wanted to get this coat off him. The Mallard is a piece of true wildfowler's kit and the designers have evidently thought about the requirements of the foreshore. First, it is both extremely waterproof and warm, being made from a double-knitted twill.

Deerhunter is so confident with its membrane that it offers a five-year guarantee.

The double zip is made to be operated by gloved hands and this is covered by a magnetic flap that seals everything in snugly. The cartridge pockets also boast a magnetic strip that holds them open to accommodate easy shell withdrawal, then snaps shut silently to keep everything dry. This is not a gimmick, but very clever. The hand-warmer pockets are perfectly sited and are actually warm.

The sleeves are slightly over-length and are pre-shaped, making gun mount an unruffled affair. The removable hood could be more generous

in size, but most fowlers shun such an item, anyway. The length from collar to tail could be longer, but the Mallard is evidently designed to be worn with waterproof trousers or waders. The cuffs have a Velcro strap that seals the sleeves well, while every pocket and seam bears reinforcing material. The colour imitates perfectly the muted browns of the marsh in winter. In all, the only challenge with this coat is to find fault in it.

Darren is a straight-talking man and praise from him is praise indeed. Deerhunter should take his approval to the bank.

9.5
/10



The Deerhunter Mallard is the ultimate wildfowler's jacket – waterproof, warm, well designed and a muted marsh colour



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Nippon out to bag a monster

The Ukrainian forests contain a subspecies of sika much bigger than our own – but they can be very hard to find, says Thomas Nissen

We had just left our vehicle, a practical if primitive Lada Niva, when we heard the cry of a sika stag. The sound came from a thick stand of pines, which we knew would be impossible to approach without alerting the stag's harem of females. Instead, our guide Roy Hrelja – an Australian who's put down roots in the Ukrainian forest area we were trekking through – put the sika call to his lips and answered the ghost hidden in the undergrowth.

The stag responded at once and was soon joined by a shrill chorus of other deer, which were foraging close by in thin deciduous woodland.

Keen to bring down one of Ukraine's monster stags, hunter Frank Olsen led the way, but by the time we got there, or at least to where we thought it was, the beast had gone.

Beautiful set-up

Eight hours later, in the cool of the evening, Frank and Roy spied several likely looking stags in the distance. For a while they stalked them, but the

sun had dropped below the horizon by the time they got close. The stags weren't easy to spot in the dying sun's rays, but one stood out. He was tucked under a golden-leaved oak, surrounded by does and calves. It was a beautiful set-up and the stag presented a viable target, but the light was leaching away too quickly and soon the chance was gone.

The hunting ground we visited is vast – around 25,000 hectares – and home to an estimated 400 sika. It features pines and poplars as thick as bridge piers, stumpy willows, birches, hawthorns, redwoods and the occasional solitary spruce. On the whole, its sandy soil hosts a semi-open forest landscape dotted with meadows, reed-covered marshes and small ponds fringed with rushes.

Unlike the Japanese sika species (*Cervus nippon*), which can be found in the UK, Ireland, Denmark and Poland among other European countries, the Manchurian sika species (*Cervus nippon mantchuricus*) – or, as it is known in Ukraine, Dybowski's sika (*Cervus nippon*

dybowskii) – originated in south-east Asia. It was introduced to different areas of Ukraine around a century ago and has since established a strong population, which yields impressive specimens each year. It is now the dominant species in this tract of land.

Impressive beasts

The morning after our first unsuccessful foray, I decided to follow Frank's travelling companion, Mike Qvist, who was shooting on the margins of the hunting ground. We found several herds with hinds and calves, each accompanied by a fine stag. We got within range of a few, but Mike decided not to shoot. Communication issues with our guide meant it wasn't clear whether the beasts we were seeing – though they seemed hugely impressive to novices like us – were the best the area could offer.

When the chance for an eight-point dream specimen finally arrived later that day, Mike had trouble with his on-loan rifle. The stag, which had ivory-white tipped heavy antlers that were covered in dark mud, was following a herd of females towards dense woodland.

“The sika's call was joined by a shrill chorus of others”

It paused, exposed between thick outlying tree trunks, but Mike failed to take the shot. The stag disappeared behind a patch of scrub. Mike quickly shifted a few feet to his right to improve his angle. The females had already been engulfed by the forest but, as the stag trailed after them, he sensed Mike's movement and stopped for a second, staring straight at him. Mike's bullet zinged out.

“I think I missed it,” Mike announced. “What happened?” Roy asked nervously, worried that the deer might be wounded. As we approached, Roy was peering intently into the woods. It was clear the stag must have run that way, otherwise we would have seen it fleeing. Mike strode to the spot where it had stood. Dry as desert sand, he asked Roy: “Is it the one lying here, do you think?”

The stag was dead at his feet.

Knowing that Roy's line of sight had been blocked when he took the



THOMAS NISSEN

Frank Olsen's first sika stag – a mighty eight-pointer – falls, after a short sprint, to a perfect shot



The Manchurian is the largest of the 13 subspecies of sika; a stag can weigh up to 160kg



The mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees and shrubs are beautiful in their autumn colours



The heavy stags are dragged to the nearest point the minibus that collects carcasses can reach

shot, Mike had deliberately unnerved our guide by claiming to have missed. Luckily, the day ended without any further leg-pulling.

Distinctive calls

Over the course of our trip, we found one of the most enjoyable ways to hunt sika was to drive into the hunting ground and listen for the bark of stags. We would then park up and stalk the beasts by following their distinctive calls. Our expedition took place at the end of the rutting season, so activity levels were fluctuating.

On the third, the sun rose beautifully, mist was rising from the marshes and the calls of stags echoed between the open grasslands, dense shrubs and branches of the thick fir trees. The Manchurian sika doesn't have the same whistling yap as the Japanese version. It is more like the deep rumbling of a red deer and is reminiscent of the half-suffocated cry of a maral, or Caspian red deer.

Frank and I clambered into the Lada on our final trip to the hunting ground and soon we saw a herd crossing an open patch of land with a pair of superb stags in tow. We swiftly parked and took off on foot. The animals were heading ➡



Dinner consisted only of game that has been shot by the hunters, including grilled fillet of sika

towards a big swamp, far to our left. The stalk, which would ultimately bring us round in front of the group, began immediately. We didn't stop until we reached a small clearing.

Skittish hinds

In the trees on the far side, somewhere between our starting point and current position, we could hear three or four stags calling from different directions. We waited for the

from us. Roy suggested that Frank prepare himself in case a large stag showed up. Almost on cue, a mature male joined the calf. He paused for a moment behind the youngster, which was nervously advancing towards the reedy wetland.

Unfortunately, despite asking Frank to ready himself, Roy hadn't set up the shooting stick. By the time it was in place, the stag had run and the chance was gone.

“The old patriarch lifted his antlered head and gave the last bellowing roar of his life”

assembly to cross the glade in front of us on their way to the marsh, but the females became skittish, silencing the stags. We didn't hear them again until the group was about a mile past us. We jogged towards the new noise, then, on approaching our targets, slowed down to start a fresh stalk to get in front of the animals. We reached a large grassy plain and took cover under a broad-crowned oak. A young deer was out in the open, about 100m

Frank tried to contain his irritation as we followed a sandy road under some shady oaks. Before long, we caught sight of more deer. Once again, the advance party was a young deer that trotted in from the grassland before disappearing into the cover of a dried-up pond. We quickly got into position, knowing that more deer should follow. Soon, a large stag appeared, though Roy was momentarily unsure

about whether the stag could be shot or not. He decided it could be and rapidly positioned the shooting stick. But Frank was unable to target and shoot the animal before it moved off and was hidden by the forest. The short, heated disagreement that followed was no doubt driven by coursing adrenaline and a mutual desire for success. But there was no time to argue over who was to blame – we had to continue the hunt.

Utmost stealth

The rut was in full swing and it wasn't long before the sound of stags pierced the cold morning air once more. The noise came from a dark pine forest – we knew the utmost stealth would be needed to sneak up on our game in there. Before long, Frank and Roy were studying the herd from behind a thick tree trunk. The group was around 100m away and almost hidden by the heavy shadows of the evergreens. The stag was barking constantly, but we couldn't see him. As quietly as possible, we inched forwards another 20m on all fours. Roy then called the deer from our new position. The stag responded immediately. Summoned from the darkness, it advanced slowly towards us. Suddenly, three females appeared in a small clearing to the beast's right. A young stag was trailing after them, but an old patriarch soon sent him running. Then he lifted his antlered head and gave the last bellowing roar of his life. Frank's bullet was aimed perfectly and hit the stag obliquely from the front. The animal dropped instantly, lifting everyone's spirits. For Frank and Mike, stalking in the new hunting ground had proved to be a fascinating and rewarding experience. 🦌

The sika stags appear, ghost-like, from the forest, accompanied by hinds and calves





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A mission on the rocks

With a summer plan to catch a bass on the fly, Adam Hart heads to the Pembrokeshire coast to face off with this ocean predator

It had been my mission this summer to catch a bass on the fly. With the rivers of west Wales dangerously low, sea fishing has proved more tempting than usual. I would describe myself as a trout fisherman used to stalking wild brownies with a light rod and even lighter tackle.

Casting a fly into the sea was a daunting prospect. Bass are famed for their explosive takes and tenacious fights; playing one on a fly-rod would be exhilarating. Luckily, Pembrokeshire is blessed with a stunning coastline that holds an abundance of bass. I began trawling

the internet for information on how to catch one.

Vital tide

Many hours of research later, I had a plan. The tide is vital when bass fishing as the fish will only properly feed when there's a current. So to maximise my chances of catching, I would fish a rocky peninsula in the sea as the tide dropped, then an estuary inland as it flooded. My father was instructed to meet me at the estuary with a spinning rod, in case the fly proved

ineffective. All I needed to do now was rummage through the mountain of fly-fishing kit at home, much of it old and useless, and choose what to take with me. A 9wt fly-rod was chosen, which I rigged out with a floating line and about 8ft of 10lb leader.

Bass will take sea trout flies, but I thought it best to order some proper bass flies. Soon the postman arrived with an Oz's Livebait Sandeel, a Red/White Deceiver and several streamers, all attached to size six hooks.

Finally, the day came to test my trout skills on an ocean predator.

Adam Hart hops cautiously from rock to rock while slipping into a casting pattern, his fly sparkling in the shimmering blue water



But, as always, the weather was doing its best to thwart my efforts. The sun had quickly burned through the morning's clouds and was beating down on the ocean. Bass prefer feeding at night or at least in low light, so today's bright conditions and glaring sea were far from ideal.

In a similar vein, my decision to wear thick trackies was proving idiotic. They were generating a considerable amount of discomfort in the August sun. Sweat began pouring off me as we ambled through a golf course to the headland.

Heat haze

On top of the peninsula, the views were stunning. East of us and about a mile out to sea lay Caldey Island, whose only inhabitants are Cistercian monks and red squirrels. Looking north, Tenby's kaleidoscopic seafront imposed itself through the heat haze. This is the best place to observe Tenby in

summer, a silent tableau of colour, far from the frenzy of tourists. Clambering down a rock-strewn gully to the shore, I decided to try the Red/White Deceiver first. If nothing else, it might tempt a mackerel. Casting it was proving interesting – my rod was more accustomed to flicking small nymphs upstream – but I soon found a rhythm.

“Rocks carpeted in seaweed oozed and gasped and sighed as the sun beat down”

In fact, on a good cast, I could shoot the fly out just as far as a regular-sized lure on my spinning rod. The rocks were treacherously slippery at low tide, but some of the boulders that jutted out into the sea had just enough grip to make fair casting platforms. I hopped cautiously from rock to rock while slipping into a casting pattern. At each new location, I fired my line

as close to Tenby as possible, letting the tidal current gently pull it seaward towards Caldey Island. On alternating casts after that, I rotated towards Caldey, hoping to cover as much of the ocean as possible. My fly sparkled in the shimmering blue water. Boulder by boulder, I worked my way down the coast toward the

tip of the peninsula. I figured this would be the premier location as the currents were at their strongest and it had access to deeper water. Someone else was already fishing there, but given there was probably an hour's worth of coast left to fish before I got there, I wasn't worried. The fishing was truly idyllic. A light westerly had picked up, cooling the sweat on the back of my neck. ➡



Bass will take sea trout flies but Adam thought it best to order some proper bass flies



Adam works his way towards the tip of the peninsula, where the currents are stronger and the water deeper



The mullet fought valiantly, but it lost and ended up on the table

The breeze carried with it the soft cries of gulls, too lazy to squawk with any conviction. Rocks carpeted in seaweed oozed and gasped and sighed as the sun beat down. Tiny waves lapped at the shore. I almost forgot why I was there.

Until I felt a knock. At the furthest extent of my cast, something had hit the Red/White Deceiver. It was never ‘on’, and I suspected a mackerel had caused the adrenaline spike. The fly-fishing-induced trance I was in had been broken.

Slack water

Perhaps spotting this, the other fisherman wandered over. We had a genial chat. From Mountain Ash in the Cynon Valley, he was a freshwater fly-fisherman and had caught a bass where I was standing yesterday, but on a spinner. Kindly, he let me take over the premier location, content to watch me cast and talk fishing. I tried all sorts of retrieves at various depths, but the bass weren’t biting. Judging by

the partially submerged rocks, it was slack water. Time to try the estuary.

Strolling to the estuary’s edge, I was concerned about the amount of mud I needed to cross to get within casting range of the water. At every step my boots seemed to sink about 2in but no more, so I decided it was safe. The faint saltiness in the breeze was now replaced by overpowering estuary mud.

Halfway to the water, I reached a small, tidal island that the snipe love in the winter. On it I found a thoroughly surprised squirrel and we eyeballed each other for a long moment. The gullies surrounding the island were littered with traffic cones and wheelie bins, the only blemishes on an otherwise picturesque location.

I began casting again. The brown water was moving inland at a fair pace, so I fished it down and across like a salmon river. The silent, flooding tide meant I had to check my feet every few casts to ensure they weren’t suddenly submerged.

Pigeons cooed from the opposite bank as the sun weakened. I changed fly twice, but still had nothing to show for it. My shoulder ached from casting and a small flap of dead skin had appeared on my finger where I retrieved the line. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when Dad joined me for the last hour with his spinning rod, I forced a trade with my fly-rod. The purist within me was giving up.

Shoals of mullet

I assumed we were heading for a blank, but as we rounded a bend in the estuary our eyes lit up. Shoals of mullet were cruising the estuary margins feeding. I quickly googled “how to catch mullet on the fly” and told Dad to find anything that looked like a small brown shrimp in

“As we rounded a bend in the estuary, our eyes lit up”

the fly box. He stalked up the shoal of mullet and began casting. Surely not, I thought. But moments later, the sound of a powerful tail ‘*swooooooshing*’ through the water confirmed my worst fears. Unbelievably, Dad had actually managed to hook one.

Livid and ecstatic, I sprinted down the bank towards him, cursing his fortune but eager to help, such is the paradox when your father out-fishes you. It was a decent fish and fought valiantly. Tense moments passed as Dad gradually guided the fish into the shallows where I flipped it on to the bank. Not only had we avoided a dreaded blank, but we also had 4lb of fresh mullet for dinner. 🐟

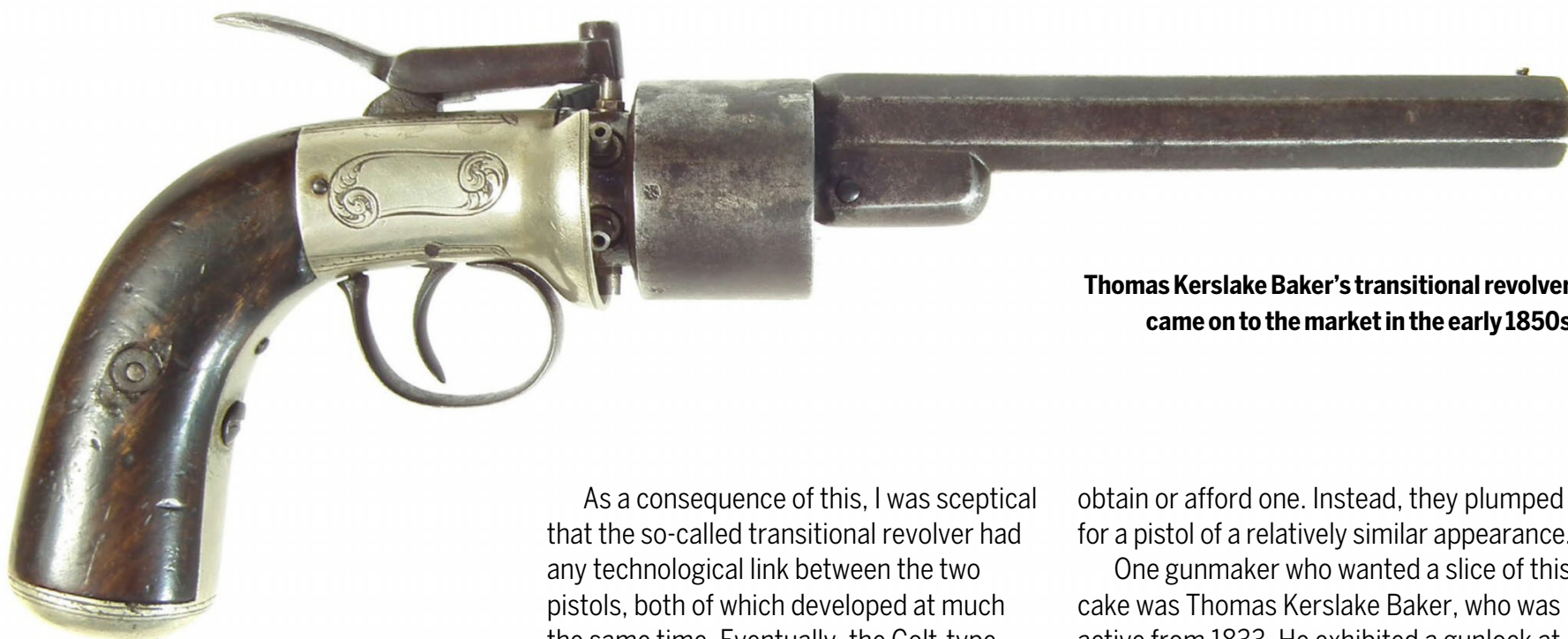


Adam fishes the estuary’s brown water down and across like a salmon river



Gunroom

Delving into the history of the so-called transitional revolver reveals this design to be a prime example of Victorian business opportunism



Thomas Kerslake Baker's transitional revolver came on to the market in the early 1850s

The so-called transitional revolver has always piqued my curiosity. These guns pair the frame and grip of a pepperbox-type revolver with a short cylinder, bored with a number of chambers. It is for that reason people imagine them to be some sort of missing link between the pepperbox-type and the perfected revolver, famously patented by Sam Colt in 1836.

Pepperbox revolvers had been about since the mid-1830s. They were little more than streamlined versions of the multi-barrelled, hand-rotated pocket pistol made in both flint and percussion ignition. They were called 'pepperboxes' due to the slight resemblance that their fluted barrel groups had to a domestic pepper shaker. They would have been handy for self-defence at close range, but their accuracy was poor because they were muzzle-heavy.

Revolutionary design

Colt's revolver, on the other hand, was the epitome of a reliable repeating pistol. It had a short rotating cylinder bored with five chambers, each with its own percussion cap. When the hammer was cocked, this caused the cylinder to rotate, bringing a chamber into line with the barrel, while a small rising stud locked it into place. It was a truly revolutionary design that had no apparent evolutionary predecessor.

As a consequence of this, I was sceptical that the so-called transitional revolver had any technological link between the two pistols, both of which developed at much the same time. Eventually, the Colt-type predominated, with the pepperbox-type not surviving much after 1870.

My scepticism was really fired when I discovered there was a dramatic increase in the number of revolvers being proofed at the London Proof House in the early 1850s. Revolvers were a rarity in Britain at the time and only 425 went to proof in 1850. That number doubled the year after and in 1852 it exploded with 6,121. I racked my brains as to what had caused this spike.

The answer came from the TV series *Victoria*, which showed the Prince Consort

obtain or afford one. Instead, they plumped for a pistol of a relatively similar appearance.

One gunmaker who wanted a slice of this cake was Thomas Kerslake Baker, who was active from 1833. He exhibited a gunlock at the Great Exhibition, so would have been well placed to see the excitement caused by the pistols of Colt and Adams. In April 1852, he obtained a registered design for "a lever cock or hammer for firearms".

This was incorporated into a transitional revolver design that rather dishonestly claimed to be 'Baker's Patent', despite no such patent ever being granted. Undoubtedly, Baker had these pistols made for him in the Birmingham gun quarter.

As transitional revolvers go, the Baker was better than most. It had half-decent

"Baker's pistol was better than most but I would not want to trust my life to one"

planning the Great Exhibition of 1851. It all became clear then — Sam Colt and Robert Adams exhibited their revolvers at the exhibition and the British public caught revolver fever as a result.

Other enterprising gunmakers sought to capitalise on this, but revolver manufacture was a fairly complex process that needed sophisticated machinery and tooling, so they produced a pistol that used existing technology, and simply gave it a bit of a tweak. Essentially, the so-called transitional revolver was no more than a stopgap to satisfy booming demand from a growing middle class. There would have been lots of customers who would have quite liked a Colt or an Adams perhaps, but who couldn't

sights and a hammer spur that allowed for more accurate single-action fire than the pepperbox, which was normally double-action. It also looked pretty flash with its nickel-silver frame.

Production seems to have been around 3,000, which was relatively respectable. Yet it was a mishmash — neither particularly robust nor well made.

That's the story of transitional revolvers that weren't really transitional at all — they were simply assumed to be by later writers. In reality, they were the product of entrepreneurial Victorians wanting a lucrative slice of the action.

Perhaps we should call them 'opportunistic revolvers' instead. 🐦

Club together for the survival of our sport

Joining a wildfowling club doesn't only give you access to exhilarating sport – it could also help to safeguard fowling's future, says Mike Swan

It's hard to believe, but wildfowling clubs are a relatively modern concept. There are one or two that can trace their origins back before World War II, but most sprang up from the 1950s. What is now the Kent Wildfowling & Conservation Association (KWCA), of which my father was a founder member, was formed in 1953, as were the Fenland and the Solway. Others formed around that time include the Dorset and Holbeach clubs, in 1952, and the Fenland Wildfowlers in 1956.

"Why this sudden activity to form clubs?" you might ask. Well, the answer was Lady Tweedsmuir's bird protection bill, which became the Protection of Birds Act 1954. Suddenly wildfowlers began to fear that their


sport was at risk. The legal quarry list was shortened, questions around securing shooting rights were thrown into sharp focus and three weeks were lopped off the season, pushing the opening date back from 12 August to 1 September.

Free for all

What had once been free for all became much more complex and wildfowlers all around the country were pretty much forced to come together if they wanted to secure their future. This, of course, did not entirely suit some of the old-timers who decided to carry on as before, but in general, the forming of clubs turned out well and most are still here decades later.

By the time I started wildfowling in the late 1960s, there was precious little free wildfowling in England or Wales. Scotland is different, with a basic right of recreation on the foreshore, which includes wildfowling, but even here clubs were formed to organise issues such as access and parking permission. Also, some of the best areas have been designated as national wildfowl refuges, with clubs set up to negotiate a continuation of wildfowling in a more systematic way.

In those days getting into a club was very hard too and many were effectively a closed shop. Youngsters were perhaps able to join as juniors under the wing of parents, grandparents or other family



"It is sad but true that membership of many wildfowling clubs is declining"

members. Arriving in Swansea in the mid-1970s to start at the university, I wrote to the secretary of the West Glamorgan Wildfowlers, asking to be considered for membership, but to no immediate effect. It was 10 years later, after I had started at GWCT, that I became a member.

When I first went to college, Father persuaded me to leave my gun at home, saying “there’ll be no time for shooting while you are studying, save that for holiday time back home”. However, as time moved on, and I embarked on a PhD project, I discovered, much to my surprise, that a section of the Gower saltmarsh was still free foreshore. So on 1 September 1979 I was hidden in a little creek at the salting edge at dawn and the miracle happened – a mallard flew over in range and I shot it. To say the boy was elated would be an understatement; this was my first success based on my own work, rather than following in my father’s footsteps.

New club

Within a season or so, danger loomed. The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust had secured a section on the other side of the estuary as a reserve, with only small areas retained for wildfowling



Visitor schemes offer the chance to try for a flight on a famous stretch of shore

by the Carmarthenshire club. Fearing the potential loss of their wildfowling, members of the Morlais Valley Shooting Club (MVSC), which ran a small DIY shoot just inland, formed a marsh section and negotiated a lease on what had hitherto been free.

Not wishing to exclude anyone who was not in the main syndicate, the MVSC marsh section called an inaugural meeting at Penclawdd rugby club to explain what was afoot. Despite my English accent, I was

made very welcome, and became a founder member. Towards the end of the meeting, the chairman, Fred Holt, asked for a couple of volunteers to act as wardens and to try to persuade any non-members found shooting the marsh to join up. “What we need is a couple of locals,” he said, “who know the marsh and the tides well.”

At this point, a voice at the back piped up. “You don’t want locals,” he said, “you want a couple of strangers with a healthy respect for the place. I’ve lived here all my life and I’ve twice stranded myself and had to be rescued by helicopter.” And so it was that I became a marsh warden.

Declining membership

It seems to me that the closed-shop era is largely over, and indeed that most clubs are actively looking for new members, so please don’t be put off from applying to joining ➡



The closed-shop era is largely over and most clubs are actively looking for new members

Wildfowling

a club or two. Most will welcome you with open arms. It is sad but true that membership of many clubs is declining. This is particularly distressing at a time when wildfowling consents from Natural England and Natural Resources Wales are becoming increasingly restrictive. A healthy membership base means a stronger voice to argue against those who would do us down.

Which club?

But which club to join? BASC has around 140 affiliated wildfowling clubs and all are not equal. I'm not sure whether it still happens, but some used to have a residency requirement to ensure that locals got a chance. Others are much more open and I recently met a Devon fowler who was also in the Kent Wildfowlers. He thought nothing of getting out of his bed at midnight to catch morning flight on the Medway or Thames shore.

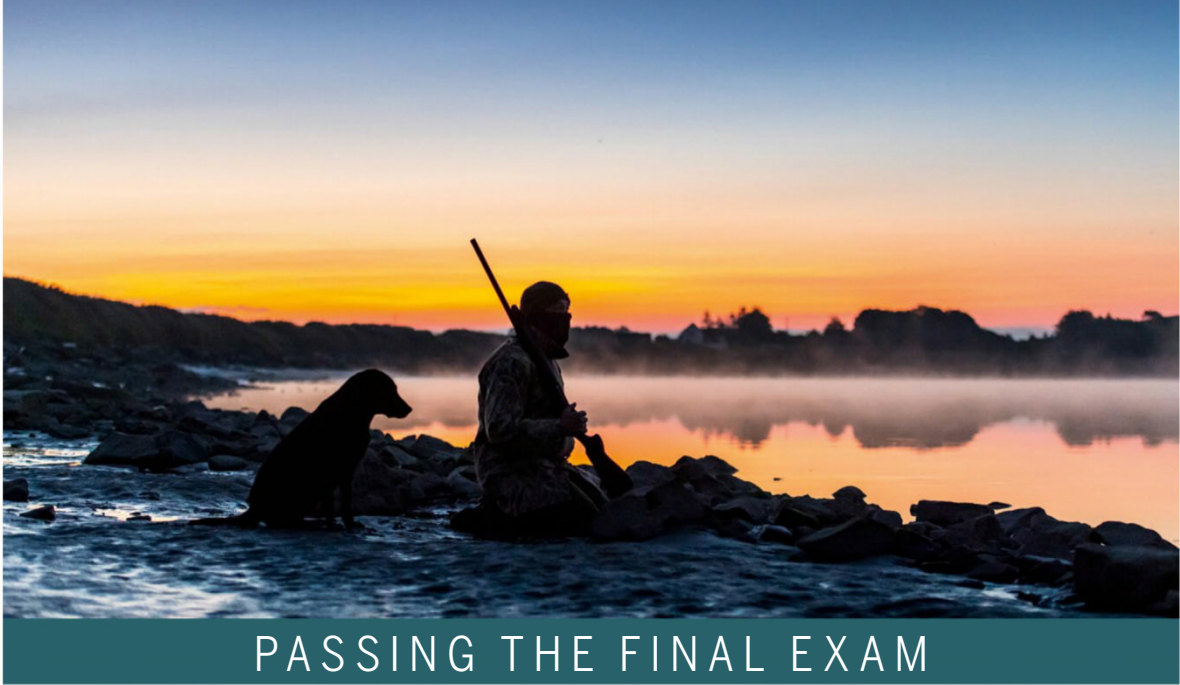
The KWCA is a good example of the sort of club that might attract you if you are not a dyed-in-the-wool wildfowler. As well as being the country's biggest, with foreshore shooting as far north as Norfolk, it has lots of interesting inland shooting,

“A healthy membership means a stronger voice to argue against our detractors”

and even a fishing section that could provide you with sport.

In similar vein, the Dorset Wildfowlers can offer varying sport from pest shooting and membership of small inland syndicates to deerstalking. You can also join as a

There is nothing to beat the feeling of bagging a bird or two on the shore as a result of good fieldcraft



PASSING THE FINAL EXAM

Most clubs expect you to pass a test before you get free rein. As part of this you will most likely need to study quarry identification, but that is a good thing anyway. Knowing what you are looking at enhances your time on the marsh, and no one should ask “What’s that?” when their bird comes to hand. They will also want to be sure that you understand how to stay safe,

and I count myself lucky that when I finally got into the West Glamorgan Wildfowlers, I was given one answer on a plate. “You wouldn’t have gone to evening flight today, would you?” said my questioner, bearing in mind a flooding tide and a ripping gale. I nodded and refrained from telling him I had just come in from flight along the coast on the next club’s marsh...

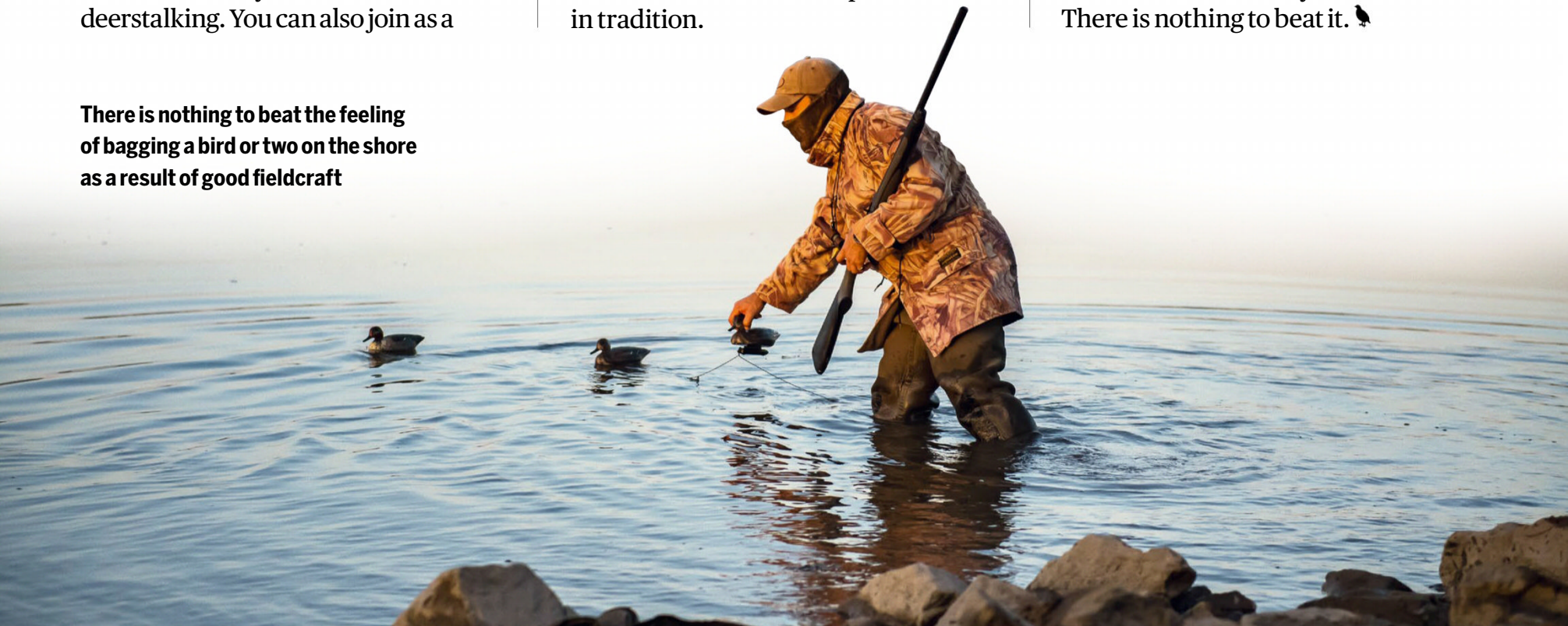
social member to enjoy the company of like-minded people and support the activities of the club.

One of the other things to look for in a club is enthusiastic people. Most clubs offer a visitor scheme, either privately to members who might wish to show a guest some sport, or through BASC’s excellent permit

Once upon a time, new members could expect guarded responses from the old-timers. Even today, experienced wildfowlers may not be quick to take you to their best places, simply because they have worked hard for success and they do not want to find someone else in a favourite spot. That said, safety on the shore and the reputation of the club both need to be promoted, so most newcomers can expect a guiding hand of some sort.

Against this background, I would recommend joining a club to anyone. Despite what amounts to a privileged background as a GWCT adviser, I can honestly say that many of my most memorable sporting occasions have been out on the shore, bagging a bird or two as a result of my own efforts. There is nothing to beat it. 🦆

scheme, where kind and experienced volunteers take out visitors. This can give you a chance to experience the magic of the shore for the first time, or perhaps to try a flight on some famous venue that is steeped in tradition.





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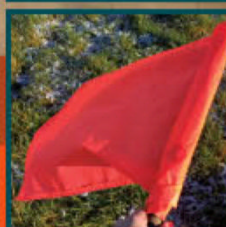
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Find a fungi for that bunny

Rabbit, brown trout or venison pair beautifully with four of our tasty native mushrooms; John Wright simply has to pick the perfect wine

Of the 7,000 or so larger – as in, not microscopic – fungi found in Britain, my educated guess is that about 500 are edible, 500 have varying degrees of toxicity and the rest are too small, too tough, too bitter or too slimy to bother with.

Only about 150 of the edible ones have any gastronomic merit and of those perhaps 30 you would be prepared to pay for in a restaurant. Even then there is a hierarchy of excellence and the four I have chosen are true top-table species.

For those who wish to forage wild mushrooms, it is worth noting that only two dozen of the 500 poisonous species are deadly. This sounds encouraging, but very few of the thousand or so fungus forays I have enjoyed over the years have failed to find something that would have had me in intensive care if I'd eaten them. I see death caps a couple of times every year and I find the brown roll rim, which can catastrophically destroy all your red blood cells, in every autumn woodland I visit.

Wine pairing with the understated flavours of most mushrooms is

a minority pursuit. I was prepared to have a stab at it and had a tentative list, but I found myself wandering without purpose around London when I encountered the discreet yet dauntingly impressive premises of Berry Bros & Rudd of Pall Mall.

Knowing it to be a bit cheeky, I expected a rather cool response to my mushroom-related questions, but they could not have been kinder nor more helpful. In fact, they sat me down in a Windsor chair next to a nice cricket table and introduced me to the dauntingly knowledgeable Edwin Dublin. The following recommendations are the result, though mushrooms seldom make

a meal on their own and I have included some game that matches both wine and fungi.

Dimples

The penny bun may be more familiar to you as the cep, porcino, steinpilz or any of two dozen other names. I like the British name as the cap markedly resembles a mid-brown soft bread roll, complete with the dimples. It is a common species that is associated with certain trees, what I call the 'big five' – oak, beech, birch, pine and spruce, the upshot being not to bother with sycamore or ash woods.

The penny bun is easy to identify: a brown, rounded cap that flattens with age, slightly sticky when damp and with characteristic dimples.

The tubes beneath the cap are grey or cream when young and firm, becoming greeny-yellow and soft when mature. The stem is grey, cream or light brown and distinctly swollen at the base when young.

If you know where to find them, foraged truffles are a bargain





The lilac hue of wood blewits makes them almost too pretty to pick

There are a couple of fine details that may help. The flesh just beneath the cap turns a very faint pink when cut, and at the very top of the stem there is a fine, pale, raised net patterning. Nothing that could be confused with the penny bun is dangerously poisonous but do watch out for the bitter bolete. Its tubes are pink and its taste is as spectacularly bitter as its name suggests.

With so substantial and meaty a mushroom, venison is the obvious choice – loin for preference – and a substantial wine is needed to accompany both. Edwin suggested a Beaujolais-Villages, preferably one with a bit of age or, you guessed it, a red Burgundy, also with a bit of age. Though the latter may involve a reckless assault on the piggy bank.

Forking wrinkles

Chanterelles are exceptionally beautiful mushrooms and a couple of hundred nestling in a carpet of moss is a joy to see. They are more common

than the penny bun but similarly found in any of those ‘big five’ woodlands. They are egg-yolk yellow, generally funnel-shaped and their gills arranged as forking wrinkles on the underside of the cap – or the outside of the funnel, if you prefer.

There is nothing dangerous that the moderately careful forager might confuse with a chanterelle, but there is the false chanterelle that has come close to fooling even your highly experienced correspondent. This tends to be thinner in substance, more flaccid and drier than the true chanterelle and is often rather orange.

do if you can assemble enough of them together in a bowl. The taste is mildly mushroomy and the texture pleasantly fibrous. I was advised to go for a white Burgundy – and not to worry too much about age.

White Burgundy, of course, goes well with fish and nothing can go wrong if you go for brown trout, provided you can catch one when the chanterelles are about.

Fairy rings

Blewits come in several species, the best of which are the wood blewit, *Clitocybe nuda*, and the field blewit,

“Go for a red Burgundy, which may involve a reckless assault on your piggy bank”

Nothing bad is likely to happen if you get it wrong beyond a poor dinner, and perhaps a touch of indigestion, so do not fret.

Chanterelles are reputed to smell of apricots, and indeed they

Csaeva. The former is found just where you would expect – in woods – but sometimes in old pasture where it can form impressive rings. It is unfussy about which type of wood it grows in, being a leaf (or grass) litter species ➔



The penny bun’s dimpled cap really does resemble a bread roll and it’s lovely to eat



Chanterelles are easy to spot and very tasty but don’t be fooled by their ‘false’ imposter

Foraging and feasting



A junior Barolo, Beaujolais-Villages, Bollinger B13 and a white Burgundy are all excellent choices, but do be careful when foraging

with no profound relationship with individual tree types.

Wood blewits are intensely purple or lilac all over when young, the stems with a bright, metallic sheen. The cap turns progressively brown and the gills and stem fade to duller colours with age. The cap always feels a little damp and clammy. Though easy to identify, the wood blewit does have impostors in the notoriously dangerous group called webcaps.

These come in all colours and the deadliest of them all – bluntly known as the deadly webcap (*Cortinarius rubellus*) – is a discouraging rust colour, though evidently not discouraging enough considering the horrors it has occasionally wrought.

Exquisite

None of the webcaps with which wood blewits may be confused are thought to be poisonous, but no webcap is particularly palatable and people sensibly dismiss the entire tribe as a matter of principle. The two that may cause confusion are the rare and exquisite violet webcap (*Cortinarius violaceus*) and the relatively drab and very common bruising webcap (*C purpurascens*).

The latter is a dead ringer for the wood blewit, but easily distinguished by its spores, which turn the purple gills to a rust brown. The spores of the wood blewit are a pinkish-cream.

The field blewit is much easier to identify as it always grows in the safer habitat of a field. It has a broad, damp, cream cap and cream gills on a short, fat and strikingly lilac stem.



Scrambled egg with a shaving of black truffle is as good as it gets

I mentioned the blewits’ slimy, sticky and rubbery – in a good way – texture to Edwin and its beetroot undertones and rather earthy overtones. He pondered a moment before suggesting that baby sister of Barolo, a Langhe Nebbiolo. ‘Earthy’ immediately brings rabbit to mind, so a hearty rabbit supper it is.

The only fungus for which I had already decided the choice of wine type before my meeting with Edwin,

I did consider beer, which was always his (and my) choice to start the day. But let us stick with champagne.

Game for breakfast beyond the trusty venison sausage is quite unusual, but partridges will do the trick nicely, especially if you can smoke them very lightly first. Simply place them on a grid in a covered pan on low heat, which contains some sawdust. Don’t forget to scramble some eggs.

As to which champagne, well,

“A Bollinger B13 is a snip at £100 – come on, it’s truffles we’re talking about here”

were truffles. These are available at great cost if you buy them, or free if you know how to seek them out yourself, though the English summer truffle is, it pains me to report, an inferior beast.

Since I have most often eaten truffles for breakfast – due to their strong affinity with scrambled eggs – champagne (already a breakfast favourite) seems the obvious choice. Being an admirer of William Cobbett,

we are dealing with one of the finest foods that nature provides and a good vintage (single-season) champagne takes a great deal of beating.

Bollinger came out tops on our two-man survey and if you want to tread the vintage path, there is Bollinger B13, a snip at £100, or RD 2007 at an agreeable £180. Come on, it’s truffles we’re talking about here. 🐿



The earthy notes of blewits cry out for a hearty rabbit supper, washed down with a Langhe Nebbiolo

Keeper of the month

Alex Rodgers's successful stint in NI did as much for the curlew as it did for grouse, says Will Pocklington



Alex Rodgers
now keeps on
Ousby Moor
in Cumbria



Alex Rodgers's CV belies his age. For six years, he was the only full-time gamekeeper in Northern Ireland. At their peak, grouse stocks on his watch made up 65% of the bird's population in the country and were accompanied by NI's most successful known breeding pair of curlew. In 2019, the Irish Grouse Conservation Trust (IGCT) — his employer at the time — won a Purdey Gold Award. Alex is 28 years old.

The IGCT was formed in 2006 with the aim of rebuilding the country's depleted population of red grouse. The 7,000-acre Glenwherry Estate in County Antrim, the trust's base and the only driven grouse moor in NI, would become a showpiece of what can be achieved with the right approach.

Until his recent move to Cumbria, Alex was central to this approach and played a key role in turning the five pairs recorded 15 years ago into a rough total of 370 birds in 2020. Last season that translated to two 10-brace days — the greatest harvestable surplus on the estate since the late 1960s.

No doubt some keepers would question quite how Alex remained so motivated for a role that culminated in an annual bag of only 40 birds. But a closer look at the Glenwherry Project as a whole points to a labour of love that is as rewarding as it is challenging.

Not surprisingly, habitat management and predator control have been integral to success. "Northern Ireland is overrun

with foxes," said Alex. The abundance of foxes, crows and ravens, he thinks, are a legacy of a long history of commercial sheep farming and previous restrictions on larger-calibre firearms. "Predator control just isn't a priority for most people."

It was a priority for Alex, though. "Foxes were the first thing I thought about when I woke up in the morning and the last thing I thought about when I went to bed at night," he admitted. That the trust employed three part-timers to assist with fox control across an area of 15,000 acres, which took in large swathes of permission over the estate boundaries, offers an idea of the task he faced.

Burning benefits

A burning programme to change the nature of the long, rank heather that hadn't been touched since the 1990s also improved prospects. "When the regrowth came through in the second year, that's when our brood numbers really started to increase," Alex explained.

But it didn't only benefit the grouse. Meadow pipit and skylark numbers also went through the roof — RSPB field staff, whom Alex worked with closely on various surveys, have the data in black and white to prove it. Later, in 2017, a pair of curlew became the first in two decades to fledge chicks; a result that has been repeated every year since — which makes them,

by Alex's reckoning, the most successful in the whole of Northern Ireland.

Achieving such results was one part of Alex's role; another was spreading the word to encourage others to do their bit. "We hosted lots of talks for gun clubs that often have the odd grouse in the areas walked-up for woodcock and snipe. It was really a case of discussing what we were doing and how elements of that might be applied to their farm or shoot."

In partnership with BASC and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, the IGCT also put together a part-time gamekeeping course for students aged 16 to 70, providing 12 teaching days a year for 16 to 20 people. According to Alex, it was a great way to engage with others who are passionate about wild game and wildlife. "We passed 50 students in my time, some of whom ended up helping me out on the estate in their spare time. It was a win-win," he said.

Today, after a move closer to family inspired by the birth of his daughter Mabel, Alex is embarking on a new challenge at Ousby Moor, a 4,000-acre grouse moor in Cumbria. It's a different proposition, but I'd wager his outlook and experience gained across the water — something he's clearly and rightly proud of — will stand him in very good stead indeed. 🐦

➡ If you have a gamekeeper you would like to nominate for Keeper of the Month please send details to shootingtimes@futurenet.com

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Davy Thomas is a professional deerstalker and estate manager in the Highlands



Stalking Diary

There are some beasts that you simply cannot walk past and a red-letter day on the hill with a former mentor ends with a perfect stalk

The rut has broken in the glen and it is truly one of the highlights of every hill stalker's year. To take a particular animal, and to be able to stalk past healthier beasts in order to do so, is not something that is learned overnight. Having the right mentor early on in a stalker's career is crucial to learning such skills.

Those of you who know Loch Shiel may have seen a lonely cottage, only accessible by boat, that sits high above the far bank. It is a place that the writer Mike Tomkies christened 'Wilderness' in his book *A Last Wild Place*.

I had been there on an estate for some months as a trainee when an older stalker moved on to the beat. He instantly took me under his wing. One particular day, we had spotted a group of hinds high out, given the time of year, and it was beautifully clear and frosty. The seven beasts we eventually took made us suffer, with the most gruelling of drags in which we had to relay them downhill. It was well after dark by the time we retrieved the final hind.

At one point, as the sun had set behind the ridge, even our drag ropes froze. On the lower slopes we had to navigate clear-felled areas. We eventually reached the bottom of the hill, completely drained. My new mentor looked out across the frozen silence of the loch, drawing on his cigarette, and calmly said: "Yep, that one was about as tough as it gets."

During the year that followed, he conveyed his knowledge with infectious enthusiasm. Our priority was the protection of commercial forestry but, in truth, he was old school — and perhaps he saw the same in me.

Cruel irony

Leaping forward 20 years and, like everybody, most of the last season was wiped out due to COVID-19. Perhaps a cruel irony, then, that it was the best rut in recent years. Nevertheless, it offered the opportunity to repay an old favour that was long overdue — inviting my old mentor to join my own apprentice as we stalked the corries for a switch (a beast whose antlers have no tines).



The switch made an excellent cull beast and he fell to a textbook shot

"It's funny," my mentor confessed, "I have guided guests to numerous switches in the past, but in all these years I have never actually shot one myself."

As we headed out the glen, the occasional stag holding hinds came into view. Somewhere above us, a lone roar

stags beneath. We had to make a long circumnavigation of the corrie, which took considerable time, to get past them.

We did pass a couple of shootable beasts but agreed that this animal was worth trying for — even if it meant coming home with nothing should we fail.

"At one point, as the sun had set behind the ridge, even our drag ropes froze"

sounded and eventually, a dark figure broke the skyline. As we glassed him with the binoculars, we silently made eye contact and reached for our telescopes to get a better look.

Two large knife-like antlers jutted skywards from his brows. My mentor and I were grinning from ear to ear. It was a little difficult, given the wind, so this was going to involve a long day in order to get it right.

By lunchtime we were high out on the ridge. Using our lofty position to our advantage, we took our time to view the

Sometimes, you simply can't walk past a beast like that. Eventually, the three of us got within range of him and the stag turned broadside. My old mentor took the shot with his .25.06, probably by then on its umpteenth barrel. With a confidence only exhibited by those of great experience, he then laid the rifle on its side and picked up his binoculars to watch as the stag expired to a perfect shot. My own young trainee, who was with us, quietly observing the action, learned some remarkable skills that day from his mentor's mentor. 🦌

Unique Alpine Kodiak Scout £1,840

This carbine has all the quality you'd expect from Unique Alpine and, with none of the showy bits, it's perfect for hard work, says Bruce Potts



As well as a super-strong laminate stock, the Scout Kodiak features an almost full-length Picatinny scope mount



OUR VERDICT

I have always been a sucker for a carbine. The short stature and feel of such rifles makes great sense for most of my woodland stalking. A carbine balances reduced weight with enough barrel length to be ballistically efficient, yet doesn't impede you stalking through foliage. That's why when Unique Alpine (UA), a Bavarian company, sent the new Kodiak Scout version of its JPR-1 series rifle, I couldn't wait to take it roe stalking.

UA has served the military and police with sniper rifles for years and has now branched out into more civilian-orientated rifles. They are

designed for stalking and vermin but still utilise UA's reputation for quality and bullet-on-bullet accuracy. This Kodiak Scout model is the archetypal

“It possesses all the features that real hunters want”

practical all-rounder as it possesses all the necessary features real hunters want without the showy bits.

Key features include a controlled round feed bolt and controlled ejection too, both of which are impressively reliable. You also have a three-position safety, which is silent



With very open sights, the Scout on test is fitted with an A-Tec PRS-2 sound moderator/muzzle brake



The nitrided barrel is 16.5in long and threaded $\frac{5}{8}$ in UNEF. It is free floated, bringing great solidity and balance to the Kodiak Scout

The 10-shot AICS-type magazine is standard, though smaller shot sizes are available

Controlled round feeding ensures perfect cartridge feeding and ejection

as well as a detachable 10-shot magazine as standard. The Kodiak Scout, as its name suggests, is designed for professional tough use, wears a super-strong laminated stock and has a near full-length Picatinny rail scope mount.

Add to this the fact that all Unique Alpines shoot below 1in groups at 100 yards with factory loads (less with reloads), and you're left wondering "why buy another rifle?" If you're old enough to remember the infamous Colonel Jeff Cooper's original Scout rifle design, this UA Kodiak is better. 🦅

★★★★★

NEED TO KNOW

- ▶ **Manufacturer** Unique Alpine
- ▶ **Model** Kodiak Scout
- ▶ **Type** Bolt action
- ▶ **Overall length** 36.75in
- ▶ **Barrel length** 16.5in muzzle threaded $\frac{5}{8}$ -24 UNEF
- ▶ **Calibre** .308 Win on test, 6.5mm Creedmoor, .243, 6.5x47L and .308 available
- ▶ **Finish** Action and bolt are DLC coated and barrel is nitrided
- ▶ **Weight** 3.95kg (8.7lb)
- ▶ **Magazine** AICS-type magazine, 10 rounds
- ▶ **Stock** Laminate
- ▶ **Trigger** Two-stage, adjustable
- ▶ **Safety** Three-position wing-type
- ▶ **Sights** Open sights, integral Picatinny rail
- ▶ **Importer** Bench Grade Brands, 01604 686800
- ▶ **Price** £1,840

IN DEPTH

The Kodiak has a three-coloured laminate stock, in brown, burgundy and grey, glued together with a tough epoxy. It handles perfectly and strikes just the right hue for Scottish heather. It is also weatherproof while being practical for the field. There is no chance of warping, which can affect your rifle's zero and accuracy.

The format is a Sporter profile with a long rounded fore-end, cut with large panels of good grippy chequering. The same is true of the pistol grip. There's no cheekpiece, but the high comb is pretty straight for comfortable scope use. The open sights provided quite a short 13.75in length of pull.

The metalwork has a highly practical non-reflective satin DLC (diamond-like carbon) coating to the action and bolt, while the barrel is nitrided, offering scratch resistance and weather protection.

Free floated

This Kodiak Scout handles excellently due to the short 16.5in match-grade barrel, which is perfect with a .308 Win. The 5/8in UNEF thread and heavy hunter profile of 0.8325in muzzle diameter achieves great solidity. It balances perfectly and is free floated, as the extended Picatinny rail has a hanger that attaches through the stock.

I love the open sights with foresight and long ear protectors. A height-adjustable sprung blade and white dot insert align effortlessly with a height and windage adjustable large ghost ring rearsight.

The 8.5in action has a large loading/ejection port that gives usable access and the 60-degree bolt arc achieves a fast, smooth operation and primary

FIELD TEST

I fitted the Kahles compact scope and new short A-Tec PRS-2 moderator, which befits this rifle. Factory ammunition shot exceedingly well in the .308 Win model with the most accurate being the Sako 123-gr Gameheads, which achieved 0.85in three-shot groups at 2,832fps and 2,191ft/lb.

I also had sub-inch groups with the Hornady 150-gr SST load, producing 2,803fps and 2,618ft/lb. Both the lead-free options from Norma and Winchester shot 1.20in groups. The Norma Ecostrike yielded 2,673fps and 2,380ft/lb while the new Winchester lead-free 150-gr shot 2,581fps for 2,219ft/lb.

This Kodiak Scout was very easy to reload and favoured lighter bullets of 150-gr and below.

Barnes TTSX 110-gr lead-free shot 0.5in groups at 3,107fps for 2,358ft/lb with a load of 41.5 grains of Swiss RS36

powder. The best 150-gr load came from the Hornady InterLock with 45.0 grains of RL15 powder, achieving 2,697fps for 2,423ft/lb and 0.75in groups. All excellent results for such a short barrel.

Keen to try some lead-free ammo, I used the reloaded TTSX Barnes and stalked in the early-morning Scottish mist around a lochside, where a young buck had been feeding.

The Kodiak, even with the sound moderator fitted, was lovely and handled superbly across the rough terrain, thick wooded lochside and salty reeds. I positioned myself so I was sitting on a convenient rock and waited until the buck emerged, as I'd expected, across the water and was feeding beneath the heather ridge. The Kodiak's excellent trigger and defined shot sound from the Barnes dropped him instantly at 125 yards.

extraction feature for stubborn cases. The three-locking lugs on the bolt forms the controlled round feed feature, ensuring the cartridge is pushed under the extractor claw during feeding and is held firmly. The result is total reliability.

The two-stage trigger has a crisp and fast locking time, contributing to accuracy, with adjustment from 1.9lb to 5.5lb. The three-point safety is a wing type. With the forward position for fire, midpoint is safe (bolt still operates) and rearward locks both the bolt and safety.

Magazines are AICS compatible, so a variety of magazines fit. I have no hesitation in saying this rifle would outlast me. 🦋



Its carbine stature makes the Kodiak the ideal rifle for stalking through any rough cover

CONCLUSION

There is an undeniable X factor with this rifle. It looks, handles and operates how you want a hunting tool to do so. It's rugged, without being crude, with design features that improve rather than impair. Its accuracy is superb. I bet it will outlast me and the next owner too.

<div>18</div> <div>/20</div> <div>Accuracy</div> <div>Ballistically efficient and accurate</div>	<div>19</div> <div>/20</div> <div>Handling</div> <div>Good heft and superb balance</div>	<div>18</div> <div>/20</div> <div>Trigger</div> <div>Match grade on a hunting arm</div>	<div>18</div> <div>/20</div> <div>Stock</div> <div>Super tough and very comfortable</div>	<div>18</div> <div>/20</div> <div>Value</div> <div>Great carbine rifle for real hunters</div>	<div>91</div> <div>/100</div> <div>Overall score</div> <div>A stalking rifle with the X factor</div>
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The 'grey grouse' is a very fine pretender

Opportunities to take on the king of the gamebirds are few and far between, but the humble pigeon is a worthy stand-in for *Blue Zulu*

As Professor Higgins didn't quite bemoan in *My Fair Lady*, "Why can't a grouse be more like a pigeon?"

The dear old woodpigeon may be accorded by its admirers the status of 'grey grouse', an accolade it surely deserves for its sporting and culinary qualities, but otherwise its lot is pretty lowly compared with the king of the gamebirds.

The pigeon and its mate are under siege throughout the year, from corvids stealing their eggs and chicks, to aerial attack from peregrine and sparrowhawk. If his natural predators don't get him, he has to avoid battalions of pigeon

shooters lurking in hedgerow, spinney and roost wood.

True entrepreneur

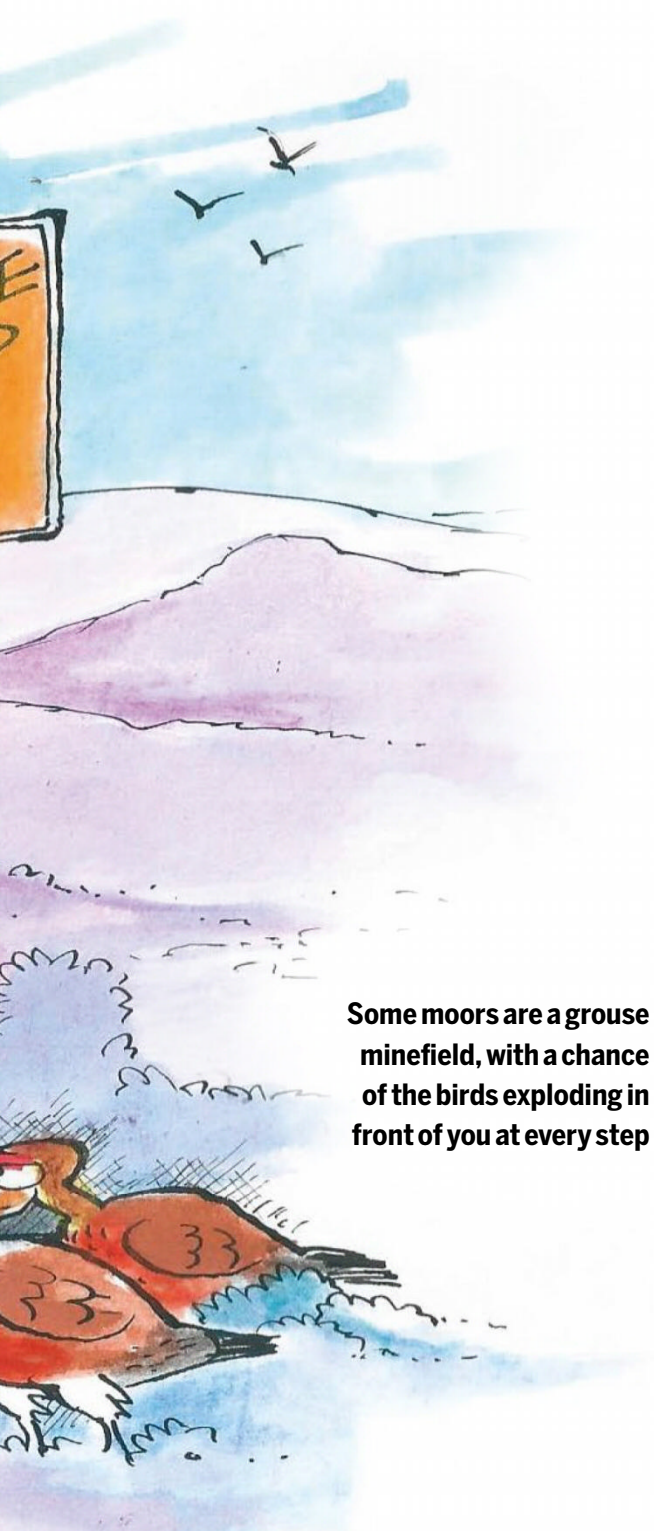
Despite all this, the pigeon thrives. It has adapted to change, a true entrepreneur, able to exploit the man-made landscape of arable crops and suburban garden and adjust to climatic change, whereas the true grouse, the famous grouse, remains dependent upon good heather and favourable weather conditions.

We almost forgot that a while ago. A rediscovered emphasis on the need for tight predator control, a series of kind winters and springs and the invention of medicated grit produced

a string of vintage grouse years when moor records were continually being beaten, topping bags last made in the 1930s. We fooled ourselves into thinking the golden days were back and would last forever.

But no longer. A run of poor-to-moderate seasons has been capped this year by what one seasoned grouse Shot labelled "the worst in his memory" – and he's not young.

Some of the greatest grouse moors have cancelled pretty much every day this year. One might not shoot the following one. The accumulative effect of poor heather last year, due to heather beetle, a freezing spring chilling eggs and chicks, a drought



Some moors are a grouse minefield, with a chance of the birds exploding in front of you at every step

in May and rainstorms in June have done for the poor grouse and those who rely on it.

For grouse shooters, this is lamentable, especially those who belong to syndicates and yet may have no shooting for their investment. But it's far worse for those who need the income that grouse shooting brings – the army of keepers, beaters, loaders and pickers-up; the local hotels; the shooting schools tuning up their clients for their special days.

Like partridges

I was one of many who'd booked a couple of hours at my local ground, a place where the coach is first class and has the willingness – and traps – to ping over true 'grouse' clays at head height rather than those that mostly resemble partridges.

I'd taken a friend who has a grouse syndicate and he'd been emailed that week with notice that pretty much every day on his moor had been cancelled. Nonetheless, we hugely enjoyed our morning, our coach ironing out the usual faults to which we both succumb – starting too far behind the target on crossers and

shooting above the going-away birds. And, as it transpired, the practice paid off for me less than a week later, though not quite as imagined.

In my county, the patchy weather has resulted in farmers harvesting late and whenever possible, resulting in a form of tip-and-run played with combine harvesters rolling out whenever a dry spell allowed.

Gleanings

The spring barley cut blended into the winter wheat then the peas, leaving thousands of acres of grain and legume gleanings from which the pigeon could choose. To our

“I would always make that long journey for the chance at the king of gamebirds”

eyes, each field looks as attractive as the next, but the woodpigeon thinks otherwise. There's a block of two fields four miles away that they love above all others and, when the farmer combined the wheat off them, I asked if I could shoot them. “No problem,” came back the text. “But tomorrow's your last chance, as we don't want the partridges disturbed after then.”

I rolled up that day at 3pm, trying to work out the flightlines. Fairly confident I'd 'fixed' them, I set up my stall the following day at 11am, using a handful of defrosted pigeon for the whirler and bouncers, reinforced by 10 flocked plastic decoys.

This last was a mistake. Though groups of pigeon came over pretty much continually from the start, they were high and kept veering off the flightline. Something was spooking them and, since the hide was sound, it had to be the artificials. I gathered them up quickly and the naturals were enough to pull in some singletons to build a proper pattern.

Even so, the birds remained skittish, with relatively few decoying, so most shots were either high or long. In addition to the very low grouse targets we'd addressed at the shooting school, we'd had half an hour on exactly this type of bird.

By 4pm, it was practically over, with 52 on the ground for a not-outrageous number of cartridges. There'd been action – or the promise of action – for five hours and the 'grey grouse' again proved to be one of most sporting and challenging quarries.

Yet, no matter how wonderful the woodpigeon, the red grouse deserves all its accolades. Ten days after that pigeon session, I made the long pilgrimage up to the moors for a sons-and-fathers-walked-up day. We'd shot with the headkeeper and his team a few times and they represent the best of their profession – intensely knowledgeable, good humoured and determined to do the best for clients.

The moor was still washed with mauve as we formed a line under perfect shooting conditions – dry, solid cloud cover and a good breeze – with that excitement and expectation that only comes from the first day

of the season. My son had christened the place the grouse minefield and I knew exactly what he meant: at every step, there's a fair chance of grouse exploding in front of you.

Rare outing

This rare day was still going ahead as the moor – one of the bigger English ones – has outside bits that are hard to drive and become sanctuaries for old, barren birds that occupy territories that could hold fertile pairs. Such birds are hard to drive over Guns and often lead younger birds away from the butts. But they can be bagged as they peel away from walking Guns, as long as they rise in range.

Often they didn't. An old cock would stick its head around a heather tump atop a rise 100 yards out, study the men trooping towards it, gather its companions and take flight. But they also made mistakes and left it too late and soon the game bags were filled. There were misses – I had a bad one at a sitter that rose behind me due to an atrocious gun mount – but also moments of long rights-and-lefts and singletons tumbled as they rose on the ends of the line and curled back with the wind through the middle.

We don't live near the moors, so real grouse shooting involves a long drive, whereas the 'grey grouse' can be shot 30 yards from my study. Yet I would always make that journey for the chance at the king of gamebirds, while remaining ever grateful to the woodpigeon for its amazing ability to thrive, whatever the weather and we throw at it. 🐦



DR MIKE SWAN
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REGIONAL
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THE GAME
& WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION
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Wild greys need the ‘three-legged stool’

Successful reintroduction of our native partridge is complex and there are several things we can do to give it the best possible chance

Writing in a September heatwave, it is easy to forget that it has been a funny old spring and summer. It started with a frosty April, followed by a cold, wet May. Then things began to look up, with a warm, sunny start to June, only to break down again with some seriously wet weather around peak partridge hatch time at the end of the month.

There is a school of thought that says grey partridges cannot take rain and that the chicks will all expire if they have to face anything much more than a light shower. That clearly isn't true. It's fair to say that, in my part of the world, it has not been a vintage year for the wild greys and, yes, there are some barren pairs and small, late broods. But there are also some very decent coveys – in fact, it looks like a pretty average year to me.

If you think about it, this is hardly surprising. Grey partridges are

native, so they must surely be able to cope with an average British summer, complete with thunderstorms and cold, wet days. Throughout history, the greys have had good and bad years – that is in the nature of the species – but years of no young at all

“Through history, greys have had good and bad years”

simply do not happen. So if you have a hankering for trying to get them back on your shoot, please don't let fears about the weather put you off.

In my early days at the GWCT, I learned a great deal about grey partridges from the late Dr Dick Potts, who was then director of research. It was he who coined the phrase ‘three-legged stool’ to help people understand the fundamentals of what

grey partridges needed to thrive. Dick said that there were three basic requirements – a suitable habitat, food throughout the life cycle and reasonable freedom from predation. As with the three legs of a milking stool, if one of the supports is missing, the whole thing will collapse.

Greys are believed to have evolved in open steppe country and they live on mixed and arable farmland, dune systems, moorland edges and similar open habitats in the UK. They largely avoid woodland and trees, though hedges and small scrubby areas can be very important in providing shelter, especially in winter. Sadly, many shoots that used to have greys will probably never be able to get them back because what was once suitable open country has had too much woodland planted.

Fully grown partridges are largely seed eaters and a diet of corn from feeders, spilled grain and weed seeds,

supplemented with a bit of salad in the form of green shoots and leaves, will do them very well.

However, like many other seed-eating birds, chicks need insects to provide easy digestibility and extra protein for growth. What is less well understood is that these insects need to be the right sorts – soft, squidgy and slow-moving creepy-crawlies that live near the ground, where tiny chicks can reach them. Little caterpillar-like things, such as sawfly and beetle larvae, are ideal.

Foraging habitats

It is also crucial to understand that the parents will lead the chicks into suitable foraging habitats to look for these. To do this, they need freedom of movement between the plants, a reasonably dry floor and some overhead cover. In many ways, the ideal version of this is a conservation headland in the edge of a cereal crop.

This is sown as usual, but has insecticides, most herbicides and fertilisers left off to produce a thin crop with a some broad-leaved weeds that act as host plants for the creepy-crawlies. Carefully chosen wild bird seed mixes, based on cereals, can recreate this habitat well. Rushy pastures offer great brood rearing. They are often the key grey partridge areas on the edges of grouse moors. Intensively managed grass is not, because it tends to be wet and impenetrable.

The other key food needed is seed in winter and spring. Once upon

Controlling predators such as foxes is key to the success of grey partridge broods



a time, there was usually enough 'natural' food by way of spilled grains and weed seeds to keep wild partridges fit and well throughout the year. Today, efficient farming has changed that, with weeds under better control and improved harvest efficiency meaning less spilled grain.

Simple hoppers filled with wheat and kept topped up until late spring are now pretty much essential to hold coveys on your ground. They then feed pairs as they go into the rigours of the breeding season.

Partridges are incredibly productive, laying some of the largest clutches of any bird. As a consequence, they can stand very high levels of predation, but there

is a plethora of predators out there to gobble them up. Making the best possible environment for them is key to minimising this, but so is good predation control. No one can expect a thriving partridge population unless they are serious about controlling predation by crows, magpies, stoats, rats and foxes.

There is no point trying to reintroduce greys unless you have first sorted all of what is said above. In most circumstances, where the basic habitat is OK, there will still be a few birds left in your parish so, given their natural productivity, you should be able to expect them to bounce back when you set their world to rights.

If that does not happen, you should consult the GWCT advisory service for specialist help. Successful reintroduction is a complex business and releasing game-farm greys is likely to do more harm than good.

Biodiversity benefits

Over the past decade or so, there have been quite a few successful partridge restoration projects, proving that it can be done, with the commitment. In all cases, these projects are shining examples of good farmland conservation, with enormous biodiversity benefits alongside, proving that conservation through wise use does work.

There is something of a habit of calling greys 'English partridges', to distinguish them from the French or redleg. I hate this term, not least because it is a snub to Scotland, Ireland and Wales, where the grey is equally native – and, in the case of Scotland at least, still thriving over wide areas.

They are also native across much of Europe and western Asia. Across the pond, where they have been established in the US and Canada, they are usually called Hungarian partridges (or Huns) because that is where they were introduced from. Let us please call them 'greys'.

Monitoring what is happening to partridges is great fun and the results are crucial to the overall picture of grey partridge conservation by shoots. So please enrol in the GWCT partridge count scheme. That way, you will get a detailed guide on how to do it well and feedback on how your results compare. My colleague Neville Kingdon is the person to help. Email nkingdon@gwct.org.uk



The sawfly larva and other soft creepy-crawlies form an essential part of a partridge chick's diet



Teams of Clumber spaniels were a popular choice on shoots in the 19th century

Bring back the pack

David Tomlinson recalls an era when a number of notable English landowners favoured shooting over a team of Clumber spaniels



WE ALL TAKE PACKS of foxhounds for granted, but packs of spaniels are another matter entirely.

Yet the concept of using a pack of spaniels as a beating team is an old one and it was quite widespread, if not common, during the 19th century. Despite delving into my library, I can find little about the Victorian spaniel packs, except the fact that most featured Clumbers, though there were some with Sussex spaniels.

Sussex spaniels were originally bred as beating dogs, though there are few records of estates using teams or packs of these russet-coloured dogs. The birthplace of the breed is considered to be Rosehill Park in the heart of East Sussex, where the owner of the park, a Mr Fuller, used his team of spaniels almost daily during the shooting season.

He was said to have “derived more pleasure from killing a few brace of birds over them than from a much bigger bag obtained by any other means”. When Fuller died, his kennel was dispersed by auction. Today, Rosehill Park is known as Brightling

Park and it does have a pheasant shoot, but not, as far as I am aware, a pack of Sussex spaniels.

There were certainly rather more teams of Clumber spaniels used on shoots in the 19th century. The best known were those kept by the

There are lots of unanswered questions about these beating packs. How many dogs were used at once and did they have more than one handler? Packs of hounds invariably have a huntsman, helped by a whipper-in, so I would expect a

“Each dog was trained individually and not introduced to its team until it was steady”

Duke of Newcastle at Clumber Park, but his near neighbour, the Duke of Portland, kept Clumbers at his seat at Welbeck Abbey, as did Earl Spencer at Althorp Park, Northamptonshire, Earl Manvers at Thoresby Hall, Nottinghamshire, and Lord Middleton at Birdsall House, North Yorkshire. King George V kept a large team at Sandringham.

Keeping order

Controlling a pack of spaniels in a beating line cannot be easy – most of us struggle with one or two, not a dozen or more – but it does seem as if Clumbers were well suited to this form of employment.

spaniel pack would have been worked in a similar way. Was communication by horn, whistle or voice?

The most recent mention of spaniel teams that I have traced is in a book called *Dogs and Guns*, written by R V Garton and published in 1964. Garton was prompted to recruit his own teams of spaniels because, he claimed, it was so difficult in his part of the country to hire beaters “except on Saturdays, which is the day when everyone wants them”.

Having decided to run a team of spaniels, Garton’s first challenge was getting the right sort of dog.

DAVID'S VIEWPOINT

STAND UP FOR SAUSAGE DOGS

Dachshunds and teckels are much-loved sporting breeds

Newspapers like to run so-called news stories about dogs. I read one recently warning would-be owners of dachshunds about the breed's problems because their legs are too short and their bodies too long. When I was a child, we always called them sausage dogs, for good reason, but it seems that in recent years the legs have got shorter, the bodies longer. However, it's long been known that dachshunds are particularly vulnerable to intervertebral disc disease, or IVDD, and that many end up paralysed, so it was hardly news.

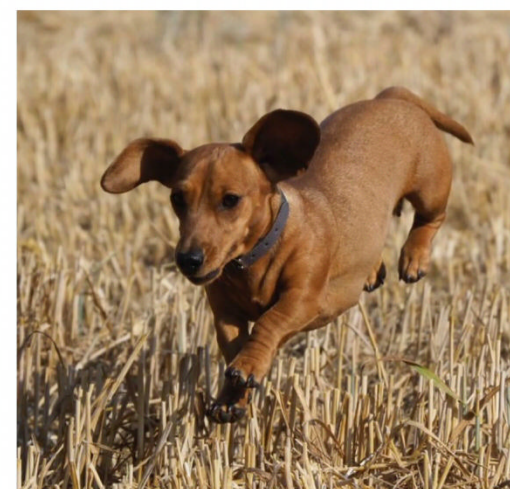
Dachshunds originated in Germany, hence the name 'dachs (badger) hound', a reminder that they were proper sporting dogs, used for going to ground with badgers. One history of the breed I

read stated that they were once popular with the royal family, who used them for flushing pheasants. Today, there are still proper sporting dachshunds, generally known as teckels, and they have long been popular with stalkers for tracking wounded deer. A typical teckel is really nothing more than a wirehaired, full-size dachshund.

Many years ago, I wrote an article about teckels that prompted a reply from a former teckel owner. He wrote to say that, in a long life in which he had owned a variety of sporting dogs of different breeds, he had never had one that was as difficult and obstinate as his teckel.

He may have been unlucky, as you can hardly damn an entire breed on the basis of one bad individual, but his dog was clearly not a success. I haven't had much to do with teckels, but I once met one belonging to a professional stalker. This particular dog didn't prove to be particularly talented as a deer tracker, so simply became a much-loved family pet.

The teckels I have encountered have generally been more sensible dogs than the show-bred, long-backed, short-legged



Sausage dogs: bodies too long, legs too short

dachshunds. Most working teckels are closer-coupled and longer-legged, physical features that make them less vulnerable to IVDD. I have been assured by owners that few dogs have as strong a prey drive as a teckel and that they do make great all-round sporting companions, something I'm quite prepared to believe.

If you have had experience of these dogs, I'd be delighted to hear your views.

Email: dhtomlinson@btinternet.com

He was fortunate to hit on a suitable breed straight away. He had always been fond of Clumbers, attracted by their plodding pace, but he regarded them as rather too heavy to stand up to a full day's beating. He thought English springers were good workers, but too fast and too thin of coat. However, the combination of the two breeds produced exactly the sort of dog he was looking for.



He admired the scenting powers of the springer, but had never come across a Clumber that "hadn't got the nose of a bloodhound and an extremely dense coat", while another bonus was that the Clumber "hunts mute, so even if he is rioting, which he seldom does, the Guns do not hear what is happening".

When it came to selecting the foundation stock for his teams, Garton was careful to choose dogs he had seen in the shooting field and which had good working pedigrees.

Interbreed

As he wanted beating dogs, he disregarded their retrieving abilities, and his spaniels were discouraged from picking-up birds. Garton disliked any suggestion that his Clumber-English springer crosses were mongrels, pointing out that they were what he called interbred and every one of his dogs had a pedigree.

For many years, his beating team consisted of two teams of about five dogs each, handled by two or three

Crossing Clumbers and English springer spaniels produced the perfect dog for beating, according to author R V Garton

of his employees. It was, apparently, a very successful arrangement. He thought that, even when a full team of beaters was employed, a good keeper could make excellent use of a couple of teams of spaniels by using them for driving in outlying fields, spinneys and hedgerows.

Safety first

Though Garton was involved in training his dogs, he had a chief handler, RJ Dennis, who I suspect did much of the work.

Each dog was trained individually and not introduced to its team until it was completely steady. On shooting days, his teams were never asked to beat a covert adjoining a road to avoid any risk of accidents. "It takes months to train a dog up to the standard required, but through stupidity or lack of concentration you can lose it in one second," he said.

Garton reckoned his spaniel teams paid for themselves. He was writing at a time when a team of 20 beaters and a couple of pickers-up cost £35. Today, a similar number of beaters and pickers-up would cost around £700. Perhaps there's a case to bring back the spaniel teams? 🐾

Getting Guns in prime position

Liam Bell offers some guidance on how to make sure the gunline is in the right place

When I am on a driven day, I sometimes wonder why drives are driven in a particular way, or why the Guns are in a particular place when, to my eyes, they would be far better somewhere else, or the birds driven slightly differently.

There are so many things to consider when you are putting the pegs out, not least the expected flight path of the birds. I quantify this by saying expected flight path, because when you are pegging out a new drive, or if you have recently taken on a new shoot and don't quite know where the Guns have stood previously, a lot of it will be guesswork.

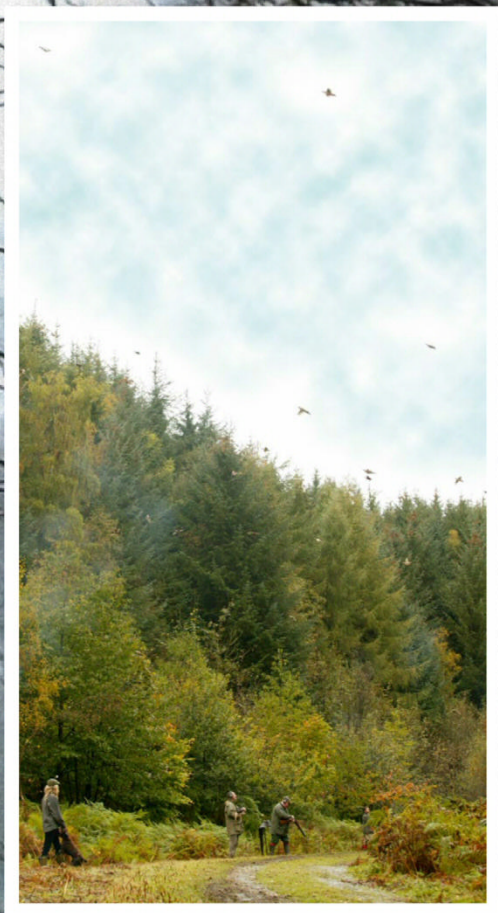
They might be educated guesses, but until a drive has been driven a few times – under varying conditions and

at different times of year – it is very much a case of going with your gut instinct and hoping you get it right. If a drive doesn't go to plan the first time, it doesn't mean it won't the second or even the third. It is usually worth giving it two or three good goes before you give it up as a bad job and move the Guns or take it in a different direction.

Careful planning

In an ideal world, birds would be drawn from a release wood into a cover crop or wood on a bank, the Guns would be put in the middle of the field between the two pieces of cover and the birds driven back home over their heads. In reality, it is rarely this simple.

Valleys are great for standing Guns in, but if they are too wide, early-



Birds need to be able to see the Guns to be at their best flying over a valley



Earlier in the season, it might make sense to place Guns a bit differently

season birds might not want to take them on and may instead break back down the wood or fly back over the beaters' heads. If a valley is relatively narrow, the birds are usually quite happy to fly across it, but they need to be able to see the Guns to be at their best. Counter-intuitively, this can sometimes mean placing the Guns part way up the bank where the birds can see them, as opposed to putting them at the deepest point of the valley bottom.

If the birds can see the Guns, they will climb and curl. If the Guns are hidden from view, a lot of them will simply set their wings and glide home. They will spot the Guns when they are already losing height and it is too late to put on the afterburners to increase their speed or climb and curl away.

On flatter ground, you can have the same sort of problems. If the Guns are too close to the wood that is being driven, the birds won't have time to see the Guns and react before they are past and gone. If the Guns are too far away, the birds will have climbed, peaked and probably be on their way down when they cross the line.

If the Guns are effectively camouflaged by having their backs against a wood, or they are hidden among scrub and trees that aren't high enough or thick enough to keep the birds up, the birds will have no reason to climb, turn on the speed or curl, because they won't be able to see them.

Judgement call

Correctly judging where to put the gunline comes with experience, as each drive is different. As a rule of thumb, the Guns should be visible and somewhere between where the birds peak after they have climbed and cleared the trees they are being flushed from, and where they start to glide down.

Ride shooting is different and, to a degree, far easier to peg out, as it is simply a case of positioning the Guns



If birds are unable to see Guns camouflaged by trees, they may not turn on the speed and curl

evenly along the predicted flightline. How far apart you put the pegs in a valley or on an open field again depends on a number of things. It used to be standard practice to put them 50 yards apart, but it only really works if the birds are going to fly over the whole of the line. No one wants to be a spectator, even if they

only letting the person behind you have a go at the ones you miss. That's not to say I haven't done it when the person behind me was a friend and we were having the craic, but if the person behind you is simply another Gun or maybe even someone who is new to shooting, it is the last thing we should do. There is nothing more

“There are so many things to consider when you are putting the pegs out”

are on the end pegs and expecting things to be a little quieter.

You can comfortably get it down to 35 to 40 yards if there is plenty to shoot at, or if the birds come over in flushes. What you don't want to do is put them so close together that very little gets through and you end up over-shooting early season and have nothing to go at in January when the birds are at their best.

Having back-guns is another option if things are a bit tight, but again you will have to be careful not to over-shoot the drive early in the season. If you are in the gunline and have a back-gun standing directly behind you, it is polite to shoot a bird then let the next one through, rather than shooting at everything and

off-putting or demoralising than having someone standing in front of you mowing everything down as you start to put your gun up.

Trading places

Walking Guns are a way of extending the gunline. They can over-shoot a drive early season, so need a briefing as to what and where to shoot. The role shouldn't be entrusted to the less experienced or the infirm, who may struggle with the walking.

Unsurprisingly, I have never shot anywhere where there has been a shortage of volunteers willing to swap their peg with the walking Gun. That says a lot about the shooting community and the camaraderie of shoot days. 🐦

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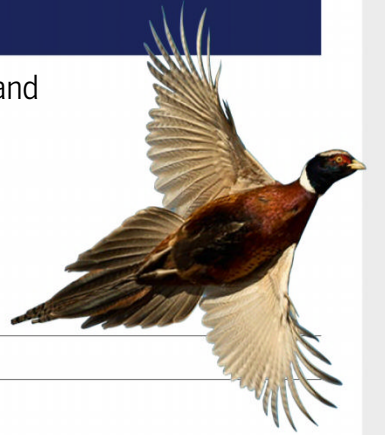
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Alan Edwards is conservation manager at Bywell, a Purdey gold award estate in Northumberland

Gamekeeper



The return of shooting after lockdown has been rather patchy, but it will be a boost for thousands of keepers, beaters and shoot helpers



The resumption of shooting after the break due to lockdown is a chance to catch up with friends

I can't remember a 12 August, at any time in my career, that did not see me out somewhere on the moors. But, this year, my first outing was early September at the Trough of Bowland in Lancashire. My last visit to this particular moor was many years ago and the friendships struck up then have lasted 30-plus years. When I arrived at the shoot meeting point, the warm and sincere greetings made me feel at home.

You can't put a measure on the positive impact the shooting season brings to the well-being of the thousands of keepers, beaters and shoot helpers. You only realise the impact when, as this year has shown, a sporadic and faltered start to the shooting calendar robs many of the opportunity to socialise with those we all have so much in common with.

Perhaps more than ever, the emphasis of beginnings is profoundly apparent as the combines roll on the lowlands. I have begun to consider the start of the grouse shooting season as a watershed moment on the wild bird shoot at Bywell.

The crops are steadily cleared and the opportunity to witness the rewards of a season's work begins to unfold. However, in the couple of months it takes to harvest this year's crop and establish next year's, much vital work needs to be completed to ensure continuation and improvement to any wild bird shoot.

As the combines move through the crops, the chance to catch up with foxes that only then become visible is one not to be missed. It takes skill and fieldcraft to put yourself, or your helpers, in the right spot to intercept a bolting fox. You can be sure that, despite the perceived mayhem of noise and dust that the harvesting process creates, the fox that remains concealed in the standing crop will be more than aware of the presence of everyone and everything.

You need to move into position with care and stealth, taking into account wind direction and possible escape routes the fox may use if you are to be successful.

Harvest signals the end of the agricultural cycle and marks the beginning of next

year and now, nine years later, they are extensive. I have never had a stubble field that could be taken into spring cropping. This year will be a first.

The greatest change will be made this year with the change of our agricultural contractor, with the incoming company much more ecologically aware. They will bring a refreshed and forward-thinking attitude to controversial elements, such as the use of agricultural pesticides, and a greater flexibility, incorporating a more diverse crop dispersion and a move away from modern block-cropping attitudes.

The ability to work with the farm on a number of issues will be a welcome opportunity to develop not only a profitable farming operation, but hopefully a more diverse and wildlife-friendly habitat.

Sinister element

As the crops vanish, a more sinister and unpleasant element becomes more apparent. The individuals who are intent on destruction of our valuable wildlife, who believe themselves outside the law, unaccountable to anyone or anything, destroy ground game without any apparent care or consideration. This cult spreads its tendrils throughout the countryside, leaving a trail of damage and destruction.

Recent developments initiated by Northumbria Police, and supported by a growing band of volunteers, are beginning to make these unpleasant characters think twice about entering the land to

"You can't measure the positive impact the shooting season brings to well-being"

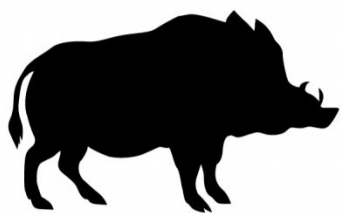
year's process. If changes are to be made to the farming system, now is the time for them to be implemented. If a wild bird shoot is to be successful and indeed exist at all in the modern intensive, agriculturally economic environment, changes need to be designed to ensure success. That's easier said than done, I hear you say.

Change is gradual and slow at times. I have tried to take small steps. The first conservation margins were only developed on one field on the estate in the first

enjoy their illegal sports. A rural crime unit within the police force is forging relationships with keen and dedicated volunteers, who spend enormous amounts of time in the field on their patch watching for and gathering information that helps police to target hotspots.

I certainly believe that this — and future initiatives working in tandem with the rural communities — is the way forward when trying to find the individuals concerned and bring them to account for their actions. 🐦





Wild boar

Game Cookery

Wild boar is superbly rich, versatile meat and Cai ap Bryn can't resist giving some delicious, tender chops the deep-fried Texas treatment

I have done a fair few wild boar recipes. Without repeating myself too much, it's a meat that I absolutely love cooking with. It's versatile, rich and incredibly delicious. Some of the best methods are, of course, to make good burgers and sausages, but you can do so much more.

This recipe, for my country-fried wild boar chops, includes a nicely seasoned herby crust that really lifts the flavour. It's great with potatoes and apple sauce — proper comfort food.

When picking the chops, I would advise getting them from a younger boar. The older the animal, the tougher they can be. The meat from a young boar can be extremely tasty and tender, especially when cooked using the method below.

Wild boar populations are cropping up in small areas all over the UK, with the largest being in the Forest of Dean. Where

we live in East Sussex, there have been wild boar since the 1980s. Some 15 to 20 years ago, we had very good numbers, but overshooting, hunting pressure and night vision mean that the numbers have dwindled and the boar have spread thinly and further afield throughout Kent and

chicken fat with a seasoned-flour crust. It is typically served with mashed potatoes and gravy. I first tried it out using pork chops and it came out very well indeed.

One thing to bear in mind, especially when you cook wild boar, is to make sure the meat that is bought, or shot, is tested

“Meat from a young boar can be extremely tasty and tender, especially cooked like this”

Sussex. Nowadays, many who shoot in this area try to give them a rest. In fact, it has been a few years since I shot my last boar in these parts.

I took inspiration for this recipe from a trip to San Antonio in Texas. I got to try some fantastically unhealthy foods while there, including a chicken-fried steak. Though it sounds confusing, it was utterly delicious. The steak was cooked in

for trichinella. Trichinosis is a food-borne disease caused by consuming raw or uncooked meat containing these parasitic worms and it can make you seriously ill.

These days, our pork products are fully tested and have no risk, meaning most of our pork can be eaten medium-rare. Though it is uncommon, wild boar are still able to carry this disease and will certainly need to be tested. 🐷

Ingredients

- 2 WILD BOAR CHOPS
- ½ TSP SALT
- ½ TSP PAPRIKA
- ½ TSP ENGLISH MUSTARD POWDER
- ½ TSP GARLIC GRANULES
- ¼ TSP SAGE
- ½ TSP GROUND WHITE PEPPER
- ¼ TSP NUTMEG
- PINCH OF CAYENNE PEPPER
- 4 TBSP FLOUR
- 150ML VEGETABLE OIL

FOR THE SAUCE

- 1 APPLE
- 1 TBSP BUTTER
- 1 TBSP WATER
- 1 TSP MAPLE SYRUP

FRIED WILD BOAR WITH APPLE BUTTER

THE METHOD

Serves 2

Prep time 25 mins • Cook time 10 mins

For the sauce

1 Peel and dice the apple. Place the butter in a pan on a medium heat, add the diced apple, water and syrup with a pinch of salt.

2 Cook down for around 25 minutes, until soft and a caramel colour. Then use a hand blender to puree into apple butter. Keep to one side.

For the chops

1 Make sure you take the chops out of the fridge up to an hour before cooking. The recipe works best if they are at room temperature.

2 Mix all of the spices and flour together. Add the chops to the mix of dry ingredients and coat well.

3 Add the oil to a deep-sided frying pan and heat to about 180°C.

4 Cook the meat and brown it all over until it reaches about 60°C. This will be slightly pink and should take about four minutes a side. I do advise using a temperature probe to avoid overcooking it.





Terrierists at large

It would be almost unthinkable to go anywhere without the dogs but travelling with them is often a bit of a nightmare, says *Petrel*



"On the return trip west, the labrador and the senior terrier rode first-class in the car with us"

The back of the truck opened and shut on the roller-blind principle, secured by a specially designed safety spring clip that passed through a fitting like the hasp of a padlock. Motoring up country to collect a load of chattels, it seemed sensible to travel with Boss and Chuckle in the back of the empty lorry, where they could stretch their legs or settle on the beanbag so kindly made for their comfort as a parting gift by the wife of one of my shooting partners.

The trip was made at the height of the petrol shortage and, as the

hired wagon had a thirst like a rugby team after a game, it was necessary to stop at every other motorway service station to top up the tank as a guarantee of further progress.

This provided a good opportunity to check the welfare of the canine passengers and all seemed to be going well until we reached Taunton Deane. There, half-crouched beneath the chassis, I was doing my best to cope with the inadequacy of the fuel tank design, with one eye on the dial, when an anxious cry of "What's that black dog?" alerted me to a labrador, wandering among the pumps.

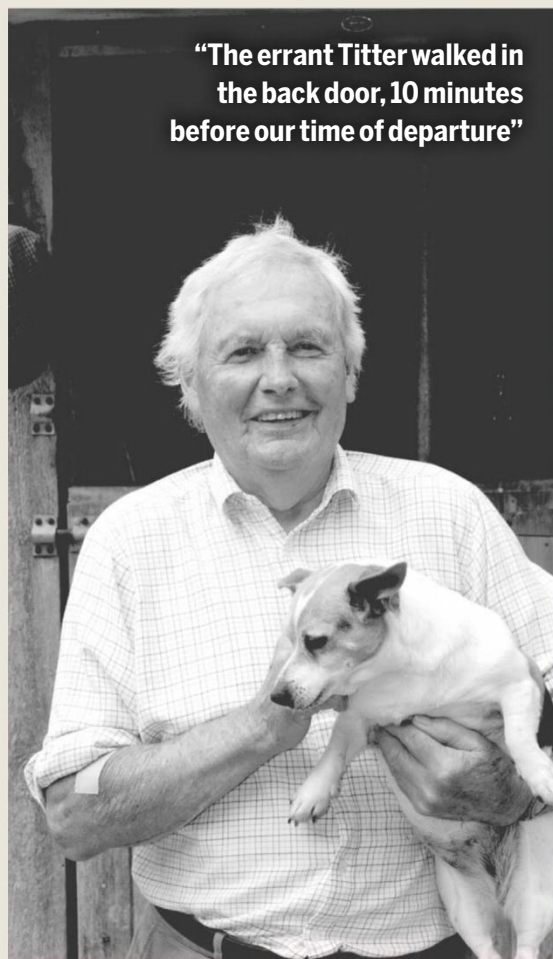
Instinctively I called "Boss!" and the now-familiar animal heeded my bidding. Taking her around to the back of the van, I was horrified to discover that the spring clip had sprung, the hasp was free and the roller-blind back of the vehicle had opened up to a height of some 2½ft. On the brink, so to speak, stood the veteran terrier, fortunately unwilling to attempt the groundward jump. I wondered with a shudder how far we had travelled up the motorway with the door in this precarious position.

A helpful cashier at the station dug out a length of wire with which I reinforced the fastening, but for the rest of the journey the dogs shared the car with us.

On the return trip westwards, the labrador and senior terrier rode first-class in the back of the car. It was the turn of the other four terriers, and the ferrets, to travel steerage. Last to be loaded were the two hutches containing eight ferrets, in the proportion of four jills and four hobs.

Circulation

Care had to be taken to allow free circulation of air all round the hutches, to avoid distressing overheating, and the space below them between the hutches' 3ft legs afforded spacious enough accommodation for the little earth dogs. Well walked before take-off, they would – it was hoped – settle



“The errant Titter walked in the back door, 10 minutes before our time of departure”

down on the clean dry sacks provided and sleep their way west.

This time the rear door was firmly secured with a snap hook of the sort found at the end of equine lead-reins, which seemed to nullify any fears of accidental opening.

At the first stop, however, I had my doubts. On opening for checking and relief, there was no sign of a single terrier. Panic gave way to admiration for the resourcefulness of the breed when the quartet was discovered fast asleep, and with no wish to debus, on the mattress atop the load. They had



“The woman who found her had no intention of handing in such an affectionate little dog”

wormed their way aloft by insinuating themselves stoat-like among the furniture and climbing to the highest spot of comfort.

In light of the previous scare we had arranged that the order of march should be the dogs in the van with the car bringing up the rear. Any untoward incident affecting the main load would be relayed to its driver by the pilot of the car signalling with horn and lights, and overtaking in a hurry. We had reckoned, however, without the noise of the engine or the width of the lead truck.

Oblivious to the hooting and flashings behind, I had to be arrested five miles west of Helston by a passing spouse, who explained that since leaving the town, sounds ahead had indicated a difference of opinion among the terriers. But with only five more miles to go, I was not prepared to dally further.

We hove to at last, pushed up the back, and three terriers almost fell

“We assembled ferrets, bleepers, spades and charts of the farm drainage system”

out, quite bloody but completely unbowed. The fourth is windy and took no part in the skirmish. At least it cut down the exercise time required on the final night of our arrival.

Recovery calls

Looking back on the move, I’m still as surprised as I am relieved that we got the dogs here without loss. This applies especially to Titter, the small-breed bitch, whose career, come to think of it, has encompassed one or two close recovery calls.

On the morning of the Glanusk Game Fair, for instance, I had arranged to leave all the dogs with a keeper friend for the duration. To start on the right foot I had taken them for a long and early-morning exercise.

In the course of it, Titter took a line, probably a fox cub disturbed by the previous day’s combining, and disappeared up a 9in field drain, marking while she went further and further within. As her message became fainter, so did my confidence and I realised it was time to muster every aid.

We assembled them. Ferrets fitted with bleepers, drain rods similarly equipped, plugs, spades, whistles

and finally charts of the farm drainage system, the implications of which did nothing to console us.

The drain of disappearance ran across three fields for the better part of three-quarters of a mile before debouching into a ditch at the end of our lane. Transversely smaller pipes occurred at intervals, and who knew the extent to which this snaky little bitch could insinuate herself.

Innocence

Time ran out. I gave up, took the rest of the kennel to their boarding quarters, started to phone the local police and neighbours, and the errant Titter walked in the back door, 10 minutes before our time of departure for the fair. Hastily, I found a friend, father of the beanbag as it were, and asked for help. In kind innocence he offered lodgings for the problem and came to fetch her.

Put to share an open-top run with his spaniel, in simian style she

climbed out and vanished. On return from work, distraught, he sent his wife searching on her bicycle, while he drove around on what seemed a hopeless quest.

A chance enquiry of a local resident about to leave for Manchester fortuitously disclosed the fact that this traveller had found a stray asleep on his car seat. Entry had been gained through a window only three-quarters open. In a hurry, he had handed the bitch to a neighbour who promised to take her to the police.

My friend sped round to see this woman and found her about to take it off for a walk on a lead. She had no intention of handing in such an affectionate little dog, and planned to keep her.

My friend explained, reclaimed and drove Titter to join her mates in the safe custody of the keeper. Fortunately, I remained in blissful ignorance of the little terror’s latest escapade until he told me when we met up at the game fair the following Saturday. 🐾

➤ *This article was first published in the 27 September 1979 issue of Shooting Times.*

The experts

THE ULTIMATE SHOOTING QUIZ TEAM



◆ BILL HARRIMAN

BASC's head of firearms and global authority on guns



◆ MAT MANNING

Airgunner and journalist from the West Country



◆ DIGGORY HADOKE

Vintage gun expert, firearms dealer, author and journalist



◆ BRUCE POTTS

Shooting Times rifle reviewer and stalker



◆ MIKE SWAN

Conservation expert and head of education for the GWCT



◆ DAVID TOMLINSON

Highly regarded writer and ornithologist



◆ LIAM BELL

NGO chairman, Shropshire gamekeeper and keen wildfowler



◆ GRAHAM DOWNING

Shooting consultant and sporting author



◆ TONY BUCKWELL

Veterinary surgeon with a special interest in gundogs



◆ TOM PAYNE

Professional shooting instructor and avid pigeon shooter



◆ ELLENA SWIFT

Award-winning gundog trainer and canine behaviour specialist



◆ TIM MADDAMS

Former head chef at River Cottage and runs a shoot in Devon



◆ SIMON WHITEHEAD

Author, professional ferreter and rabbit controller



◆ IAIN WATSON

Keen stalker and senior CIC international trophy judge



◆ CHRIS DALTON

Professional stalker and regular presenter on *The Shooting Show*



◆ MARK RIPLEY

Well-known fox controller and long-range shooting expert

Contact the team

Email: stanswers@futurenet.com

By post: Shooting Times, Future, 161 Marsh Wall, London E14 9AP



Bleeding a deer carcass helps to ensure the meat will keep well and be good quality

How important is bleeding?

◆ STALKING

Q Is it essential to bleed a deer carcass after the animal has been shot?

A Blood should be removed from the organs, arteries and veins of an animal after it is killed in order to ensure that the meat will keep well and that it remains of good quality for human consumption. If a deer is chest-shot, the organs will bleed out

naturally and the blood will collect in the chest cavity.

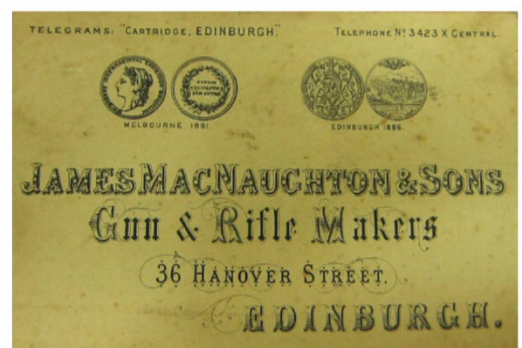
Provided that the chest is opened relatively soon after shooting and the blood allowed to drain out, there is no need to bleed the carcass.

If an animal is head or neck shot, however, natural bleeding out will not occur quickly and you should 'stick' the carcass by inserting a knife point at the base of the neck through the jugular vein and carotid artery. This will allow the blood to escape. **GD**

GUN CASE LABEL OF THE WEEK

JAMES MACNAUGHTON

James MacNaughton was the first Edinburgh gunmaker to patent a trigger-plate action gun, in 1879. His business was taken over by John Dickson in 1947, but this label precedes this date. It attests to medals at exhibitions in Melbourne in 1881 and Edinburgh in 1886. He moved several times and the label address of 36 Hanover Street places it after 1905. The label is ink printed on paper and shows the telephone



number. In the early 20th century, numbers became a standard addition to labels. This label would suit a MacNaughton trigger-plate gun from the late 1800s to around 1920. **DH**

Dummy and Crocs issue

GUNDOGS

Q I have a really lovely 13-month-old cocker spaniel. He is pretty obedient with heel and recall, and loves hunting for treats. However, I cannot get him to retrieve dummies. He is obsessed with my Crocs. If I throw one of those, he will retrieve it all day long. I didn't worry about it to begin with, but now I am getting concerned. I intend to beat with him primarily, but sometimes the beaters are allowed to pick dead game at the end of the drive and I would love it if he would pick a bird and know what to do. Is he a lost cause?

A I would not be too concerned right now. Though frustrating for you, if he is not going to be a picking-up dog, he sounds perfect for the job you want him for.

If you really want to go down the route of training him to pick-up, maybe look into something like a rabbit-skin



Training dummies will often hold more interest for dogs if they are covered with some rabbit fur

dummy or rabbit-skin ball. Some dogs simply do not like canvas. If he really does only enjoy picking your Crocs then, for now, you can teach him the basics using those.

All he needs to begin with is a desire to carry something. Very few turn their noses up at the real thing, so when he gets on to game, I am sure you won't have an issue. During September, try to get hold of some partridge wings to put on to a dummy. This can help his game introduction but also encourage him on canvas. **ES**

Where are the berries?

HEDGES

Q We have miles of neatly trimmed hawthorn hedges on the shoot, but we never seem to see much fruit. Are there different species of hawthorn that fruit more freely?

A I suspect that the answer lies in the words 'neatly trimmed'. In common with most fruiting shrubs and trees, hawthorn produces most of its fruit on second-year wood. This

means that a new branch from this summer's growth will normally flower and set fruit next year.

If you give hedges an annual trim, you lop off most of the young branches with flower buds and prevent fruiting. On the other hand, not trimming a hedge allows it to get out of hand and it is likely to be unpopular with the farm manager for taking up too much space.

Trim hedges every two years, doing half each winter, after fruit has dropped or been stripped. Try to spread cutting across the shoot. **MS**

Hedges are best trimmed in rotation to ensure that some are in fruit each year



Native Britain

Plants, flowers and fungi of Great Britain at a glance

Latin name: *Calamintha nepeta*
Common name: Lesser calamint
Other names: Thymus minor, thymus minus, clinopodium nepeta, clinopodium calamintha



How to spot it and where to find it: A compact perennial, lesser calamint forms tidy bushes of about 60cm high. Its oval, grey-green leaves are fragrant and it produces loose clusters of tiny, tubular white or pale lilac flowers from July to early autumn. Seeds generally appear after the first frosts. Lesser calamint can't grow in shade, it needs sun and dry or well-drained soil.

Interesting facts: As its name suggests, lesser calamint smells like mint and its leaves can be made into a sweet and aromatic tea. The leaves are best harvested in the summer and dried for later use. An infusion can help with wind, colic and other stomach ailments. Widely used as a medicinal herb in medieval times, the whole plant is useful for all kinds of complaints. It has been used to reduce temperature and as an expectorant, as well as treating insomnia and depression. It should never be used for pregnant women, however, as it can cause miscarriage. Lesser calamint has been named as the US Perennial Plant Association's perennial plant of the year 2021. It's extremely attractive to bees and other pollinators. The genus name comes from the Greek *kalos*, meaning beautiful, and *minthe*, meaning mint. **NJS**

The fibres from the tails of grey squirrels are widely used in trout-fishing flies



Grey squirrel tails make great fishing flies

➤ AIRGUNNING

Q I shoot a lot of grey squirrels with my air rifle and enjoy eating them. I think the meat is better than rabbit. I would also like to make use of their tails. Is there anything I can do with them?

A The fibres from grey squirrels' tails are a popular material in the tying of imitation flies for trout fishing.

If you don't fancy taking the time to tie your own, there are plenty of anglers who will happily take squirrel tails from you to use in their own creations. If you don't have any fly-fishing friends who

tie their own flies, try getting in touch with local angling clubs and fisheries.

It shouldn't take long to find someone who will be very grateful to take your squirrel tails and they may even be willing to make a modest contribution towards your ammunition in exchange. **MM**

How long can meat be kept in freezer?

➤ COOKERY

Q Once frozen, how long can I keep pheasant breasts in the freezer and how is it best to defrost them?

A Even in a proper deep freeze (-18°C and below) things can still deteriorate. Remember that when you freeze meat, you expand the water molecules within its cellular structure and these will leach out on defrosting.

That will not really affect the length of time you can store something in the freezer. There isn't a hard and fast limit to how long meat can be frozen if it is well packaged to exclude the air and protect the meat.

However, there are some guidelines I would stick to. Aim to never have anything frozen for more than six months, and ideally three months,

as after this period of time, things can have deteriorated a surprising amount.

I manage this situation by using two freezers, a chest-type in the shed for long-term storage and another one in the kitchen with drawers in it. I move things from the shed to the kitchen to make sure I use up all the oldest frozen stuff first and don't simply end up eating the most recently frozen food from the top all the time.

This approach will also work fine on a much smaller scale by simply designating a shelf for each within your freezer at home.

There are some interesting examples of the Inuit people freezing seal meat in the permafrost for a very long time indeed and the meat still being edible and safe. However, I'd advise strongly against attempting to store anything for more than a year. The golden rule is that when you defrost it, use your nose and

your eyes to make sure it is still fresh. If it smells a bit iffy or looks knackered, burned, bruised or dried out, it is probably destined for the food bin.

That would be a terrible waste, so crack on and get it all used up as soon as you can. There are plenty of great recipes in *Shooting Times* to help you out in that respect. **TM**



Pheasant breasts and other game meat can be safely stored in a freezer for around six months

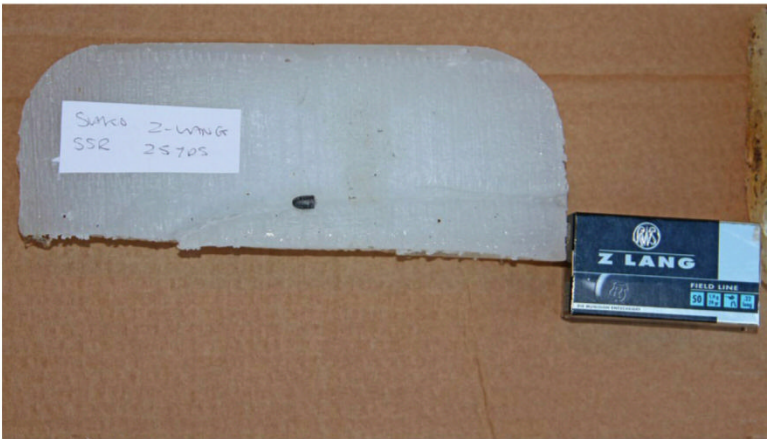
Rimfire ratting

RIFLES

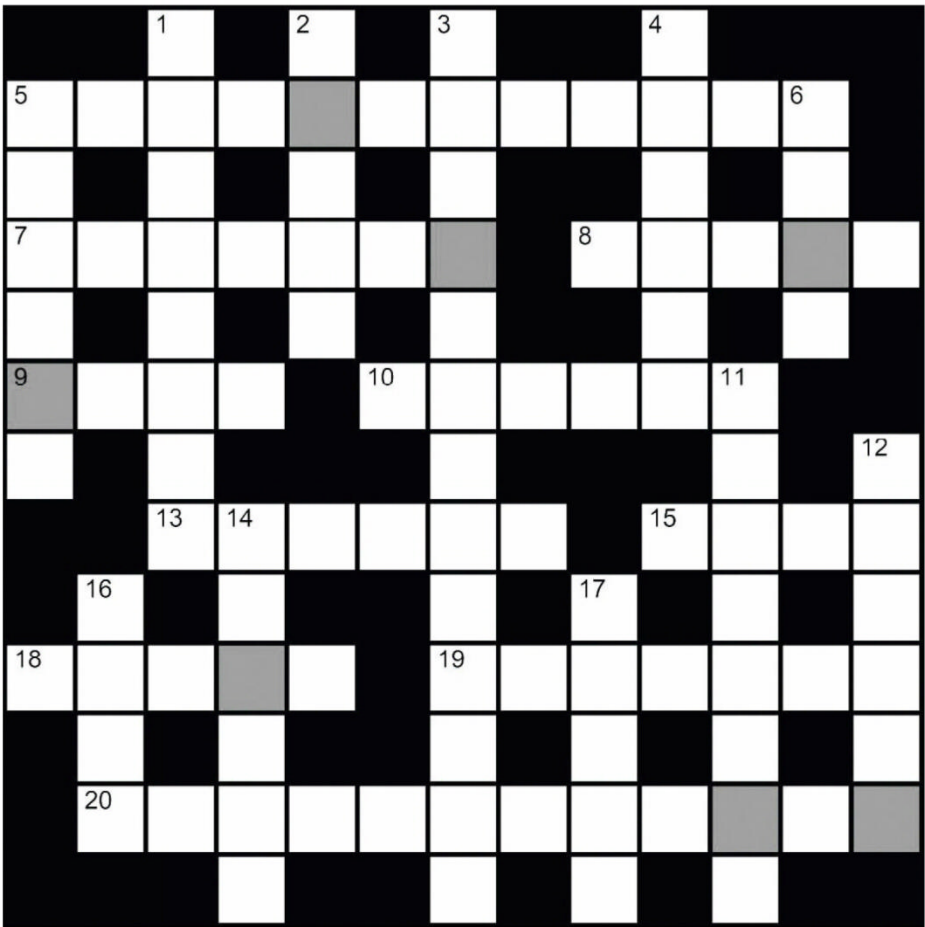
Q Would you recommend using the RWS Z Lang .22 rimfire ammunition when going close-range rat shooting?

A Z Lang ammunition is available from RUAG Ltd and it is a very consistent performer. It's part of RWS's Field Line range and, with it being made by RWS, you know it will be very well quality controlled for dependable accuracy. The Z Lang means Zimmer or Room Round. Intended for indoor use on short indoor ranges, they may be good at double-duty vermin

control. They use a round-nose solid lead bullet, so you still have to be very careful with your shot, especially with non-expanding bullets like these. They look very similar to the CCI CB long rounds and, as such, feed much better from a magazine. The bullet weight is 28.8-gr and is a conventional round-nose lead projectile. I had a very consistent 851fps velocity for 46.7ft/lb energy. Accuracy, too, is good. At 10 yards, there was one big hole with my Sako .22 LR. At double that range, the groups were still small at 0.45in. It's a great little round and quiet, too. **BP**



The RWS Z Lang .22 rimfire round is designed for indoor range use



Crossword / Compiled by Eric Linden / 1528

Across

- 5** The removal of wine from an outlet for spent cases (8,4)
- 7** A choice era for feathers (7)
- 8** A spicy game recipe reminds us to groom the horse (5)
- 9** A transport network designed for scope mounting? (4)
- 10** Learnt to adapt to stag growth (6)
- 13** Lads in a muddle on Lindisfarne (6)
- 15** The movement of rotary decoys is revolutionary! (4)
- 18** Is the stag one from the Windsor family? (5)
- 19** The top brass may talk aimlessly about a prickly bush (7)

- 20** An example of gun revival is all about good breeding (12)

Down

- 1** Pure gin I mix for Visini's gun partner (8)
- 2** Prepare to toast the rabbit hunter (5)
- 3** A regulatory group like the CPSA with presumably GB origins (9,4)
- 4** A measure of deer trophies that's by the book (6)
- 5** A do-or-die date for shotgun certificate renewals? (6)
- 6** Grassy gangland? (4)
- 11** Religious education for the people brings us to Ireland (8)
- 12** A retrieve never before witnessed? (6)

- 14** Proof marks are provided, postage paid (6)
- 16** The moderator loses heart on grouse land (4)
- 17** There's a hidden complication as traps do their job (5)

Solution 1526

(Issue 15 September 2021):

- Across:** 5. Ithaca 7. Focal 10. Bar-in-wood 11. Air 12. Rook 14. Plinking 15. Take-down 17. Leaf 20. Car 21. Perimeter 23. Peter 24. Magpie

- Down:** 1. Kimber 2. Scent 3. Golden 4. Magazine 6. HPR 8. Followers 9. Drag 13. Oak trees 15. Tick 16. Duplex 18. Forked 19. Smear 22. Tip
- PRIZE WORD: CABINET**
WINNER: VICKY HUTTON, NOTTINGHAM



TO CATCH A FISH

Silver Stroat

The Silver Stroat is a very versatile pattern and I doubt many of us are without a selection in the fly box. This is the quintessential hairwing salmon fly. It is the pattern that best embodies everything about autumn fishing, when the water can still be clear and low, fished with a floating line and long leader.



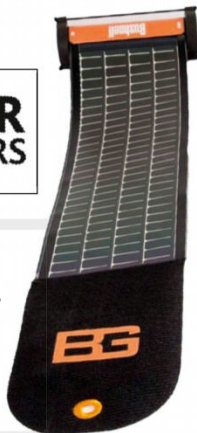
It is part of a generation of flies that includes Hairy Mary and the Tosh – great workhorse patterns. When the water drops and clears, it takes its share of autumn salmon. **AS**

How to enter

To enter our crossword competition, identify the word in the shaded squares and you could win a solar-powered charger pack. It's just the thing for charging your phone when on the hill.



Due to COVID-19 we are only accepting submissions via email
Please email the solution with the crossword number in the subject line, and giving your name, address and mystery word answer to:
ollie.harvey@futurenet.com
All prizes will be despatched as soon as possible.



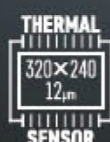
Rules: Entries must be received by 6 October 2021. All usual conditions apply. Solution and winner will appear in the 13 October 2021 issue.

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⚡ 2 XQ50

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⚡ 2 XP50

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The Shooting Times Almanac

— 29 SEPT – 6 OCT —



OCTOBER MOONPHASE ● 6th ● 13th ○ 20th ● 28th | 2nd OCTOBER ☀ Sunrise 07:03 BST ☁ Sunset 18:35 BST 🌙 Moonrise 01:22 BST 🌄 Moonset 17:37 BST

TIMES SHOWN FOR LONDON

THOUGHTS FROM THE FIELD

Now is the time hedgerows provide a heady bounty. While elderberry wine and sloe gin are well-loved home-brew staples, there are many other delights to be found in the hedge that can be turned into alcoholic delights.

Crab apples make a full-flavoured white wine, hawberries a passable rosé, and 'hedgerow port', a blend of elderberry, bullace and blackberry, is guaranteed to generate a headache the next morning. For home beer brewers, wild hops are in flower and ready for



picking. This is best done when the cones crinkle like tissue paper.

Tony Butler, late headkeeper on the Hinton Ampner Estate, was famed for the esoteric ingredients in his wines. When trying something new, he added more sugar to the mix, in case of bitterness. What he failed to realise was that the more sugar he added, the higher the alcohol level became. His broad bean and pea pod cremant became known as Hampshire Absinthe.

Richard Negus



Though blank, Mike's first foray of the season was a real joy

LOOK TO THE SKIES

The season's first trip to the shore is always a joy, and high tide on the Medway the other day was great. Flat calm and bright sun were hardly propitious, but some decent rafts of newly arrived wigeon added spice. We may not have had any chances, and guns came home unfired, but keeping a low profile and a careful lookout was still the order of the day.

We hardly saw a teal and I suspect that a first wave of birds has already moved through, but extra excitement came as several parties of pintail arrived high from the east. Were they newly arrived across the sea, or just birds from further along the Kent coast? There is no way of knowing, but either way they were good to see. A pintail in the bag is always a mark of a special day, so fingers are definitely crossed for next Thursday. I don't need a gale, but a stiff breeze and a grey sky would be wonderful.

Mike Swan

The finer things

Cigar

Ramon Allones Gigantes
Length 7⁵/₈in • Ring gauge 49
£35 • turmeaus.co.uk

The Gigantes lives up to its name. It requires time and should always be smoked after a meal, ideally steak. With double coronas



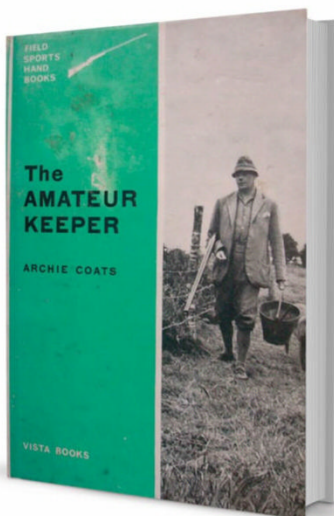
like this, I often find them a little temperamental on the draw and burn as they are so large, but this one isn't too problematic. It has a pleasant flavour with leathery notes and a floral aroma to the smoke. It is certainly a statement cigar. I paired it with a bottle of Pomerol 2012 Christian Moueix, which went beautifully with the Gigantes following a stunning rib-eye.

Nathan Little

Book club

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Sharpshooter



For most types of shooting, good relations with farmers are vital. But what happens when you run into one of the rare hostile characters?

Shooting has a close relationship with farming. It has to, because farming is the dominant land use of the countryside. Deerstalkers and wildfowlers may be less dependent on the farmed landscape, but for most other types of shooting, good relations with the farming community are essential. Many of us have a very high regard for farmers and relations are generally good. But what happens when farmers go bad?

Let's face it, the occasional awkward farmer is a fact of countryside life. In a thousand ways, this rare species can make your life hell. It doesn't matter that you have a written shooting lease and pay rent — if you get on the wrong side of the person who actually farms the land, there will be trouble.

Muckspreading

Beware of joining a shoot where there is ill-feeling between landowner and tenant. I know of an incident where a tenant farmer decided to start muckspreading right in front of a line of Guns as they stood in a field waiting for a drive to begin. It emerged that he had a grievance against his landowner, with whom the shoot had signed a lease. The tenant went out of his way to disrupt

the shoot's activities whenever he thought he could get away with it.

Or take a friend of mine, who was walking with his elderly gundog on a public footpath when he was accosted by an angry stockman shouting that he had better put the dog on a lead 'or else'. My friend didn't have a lead, so he used his belt. His dog had been walking quietly to heel.

Yet it is not a legal requirement to put a dog on a lead on most linear public

mechanism. He complained the gate was "always being left open by you lot".

Yet, in truth, he is legally required to maintain that gate. It is sited across the bridleway for his benefit and he has a responsibility to keep it in good working order. If it becomes difficult to use, it may amount to an obstruction of a public right of way, which is a criminal offence. Furthermore, if he knows that it tends to be left open due to poor maintenance, and his

“Let's face it, the occasional awkward farmer is a fact of countryside life”

rights of way in England, providing that the animal is under close control. By harassing and intimidating a member of the public on a public footpath, the stockman was committing an offence and could have been reported to the police.

On another occasion, two women on horses were negotiating a gate on a public bridleway in Northumberland when the farmer rolled up. This hero sat on his quad, arms folded, making sarcastic remarks as he watched the women struggling to operate the gate and its bodged fastening

livestock escape and cause a road traffic accident, he might be held liable.

Farmers put up with a lot. The unprecedented hordes of people accessing the countryside this summer caused an avalanche of problems. Even the conservation bodies, normally so politically correct, have complained about the antics of some members of the public.

But the other side of the coin is a hostile attitude towards lawful countryside users from a minority of farmers who really should know better. 🐾

DOG BY KEITH REYNOLDS



SHOOTING TIMES & COUNTRY MAGAZINE, ISSN 0037-4164, is published weekly, incorporating Shooting Magazine, Shooting Life, British Sportsman, The Angler's News & Sea Fisher's Journal and Field Sport, by Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA, United Kingdom. © 2021 Future PLC. Printed by Walstead UK Ltd. Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU; tel 020 3787 9001; marketforce.co.uk We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. The manufacturing paper mill holds full FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification and accreditation All contents © 2021 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein. If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/ or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions. Subscription rates for 52 issues: UK — £143. Priority Service (5-7 days): Europe — £234, ROW — £199. The US annual subscription price is \$305. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431. US Postmaster: Send address changes to SHOOTING TIMES & COUNTRY MAGAZINE, Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA, United Kingdom. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent. All prices include postage and packing. Enquiries and subscription orders: Future PLC, PO Box 272, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 3FS. Cheques payable to Future PLC. Tel: +44 (0)845 845 123 1231, fax +44 (0) 1444 445599.

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