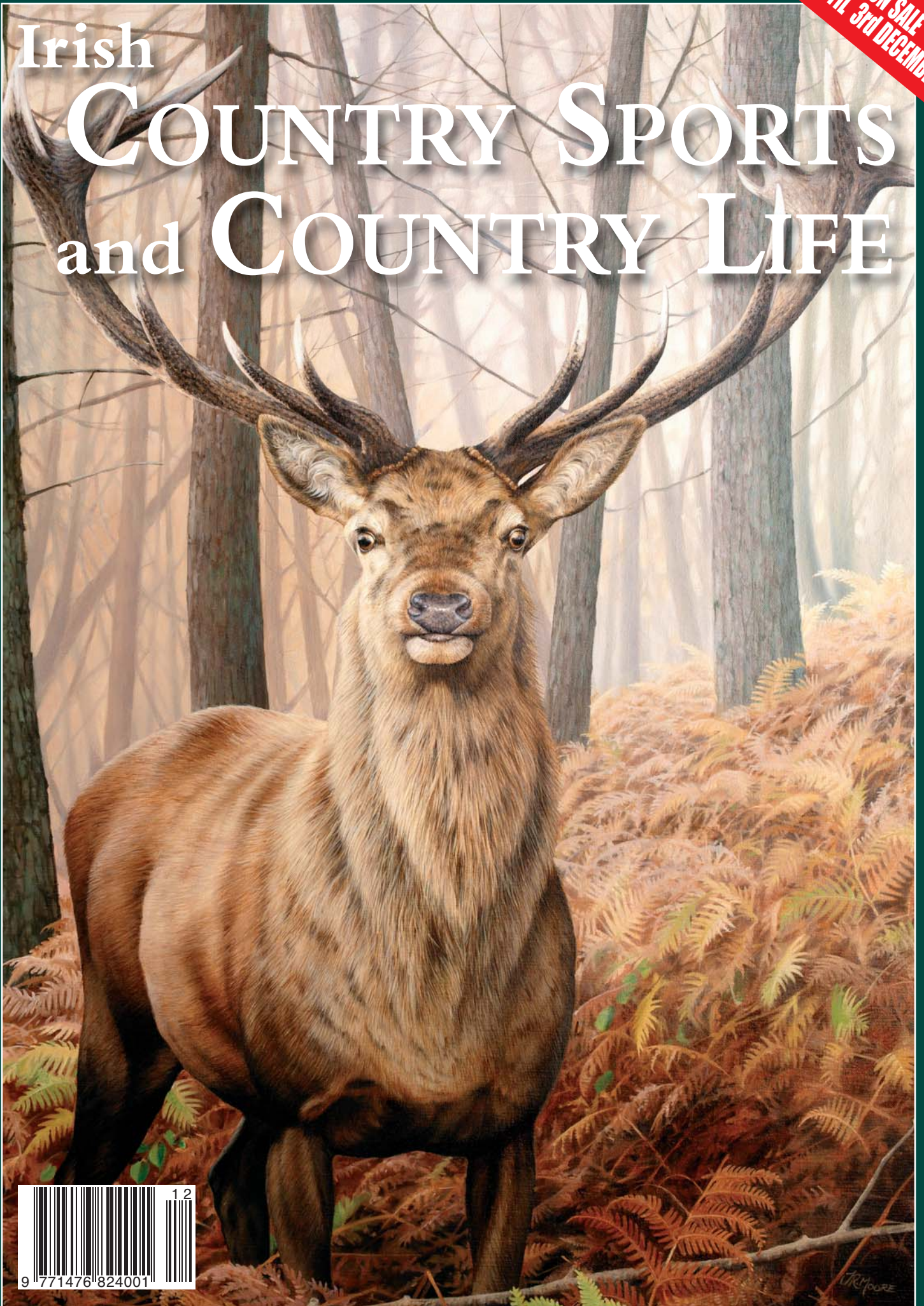


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**'Red Stag'**  
by John R Moore

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# Country Sports and Country Life

## Rol Comment

**A**nother game fishing season is coming to an end and so is another game fair season which, despite a very wet summer has been successful for The Great Game Fairs of Ireland with three well run fairs where some of the best in country sports and country living have been shown to a large and varied audience. The Irish Game and Country Fair at Birr Castle Demesne saw a record number of visitors on the Sunday and, due to the careful control of ground conditions during the build-up, everyone was able to enjoy the day with ease and that was greatly helped by the co-operation of exhibitors, traders, arena acts and all those who have to work so hard to put on a REAL game fair.

The team that run the Great Game Fairs of Ireland proved beyond doubt that experience and careful planning pays off especially in less than ideal weather conditions. Remember it won't be long until all that planning starts all over again for 2013.

The fair at Birr also hosted the RISE Campaign (Rural Ireland Says 'Enough') who showed the world through Dog & Country TV and the Fieldsports Channel that they are alive and well and not suffering from any form of memory loss, even if the present government in the Republic are showing definite signs of serious amnesia. Ladies and gentlemen of the Coalition Government of Fine Gael and Labour the honeymoon is well and truly over! It was a dignified reminder rather than a raucous rabble, but then that's what you expect from law abiding sportsmen and women but it should not be taken as a sign of weakness – rather determination.

For most of us, it is hard to believe that three years have passed since we all struggled with the new Firearms Renewal Forms, but some shooters have



already received their next renewal in the post and I think it was a pleasant surprise. Rather than the endless forms which appeared last time with very little practical guidance to help the shooter, we have received a shorter form which is better set out and contains much of the information which we provided last time. This only needs correction if the details have changed and certainly I, for one, will be glad of less paperwork. I hope it also indicates that there is an improvement in the attitudes of some of those responsible for the day to day handling of these regulations and that we will not see the fiasco that wended its way through court after court when some shooters were denied the right to

continue to hold their legally held guns. While this is far from over there is light at the end of this tunnel and it is a pity that the over zealousness of a few besmirched the good name of all the firearms officers who did their best in difficult conditions not usually of their making. I look forward to a new era in firearms licensing with the application of that, no so common, common-sense.

I have recently had the great pleasure of attending the celebrations of FACE's 35th anniversary in Brussels and it has shown that FACE, as the representative body of over seven million 'hunters' of all varied traditions, is as necessary as it was when it first saw the light of day. Their new Secretary General, Angus Middleton, will, I'm sure, prove himself a suitable successor to Yves LeCoq who served the organisation and its many members so well for many years. Yves will, no doubt, be working as hard as ever for his love of hunting and all the valuable traditions and standards that go with it.

**Philip Lawton**  
ROI Editor

# Country Sports and Country Life

## Comment

Shooters in Northern Ireland are well aware that proposals for firearms licensing fees are currently out for consultation. For that you might as well say: here are some swinging increases in fees that the Department of Justice thinks are required to make the system pay for itself:

Grant of firearms certificate up from £50 to £120 - in GB it's £50;

Variation up from £26 to £54 - GB it's £26;

Variation of certificate (same type) up from £10 to £15 - in GB it's free

Duplicate certificate up from £9 to £14 - while in GB the cost is £9; and a

Dealer's certificate up from £150 to £697 - GB £150

Variation by dealer up from no fee to £12.

I spoke to a number of people, including some dealers, to gauge their reaction. Some felt that firearms licensing exists, in government's mind, only for the benefit of those who hold certificates and that those people should pay the entire costs of the system. But is the licensing system not designed for public safety and therefore the public purse should bear some of the cost? Nowhere is there detail of what this benefit represents.

What about the 'improved' systems in PSNI? Should they not have been taken account of along with the increasing use of IT? Should we not see costs for each piece of the service taken into account? As one person quoted to me: "It is neither proper nor fair to seek to compel one group of certificate holders to pay for matters that are in no way related to the service provided to them.....there is no basis for assuming that grants and renewals involve the same amount of work and the same actual cost." With the number of people computer literate nowadays, surely by using the humble home laptop, electronic updating information of, for example, a change of address would reduce administrative costs. Surely there are other glaring examples of improving efficiency and reducing costs to explore.

The really heavy increase in costs falls on the firearms dealers, at around five times the current fee. They are none too pleased. Taking but one comment also expressed by some others, why not look separately at the costs of granting a dealer's certificate and at the costs of re-granting the certificate before a one size fits all fee is in place? Given the very large increase in the Grant Fee for a Firearms Certificate that no additional fee should be



charged for variations carried out by Firearms Dealers.

And what about targets for the PSNI to aim for in the name of efficiency? What about an outside body looking at this aspect? Would that add to the cost to us though and just passed off as yet another element of the total fee structure? If it's up to the PSNI's existing efficiency experts to examine, are we then back to square one as I can only assume that it was these efficiency experts who let us get to the current state of affairs. If I was marking the PSNI's annual licensing school report it would probably be 'showing some

improvement but could do better.'

Some were keen to say that in relation to rifles or handguns held for target shooting on approved ranges, then the FAC holder should be allowed to exchange his/her firearm for any calibre of firearm, provided that the range he shoots on is approved for that calibre of firearm. This could easily be verified by the Firearms Dealer by asking the FAC holder to produce written confirmation from the secretary of the club for which he/she was a member confirming that the range was suitable.

Now there are some good proposals: a copy of a European Firearms Pass will suffice for visitors allowing them to bring their legally held firearms into this country, rather than needing to submit the original and will be free as now. It is 'free' but who actually pays for it? The licence holders, that's who. As well, dealers will be able to continue to operate the 'one on one off,' transaction, perhaps extended to weapons within a banded system. On the proposal to lower the age for supervised shooting, there was mixed comment, some for and some against it.

But it's the fees increase which seems to anger most. When compared to the cost of obtaining a driving licence or MOT test then firearms licensing is a clear winner, not for the shooting community but for the government's bean counters. It may be a quick fix for their balance sheets but it's out of step with the rest of the UK. I wonder how long it takes them to publish how much the entire process and the fees increase has benefitted the public and the shooting community. Or will I just need to look at a Department of Justice balance sheet?

**Paul Pringle**  
Northern Editor

## Countryside Favourite, Barbour, Leads in the Field with its Latest Sporting Collection

**T**his season, Barbour introduces a new ladies collection, footwear and a greater choice of co-ordinated shirts and knitwear into the Barbour Sporting range.

The latest collection sees more depth added to the South Shields-based brand's fleeces and gilets as they continue to grow in popularity as the preferred choice of shooting clothing. This collection includes the Glendale Half Zip, a functional lightweight polyester fleece that slips comfortably under a jacket or can be worn on its own on warmer days, and the Dunmoor Sporter, which handily comes with a weatherproof and windproof membrane.



*Dunmoor Fleece RRP £179*

Exceptionally light, the Dunmoor Sporter also has a soft fleece on the inside and articulated shoulders for plenty of freedom of movement – ideal for driven and walked up shooting.

Barbour's sporting knitwear also continues to go from strength to strength. The standout new piece is the Sporting Zip Thru. Made from 100% lambswool, it's warm and comfortable to wear. The two way zip offers flexibility and it can be worn under a jacket on colder days or on its own for early season.

New for Autumn Winter 12, is Barbour's Sporting footwear. In a traditional sturdy Derby brogue with commando sole and storm welted brass eyelets, the Ilkley brogues are ideal to wear with breeks or moleskin trousers, whilst the Albacore leather and nubuck boots

featuring the new Barbour Tech breathable membrane, have been designed to keep feet warm and dry for long periods of time.



*Ilkley Brogue RRP £159*

Finally, it wouldn't be Barbour if we didn't mention the jackets! Three new ladies shooting jackets adorn this season's collection, with the signature piece being the Sporting Cotterdale 3 in 1, the ultimate all season jacket designed to keep ladies in the field, warm and ideal for driven shooting.

For men, the Sporting Featherweight still leads the pack: it's Barbour's lightest ever shooting jacket, offering complete protection from the elements yet retaining all the features and technical innovation required from a performance shooting jacket.

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## CAI's Political Update

The Countryside Alliance Ireland team continue to monitor and stand up for fair and just legislation in respect of country sports and the rural way of life.

At the time of going to press, we can advise you of the following:

**Dog Breeding Establishments Bill** – Following the consultation period on the Proposed Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has recently published a report on the consultation responses. The Department is not seeking any further comments or views on the revised draft regulations as the consultation has closed. However, CAI has been asked to present evidence to the DARD Committee in September and will be representing our members' views and best interests again then.

**Marine Bill** - A report on the draft Marine Bill was published in July by the Department of the Environment. There are still concerns regarding the potential for Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) to be created in areas such as Strangford and Carlingford Lough. These could potentially prohibit wildfowling and angling in these areas. The Marine Bill has currently reached Consideration Stage and CAI will continue to strive to ensure our members and the public will receive fair treatment.

**Consultation on Proposals to Vary Firearms Licensing Fees and Other Miscellaneous Amendments to the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004** – the consultation period on these proposals closes on 20th September 2012. CAI will formulate and submit a response that best represents our members. In addition, there is a meeting for firearms dealers and stakeholders scheduled to take place before the deadline and their views will have been incorporated.

The Animal Health and Welfare Bill will continue to move through the Oireachtas when they resume after summer recess. It has gone through the first Committee stage and will next go for the second stage. CAI will keep you updated. For more information – [www.caireland.org](http://www.caireland.org)

## The launch of Operation Wild Deer



*Operation Wild Deer - PSNI and partners embark on initiative to combat deer poaching*

A new initiative has been set up to tackle the issue of deer poaching head-on in the Cookstown area. Representatives from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), including the Wildlife Liaison Officer, Firearms Branch, and local police officers in Cookstown, County Tyrone, have joined forces with a number of organisations including Countryside Alliance Ireland (CAI), to combat illegal and ongoing deer poaching issues and to ensure illegal meat is not sold into the food industry.

Fallow, Red and Sika are the three main types of deer in Northern Ireland and deer poaching is an illegal activity under the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985. One consequence of poaching is that animals may be wounded rather than cleanly killed, especially if weapons of the incorrect calibre are used. This often results in severe suffering for the animal.

# COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE IRELAND

## Love the countryside

Michaela Fox, PSNI senior firearms licensing manager, said: "Anyone found to be committing an offence under the Wildlife or Firearms Order, or found to be breaching a condition of their Northern Ireland Firearm Certificate, will have their firearms removed and be considered for revocation." PSNI officers will be raising the profile to help tackle deer poaching. Inspector Hazel Moucka, the Cookstown area commander, said local police resources would be used to assist in tackling this wildlife crime, particularly within local forests. The shooting and country sports organisations represented in the initiative are keen to see the use of best practice during stalking. All these organisations have condemned deer poaching, which, they say, brings the responsible shooting community into disrepute. PSNI Wildlife Liaison Officer, Emma Meredith, said: "This is the first time so many organisations have come together to form this initiative to tackle deer poaching in the Cookstown area. This initiative is pro-active and a great opportunity to engage with enthusiastic organisations and partners to tackle deer poaching."

The illegal sale of venison can pose risks to human health and therefore Environmental Health in Cookstown have also got involved in the initiative. Police are urging anyone with information, on deer poaching to contact the PSNI on 0845 600 8000 or anonymously to Crimestoppers 0800 555 111.

## Shanes Castle shines despite the weather

The 50th Game Fair of Ireland took place over the first weekend of July at Shanes Castle in County Antrim. As per the norm for our Irish summer, the weekend did not completely pass without a few rain showers. However, this did not deter the crowds and an impressive number of spectators attended to support the fair and view the many demonstrations and stands that were on show.

The Countryside Alliance Ireland (CAI) marquee was host to a wide array of fellow exhibitors including The British Deer Society NI Branch who had Muntjac deer on show and some examples of their calls which sound similar to that of a fox.

The Irish Deer Society (IDS) had an extensive range of information for people interested in spotting deer as well as deer hunters. There was also a competition to win a lovely fishing trip in Connemara. The IDS was in the CAI marquee again at Borris House and Birr Castle fairs, as were the Wild Deer Association of Ireland who had their extensive display of deer heads on show.

Lindsay Carlisle brought his impressive display of hand crafted walking sticks, one of which he kindly presented to Lyall, as a personalised gift.

The Sunnyland Beagles were on hand to provide entertainment for the many children at the fair, who all wanted to meet the beagles. A number of children also brought their own dogs and took part in Keith Matthews' Dog Obedience class. CAI sponsored the prizes for best dog handler in three categories: ladies, gentlemen and children.





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Pictured is Denise McArdle and Tag, winners of the lady's trophy on the Sunday afternoon.

## Red Grouse and Upland Management Conference

A Red Grouse and Upland Management Conference is to be held on Wednesday 3rd October 2012 at CAFRE, Greenmount Campus, Antrim. This all day conference, jointly organised by CAFRE and the Irish Grouse Conservation Trust (IGCT), will provide participants with an update on the Glenwherry Hill Regeneration Project and the successful methods used for red grouse and upland management.

The course promises to be interesting and educational, with subjects including all aspects of policy and legislation, land management, conservation and predator control being discussed throughout the day. To register or for further information contact Margaret McLarnon at 028 9442 6728 or email [margaret.mclarnon@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:margaret.mclarnon@dardni.gov.uk)

## Irish Trophy Commission

The Irish Trophy Commission (ITC) measures trophy heads principally for the three Irish deer species; red, fallow and sika, and awards certificates and medals based on the CIC International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation and Rowland Ward measurement criteria.

ITC measurers are fully trained, accredited and experienced in the task of measuring trophy heads. Trophy measurement is utilised to track the quality, including the genetic quality, and outcome of selective deer management and as part of the ITC contribution to education and research in the matter of wild deer in Ireland.

The ITC is a non-profit organisation committed to contributing to the better conservation of game and wildlife in Ireland. Therefore, a nominal charge, payable to the ITC, applies in respect of the expenses of the Accredited Measurer carrying out any head measurement.

The ITC supports Deer Alliance HCAP (Hunter Competence Assessment Programme) as the competent standard for Stalker Assessment and Certification in Ireland.

For more information on the ITC, contact Liam on +353 (0)87 264 3492 or Joe on +353 (0)87 283 4662.

## 'Shoot, Cook and Eat' at Belle Isle Cookery School this October

This October (on Saturday 13th and Wednesday 17th), Belle Isle Cookery School is organising something a little different for game lovers who would also enjoy some sport by

offering two 'Shoot, Cook, and Eat' days. Particularly suitable for less experienced shots, the morning will be devoted to pigeon shooting around the beautiful Belle Isle Estate. This will be followed by a light lunch in the Cookery School and a hands-on cookery lesson with Belle Isle's renowned chef Corrie Cadden.

Using the morning's bag and other game, Corrie will show you how to create innovative and unusual dishes. Then time for a leisurely walk around Belle Isle, a little relaxation in your cosy accommodation and return to the school at 8pm for the ultimate feast. After a rewarding night's sleep depart the following morning after breakfast at 10am. Places are limited to 14 (7 guns and 7 non-shooting partners) Prices: £230 per gun /£190 non shooting partners.

## Wild About Game

For anyone wanting to learn all about game cooking without the shooting, then join Belle Isle for the 'Wild About Game' day on Saturday 17th November to discover the joys of preparing and cooking with game. They will guide you through the rudiments of plucking, drawing and filleting whatever is in season. Belle Isle Estate has a wealth of game birds and rabbit. Venison comes from their sister estate, Barons Court, in neighbouring County Tyrone. The day will inspire you with recipes for starters and main courses that can easily be prepared in advance at home. You might try your hand at seared wood pigeon with a tomato compote or herb crusted loin of venison with a rosemary jus. You will also prepare vegetable dishes and sauces to accompany the game you cook. These recipes are very versatile and can be used for other meats as well. Price £130. For more information - [www.belleisle.com](http://www.belleisle.com)

## 'Land, Lust and Gun Smoke'

Countryside Alliance Ireland has become a member of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation. 'Land, Lust and Gun Smoke' - this vibrant book detailing a social history of game shooting in Ireland by Countryside Alliance Ireland Chairman, Peter Bacon, has recently been published. For more information visit [www.thehistorypress.ie](http://www.thehistorypress.ie)

## CAI Attends launch of ground-breaking facility for shooters

Countryside Alliance Ireland attended the sod cutting launch for the newly planned underground pistol & rifle complex outside the small village of Dunloy in County Antrim. This new venture is being undertaken by local man (and CAI member), Seamus McAleese and the launch was attended by a number of individuals and organisations including local MP - Ian Paisley Jr DUP, local MLA - Mervyn Storey DUP and DUP member Bill Kennedy.

*Cutting the first sod for the new shooting complex*



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## Willowbreeze Anglers raise £2685.00 for Children's Heartbeat Trust

**W**illowbreeze Flyfishing Club from Larne held their now annual fundraiser called the Northern Ireland Children's Heartbeat Trust Fly Fishing Championship open competition at Kilgad Fishery near Kells on the 30th June. The event was a great success and a total of £2685.00 was raised for the charity.

The event saw 24 fishermen from across five counties of Northern Ireland competing and the results were as follows: 1st Ian Rowan, 2nd Cathal Cleary, 3rd Chris Martin, 4th Gary McFadden.

Heaviest fish of the day went to Anthony McCormick

Ian Rowan also won the George Connell memorial trophy as well as

the Children's Heartbeat Shield. The George Connell Memorial Trophy was donated by the Connell family in memory of their father who was a very keen fisherman. The day was a particular pleasure for Ian as his young son Dylan had to have major heart surgery last year when he was only three weeks old, but is now 13 months and doing well. Ian dedicated his win to his son and on the shield it reads 'Ian Rowan dedicated to Dylan Rowan.'

The organisers would like to thank all those who donated prize and their special thanks goes to Tina Turner who owns Kilgad Fishery for kindly donating the entire lake for the event.



Ian Rowan and Alan Greer with Sarah Quinlan and Robin Swann MLA presenting the cheque.

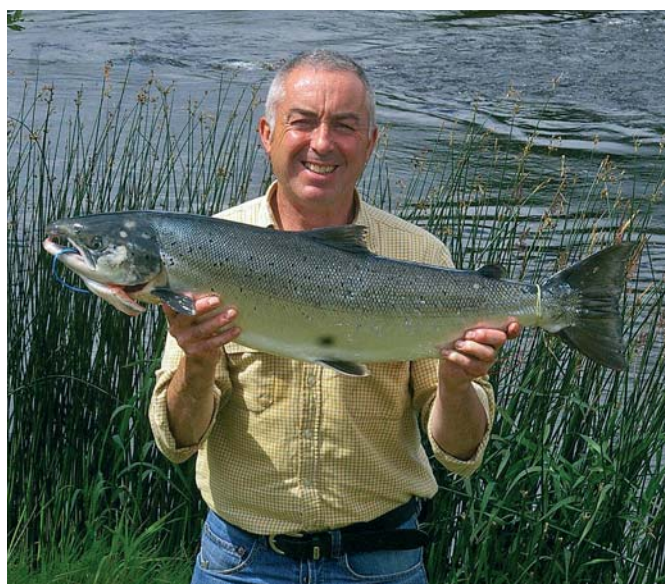


The line-up of prize winners includes overall winner Ian Rowan, Cathal Cleary (2nd) Chris Martin (3rd) and Gary McFadden (4th).

## History repeats itself for Moy angler Sean Kearney

**I**t was red letter day for Sean Kearney on 16th July this year, when he landed this magnificent sea-liced salmon. It turned the scales at 16lb and was caught on a prawn at Paddens Pool, Attymass, Ballina, Co Mayo.

Sean, who is a Waterkeeper at the fishery, tells us that his father, who is deceased, caught an 18lb Salmon on the same beat on 5/7/73. History repeating itself indeed!



Now that's a fine fish! Sean with his fine sea-liced salmon when history repeated itself on the Moy

## Aaron Smyth wins 2012 British Open Down The Line Championship



Aaron Smyth (centre left) shows Donal McCloy (centre right) and staff his British Open DTL Trophy.

**T**his was a truly amazing feat for local man Aaron Smyth who shot a perfect score of 100/300 to get into the shoot off against Ted Philipson and Nick Dean, both from England. But that was just the appetiser as Aaron, who is sponsored by Donal McCloy Guns Unlimited and Shoots Gamebore White Gold shells, next shot a perfect score of 25/75 and that was enough to clinch the title.

With over 435 entries for the competition the competition was intense but Aaron did enough to emerge the winner and claim his prize of a Perazzi MX 8.

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\*XV class consists of four wheel drive, 2.0 diesel equivalent versions of Audi Q3 (177ps), BMW X1 (143ps), Ford Kuga (140ps), Hyundai ix35 (136ps), Kia Sportage (136ps), Mitsubishi ASX (150ps), Nissan Qashqai (150ps), Skoda Yeti (140ps) and VW Tiguan (140ps). Please note the preceding differences in maximum power (ps). Figures correct at time of going to press and have been based on our competitors' published figures.

\*\*In its 2011 Euro NCAP test, the Subaru XV scored 86% for adult protection, 90% for child protection, 64% for pedestrian protection and 86% for safety assistance generating a combined score of 326%. Euro NCAP data taken from [www.euroncap.com](http://www.euroncap.com) - 13th December 2011.

Subaru XV range fuel consumption in mpg (l/100km): Urban from 32.1 (8.8) to 41.5 (6.8). Extra urban from 47.9 (5.9) to 56.5 (5.0). Combined from 40.9 (6.9) to 50.4 (5.6). CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from 160 to 146 (g/km).



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# COUNTRYSIDE NEWS

## The reinvention of the telescope: the ATX / STX from SWAROVSKI OPTIK

**S**WAROVSKI OPTIK presents its new generation of telescopes. The ATX/STX telescopes have a modular, ergonomic design and allow you to see the world through completely new eyes. Two eyepiece modules and three objective modules featuring SWAROVISION technology combine to provide a total of six different telescopes to suit every viewing opportunity. Furthermore, the ATX/STX telescopes could not be easier to use. For the first time, the zoom and focusing rings are right next to each other, thereby ensuring that you can use the telescope intuitively and quickly, with just one hand.

Whether you are pursuing chamois on steep slopes, spending a long day on the hunting ground or documenting wildlife from a raised hide, every hunting situation requires specific optical equipment. The new ATX/STX telescope family from SWAROVSKI OPTIK allows you to adapt to each situation without having to compromise on performance or features. Optical luminosity, user-friendliness, ergonomic design and modular flexibility combine to bring about a real revolution in the history of the telescope and set new standards.

### Modular with the perfect fit: unimaginable versatility

For the first time, you can change a telescope's performance by changing the objective lens, allowing you to adapt it according to the situation in which you want to use it. Two eyepiece modules (angled/straight) and three objective modules can be assembled to form six different telescopes. With its compact dimensions and light weight, the handy ATX/STX 25-60x65 is the ideal companion for mountain hunting in difficult terrain, for long stalking exercises and for hunting trips. Stored separately in a functional bag, the eyepiece and objective modules are easy to stow away in a hunting rucksack. Whether hunting from a hide or documenting wildlife using digiscoping, the versatile ATX/STX 25-60x85 meets all of the hunter's needs with its perfect combination of size, weight and optical performance. Its

strengths are equally impressive in adverse lighting conditions, for example when approaching deer and roebuck at dusk.

### Ergonomic and accurate: intuitive use

Another new feature of the ATX/STX telescopes is the positioning of the focusing and zoom which are positioned next to each other to enable calm and stable operating with just one hand. ATX/STX telescopes are ready for those crucial moments when hunting, allowing full concentration to remain on the game. The new telescope family will be available from specialist dealers from September 2012. For more information contact SWAROVSKI OPTIK



The new ATX / STX range in action.

## Sinn Féin TD and Trout Angling Federation Ireland (TAFI) meet DCAL minister

**S**inn Féin TD and spokesperson on the environment, Brian Stanley TD, led a delegation from the Trout Angling Federation of Ireland (TAFI) yesterday to meet the Minister for Arts, Culture and Leisure in the Northern Executive, Carál Ní Chuilín.

Following the meeting Deputy Stanley said: "TAFI is a 32-county organisation with over 20,000 members and it's important that

governments, north and south, work in partnership with it. The purpose of the meeting was to establish a working relationship between TAFI and the Northern Executive and to deal with issues such as: support for All Ireland and international competitions and TAFI initiatives, conservation and protection of trout stocks, develop youth angling north and south and to further develop trout angling

as a major tourist and leisure activity. Progress was made on all these issues and practical steps were agreed including support for the International Youth Angling Competition in July next year.

"It was agreed to meet again in the future to continue this work. Trout angling is a major leisure and tourist activity and we must do everything possible to protect it."

*(l/r) Brian Lynch, National Secretary TAFI, Eamonn Moore, Chairperson TAFI, Carál Ní Chuilín, Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Charles Kennedy, Vice Chair TAFI, Brian Stanley, Sinn Féin TD.*



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## Fishers of Newtownmountkennedy welcomes Schöffel Countrywear exclusively to Ireland

**F**ishers of Newtownmountkennedy in Co. Wicklow are delighted to welcome Schöffel Countrywear to Ireland exclusively with the stunning Autumn 2012 season.

Schöffel Countrywear is one of the world's leading country labels having been founded with the heady task of creating "the best shooting coat in the world" – waterproof, windproof, highly breathable, ultra lightweight and machine washable.

The task was taken up by the leading skiwear manufacturer which started life in 1804 in Bavaria, Germany and has over the past seven generations prospered by combining innovation and technology with a passion for superb styling and outstanding quality.

The Ptarmigan shooting coat was born of the combined expertise of the leading country retailers and manufacturing excellence of Schöffel. It has been refined and improved over the last 14 years and the various styles are now regarded in the market place as the definitive super lightweight Gore-Tex® shooting coats using high technology Cordura® and Meryl® as the outer fabrics.

Fishers stock two versions of the coat the original in hunter green and the super light and even lighter weight jacket perfect for the mild Autumns in Ireland. The list of little extra features on both just make them the flawless coat; along with meeting the original requirements of 100% waterproofness, windproof and highly breathable it has micro fleece hand warming pockets, large easy access cartridge pockets with drainage holes, two way zip for comfort, adjustable storm cuffs with detachable hood and even two inner zip security pockets AND all this is also machine washable, so you'll always look your best!

But the Schöffel Countrywear range is so much more than one shooting coat. It has been carefully expanded to include several styles in coats, jackets and fleeces of the finest quality in classic, attractive colours. The ladies range is designed to suit the female form by using innovative styling and design, but still retaining the essential features and sporty cut. Every style in the range has been designed and manufactured to the high standard customers have come to expect from Schöffel.



Oakham Fleece Gilet €139

Fishers stock the Uppingham Coat for the ladies with a list of features nearly as long as those for the Ptarmigan and the addition of a zip out fleece liner that looks equally good on its own, making it a fantastic 3 in 1 coat.

Another of our favourites are Schöffel Countrywear's luxurious fleece range. It has been updated this season, with the addition of opulent new colours for ladies: Aubergine and Navy complimented with an Alcantara trim and for the men Burgundy, Navy and Gunmetal. Available in both jacket (Cottesmore & Burley) and gilet styles (Oakham and Lyndon) the Schöffel Fleece is made from Polartec® 200, and is ideal to wear as a mid-layer on cold days but is stylish to be worn on its own at any time.



Schöffel Burley Fleece Jacket €175

The collection at Fishers is completed with the luxurious Schöffel sock range and the excellent Manton mens and Seaton ladies quilt jackets for more casual occasions when a bit of style is required!

"We are thrilled to offer our discerning customers the Schöffel range at Fishers and being the only Irish stockists we are looking forward to welcoming other fans of the range to the shop too. The Schöffel collection really compliments the rest of our Country Wear ranges and we now offer something for every countryman and woman's taste and budget. Roll on the start of the season," Simon Harrison of Fishers commented.

The new Schöffel collection will be in Fishers from September and the store is open 7 days. [www.fishers.ie](http://www.fishers.ie) for more info.



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For stockists details and to view the full range visit [www.schoffel.co.uk](http://www.schoffel.co.uk) or call 01572 770900

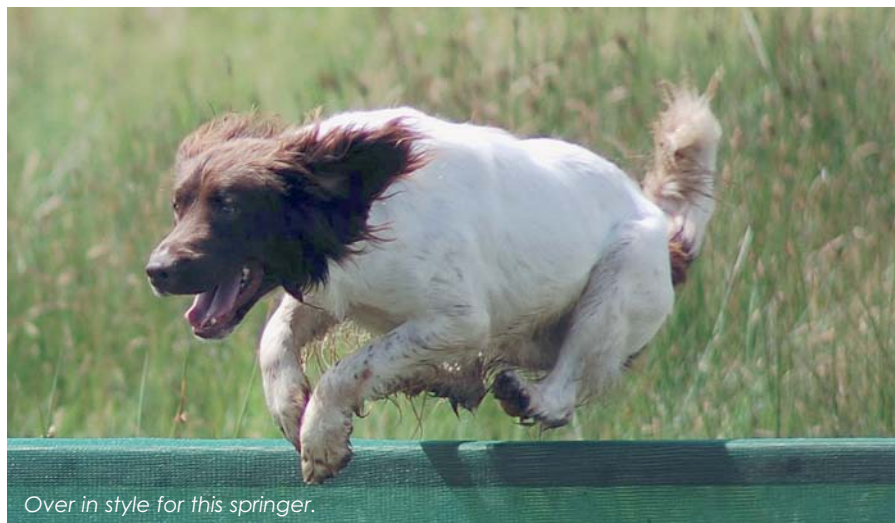
# COUNTRYSIDE NEWS

## The West of Ireland Spaniel Club Working Tests

**E**nda Jennings writes that The West of Ireland Spaniel Club held its annual working tests on Sunday 29th July 2012 at Mountbellew, Co Galway in conjunction with the Mountbellew Vintage Club. The days events were kindly sponsored by Mr Brian Connaughton of Wildhunter Outdoor Sports and Hunting Products, Athlone, Co Westmeath ([www.wildhunter.eu](http://www.wildhunter.eu)). The tests were judged by Mr Liam Dundon from Co Limerick and Mr Dermot Cahill from Co Cork. The Steward of the beat was Mr Declan Mitchell from Co Galway. A bright morning and the imposing bronze statue of the famous racehorse Bobby Jo greeted all as they made their way through Mountbellew's triangular square and onto the chosen ground which was in perfect order for the days events. The jovial atmosphere was palpable as Competitors and Spectators descended on the quaint Galway hamlet of Mountbellew for what turned out to be a competitive yet affable day.

There were four tests run on the day: A/V Puppy, A/V Novice, Confined Cocker Open and

A/V Open. Between each test, Labrador demonstrations were conducted by Mr Lorenzo Hynes and Mr Kevin Coyne of the Midland Retriever Club. A total entry of 60 dogs was received which was the biggest entry ever received at a working test by the club and great credit must be given to the competitors who travelled from all over the Island of Ireland to support the Club. Indeed we had two very special guests in Tom and



*Over in style for this springer.*

Veronica Lauritzsen from Sweden who joined us on the day to view the wonderful Cocker Spaniels on display and they were not disappointed. Tom and Veronica are two trialling people with a passion for Cocker Spaniels and Flatcoat Retrievers.

The day started with the Puppy Test and a field of 13 Springer Spaniels and 3 Cocker Spaniels. The standard of those puppies set the bar very high and the hunting prowess of some of them belied their youth. The judges gave each Puppy ample time to show their skills and the results were given as follows:

1st. No.8 Ainninn Thunder Bolt – Mr Barry Caffrey, Co Meath. 2nd. No.16 Butterford Dreamer – Mr John Fitzgerald, Co Mayo. 3rd. No.13 Tonacrick Marley – Mr Tom Maloney, Co

Mayo. 4th. No.3 Gortnacor Daffodil – Mr Barry Caffrey, Co Meath.

Following the presentation of prizes by Mr John Regan of the Mountbellew Vintage Club after each event, we were straight into the Novice dogs with an unprecedented entry of 20 dogs. The Springer Spaniels were out in force again with a sprinkling of two cockers in what was another stunning display of quality dog work. We were delighted to welcome our youngest competitor of the day, participating in this test, 14 year old Aaron Connaughton from Co Galway. He handled his dog with a sense of coolness that I have no doubt left some of the more seasoned campaigners fearing an

encounter with this man in the future. The result of the Novice Test was as follows:

1st. No.15 Ainninn Thunder Bolt – Mr Barry Caffrey, Co Meath. 2nd. No.12 Churchview Chunnel – Mr Christy Murphy, Co Mayo. 3rd. No.11 Tonacrick Marley – Mr Tom Maloney, Co Mayo. 4th. No.16 Drumreenagh Janequin – Mr Brian McConnell, Co Mayo.

Next in were the cockers with a field of 11 dogs. Again the quality of the dogs was prevalent and it was the cream that came to the top. A difficult course ensured the dogs had to be top class to shine and every one gave it a real go. This was really an All Ireland affair with Cocker from each province battling it out for the spoils which resulted as follows:

1st. No.8 Milly Mor Braf – Mr Pat Cox, Co Mayo. 2nd. No.1 Cheweky Gigges – Mr Domhnall Creamer, Co Dublin. 3rd. No.5 Sperrinside Breeze – Mr Jason McGonagle, Co Derry. 4th. No.4 Megafold Ambleside with Connobenal – Ms Nicky Rodgers, Co Down. Handled by Mr Ken Lindsay.

As the day progressed into evening and the passing showers of rain came at ever increasing intervals we entered the final test of the day, the A/V Open and a field of 13 dogs were entered. Quality again was everywhere and such was the testing layout of the course that those that came to the fore had to be top class. All dogs hunted with real purpose and drive and there was some spectacular retrieving. A real treat for the many spaniel connoisseurs that braved the elements to the end of what was a very enjoyable and successful day for The West of Ireland Spaniel Club. Mr John Regan presented the prizes as follows:

1st. No.4 Churchview Chunnel – Mr Christy Murphy, Co Mayo. 2nd. No.3 Tonacrick Marley – Mr Tom Maloney, Co Mayo. 3rd. No.11 Fich Owenwee Acorn – Mr Pat Cox, Co Mayo. 4th. No.9 Wanderer of Tobyhill – Mr Larry Taaffe, Co Dublin.

*Aaron Connaughton in action.*



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## The Irish Fly Fair & International Angling Show to be held in the Galway Bay Hotel, Salthill, Galway Saturday 10th and Sunday 11th November 2012 from (10am - 5pm daily)

**T**he show will feature a range of exhibitors from all parts of the angling world; as normal, at its heart will be some of the world's greatest fly dressers who will display their unique skills and craft. This year the show will be even better for the angling public as we have assembled the largest group of flytyers ever to dress flies at any show in Ireland. At the moment, we have over 60 of the world's most famous flytyers from 15 different countries.

There will also be a large number of trade stands selling all the top quality tackle brands and fly tying materials. We plan to hold a series of interesting and relevant angling talks from famous personalities. New for 2012 is a fly dressers' workshop with some of the greatest fly dressers in the world passing on their wisdom and tips.

Outside, there will be fly casting demonstrations and help clinics by famous anglers, among them Charles Jardine (England) Glenda Powell (Ireland) and Hywel Morgan (Wales). Avail of free individual fly casting and fly tying tuition from APGAI - IRELAND. In their ranks they have some of the highest qualified instructors and best-known personalities in the sport of game angling on this island such as Peter O'Reilly, Stevie Munn, Paddy McDonnell, Joe Stiff and Jim Hoy. The Youth Fly Tying competition will be run by APGAI IRELAND fly dressers with some fabulous prizes for the kids.

There will be much more to keep you, the angling public, fascinated over the two days. This show is a must for the angling enthusiast. Why not encourage your local angling club to make it a club outing? Come along with your friends. You can take advantage of our new two-day Ticket at a special, cheaper rate and make a great weekend of it. There are special room rates at the event hotel for those staying the weekend, details under 'Accommodation' on the fly fair website.

The International Fly Dressers Row includes: Paul Little, England, Hans Weilenmann, Netherlands, Kat Rollin, USA, Stoyan Filipov, Bulgaria, Anders Ståhl, Sweden, Brian Burnett, Scotland, Chris Sandford, England, Hendrik Wiegand, Germany, Alice Conba, Ireland, Arthur Greenwood, Ireland, Rockwell Hammond, USA, Caroline Emmet, England, David Edwards, England, Dean Armstrong, Ireland, Declan Tuffy, Ireland, Dougie Loughridge, Scotland, Emyr Breese, Wales, Frankie McPhillips, Ireland, Frank Moors, England, Gary Bell, Ireland, Glyn Davies, Wales, Harald Larsen, Norway, Ian McKenzie, England, Jim Lees, Scotland, Joe McDonald, Ireland, Mike Keady, Ireland, Pat Mulholland, Ireland, Riny Sluiter, Holland, Robert Reilly, Ireland, Roger Salomonsson, Sweden, Ryan Houston, Ireland, Skuli Kristinsson, Iceland, Trevor Jones, Wales, Vytautas Markevicius, Lithuania, Walter Bayer, Germany, Wilco Steenbergen, Netherlands, and many more.

For full details, see: [www.Irishflyfair.com](http://www.Irishflyfair.com) or email Stevie at [anglingclassics@aol.com](mailto:anglingclassics@aol.com) or Gerry at [dunkelt@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:dunkelt@hotmail.co.uk) or Elaine at [callenconn@aol.com](mailto:callenconn@aol.com).

## Latest News From Countryside Alliance The lowdown on lead

**A**s we have been aware for some time, the question of lead ammunition is alive in Europe. The 20,000 emails you have sent to MEPs via our e-lobby in lead shot's defence bears testament to that. Last week the Countryside Alliance had a very useful discussion on the subject at the FACE offices in Brussels (FACE, of course, being the European umbrella body for fieldsports). The meeting was attended by several shooting organisations from member states, including BASC. The purpose of the meeting, which was the first of its kind, was to identify and discuss the many threats that lead faces in Europe. The recent survey by the European Chemicals Agency was just one of these and a list of further issues can be found here.

It was extremely encouraging to discover that every other nation present is equally as concerned about the issues that we face. The threats span politics and science and therefore require a united front to defend our sport. The overwhelming response to our lead MEP lobby has launched the debate into the forefront of many decision makers' minds at this very critical time. Nevertheless, we must not rest on our laurels as there are still organisations that are continually pushing in every way they can to get a ban on lead. Continued co-operation and knowledge-sharing though FACE makes a critical difference, both in Europe and domestically, for the preservation of our shooting.

**Barney White-Spunner**  
Executive Chairman

## Bog Snorkelling Scoops Countryfile Award

**T**he Northern Ireland Bog Snorkelling Championships, which took place at Peatlands Park in July, have won a Countryfile Magazine Award. The championships, organised by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, took third prize in the Britain's Favourite Quirky Event category which was voted for by the public. Bog Day attracts people from all over Ireland and beyond. Competitors have to swim two lengths of a 60 yard bog drain with the aid of a snorkel, mask and flippers but without using any conventional swimming strokes. Colin Gates NIEA Assistant Warden said: "We're delighted to win a Countryfile Magazine Award for this unusual, but very popular, event. However, there is a serious side as bogs are now some of the richest areas of natural vegetation in Ireland. The Bog Snorkelling Championships are a great way to highlight the plight of peat bogs - 96% of which have been destroyed since 1945, and what people can do to preserve them."

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## The Shoot raises £140k for Barnardo's and Juvenile Diabetes Research

**T**he annual clay pigeon shoot on 12 August, hosted by CR Smith chairman Gerard Eadie CBE, raised a staggering £140k for Barnardo's Scotland and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF), taking the total raised so far from the event to £1.9million.

The Shoot, the twelfth in succession, attracted 40 teams of shooters in the Amateur, Game Shot and Professional categories. Non-shooters were entertained by a 'Sunday Kitchen' cookery demonstration with celebrity chefs Nick Nairn, Paul Rankin and Michael Smith while comedian Fred MacAulay was on hand to taste their creations. After lunch, guests were treated to a performance by X-factor finalist Amelia Lily.

In total, 400 people took part in the fundraiser which took place at the Auchterhouse Country Sports, near Dundee.

Gerard Eadie CBE said: "The Shoot was another great success. The money raised this year is going specifically to a research project at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee to find a cure for type 1 diabetes and to Barnardo's Caern House, which is just outside Edinburgh. I would like to thank everyone who came along and to our sponsors, who help make this possible."

Teams taking part this year included RAF Leuchars, who scooped the title of Top Amateur Team. The team of RAF personnel, hosted by Air Commodore Gavin Parker, was made up of Wing Commander Neville Clayton, Flight Lieutenant Richard Heap and Major Jed Miller. To help with the fundraising, RAF Leuchars kindly donated a VIP day at the Jubilee Airshow on 15 September to the auction, including the chance of a lifetime to take a trip in the Blades display aeroplanes. Other trophy winners included Craneware (top Amateur Flush), Sabre Safety (top Game Shot Flush), Morphie Estates (top Game Shot team), Carnegie Base Services (top Flypast), James Keiller Estates (top Professional team) and Guns Unlimited (top Professional Flush).

The individual winners were Anne Gardner, who beat off a record number of lady competitors to win top Lady, Tony Bancewicz, who won top Amateur gun, Chris Dewbury, top Game Shot gun and Ian Mason, top Professional gun. As well as silverware, the winners were awarded prestigious prizes including Bose Sound Docks, Garmin Sportswatches, an iPad 4, and Oakley customised glasses. The prize for the top Game Shot team was four Bettinsoli shotguns. Richard Gibson of Petrofac won the prize draw to drive away with a new Audi A1 Sport. The Shoot was sponsored by Adam & Company, ASCO, brightsolid, Craneware, Compass, CR Smith, FES, Hunter Boot Ltd, James Keiller Estates, Johnston Carmichael, Petrofac, Sabre Safety, Stena Drilling and UBS.



Top Game Shot Team Morphie Estates (Leigh Anderson, Bill Dunnett, Gerard Eadie, Christine Dunnett, Bernie Neal)



Top Amateur Team RAF Leuchars (Neville Clayton, Gavin Parker, Gerard Eadie, Richard Heap, Jed Miller)

## O'Neill attends the launch of Rural Respect Week

**R**ural Development Minister, Michelle O'Neill attended the launch of Rural Respect Week aimed at addressing issues of sectarianism, racism, social exclusion and all other forms of rural inequality.

Rural Respect Week will take place from International Peace Day on 21-29 September 2012. The week will be coordinated by the Rural Enabler Programme which is a Peace III funded programme, managed by Rural Community Network and is a partnership approach between the Rural Community Network (the Lead partner), Irish Rural Link (IRL), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG).

The theme of Rural Respect Week is "Building peace through respect" and will feature many events in 12 counties which will highlight the incredible role that rural communities play in building

peace. The events will be supported by local County Enablers.

Speaking at the launch the Minister said: "I believe that the events like those taking place during rural respect week have the potential to move us toward the shared future to which we all aspire."

The Minister continued: "Such diversity within our communities and the opportunities to exchange ideas, values and traditions can only enrich our society. But it remains important to ensure that we also embrace our differences and seek new ways of working and living together to promote social cohesion, share our successes and work with a common aim of delivering rural sustainability."

The programme cost of £2.7million is funded through PEACE III Programme, Priority 1, Reconciling Communities, Theme 1, Building Positive Relations at the Local Level.

## Obituary

# PAUL ANTHONY WOOD

**T**he death occurred on 11 August 2012 of Paul Anthony Wood, Vice-President of the Irish Deer Society, at his home in Oughterard, Co. Galway. Paul was born in Rugby, England on 4th March 1947 but had been resident in Ireland since the late 1960s when he came to Ireland to enter the world of advertising in Dublin. He was to remain in Ireland from that date, becoming 'more Irish than the Irish themselves' in many ways. Although highly successful in the sphere of advertising and graphic design, and an accomplished artist whose work has been collected by many over the years, Paul was perhaps better known as a "deer man", game shooter and wildfowler of considerable knowledge and experience, much of which he regularly sought to impart in the columns of the Irish Shooter's Digest. Importantly, Paul was Deer Manager at Screebe Estate in Connemara, Co. Galway, where his work and achievements led to the reintroduction of Red deer after an absence of over a century and a half. More importantly, his careful management policies and highly selective cull programme, supported by characteristics of habitat, natural feeding and generic quality of the base deer population have led to an astonishing quality of animal, at least equal, and probably superior, to any Red deer elsewhere, world-wide.

Paul's work at Screebe began in the mid-1990s, when Nikolai Burkart, whose family are the owners and custodians of Screebe Estate, decided to take up the challenge of introducing and fostering a small population of deer, and Paul Wood was recruited to manage the project. Paul's enthusiasm was matched only by Nikolai Burkart's commitment and financial support over the last decade and a half. Put simply, Paul achieved something of a miracle, in building a population of deer in habitat far removed from the hardwood forestry and lowland grazing usually associated with the sort of heads seen at Screebe.

Meanwhile Paul remained an active bird-shooter too. Paul was a gifted naturalist and extremely knowledgeable in the matter of rearing and releasing game, a talent he brought to bear with the creation of a duck shoot at Screebe. Having shot both deer and game with Paul over many, many years, this writer can confirm that he had the hugely aggravating habit of always being in the right place at the right time when it came to spotting deer or pulling down an impossible bird. He was tireless in the field and the luckiest man too. He was a magnet for deer and game, but it was always a gamble whether he would get the shot before you did!

Paul was active in the Irish Deer Society, as an officer of the Leinster Branch, Chairman of the Connacht Branch and most recently, Vice-President of the national body. Paul recently received the John Nicholson Trophy by the Irish Deer Society, the Society's highest honour, awarded for exceptional services to the conservation and management of wild deer. Paul was a CIC- and Rowland Ward-accredited head measurer and will be known to many in that context. Immediately prior to his unfortunate death, Paul was active in the creation of the Irish Trophy Commission Limited, of which he was a founding director and the work of which will be carried on as part of his legacy.

This writer had the very great pleasure of knowing Paul Wood for nearly thirty-five years, of shooting with him for most of that time, and of working alongside him in relation to the better management and practical conservation of wild deer throughout Ireland. I knew too his



very great love for his family, and I watched his family grow and develop their own lives as they made Connemara their home. His wife Trish, in common with the wives of many shooting men, was patient and long suffering but her love and support was of vital importance to Paul throughout his married life. Nobody could remain annoyed at Paul for very long, such was his innate charm and good humour. Just a week before he died Paul went to Germany for some specialist medical tests and of course, he managed to squeeze in an outing after Roe deer and wild boar. A sense of his love and appreciation of nature may be gleaned from his record of those outings, where he writes of "the laughing call of the green woodpecker, the mewing call of the common buzzard, a nuthatch creeping up the bark of the tree next to me. A pair of brown hares skipped and jumped about only twenty metres in front of us.... the bright chestnut form of a roe doe [taking] several delicate steps out into the field". He concludes: "There is something about the hunting fraternity, even if you cannot speak the same language, hunting transcends all. Friendships that are made together whilst hunting last for a lifetime."

It was a great privilege to have known Paul Wood for as long as I have. His sudden and untimely death has deprived us all of a valued friend and an important contributor to the welfare, conservation and better management of wild deer. His legacy at Screebe will hopefully live on, as will the legacy of his much-loved family. I know that I speak for countless shooting men and deer people when I say that he will be greatly missed. Paul is survived by his wife Trish, daughters Isobel, Jodie, Abbey and Lola, son-in-law Pascal and granddaughters Millicent and Alice, all of whom he loved equally and deeply, and to whom we extend our sincerest sympathies and condolences.

**Liam N. Nolan**  
(Deer Alliance HCAP, Irish Trophy Commission)

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# Irish game and country fairs challenged by wettest summer in living memory – but Shanes Castle and Birr Castle fairs triumphed in the face of adversity.

**The challenges to outdoor events organisers posed by the wettest summer in living memory simply demonstrated the reasons why the Great Game Fairs of Ireland team truly lead the way in game fair organising.**

All five Irish game or country fairs planned for the summer 2012 went ahead, which in itself was a bit of a triumph for Irish tenacity, when similar events in the UK such as the Scottish Game Fair at Scone, The CLA fair and even the Great Yorkshire Show (for the first time in its history) were cancelled.

Three fairs at Ballywalter, Shanes Castle and Birr Castle were organised by the Great Game Fairs of Ireland team – the other two at Moira and Borris were organised by the National Country Fair/and National Countrysports Fair team.

## ***Ballywalter continued its upward growth curve and missed the worst of the weather***

Our Ballywalter Game & Country Fair faced some really threatening weather, which fortunately swerved right and left of the estate and overall the weather for the two days of the fair was good. As we reported in last issue attendance at the fair continued its upward trend. Overall the fair was a success, but we have not yet finalised our dates for Ballywalter 2013, as we are still in negotiations with the local council and with the recent poor summers we have to consider it is the one of our

fairs that we have not ‘weather proofed’ with roadways.

## ***Re Branding at Moira – as usual a good solid event – but did it live up to its new ‘hyped up’ branding as a ‘giant festival’?***

The re-branded fair at Moira as the ‘NI Countryside Festival’ was next and was fortunate to be the only one of the five events blessed with good weather – bright sunshine. It was a pleasant event and had decent crowds, but its billing as ‘Three Great Events – One Giant Festival’ appeared to be more aspirational than factual. Certainly one of the ‘Great Events’- the new evening ‘Tea on the Titanic musical festival’ appeared to be a bit of a flop with not even the good weather bringing out an early evening crowd.

Overall my impression was of an event which in spite of its new branding by the organisers had not really delivered a greatly improved performance and certainly, in my opinion, did not live up to its billing of being a ‘giant festival.’

## ***Shanes Castle - the 50th Great Game Fair of Ireland threatened by the weather***

Next up was the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle, our 50th ‘Golden’ Fair. We pulled out all the stops to make it truly memorable, with an imaginative launch at the new Clotworthy Gardens in Antrim. The fair was opened by Deputy first Minster Martin McGuinness, who is a

passionate angler especially when it comes to flyfishing and he even tried his luck on the nearby Lough Neagh waters much to the media's appreciation. With the provision of one of the best ranges of exhibitors at any Irish fair and most definitely one of the best prize funds seen at an Irish Fair no wonder it got the ‘government endorsement.’

*Style and Elegance at Ballywalter – living history and fine food.*





*Huge family crowds at Shanes Castle in spite of the dreadful weather – a packed car park and due to good wet weather planning only one vehicle had to be towed out!*



*Ministerial endorsement at Shanes Castle – Angling enthusiast and Deputy first Minister Martin McGuinness with Ingrid Houwers and Miss Country Lifestyle Eirin Corbett help launch the fair with an angling and historical Irish Wolfhound theme.*

Unfortunately the weather that caused the Scone Fair to be cancelled the week before carried on during our 'build up' week and right through the two days of the fair. Emergency plans were put in place including a revised layout, extended roadways, new gateways and operational plans that changed virtually by the day. The estate staff and our own team worked tirelessly to keep the ground in shape and to ensure that contractors did minimal damage to the ground and exhibitors were brought on to the site in a controlled fashion that left the ground in great condition for the public.

### **'Planning for bad weather and hoping for dry'**

I am proud to say that this is the way we do things in the Great Game Fairs of Ireland: we plan for bad weather and hope for good and we try to give the ground back to

the owners in good condition and not the 'ploughed up' mess that one saw at another fair. The difference is not down to luck but sheer professionalism in planning and operations. In fact the ground at Shanes was able to be used less than three weeks later to stage the Antrim Agricultural Show.

On Saturday, the weather was a sporadic mix of sunshine and showers, but Sunday was truly horrendous with heavy rain from midnight to around 1.30 pm. We were truly humbled by the crowds of people who turned out in appalling weather to give us not far short of our normal high attendance. A real bonus was that many of our hard pressed exhibitors suffering from the cancellation of other events reported really good business, actually due to the combination of poorish weather and a very big crowd!

### **Thankfully not one of ours**

Next fair on the Irish agenda and thankfully not one of our fairs was the new fair at Borris – rather bizarrely trailed by its organisers as 'Ireland's leading game fair' and 'Ireland's foremost game fair.' As it had been organised on the back of a couple of what could at best be described as extremely modest Ballinlough fairs, this appeared to be pure 'hype' of the most misleading kind and so it turned out to be. I understand the weather during the set up was OK and the fair really only took bad weather on the Saturday morning but the photographs taken by my colleague and others posted on social networking sites appear to indicate that the foremost facet of this fair was not the attendance, the prize fund or the range of stands but the mass of mud and the fact that a large proportion of the vehicles involved had to be towed out! It certainly was not either Ireland's 'leading game fair' or 'foremost game fair' –



*Mud and towing appeared the order of the day at Borrís.*

descriptions that should and can only be attached to the fairs at Shanes and Birr Castles – in fact in my opinion it is where Ballinlough was – in fifth place behind Birr, Shanes, Moira and Ballywalter! We congratulate the organisers on keeping this fair going in spite of the weather and ground conditions, but I think they might have been better concentrating on making proper wet weather provisions rather than making what turned out to be outrageously inaccurate comparative claims.

### ***Keeping the best to the last?***

Finally it was the turn of the fair at Birr Castle. I have to admit in spite of the roadways, which we with foresight, put in some years ago I was concerned that the continuing poor weather would still mount serious challenges. With a huge range of rearranged events for the month of August locally, including a major garden Festival rearranged for the week before, I also felt that Birr's reputation as a 'buying' fair and one where traders often have their best trading performance of the year could be threatened by weather, the economy and the fact that the month's wages could already have been spent elsewhere.

Our concerns were further heightened when on a visit, just a couple of weeks before the event, we found that a silage contractor had damaged several areas that we used for various events and for exhibitor car parking quite beyond repair and we had to do a major redesign of the site and make major changes to our operational plans. I have to say this is where the Irish fairs with c 200 stands score over the UK ones in dealing with poor weather conditions in they offer more flexibility of operation. And with the committed help of the estate staff and local contacts we quickly made the necessary changes to make the operational plans viable.

During the build up week we took some of the most depressing weather any organiser can face periods of good weather when building work progresses well and torrential rain when work almost stops as vehicles cannot be driven on site. Thursday and parts of Friday were really bad and it was a relief to get most exhibitors in good shape. Saturday too was bedevilled by heavy showers with flooding in outlying areas of the region

and this was reflected in overall attendance, which while being still buoyant was down by about 20%.

It was a relief on Sunday to waken to a misty dry day and when the mist burned off to see quite a sunny day and the crowds literally pouring in.

Unfortunately there was a heavy prolonged shower late in the afternoon but by then we had achieved what I did not think was going to be possible:

A record attendance not only for Sunday at Birr but for any Irish game fair ever.

In spite of the weather, through the professionalism of our team, the goodwill and forbearance of our exhibitors and the sheer enthusiasm of the public we had demonstrated without a shadow of a doubt which fair in the ROI was Ireland's 'leading' and 'foremost' game fair – the one at Birr!

AND

our exhibitors virtually all recorded excellent takings and we handed the estate back with really only verge damage. As numerous people have stated and I will state again the reason why the Great Game Fairs of Ireland are Ireland's premier country sports events is because of the dedication, creativity, commitment, flexibility and most of all PROFESSIONALISM of our team. We don't waste time on making wild promises and publishing hype we concentrate on delivering successful events.

In the next few pages we include a selection of



*Record crowds and packed shopping aisles at Birr.*

photographs to give a 'flavour' of the fairs at Shanes Castle and Birr Castles. More photographs and results will be published in our Winter/Christmas editions of the magazines.

**NB - Booking for our fairs for 2013: We were sorry we were not able to consider a number of late enquiries from exhibitors who had been left with stock from cancelled events or those who wished to participate in a professionally organised Irish event. We cut each fair off at 200 exhibitors and take bookings on a 'first come first served' basis. So if you want to exhibit at Ireland's premier, leading and foremost game and country fairs please contact us immediately for an information pack. Bookings are now open. Call 028 (from ROI 048) 44839167 or 44615416 or email [irishgamefair@btinternet.com](mailto:irishgamefair@btinternet.com)**

# Great Game Fairs of Ireland Launch

This year the Great Game Fairs of Ireland formal launch moved to the newly refurbished Clotworthy House and gardens in Antrim. The reception was hosted by the outgoing Mayor of Antrim, Councillor Paul Michael, who welcomed the cross border group of guests to the Borough. The two themes that were celebrated were 'The Year of the Salmon & Trout' and the 300th anniversary

of the carving of the Massereene Hound. Both themes were captured in iconic paintings by County Antrim artist JR Moore. The statue of MassereeneHound featured in many of the publicity photographs and the legend was 'brought to life' by the presence of a number of Irish Wolfhounds at the launch and special classes sponsored by Chudleys put on for them at the dog show at the fair.



1. Lyall Plant (CAI) and Des Crofton (NARGC) join Miss Country Lifestyle and the Massereene Hound.
2. Fair Director Albert Titterington presents Des Crofton with the annual Brownlow Award for the person making the largest contribution to country sports in Ireland.
3. Lindsay Carlisle, stickmaker to the Great Game Fairs of Ireland presents Councillor Michael with a very fine stick.
4. Fair Director Albert Titterington with Aramis, and Councillor Paul Michael with artist John R Moore and the painting of the Massereene Hound.
5. Councillor Paul Michael with Ingrid Houwers and Eirin Corbett and two gentlemen from Living History Ireland.



6. Albert Titterington, Emmett McCourt (Go for Game chef) and Emma Cowan launch the fair's 'year of the Salmon & Trout' theme and the Flavour magazine Fine Food Festival.
7. Councillor Paul Michael, Fair Directors Edwin Dash, Liz McCracken and Irene Titterington with Pauline Carson of the Little Bake Shop who produced the Anniversary cake.
8. Wolfhound sponsors Robert Harley and Martin Lavery from Chudleys with Eirin Corbett, some modern wolfhounds and the Massereene Hound.

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# Crowds and more at Shanes Castle



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1. In spite of an extremely wet Sunday the crowds enjoyed the arena entertainment
2. In spite of heavy rain it was two rows of bumper to bumper traffic as crowds rolled in.
3. The food hall was packed throughout the two days
4. The new Angling pavilion had a rich mix of angling exhibitors
5. Suspense - lurcher enthusiasts stretch along the 200 yards of the Master McGrath course to see Ireland's top lurcher race.



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6. Again a black bitch shows them the way home in the Master McGrath but this time it belongs to the Roscrea's Pat Lee.
7. Paul Pringle interviews Pat Lee for fieldsports channel tv.

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Damian Newman



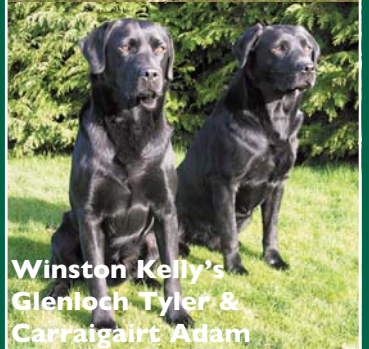
Laurence Hennessy



Alan Rountree



Tim Crothers



Winston Kelly's  
Glenloch Tyler &  
Carraigairt Adam



John Wilson



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- 8. Beagles appreciated the cover in the CAI marquee!
- 9. But when the hounds came out the kids went into the arena.
- 10. Peter Gott is one of the culinary stars of the show.
- 11. Stevie Munn and Albert Titterington with Texan visitor Ricky Ray Behrand.
- 12. Dog agility was popular with the children.
- 13. The English Retriever team was completely made up of golden retrievers - they were third in the international team test but were first and second in the individual test. Pictured here with the team from the sponsors Feedwell.



16

- 14. The top terrier, lurcher and whippet were also sponsored by Feedwell.
- 15. Top Gundog handler was Ray Hardie who was presented with a fine pair of Dubarry boots by Paul Corson of Dubarry.
- 16. Clay shooting continued unabated even in heavy rain.



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*The Flavour Food Festival at Shanes Castle Game and Country Living Fair was a real crowd-pleaser, as this selection of images from the event show.*

# Festival of Flavour

1. Flavour's Kate Richey and chef Emmett McCourt with one of the fabulous eel dishes created by Sean Owens
2. Jenna Haugh from Jen's Gourmet Foods with her range of extra virgin olive oils and balsamic vinegars from Pukara Estate in Australia
3. Emily Spence from Aunty May's Preserves and Jane Harnett from Harnett Oils
4. With nearly as many dogs at Shanes as people, the Waggy's Tail Treats stand was very popular!
5. DJ's Juice & Cider was a popular exhibitor at the Flavour Food Festival
6. As at Ballywalter, the fabulous breads and sausage rolls from artisan bakery, Ann's Pantry in Larne were a huge hit with visitors
7. Jo McGowan from Bella Jo Preserves in Ballycastle produces really tasty chutneys that everyone loved
8. Helen Troughton from Armagh Cider Company explains what makes



# at Irish Game Fair

her juices and ciders so good - totally natural juice from apples grown on the family farm

9. Ben Craig from Root & Branch Organic offered a great selection of organic fruit, vegetables, eggs, preserves and coffee

10. Ted Jensen from Big Ted's American Cookies was the life and soul of the festival!

11. The award-winning Dexter beef products from Bruce's Hill Farm Shop were a sell-out with visitors

12. Shivani Robinson's R&S Desserts cupcakes were really popular

13. Pollock's Pickles from Monaghan offered visitors an amazing and delicious selection of sweet and savoury preserves

14. Flavour's wine expert Gary Elliott tries a sample of Château de la Ligne from Michael Morris, who also represented Belfast Distillery

15. Leona Kane from Brighter Gold Rapeseed Oil demonstrated that her oil made excellent chips!



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# Pictured at the Irish Game & Country Fair, Birr



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1. Keith Mathews the Dog Guru attracted a very involved crowd.
2. Philip Lawton, Lord Oxmantown and Richard Binley (Massbrook) with the winning ROI Retriever team.
3. Philip Lawton and Richard Binley (Massbrook) with some of the prize winning lurchers owned by the Roscrea Club.
4. Kids loved the Living History Village.
5. Tom Kavanagh from the Celtic Stickmakers presents hosts Lord and Lady Oxmantown with a fine stick.
6. The team from Redmills sponsors of the All Ireland Game Fair Retriever Handling Championships with Champion Denis O'Regan.
7. Crowds in the Fisherman's Row.

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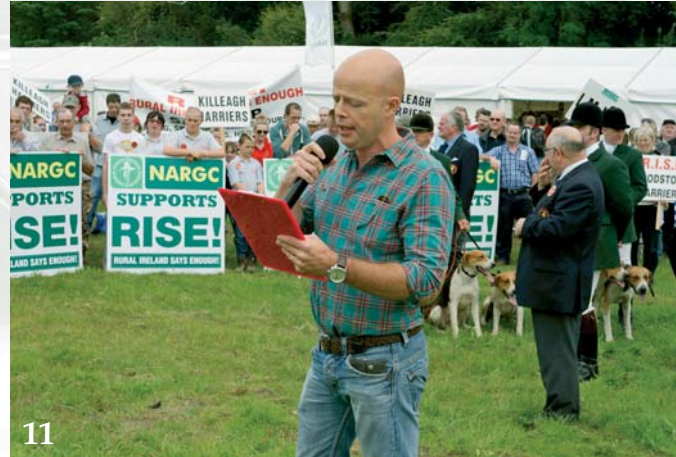
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- 8. The RISE rally saw a huge crowd in the main arena.
- 9. The Mourne Digging Championship drew a crowd - pictured here the ultimate winners in action.
- 10. Jacoby from the Fieldsports Channel interviewing Lyall Plant CAI Chief Executive.
- 11. RISE spokesman, Philip Donnelly, Chairman of the Hunting Association of Ireland gave a rousing speech
- 12. Philip Lawton presents the John McClelland Memorial Cup to the All Ireland Stick Making Championships
- 13. The NARGC stand - the full length of the main arena - was packed from early morning.
- 14. Bangs and black powder thrilled the crowds
- 15-16. It seems that in Birr ...they take their birds for a walk.



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# BOOK REVIEW

## The Season's End by Steven McGonigal

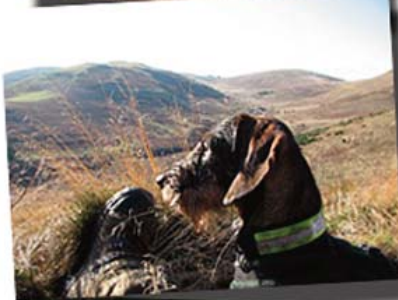
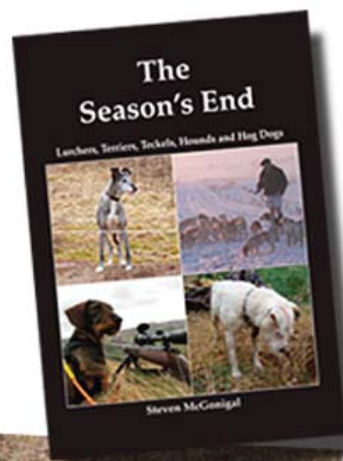
**T**here is no doubt one of the major hits of the recent Great Game Fairs of Ireland has been the antics of the Victorian Poacher (pursued by the unfortunate 'Constable Lawton' who seems unable - for now - to catch his man). And we have seen the Poacher's alter ego Steven McGonigal demonstrating the art of long netting and more in the Main Arena to the delight of huge crowds.

But here's the thing - how many of you knew that Stephen has produced a book entitled 'The Season's End' with tales about lurchers, terriers, teckels, hounds and hog dogs? And what a fine book too.

It's a compilation of personal accounts by some of the leading writers on dogs including

P. Burns, Zack, Teddy Moritz, Chipper Smith, Lurcher and Hound, Old Duck Runner, Patrick Burns, Dublin Digger, Penny Taylor, Saskia, and The Deer Stalker, and a couple of stories by Steven McGonigal himself.

To my great relief I discovered it is not a 'how to' book or an exercise in showing how clever the writers are, or how they bred a wonder dog. It's a book which illustrates the tremendous bond the writers have with their animals and describes some of their hunting outings from mountains to prairies, from lowlands to high rocky escarpments and beyond, both in these islands and abroad, with all sorts of animals which include canines from hog dogs to wildfowling lurchers; there's something for everyone.



The tales are not all about the great days, there are highs and lows. Quite literally the atmospheric writing takes you on the hunt; you see the country, the quarry, and you feel you get to know not only the authors, as well their dogs. There's even a poem about an old canine friend now passed away and I defy readers not to have a lump in their throats with that one.

There is no 'I have the world's best super-dog blah blah here: rather we are entranced by the relationships with the dogs, the young entry, the old stagers, dogs starting out and others at the end of their day. Be it a red letter hunt or something else, there's a common theme: the bond, the relationship between hunter and dog and the respect for the quarry as well.

I started reading the book intending to dip in and out but I read it at one sitting. If ever the word 'unputdownable' was to apply it would be appropriate here. I particularly like Steven's own tales, and hope he includes more, as I'm told that he is working on a follow up which will contain even more about the subject and I for one cannot wait to read it.

But that I suppose depends on whether the Victorian Poacher gets caught by Constable Lawton but that, as they say, is another story.

For now my advice is to get yourself a darned good read. And The Season's End is just that. Highly recommended.

The Season's End is published by Skycat Publications price £10.99. Visit [www.skycatpublications.com](http://www.skycatpublications.com) for details.





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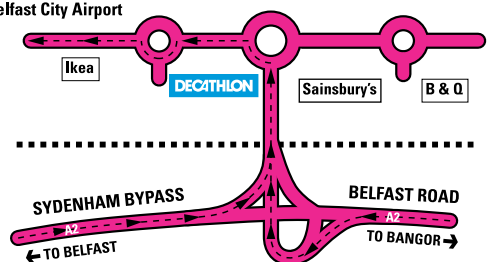
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*S2000 Sporter - lean, mean and lovely.*



*Round Action Detail.*



*Again some amazing engraving on the sporter.*

**D**onal McCloy Guns Unlimited from Toomebridge, Co. Antrim has an international reputation for its stock of Berettas, Brownings, Famars, Perazzis and Bettinsolis to name but some of the huge stock of quality brand names.

Now the company is offering one of the most exciting range of guns ever seen in the country - Rizzini. If you have not seen the incredible range of modern guns from the B. Rizzini then you really should take a visit to the Gun Unlimited premises. The range is huge and the quality top notch.

Rizzini cannot boast a centuries old tradition, but from 1966, the year of its foundation, its guns have become world renowned, thanks to the perfect combination of technology and workmanship. This has been possible, as a result of the personal commitment of the owner Battista Rizzini, and by the valuable cooperation and enthusiasm of his three children, actively engaged in the Company.

Readers may have come across the name Rizzini before, as there a number of members of the Rizzini family, all actively involved in producing guns in their own factories in Italy. But Battista Rizzini (or B. Rizzini) is the biggest

and best known of these.

Donal McCloy explains: "B. Rizzini has made a huge investment in hi-tech machinery which, along with traditional handwork, results in weapons that are not only elegant to look but built to the very highest standards."

And what about value for money - how do Rizzinis stack up in today's hotly contested marketplace?

"I have always been a key supporter of the traditional brand leaders such as Browning, Miroku, Beretta, and by the guns produced by Bettinsoli which always offer an amazing 'bang for your buck.'

"But when I used a Rizzini on a pheasant shoot last year in England, well, I knew that here was something



*(Above) The S2000 features beautiful engraving.*

*(Below) Rizzini S2000 12 bore Trap with adjustable stock.*





(Above) *Black means business - the BR440 Trap.*

(Below) *BR440 up close and personal.*

special. And when I enquired about the gun's price, it was obvious to me that this was one of the best value products available," said Donal. "I just had to find out more and that lead to me bringing in some of the range to examine and test before offering the range to the public.

What he found was simply this: top quality design, elegant well grained wood, top quality 'innards,' and all in an extremely competitively priced package.



"One thing is common to all the guns which I have seen from the B. Rizinni factory," said Donal. "They not only appear aesthetically pleasing with beautiful quality woodwork and engraving, but inside the mechanism is on a par with some of the best guns that I have seen - at any price! And if you are keen on a sweet handling gun, then the Rizzini range have that one cracked as well.

You only have to see the 20 bore round action in operation to

learn how devastating it can be on a shoot.

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(Bottom) *Stunning but effective you modify the settings to suit.*



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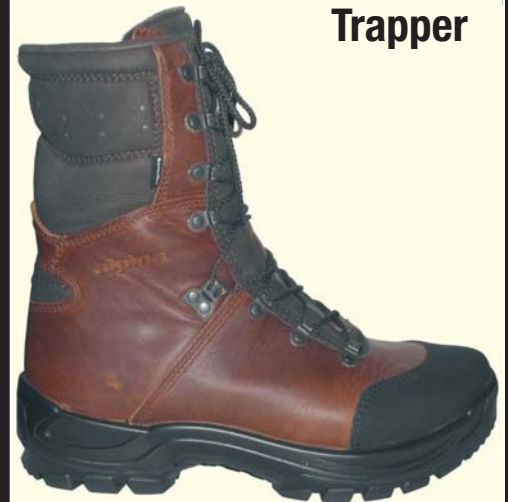
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# Art and Antiques

**W**ell through another year we are still wondering if there is any real light at the end of the tunnel, so far as the Irish auction scene is concerned. Sales houses are bravely reporting how things are affecting them as individuals but sales-goers who bought, particularly Irish art during the boom years, are, if they are wise, holding on to their possessions until we have sight of better days.

A year ago I asked Co Down auctioneer James Armstrong for his opinion s at the time so I returned to him again this spring time to see how he views the scene at present. "Had you asked me a year ago whether we would still be in the doldrums 12 months later, I would have indicated about an 80% chance and I think that is exactly where we are now, a few green shoots, but certainly nothing structurally positive," he tells me. "From an Auctioneer's perspective it is always a balance between volume of sales and realised asset prices. Sometimes less volume at good prices is better than more volume at poor prices. On the positive side, record livestock prices and robust agricultural commodity prices are underpinning good quality agricultural land,



*This painting by George Campbell sold for €20,000 by Adams.*

which remains at the upper end of its recent range. The used car market remains strong, as there is a supply shortfall feeding in due to reduced new vehicle purchases over the last three years. The plant and machinery market retains its lustre, as businesses opt for second hand over new, and the used plant export route to the UK mainland and further afield remains attractive.

"Fine Art, and specialised antiques, have had a mixed year, largely either holding their own or declining slightly, yet in contrast fine wine is enjoying double digit percentage growth, as the new consumers of the Far East discover it both for consumption and for investment."

Then there is the negative side: "Despite a minor pick up in construction activity, land bank remains in the doldrums, commercial property is in decline, and residential property is at best flat-lining.

"Increasingly, distressed property assets are coming onto the market, as lenders adopt an increasingly bearish view of the sector, with significant oversupply in the retail, office and commercial sectors," he adds

"There is however opportunity out there in the residential market,



*This Middleton was sold for €10,000 by Adams.*



*Peter Mandelson Spitting Image snake puppet sold by Whyte's for €500.*

with the return of the buy to let investor, snapping up distressed residential property, often with tenants in situ, and giving attractive double digit yields.

What then about the future: "Going forward, I am more optimistic. We have probably passed peak unemployment, and Northern Ireland fared rather better than many other regions in the UK. Incomes are gradually rising, interest rates remain low, so disposable incomes should once more begin to slowly increase. As the banks increasingly repair their own balance sheets, inevitably lending levels will increase both to businesses and individuals. I feel we are at the pricing floor in most markets, and both companies and individuals are increasingly realising there are attractively priced bargains out there. Add to this an increase in real incomes for the first time in 2 or 3 years, and a gradual easing in the availability of credit, and the picture going forward begins to look a lot brighter. My auctioneer's gavel will remain busy, but this year will be better than last, and next year will be considerably better again."

So there you have it. An experienced auctioneer who feels the months ahead could be more fruitful than the recent ones we have travelled through. I hope he is right.

## **CONFIDENCE IN THE SALES SCENE**

Another who espouses a bit of confidence in the sales scene is James O'Halloran of Dublin based ADAMS.

"This year so far, at least as far as ADAMS are concerned is better than last year with all out sales to date generating better revenue in all sectors and forthcoming sales are also shaping up very well indeed," he told me.

Their late March sale saw a Jack Butler Yeats coming under the hammer at €95,000 while a Paul Henry made €37,000 and two by Louis Le Brocquy sold for €29,500 and €27,000 respectively. The work of Northern artist George Campbell is always in demand so it was no surprise to see one of his painting sell at €20,000, while one from James Arthur O'Connor made €13,000 and another from Colin Middleton went at €10,000. Among others of note were: Hugh Douglass Hamilton, €9,000; Daniel O'Neill, €7,500; John B. Vallely, €7,000; Frank McKelvey, €6,200; James H. Craig €6,000; Cecil Maguire €5,600 Basil Blackshaw, €5,200 Donald Teskey, €4,000, William Percy French €3,200.

ADAM's director David Britton said: "We held a very successful preview exhibition at the Ava Gallery in the Clondeboy Estate, Co Down. It highlighted the sale and gave everyone who visited it a great opportunity to view Irish art at first hand."

## **SUCCESS AT WHYTE'S**

There was a crowded saleroom for WHYTE'S History, Literature & Collectibles auction in Dublin in late April with over 400 bidders in the room while others were on the telephone on watching live on line from all corners of the globe. And the success of the event is found in the fact that over 80% of the lots on offer were sold to a wide and far flung selection of buyers.



*Florin, 1943. The rarest date 20th century Irish silver coin sold by Whyte's for €7,500.*

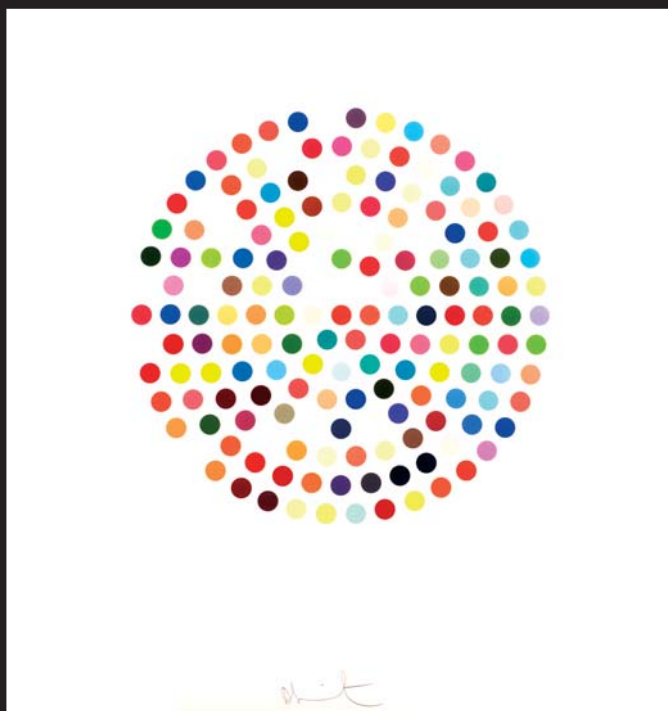
Top results included €7,500 for a 1943 Florin, the rarest date 20th century Irish silver coin (illustrated); €7,500 for unique and important documents from the 1916 Rising including a ceasefire order; €6,200 for The paramilitary archive of UVF leader Augustus Andrew (Gusty) Spence and €5,000 for extraordinary correspondence regarding Pádraig Pearse's Life Assurance Policy.

Some of the most talked about items in the auction were the Spitting Image puppets of Gerry Adams, Nelson Mandela and Peter Mandelson. They were bought for Johnnie Fox's south Dublin pub in Glencullen. The Mandela puppet went for €1,500 while Adams fetched €1,300 and Mandelson €500 and no doubt all will bring much amusement to clients of the establishment in the future. The auction was something of a marathon lasting well over seven hours and contained an eclectic mix of items from Titanic



William Conor, 'Girls on tram' went for £14,000 at ROSS'S.

mementos to Lady Lavery bank notes. A James Morton painting of Titanic passing the Fastnet Lighthouse sold for €5,600 while White Star Line cups and saucers made over four times their auction estimated as did autographs of longest living survivor Millvina Dean. A dozen Irish Victorian Valentine cards sent to a 'Marion Bradshaw of Dublin' during the 1850s and 1860s sold for €280 while tickets for an 18th century Dublin lottery to raise money for Mercer's hospital made €320. Correspondence between an insurance company and a



ROSS'S sold this Damien Hirst limited edition lithograph for £500.

bank relating to Pádraig Pearse sold for €5,000 while three unopened packs of Fliieger brand cigarettes, made for German Luftwaffe during WW2 made €280. A telegram which brought the first news of the Titanic disaster to an Irish newspaper, the Belfast Telegraph, did not sell. It was expected to make €30,000.

## THE BELFAST SCENE

In Belfast, ROSS'S spring sale of Irish art saw a William Conor, wax crayon, 'Girls on tram' going for £14,000 while another, 'The Donkey cart' made £8,500, Markey Robinson sold for £8,000 while a work from the studio of Roderic O'Connor made £6,500. George Russell's 'Enchanted wood' realised £5,000 while a Cecil Maguire made £4,100 and similar price was paid for a James H. Craig oil.

Other prices included: Damien Hirst limited edition lithograph, £500; Frank Egginton, watercolour, £3,400; Norah McGuinness, £2,645; Gladys Maccabe £2,500; Charles McAuley, £2,200; Tom Carr, £2,100; Ken Hamilton, £2,000; Joseph McWilliams, £1,950; Breon O'Casey, £1,900; Colin Davidson, £1,900; Colin Middleton, £1,800; George Callaghan £1,800.



Champion Jockey Tony McCoy with Alan Quigley.

## TAILPIECE.

International artist Alan Quigley is an avid follower of the sport of kings and indeed many other sports for that matter. His monumental life size painting of the late Alex Higgins is currently hanging in Belfast's Merchant hotel where it is attracting much attention from a world-wide audience which is continually passing through this acclaimed building. His recent commissions for sporting personalities have included champion jockey Tony 'AP' McCoy with whom he is seen in the photograph.





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# Top Chefs put eels on the menu at Shanes Castle

**C**hefs Sean Owens and Emmett McCourt, both passionate about our local food heritage, teamed up at the Flavour Fine Food Festival at Shanes Castle to tickle the tastebuds of the thousands who came to the Irish Game Fair in July.

## Putting eels on the menu

Although Lough Neagh is home to the largest commercial wild eel fishery in Europe, almost all of our eel catch is exported, to be enjoyed in London, Holland, Germany and beyond. This year, with the Flavour Food Festival at Shanes Castle Game and Country Fair taking place right on the shores of the Lough, Flavour decided it was the perfect chance to remind people about this delicious fish, regarded as a delicacy in so many countries around the world, but forgotten right here in Northern Ireland.

Flavour Magazine teamed up with two of County Londonderry's top chefs take each other on in a culinary



*Emmett McCourt in action*

eel recipes –from traditional to contemporary - in a battle of the taste buds.

Sean Owens, the Northern Ireland 'chefs' celebrity chef, is one of the best known characters, most respected chefs and influential lobbyists for food on the local culinary map. His restaurant, Gardiners in Magherafelt, sets the bar for good food in Mid-Ulster and eel is a regular on his menus.

Emmett McCourt is a lecturer at North-West Regional College in Derry City and, with an international career as a chef behind him, there is no better man to pass on learning. He is also the author of 'Feast or Famine' a culinary and cultural history of the north-west, due to be published in 2013 as part of the 'City of Culture' celebrations. Both chefs are passionate about local food and food traditions and in their view, eel quite simply should be on local menus.

Lough Neagh eels come with their own story. Local fishermen had their rights to fish the lough for eels taken from them in the early seventeenth century and the Lough Fishermen's Cooperative Society, formed in 1963

and headed by Father Oliver Kennedy, raised enough money to buy back the rights, taking full control of eel fishing in the lough from 1971 onwards.



*"That's delicious" - Sean Owens tempts the tastebuds.*

challenge to get visitors to the Game Fair excited about eels. Over the course of the two-day event, Sean Owens and Emmett McCourt demonstrated a range of delicious

The Flavour Food Festival eel challenge at Shanes Castle proved so popular, they couldn't call a winner – when asked to vote for their favourite dish people just voted for them all! What was very special was the frequency with which the idea of eating eels turned from noses being turned up at the idea into lip-smacking delight and a call for more, as people actually tasted eels cooked to perfection for the first time. Yes, we did manage to educate quite a few 'non-believers' on the wonders of eel!

### **Eels - the local story**

Lough Neagh is home to the largest commercial wild eel fishery in Europe. Eel fishing is managed by the Lough Fishermen's Cooperative Society, under the leadership of Father Oliver Kennedy, which exports around 650 tonnes of eels a year, to Billingsgate Market in London, to Holland and to Germany. Eels are prized in London, throughout Europe and especially in Japan and the Far East, but here in Northern Ireland, where we are fortunate to have such a plentiful supply, we rarely, if ever, indulge in one of the world's great culinary delicacies.

You can order eels directly from: Lough Neagh Fishermen's Cooperative Society, Toomebridge, Co Antrim BT41 3SB

E: loughneagh-eels@btconnect.com T: 028 7965 0618

### **Sean Owens' Curry Rubbed Lough Neagh Eels with Celeriac Remoulade, Champ Galette and Curry Oil Drizzle**

#### **Ingredients**

fresh Lough Neagh eels (skinned and gutted)  
plain flour  
salt and pepper  
curry powder



vegetable oil

#### **Celeriac Remoulade**

200g celeriac, grated  
½ lemon, juice only  
50ml double cream  
100ml mayonnaise  
2 tsp Dijon mustard  
salt and white pepper to season

#### **Champ Galette**

200g cooked mashed potato  
2 tbsp buttermilk  
2 tbsp cream  
1 bunch scallions, chopped  
1 tbsp butter  
salt and pepper  
flour

#### **Curry Oil**

100g onions  
20g curry powder  
1 litre good quality vegetable oil  
3 cinnamon sticks  
rock salt

#### **Method**

##### **For the eels**

Mix together the flour, salt, pepper and curry powder  
Rub this mixture over the eels and pan fry in a little oil, until browned.

Transfer to a moderate oven (180C/350F/Gas 4) to cook for 15 minutes.

#### **Celeriac Remoulade**

Mix all ingredients together and infuse overnight.

#### **Champ Galette**

Cook the scallions in the cream and add to the potatoes together with the buttermilk and butter. Mash to an even, creamy consistency.

Shape the champ into patties with your hands and roll in the flour to coat

Cook on a griddle or fry pan until golden brown

#### **Curry Oil**

In a thick bottomed pan, fry off the spices and onions in the oil over a medium heat and leave to infuse and cool. Pass through a strainer and

*Curry Rubbed Lough Neagh Eels with Celeriac Remoulade, Champ Galette and Curry Oil Drizzle*

place in a bottle.

### **Presentation and Assembly**

Place the Galette in the centre of a plate. Top with the golden fried Lough Neagh eels. Top with lots of celeriac remoulade and drizzle with curry oil. Grated Granny Smith apples make a great, acidic accompaniment.

## ***Emmett McCourt's Summer Salad of Smoked Lough Neagh Eel***

### **Ingredients**

200g smoked Lough Neagh Eel, cut into 3 diamond slices

2 whole beetroot

100g chopped walnuts

Brighter Gold rapeseed oil

100g peeled and grated Celeriac

50g peeled and grated horseradish

2 tbsp of mayonnaise

1 tbsp Dijon mustard

1tbsp white vinegar

1tbsp sugar

drop of lemon juice

summer salad leaves – wild rocket, oak leaf, red chard, mustard leaves

edible flowers, rapeseed, chive, borage, nasturtiums

salt and pepper to season

### **Method**

#### **Roasted Beetroot**

Prepare the beetroot for roasting by washing thoroughly in cold water. Slice the stalk and root from

the beetroot and pierce with a knife several times. Season with rock salt and wrap in tinfoil. Roast in a moderate oven at 180C/350F/Gas 4 for 1 hour 15 minutes and allow to cool.

#### **Walnut and Roasted Beetroot**

Skin, slice and dice one roasted beetroot. Mix with the chopped walnuts. Add Brighter Gold Rapeseed oil to bind and add a little sugar and season to taste.

#### **Brighter Gold and Beetroot Dressing**

Skin and chop the remaining beetroot and liquidise or blend, adding the vinegar and sugar. Season with salt and pepper. Turn the liquidiser to low speed, slowly adding the Brighter Gold rapeseed oil. Liquidise until a fine dressing is achieved, adding more oil if necessary.

#### **Celeriac Remoulade**

Mix the grated celeriac and horseradish in a bowl. Add the lemon juice and Dijon mustard and bind with the mayonnaise. Season to taste.

#### **Finish and Present**

Pan fry or grill the smoked Lough Neagh Eel for 2 minutes on each side.

Arrange the Celeriac remoulade on the centre of the plate. Add a little dressing to the salad leaves and arrange on top of the celeriac. Place the cooked smoked lough Neagh eel on top of the salad. Spoon a little of the walnut and beetroot mixture on top of the eel and around the plate. Drizzle with the dressing. Finish by arranging the edible flowers on and around



*Smoked eel salad*



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# Lough Boora Ranger Wants A Seat For Wildlife On The Farmland Bus



*Kieran Buckley at a partridge field, Lough Boora.*

**Kieran Buckley is originally from Kildare and has been working as a Ranger in Lough Boora since 1996 where he has overseen the Grey Partridge scheme which has brought this bird back from the brink of extinction and has been a massive success, so much so that a group of gamekeepers from Britain visited Lough Boora last July to witness the success story in action. Derek Fanning talked to Kieran and was told that society is not treating wildlife correctly.**

Kieran Buckley is passionate about his work. As we walked through the fields of Lough Boora last July he pointed out the grey partridge flying above the grass and showed me the habitats which partridges like to nest and live in, while all the time talking enthusiastically about wildlife and nature, which is his love and his life. The grey partridge is fine now in Lough Boora, he told me, but the National Parks and Wildlife Service (which employs Kieran) wants to expand the bird's numbers outside of Lough Boora. About ten years ago there were only about 20 grey partridges in Boora. Now there are about 900.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is not resting on its laurels. "The longer term solution for the grey partridge," Kieran told me, "is a much more difficult challenge because it means a change of attitudes and it all depends on the availability of good habitat on farmland; in other words situations where the farmer is farming his land but there is also room for the partridge and other birds. In other words the creation of farms where there is biodiversity." He commented that when he thinks of the plight of wildlife in the world he thinks

of the black rights activist Rosa Parks. "She only wanted one seat on the bus. In the same way wildlife only wants one seat on the farm and the farmers will still be able to have the other 19 seats. If you provide that seat for it wildlife restores itself very quickly." He talked with reverence about the Native Americans and the way they used to hunt: "I was in Tall Timbers research station in Florida where the Native Americans used to burn large areas which encouraged game into the burnt area."

He told me that his Mum and Dad Pat and Jenny are living in Newbridge. "My dad wouldn't have a similar passion for the outdoors. GAA is his passion and soccer. My mother used to encourage me in my love of the outdoors.' His granduncle Tom was a gamekeeper and he managed an estate. His great grandmother was Spanish 'and she was very dark. My grey hair used to be dark once!"

The grey partridge Lough Boora project started in 1996. "In '96 it was research and predator control and we knew little about grey partridges back then. I was here working nine years on the project and then I became a Wildlife Ranger in the National Parks and Wildlife Service." He's a Ranger in Louth as well, so his week is divided between Louth and Offaly. 'In Louth I'm enforcing the wildlife acts in terms of the European regulations.'

Kieran is 46 years of age and is originally from Newbridge. He left school when he was 16: "Because I had little interest in what was going on in the classroom! I was more interested in what was going on in the natural world outside." After school he worked on buildings in the UK, he worked in a butcher's shop and in Irish Ropes in Newbridge (which made baling twine).

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*For details contact Patricia*

He was in the army for three years and joined when he was 17. He joined the 3rd Infantry Battalion in the Curragh in the early '80s. 'There was a huge crisis with the recession - there were no jobs and the Defence Forces announced they were looking for recruits and thousands went for it because there was nothing else.

"I did a good interview and I was fit, young, enthusiastic and I got the job." He was a private and didn't really like the job: "I met really sound people whom you could be friends with for life, and I am still friends with them after all these years. I realised that I didn't want a career in the army. I saw quite a bit of bullying going on in the army and I didn't like it one bit." This wasn't the *de rigeur*, tough sergeant major role, that we are so familiar with through the movies. It was, in fact, a mode of behaviour which was wrong. "Sometimes," said Kieran, "it was almost like *Lord of the Flies* with the strong maltreating the weak. This bullying wasn't rampant but there were some instances of it. I noticed as well that the less intelligent a person was the bigger bully he was."

## ***A love of nature and a love of hunting***

He recalled that he was always interested in wildlife: "When I was a young lad I used to collect birds' eggs which we called "nesting". The countryside was my playground. I got my first shotgun when I was 16 and I went hunting with it. I went hunting rabbits and fishing. A love of nature and a love of hunting are, paradoxically, interlinked."

In the early '90s he got a job as a gamekeeper on Oileán Mór Island on Lough Derg which was his introduction to gamekeeping and the managing of game birds: "I stayed there for three years. I did a diploma in Field Ecology in UCC and I did very well in that. I got a better understanding of how systems work and finished the UCC course in 2003."

In 2005 Kieran did an interview for six full-time permanent Ranger positions and got the job. He was appointed to Louth. He commented that people in the wildlife world are often not very well paid and it's a labour of love for them. He recalled that in the mid '90s Professor Brendan Kavanagh and a wildlife ranger called Val Swan 'were stirring things up about the plight of the grey partridge.

"In '96 Ireland was left with two naturally occurring populations of grey partridge, one in Lullymore and one in Boora. It was decided to manage the Boora population because it was more viable. In 2000 the Lullymore population was deemed to be extinct leaving Boora as the last vestige of naturally occurring populations." He pointed out that the NPWS has already begun the project of expanding the grey partridge population beyond Lough Boora and back onto farmland. He added that the

partridge is seen by the EU as being a barometer bird, in other words it's an indication of the health of an ecosystem. (The secretive, ground-nesting grey partridge is part of a trans-European fight to stop and reverse the continent's worsening ecological richness.)

He remarked that unfortunately in Ireland so often the environment is not a priority unless Europe is breathing down our neck with a flamethrower! Ireland's track record regarding environmental management is rated as being the second worst in Europe, after Malta (which refused to sign the birds directive until the EU said sign it or else you are not coming in). One environmental report colour-coded Ireland as being red in nearly every zone - red is the worst colour-code for species.

He would like to be involved in a corncrake reintroduction scheme. He remarked that there was only one calling male in the Shannon Callows this year: "We have seen the demise of the corncrake because the underlying cause hasn't been addressed which is the change from extensive to intensive farming. Corncrakes can survive where the farming is extensive. Unfortunately the Callows was a wet place and wasn't ideal for the corncrakes. The reason the corncrakes were there was because it was so unfriendly everywhere else, and it was so unfriendly because the farming was intensive; and the Callows was less intensive so they could hang on. There were about a hundred corncrakes in the Callows and the numbers crashed when it got wet.

"There may be the option to do a captive breeding programme to assist the recovery but unless we address the underlying cause it is futile. The issue of predation would need to be looked at as well. A ground-nesting bird like the corncrake is vulnerable to predation from predators such as foxes and grey crows and magpies (which go for chicks and young poults). Birdwatch Ireland did their best in the Callows and tried everything. In the Callows the corncrake's life-support system, their habitat, has crashed."

## ***Eagles can 'slot in,' unlike the corncrake and partridge ecosystem***

By contrast the Golden Eagles were successfully reintroduced in Donegal: "All the Golden Eagles need is enough dead stuff to eat. They don't have huge demands on habitat - in other words they can slot in, if they are not poisoned. Whereas with the corncrake and partridge the whole ecosystem is gone. To manage both of those species you have to rebuild it from the bottom. Therefore it is much more difficult.

"In Lough Boora it so happened that the cutaway bogs were the last refuges of the grey partridges and that's because they had died off on the farmlands. We didn't know this before the early '90s but the partridges





*Kieran says the demise of the corncrake is because the underlying cause hasn't been addressed.*

were spending their autumns and winters in adjacent farmland and then moving onto the cutaway bogs during the spring to breed, because the cutaways were not managed i.e. they were not sprayed with pesticides so some of the weeds that used to grow in the traditional tillage farms were

existing on the edges of the cutaways (along the spoil that would have been dug up when the drains were being created) and the insects were here and the insects supported the grey partridge chicks. Whereas the farms were devoid of that. So they either went to the cutaway or they starved."

He said the National Parks and Wildlife Service bought 644 acres in Lough Boora from Bord na Móna in 2006, so they could secure the land usage because there were plans to further develop grassland (which would not have been good for the partridge). The NPWS bought the land in order to secure the species for the nation. The old extensive type of farming has been recreated on the 644 acres. A Ranger's job in these situations also includes predator control.

"At this time of the year," remarked Kieran, "the predator control has taken a back seat. The work was done in the spring when we reduced the numbers of predators such as magpies and grey crows, rats and mink etc. At this time of the year the chicks are big enough so they can get away. But we are still controlling foxes during this time because they are still killing adult birds."

This predator control has benefited the lapwing population. 'The number of lapwings in Lough Boora has increased. We found 79 lapwing nests this year with over 200 eggs on the same lands managed for the grey partridge. The lapwings are jockeying on the back of our grey partridge work. The lapwing's numbers have reduced in Ireland because of the same problems which have beset the grey partridge - habitat loss and predation."

Finally, Kieran told me that during this time of the year he is also stopping people coming in with dogs because the chicks are still very young, another rung in the conservation ladder.



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# Flight And Some Irish Connections



*De Havilland (centre) and Spitfire (right).*

**A**viation has come a long way since the Wright Brothers were accredited for the first heavier than air, powered, controlled flight in December of 1903, developing many of their navigation skills from maritime methods. Since their invention, aeroplanes were almost immediately drafted in for military service, first seeing action during the Italian-Turkish War in 1911 on reconnaissance, bombing and shelling missions. Their first major military usage was during World War I with aviators such as Manfred Von Richthofen (The Red Baron) becoming famous for air to air combat, shooting down 80 planes. On the allied side their record was held by Frenchman Rene Fonck with 75, while the British Ace was Edward Mannock, who held a record of 73.

Italy, Germany, France and Britain became the leading fighter plane manufacturers but accreditation had to go to France for their creation of a steady point to attach a fixed machine gun, improving accuracy. Many of the guns used would have included Vickers, Lewis, Maxim or Hotchkiss guns.

Between World War I and World War II, aviation saw great advances with aircraft developing from low powered wooden and fabric biplanes to high powered aluminium aircraft. After the First World War aviators were keen to show off their developed flying skills and often took part in aerobatic displays and air races. One such person was Amelia Earhart, one of the most famous female pilots, who was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. She received the U.S Distinguished Flying Cross but later, in an attempt to circumnavigate the

globe, disappeared over the Central Pacific Ocean. Recently investigators have been scanning the ocean and think that they may have found her plane wreck, although it had not yet been confirmed.

By the 1930s both Britain and Germany had started their development on the jet engine, with the first jet plane being introduced by Germany in 1939. They had little impact due to their late development, fuel shortages and lack of experienced pilots.

During World War Two there was a marked increase in the development and production of aircraft; all countries involved stepped up their efforts. The first long range bomber was created, allowing a change in tactics with large scale bombing campaigns; they developed their weapons systems to allow precise attacks on small targets; and new technologies like radar helped in air defence. Germany also developed the first cruise missile, first ballistic missile and first vertical take off rocket interceptor.

Due to the danger in flying there was a great need for the invention of safe and reliable ejection seats, as previously pilots would have to try jump clear, something very difficult due to injury, confined spaces, g-forces and even the airflow over the aircraft. Early models created were based on bungee and air propelled systems, with the first man ejecting from a damaged plane back in January 1942, but as the planes developed and got faster, there was a need for a new ejection system. Stepping up to the mark Northern Ireland as The Martin-Baker Company, formed by Sir James Martin from Crossgar, Co Down, were called upon in 1944 by the Ministry of Aircraft Production to investigate a new system as way of escaping a fighter plane. His ideas were based on an upward forced ejection, created by an

explosive charge. When up, the seat would fall away from the pilot and then he could open his parachute in the usual way. The first seat was tested in a Gloster Meteor, was the first British jet fighter and the Allies' first operational jet, in July 1946 and since then 7,400 lives have been saved by their seats.

Ireland has played a major part in shaping aviation history, beginning back on 31st December 1909 with Harry Ferguson, who became the first person to fly in Ireland, when he flew a monoplane he designed and built himself. By 1947 the sound barrier was broken by Chuck Yeager, although there was some controversy whether it had not already been broken by dive bombers during the war. Commercial flying really 'took off' thanks to the ex-military planes, such as the Lancaster, which were converted into commercial planes. And of course later to come was the first flight to the moon. Better military aircraft were invented like the Harrier Jump Jet, which was capable of vertical lift and short take off and landing. And here again, a Northern Ireland first with the first vertical take off plane being built here by Shorts, achieving its first VTOL flight by May 1958. More was to follow with today's commercial planes such as the A380, the world's largest passenger airliner, a double decked four engine, jet aircraft which can hold up to 840 passengers.

### ***The first woman to 'loop the loop'***

As planes developed, increasingly people took an interest in aviation like Lady Mary Heath, originally from County Limerick and educated in Dublin in the Royal College of Science. She married in 1919 to an engineer based in Curragh, but soon after their marriage she joined the War Office as a dispatch rider, being based in England and France. When she returned home after the war, she spent some time with her husband in East Africa on a coffee farm they acquired, but as their marriage broke down she returned to England for longer periods. In that time she was a delegate to an Olympic Congress in Prague, which she travelled to for the first time by aeroplane in 1925 sparking her love for aviation. Mary became one of the first members of the London Aero Club and qualified for her 'B' licence. She became well known as the first woman to 'loop the loop' and parachute from a plane. Later she campaigned for her right to sit for a commercial 'A' licence, becoming Britain's first female commercial pilot and then received worldwide acknowledgment for flying all the way from



*A Dakota DC3*

South Africa to London in 1927.

Another family with a passion for flying was the Vane-Tempest-Stewart family of Mount Stewart in County Down. Lord Londonderry was the Air Minister (a title Sir Winston Churchill had held) and a qualified pilot. Back in May 1935 for his 57th birthday his wife erected him his own hanger to accommodate his two machines on their estate. He died in 1949, after suffering a stroke from a gliding accident. His daughter Lady Mairi Elizabeth also had a passion to fly and piloted her first plane aged 12.

### ***Belfast's new aircraft factory***

By 1936 the Air Ministry had commissioned a new aircraft factory in Belfast under the new company name of Short & Harland Ltd. It was owned 50:50 by Harland & Wolff and Shorts. During the Second World War they produced Short Sunderlands, anti submarine patrol bombers, which helped to win the Battle of the Atlantic. Thanks to their work on the Shorts Sunderland they also won the contract for the Short Stirling, the RAF's first four engine bomber. Following a bombing by the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain on a Shorts factory in Rochester, a number of Sterlings and other aircraft were destroyed, so efforts were concentrated in Belfast, as it was deemed out of range from German bombers. In Easter week 1941 the factory was again hit by the Germans, so other factories were opened at nearby Aldergrove and Maghaberry, which were successful in producing 232 Stirlings.

Aldergrove originally was opened during the First World War as a Royal Flying Corp training base but by 1925 was designated as an RAF station and it was vitally important during the Second World War for the Coastal Command, because it was capable of accommodating their large long range aircraft, which would have been

*A pair of Sopwith Triplanes.*



invasion of Britain. They had areas covered by airfields in Rineanne near Limerick and Dublin Airport, but they needed somewhere else which wouldn't be overrun quickly. They decided on a site at the south of Tipperary, named Rathduff, a name found throughout Munster. The Irish Army built a HQ close to a Convent school several miles away and both

used during the battle of the Atlantic, patrolling for U-Boats.

During the Second World War the Germans had planned 'Operation Green', their planned occupation of Ireland. It was a front of 'Operation Sea Lion' which was the planned Nazi invasion of the UK. RAF Long Kesh was to be destroyed by German paratroopers (today it stands as a very interesting aviation history museum, run by the Ulster Aviation Society) while RAF Aldergrove, Nutts Corner and Langford Lodge were all to be captured. We are not sure if this was either a credible threat or an actual plan. Although 'Plan W' was drawn up, this was a joint military operation between the United Kingdom and Ireland, which would be executed in the event of Ireland being invaded by Nazi Germany. Even though Ireland remained neutral they had valuable ports to protect and for the British it was important to protect their Western flank.

Today there is also a suspicion whether the UK was working with Ireland to locate a secret aerodrome, which the RAF could have used in the event of a German

areas remained 'no-go' for normal military operations.

During the Second World War, 120,000 American service men were stationed across Northern Ireland, the first arriving in January 1942 after the attack of Pearl Harbour. To this day, plane wrecks can still be found throughout the island where many of these service men went down after battles across the Atlantic or mechanical errors. I thought that it was noteworthy that if any service man went down in the Republic, they were interned in the South because Ireland was a



*Spitfire Trainer*

neutral nation. Even if the service men escaped they would even be returned, to cause no political animosity. They could even find themselves being held with German sailors who went down on U-boats or with the Luftwaffe aircrew.

Today the flying scene in Ireland has changed, our commercial airports are buzzing, old airstrips have been transformed, our aircraft keep developing thanks to the work of companies like Bombardier and many people now fly for fun, a hobby I enjoy myself. I think that it's interesting flying over the different airfields scattered across the country and I enjoy visiting different air shows where you can see wartime aircraft, such as Lancaster's and spitfires, mixed with modern day jets, like hawks soaring in the skies together and mull over Ireland's flying connections.



*(Left) Lewis Gun in situ - note that it was fired from above the pilot's head.*

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# THE FIRST STUBBLE

**I**love the ripening of the barley and wheat, it heralds the start of proper shooting again. The patches in the standing crop where the wind eddies produce opening that the birds take advantage of, both crows and pigeons. These present opportunities that have been missing through the green phase of the year but they are ubiquitous and the birds can easily find another patch to drop in on if your shooting puts them. Not so when the first fields are harvested though. The first field to be cut is always like a magnet to the pigeons and it provides the chance of some of the best decoying there is.

We were lucky this year as the first field of barley for miles around to be cut was on one of the farms where we shoot. Colin, the farmer, gave us a ring to say the combine was coming in and to be ready for some hectic action. Bill bought a load of cartridges and a new rotary decoy device to try out. I supplied the bulk of the decoys, a mix of shells and full bodied Flexicoys that I have had for at least 25 years and they are still as good today as they were when I bought them, some could do with a wash off mind. The field was in an ideal position, on top of a slight hill with a small wood at the back and other

woodlands round about within a couple of fields flight. We selected a spot under a couple of old oaks that would provide good overhead cover and a solid background for the hide netting, an important aspect of hide building is to ensure there is plenty of background to build it against. We used three nets, with slightly different colours. The mix of greens and browns broke up the shape of the hide without having to add a load of foliage to the netting. As there were three of us shooting we built two hides, one for Gary on the right and one for Bill and myself to the left. This way the main decoy pattern was covered from both sides and the birds going out either way were also covered.

The slight wind was ideal, coming from off our backs, so I set the decoys in a large U shape with the central gap in front of the two hides, which were about 40 yards apart. The idea being the pigeons would see the decoys and land in the vacant space in the middle. Bill and Gary sorted out the puzzle of the new rotary device that came without instructions and set it up just to the offside of the gap, where any flying birds would naturally come in to land. With the battery hidden under a swath of straw we were all set and retired to the hides. Bill went off in the van to park it out of the way.

It can't have been five minutes before the first pigeon

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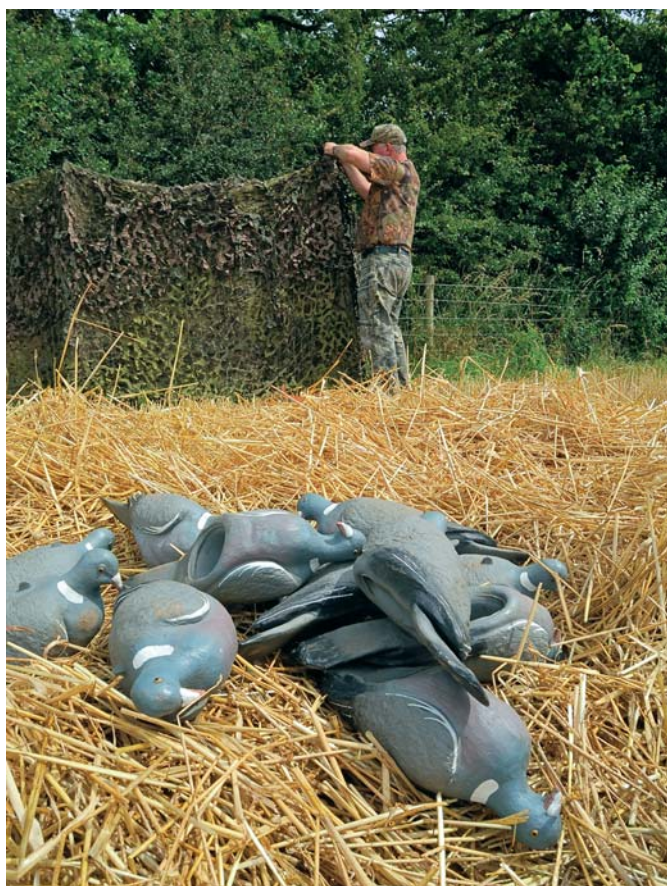
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*Fly doesn't like picking up pigeon but she finds them anyway.*

flew over and turned, drawn by the lure of the decoy pattern. It set its wings and dropped in confidently, as it came into range I swung through and folded it with the



*Some of the mix of shells and full bodied Flexicoys.*

first shot of the day. That gave me confidence because I hadn't picked the shotgun up since about February! I got the next five too, all with one shot apiece. I knew it couldn't last but Gary was shooting well too and I witnessed a couple of great doubles that his gun accounted for. He does shoot clays every week, so gets constant practise and it showed.

### ***As the pigeon swooped he lifted the new gun and promptly missed twice***

Bill arrived back, walking carefully around the field boundary to keep out of our arc of fire and as out of view of the approaching pigeons as possible before joining me in the bigger hide. Bill had his new Remington semi auto shotgun to christen and as he loaded the first cartridges into it a pigeon started to approach from in front, we peered low over the top of the net and Bill got himself ready. As the pigeon swooped in he lifted the new gun and promptly missed, twice. At the report more birds were disturbed from the woods around and the decoys drew them in. Poor Bill, he missed another couple and his confidence was knocked. Gary stopped a couple for him and I downed a couple as the flew out my side but Bill was still to open his score. After a few more misses Gary came over and gave Bill a bit of coaching, after which he was hitting pigeons as well as with his old gun.



*Bill and Gary sorted out the puzzle of the new rotary device.*

The afternoon was hot, sticky and hot and having some water in the hide was important to avoid getting dehydrated. Decoying on the early harvest fields is always thirsty work and having fluid with you is imperative, it helps to keep your reflexes sharp and prevent fatigue. There was a steady stream of birds in ones and twos, with the odd small party of four or five,



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but by far the majority of the visitors to our decoys were on solo missions, which is a useful because the report can put the pigeons off if they come in large flocks. A nice steady stream of pigeons every couple of minutes is ideal and we made the most of it. The decoys were working perfectly and as we added dead birds to the pattern the draw became stronger and stronger and we could see birds turning from a long way away and heading straight for our part of the field and the grey shadows on the ground.

The shooting was pretty well shared between us and even though I had Fly with us she doesn't like picking up pigeons, but she will find them for me to force my way into the brush to collect! The final count for the afternoon was 93 picked. Had we had a proper dog with us we might have made three figures. Even so, it was a great afternoon and we were lucky that the first stubble field was on our ground. As the harvest progresses so the ability to decoy will become progressively more difficult, as the choice of feeding ground increases. I am glad we took advantage of the first stubble field, it gave us some memorable shooting.



*As we added dead birds to the pattern the draw became stronger.*



*(l/r) The shooting party of Bill, Gary and the Author.*



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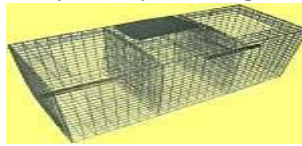
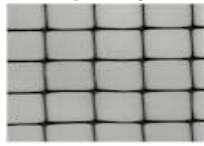
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# NARGC Director Is A Man With A Mission



*Des Crofton (rt) with former Government Press Secretary and RTE Journalist, Sean Duignan.*

**O**ffaly shooting representative Des Crofton is a man with a mission because he wants to change some people's negative perception of hunting. And he pointed out that hunting can keep young men off the streets and teach them self-discipline. There is no doubt that Des Crofton is a hard working shooting representative who has a massive love for the sport, a sport which he sometimes finds himself defending. He told me that despite his very busy job as a director of the NARGC (the National Association of Regional Game Councils), which has been based in Ferbane County Offaly for the last three years, he still finds lots of time to get out into the countryside for a spot of game shooting or deer stalking.

He said he's been shooting for 37 years and adores it as much as ever. "There's nothing I like more than heading out on a Saturday for a shoot, sometimes with a group if I'm game shooting, sometimes with just one other person, if I'm deer stalking. I just love being out in the countryside, I love its tranquillity and beauty. There is lots of time to think and ponder things and sometimes solutions come to me about problems in my daily life when I am out shooting." He said he can't recommend country pursuits strongly enough as a pastime whether it's shooting, fishing or fox hunting because they are fun, social, and mentally and physically good for people. "Many of us have hectic daily lives. We may have problems with loved ones. Because of the recession our daily environment can be depressing. Country sports are an antidote for all of that." He pointed out that we often read negative things about country sports in the media.

He said his mission, as an NARGC man, is to point out the positives.

It is a very commendable mission because there is little doubt but there is plenty of positives in country sports. "When I am out deer stalking," commented Des, "I am often in beautiful places, in woodlands or mountains, and I am often on my own; and for long periods of time I am stationary, quiet. It is a very calming experience; therapeutic. Because we are still and camouflaged the animal world can't see us, so we get to see the animals going about their usual business, which is a very peaceful atmosphere to experience."

Des has been working for the NARGC since 1991 and he was born and raised in County Dublin at the foot of the Dublin mountains. He was raised in Saggart, which at the time was a rural, farming community but unfortunately since then has become another branch of suburbia. He is 59 years of age and separated a few years ago from Brenda, his wife of many years, "but we remain on very amicable terms," he said, showing that marriage breakups can be civilised affairs as well as unpleasant ones. He has two children, Des Junior and Lynn, who long ago left the parental nest to make their own way in the world. Des is living in Cloghan County Offaly with his partner Ruta, from Lithuania, a graduate of Vilnius University with a Masters in Biology who speaks six languages and has a deep love of animals and birds. She is a well-respected dog trainer and has been living with Des in their Cloghan house for the last three years with their four dogs, harris hawk, horse and a plethora of chickens and ducks which supply them with lots of eggs. They also have a pet American Corn Snake which they have called Jeremy.

"There is an interesting story about that snake," said Des. Ruta worked for a while as a herpetologist (which is someone who is knowledgeable about reptiles) and one day she phoned me and said she had found an American Corn Snake in a field near her place of work. This was a field here in Ireland and she put the snake in her pocket and brought it home. At the time it was nine inches in length; now it is over a metre long. We think it was in the field because it may have escaped from a nearby pet shop, which means it had to cross the busy road in Malahide and survive the predators in the field, including a marsh harrier which was hunting in the area at the time."

### ***Director of FACE Ireland***

Prior to his current job he worked in Banking and Telecommunications. "Then in 1991 I saw an advert for the NARGC job and I thought it sounded very interesting. To begin with this job was part-time and there wasn't enough happening for it to be a full-time job, but it gradually expanded and it's now a very busy

job. It's a very busy brief which includes a large range of activities including fundraising, helping shooting clubs with advice, and developing habitats for birds." He is also the director of FACE Ireland, an umbrella organisation representing 13 hunting organisations and over 300,000 members including the angling, fox hunting and beagling communities as well as the shooting community. FACE Ireland is affiliated to an European organisation FACE Europe which comprises 29 countries. Des was recently appointed the Vice President of FACE Europe. The word FACE derives from the French *Fédération des Associations de Chasseurs de L'UE*, which was founded in September 1977 by the National Hunters' Associations of the Member States of the European Union. FACE has regular contacts with the 736 Members of the European Parliament and works in close collaboration with MEPs taking part in the Sustainable Hunting, Biodiversity, Countryside Activities & Forestry section of the EU. Since its foundation, FACE has had a big input into all EU initiatives (Directives, Amendments and Regulations) relating directly or indirectly to hunting and wildlife management. FACE represents 7 million hunters and part of its work is to gather and distribute information about nature conservation issues, and to raise awareness among European citizens.

### ***"Gun clubs have the goodwill of the majority of farmers"***

Habitat conservation is a big part of Des' brief. He told me that habitat is a vital ingredient in game development, but unfortunately over the last 20 years the great big yellow machine wrecked a large portion of habitat in this country, all in the name of progress. He pointed out that understandably, it is the farmer's prerogative to gain every available acre of land: "But in hindsight, one wonders if it was really necessary to clear away that corner of hazel or drain that small bit of marshland, not to mention the number of ponds that were drained. Thankfully, the introduction of REPS put an end to unplanned development. Generally speaking, gun clubs have the goodwill of the majority of farmers."

The NARGC provides advice to gun clubs when they are planning game development. It advises that in these instances the gun club should take stock of the habitat available in the club area and plan accordingly. For example if the club is in a non tillage area where intensive dairying and/or beef production is carried out with 40 acre plus fields, no ditches or hedgerows and plenty of slurry spread, then the club shouldn't consider pheasant release. But on the other hand, there may be ample streams or rivers to develop flight ponds for mallard, widgeon, teal, etc. At the moment there are grants available from the NARGC for such projects. He

remarked that if your club area happens to hold a good natural wild pheasant stock then you are indeed very lucky and you should do your utmost to help conserve that stock which could include improving where possible, your pest control programme, paying particular attention to mink or, if not already doing so, sowing small food plots and cover crops. Des is also a spokesman for the RISE campaign and the NARGC is a nominating body for the Seanad.

Des pointed out that the National Association of Regional Game Councils is the largest voluntary organisation in Ireland involved in game shooting and conservation. He said the Association has 28,000 members in 926 Clubs spread throughout the country which is one Club in almost every parish. It has enjoyed an increasing membership year on year for the past ten years with an average increase of 500 per annum. He told me that it was decided to move the NARGC offices from Ranelagh Dublin down to Ferbane because it would be a more accessible location for its members. "People living outside Dublin often dislike coming up to Dublin and we felt that a move to Ferbane would facilitate them as well." There is another NARGC office in Leitrim which oversees the insurance fund for shooting accidents.

One of the challenges currently facing the NARGC is the degradation of habitat, a problem that is present all over Europe. He laments the decline of birds such as the corncrake and the curlew. "The NARGC," he remarked, "believes in the wise and sustainable use of the land and if the species is not sustainable then shooting of that species shouldn't take place. I recently wrote to Minister Deenihan asking him to remove the curlew from the hunting list."

Another challenge facing the NARGC is changing the perception of hunting and shooting in the minds of some members of the public. "We are becoming an increasingly urbanised society and therefore more and more people have the wrong perception of hunting and shooting. We are living in a world where many young people don't know where their sausages come from; they don't know where butter comes from, nor where eggs come from. A professor in University College Cork recently lamented to me the fact that some new students coming into the university are very ignorant of the natural world. It should also be stated that game meat is organic meat.

## **Government attitude**

"There was a time when a lot of children spent a great deal of their time with their Dads hunting in the countryside. Now the Xbox and the TV have taken over and is competing for the interest of young people. With the result as well that many are entering hunting later

rather than earlier. Here in the NARGC we have developed really good hunting education courses. And next year we will partner a Transition Year course in a secondary school." The NARGC also offers a course for those people wishing to put game into shops (which is done through a game dealer). If you would like to become a better shot then the organisation also has a programme of shooting proficiency courses. Another of our concerns is the attitude of the government. For example members of this government said to us before the last general election that they would lift the ban against the Ward Union Hunt. We therefore lobbied our members to vote for this government during the last general election. However since then the promises haven't been kept and the ban against the Ward Union hasn't been lifted.

"We have experienced in Ireland a series of successive governments ignoring rural Ireland in many ways. We have witnessed the closing of Garda Stations, Post Offices, the cutting of services from hospitals and nursing units, the lack of an adequate rural transport system. The septic tank tax is another burdensome tax and if you live in urban areas you are not burdened with a septic tank tax. Rural Ireland is on its knees. However, it should also be pointed out that we have some very good politicians across all the parties who have the best interests of rural Ireland at heart."

Des said that shooting clubs are important cogs in the wheels of their local towns and villages: "Getting young people involved in the hobbies of fox hunting, shooting or fishing can be beneficial for society because it can keep them away from causing mischief on the streets of our towns and it can also teach them self-discipline. It also inculcates in young people a respect for the natural world."

### *Editor's Note:*

We in Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine have profiled Des Crofton and his work on behalf of virtually all country sports in Ireland but particularly the shooting sports. We consider that he has made a major contribution including the most recent firearms victory in the high court and for this and his past work on behalf of us all we were pleased to award him the Brownlow Award for 2011/12 for the person who made the largest contribution to country sports in Ireland.

We though it might be interesting to have a 'newspaper man's take' on the director of Ireland's largest countrysports organisation and when we heard that Derek Fanning was 'doing a piece on Des' for the local paper thought we would carry a variant of it.

Derek Fanning a regular contributor to ICS&CL is also Deputy Editor of the Midland Tribune newspaper for which he recently interviewed Des Crofton as a new 'Midlands' resident'.



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# Country Chat

*Billy's (short) radio career, qualification thoughts and tortuous torrents in a kayak*

**O**ne of the fortunate things about writing under the heading of Country Chat, I am not tied down to a particular topic or subject, so I can scribble about virtually anything that enters my head. Which is just as well, for as I drift from one topic to another, one could be forgiven for believing that it is a deliberate attempt to be confusing or that it is done with such genius gusto that it is easily forgotten. But then again, if I was permitted to write on the same subject each quarter, I strongly suspect that the editing team would have an army of solicitors standing by.

I remember the late Dinah Brown who, at the time worked for local radio and lived in my home village of Seaforde, interviewing me for a wee slot on Friday morning's country topics. The first recording we made together was with me waffling about Peregrine falcons and the next recording was about wood pigeons in the Seaforde area. In those days, radio must have been a very powerful media tool, for shortly after



*Billy heads for the hills with dogs in tow.*

the wood pigeon recording went on air, we had mini buses, public buses, cars and even scooters dropping people off, ironically enough right outside Dinah's house, for that was the

only place in Seaforde which was convenient to the nearby woods. All of them had one thing in common though, they were kitted out in camouflaged clothing and toting shotguns!

On another occasion I innocently remarked that my cousin out wildfowling had found an American Great Belted Kingfisher, it had more rings on it than at a Gypsy wedding. Apparently it was being monitored as it drifted along our northern coastline, brought over to our shores by unusual high winds at that time, which of course explained the presence of my wildfowling cousin. Anyhow, I handed it over to the warden at Dundrum Murlough nature reserve; the twitchers who were monitoring it obviously didn't monitor it well enough or kept the hours of my wildfowling cousin, for until it was found, they had assumed that it had enough of Irish hospitality and had gone back home.

Anyway, my wee spiel on local bird life was all innocent

enough rubbish, certainly to the majority of casual listeners, if indeed anybody was listening at all, but when I started talking about dead wildlife and our American Kingfisher in particular, granny stopped her knitting. Gordon Bennet, some people are easily offended, but that put an end to my very short radio career. Dinah went back to interviewing more reliable people and could still keep the country topic thing going providing, no doubt, she stayed away from me!

Staying with Seaforde, but moving swiftly on to the present time, I was driving up the road the other day towards the village of Seaforde, when a brown animal went across the road in front of me. Now this was about midday, it obviously wasn't a fox or a badger, it had a distinct hump on its back though, but too brown and certainly to big to be



*The team in action.*



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a mink. It was rough-coated and its tail resembled that of a fox, so I came to the conclusion that it could only have been an otter. But I expected it to be more otter-like in appearance, certainly where the tail was concerned, perhaps it was a young one, moulting or whatever. I had seen an otter in the same area many years previously, but that was definitely an otter. Some of the lads in the club have seen one in the same location before, so all roads lead to it being an otter. To have unusual and rare sightings such as that on your own home patch is, for me, very exciting and adds that extra thrill to being out in the countryside.

### ***“Cuckoo spit,” he told the children, “from Cuckoos!”***

I remember once when I worked for a brief period as an instructor on outdoor pursuits, we were filling in the morning by taking the children to a nature reserve and, on that particular morning, with the aid of the local warden, it was decided that a gentle stroll along the river path would be ideal for the kid’s age group, or leastways it should have been, but the warden wasn’t available, so his assistant kindly stood in for him instead. My goodness, I have never heard such misinterpretation of our countryside’s inhabitants, there was barely a bird, animal or plant that he got right. As we got closer to the centre on our way back, one of the children asked what the little white frothy bubbles were, that were all over the shrubs and saplings, little blobs of white froth that are secreted by froghopper nymphs, commonly known as Cuckoo-spits to you and me. This should be a good one I thought to myself as I looked towards the children’s school tutor, who probably was thinking the same. “Does anyone know what you call those little white bubbles?” the assistant enquired. No-one answered him. “Well, they are cuckoo-spits” he said. Immediately a show of wee hands shot up. “What makes them?” asked one child, “Cuckoos!” he said. I have often wondered about that young assistant, he could be a professor by now or teaching biology in a college somewhere.

Staying with outdoor pursuits for a while longer, reminds me of the time the staff found themselves at a loose end one day, so it was decided we should have a staff bonding and training day, in the shape of a little water trip along the River Rann on the outskirts of Downpatrick, using Canadian canoes and kayaks, turfing them in the river at the small village of Annacloy and ending up at the Quoile nature reserve a few miles away, as the duck paddles so to speak. I purposely chose the canoe, tramping over the top of some poor sod to plant my behind at the rear end, which meant of course, I didn’t have to row all the time and I could rest undetected.

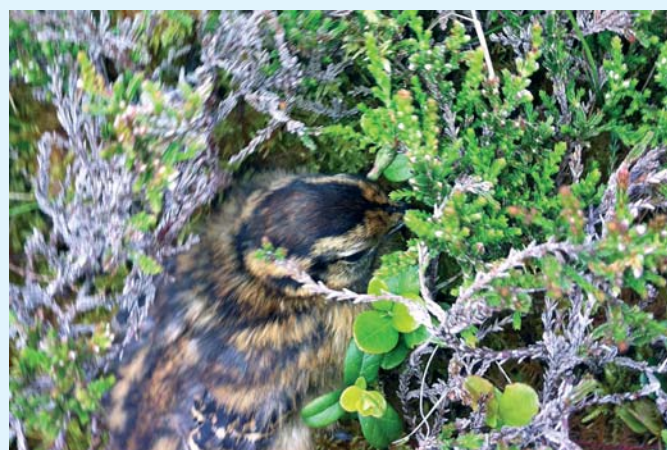
It was a pleasant and relaxing experience, floating down the river with a close up to nature, so much so, that I often toyed with the notion of getting a canoe of my own. Mind you, I couldn’t say the same about my experience in the Kayak a few years earlier, (a much smaller version of the Canadian canoe and singly operated). On that day, we were going to negotiate

the ‘white waters’ on the River Bann, entering the gentle rapids at Katesbridge, County Down and then making our way to the centre of Banbridge. Earlier in the day, a friend and myself were pooh-poohing the whole kayak experience, implying that there wasn’t anything to it, which of course rattled a more qualified member of staff, who had qualifications on everything from A to Z.

### ***The paddle flew from my hands***

As we made our way along the River Bann, with the more experienced members of staff leading and tailing, I started to become less confident. Worth pointing out though, that the only experience I had in a Kayak, was showing off to infants on the tranquillity of Castlewellan Lake. As we were starting to near Banbridge, the river became a nasty torrent, flowing that much faster. It was also swirling at the point where it disappeared around a sharp bend, coupled with a nasty fall just before the bend and, to top it all off, a huge boulder sat mockingly in the middle. At this stage, if I could have made a pit stop I would have. Screaming like a trapped rabbit, (the others thought I was shouting with excitement) I frantically battered the water with my paddle like I knew what I was doing. Long before I reached the drop the paddle flew from my hands seemingly wrenched by a tornado. I clung on to the kayak like grim death until I got to the fall. Sailing through the air, the kayak did some sort of a half-baked loop and I dropped out, flew past the astonished safety instructor and continued on down the rapids - with my kayak and safety instructor in rapid pursuit - finally bouncing off the huge rock and ending up at the side of the river entangled in some overhanging branches, squealing and squawking like a banshee.

I could hear a voice but couldn’t register that it was directed at me, as I floundered about the branches like a beached whale, the voice became much clearer. “Stand up Billy, you’re OK.” as I stood up in about four inches of water, with a gallon of the stuff cascading out of my helmet and down the sides of my face, the person with the qualifications calmly handed me my paddle and the small toggle attached to my kayak! It was then I knew that shooting, dogs and suchlike were where I should keep my interests in future!



*What a wonderful sight - a young bird spotted in the heather.*

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# Dogs, Shows And Craic

## ***The Irish Game Fair, Shanes Castle, Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th July***

**S**hanes Castle Co Antrim was the venue for **The Great Game Fairs of Ireland's 50th 'Golden' Game Fair. Steeped in history, it sits on the north-east shores of Lough Neagh and what a memorable weekend we had at that historic venue.**

Friday 6th July saw Game Fair of Ireland launched at the press breakfast by Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness in the presence of Roy Thompson, Mayor of Antrim, Irene and Albert Titterington, the Co-Directors and a host of sporting enthusiasts from all areas of country sports.

This was followed on Saturday by the Game Fair and the Master McGrath Championship and racing. On Sunday, as well as the brilliant Fair, the added highlight of the day was the Dog Show. Cars, vans and trailers came in droves, with families and dogs in tow, and had the parking area filled to capacity in no time. Although the weather was not very kind to us, it did not dampen the spirits of these avid show goers.

Huge crowds attended on both days, and I have heard nothing but praise for this year's 'best game fair ever,' and its organising team and helpers. Well done to you all. Albert, I am sure after 34 years of organising Game Fairs, you could do it with your eyes shut. May you have many more years to do the same.

It was great to meet so many old faces and some new. It filled my heart with pride when I met Sammy Bowers and his wife Linda, with some guests with special needs from the Forest Lodge Respite Centre, Belfast. These young people presented a Perpetual Shield from Forest Lodge Respite Centre to the Glenbank Club. Two of the children showed Sammy's Dogs in the child handling class, and each got a rosette. They were overwhelmed with their rosettes and Sammy and Linda's act of kindness and their day out at Shanes Castle.

The Game Fair was filled with visitors from Australia, America and Canada, and many parts of the UK and Southern Ireland. The place was crawling with families out to enjoy the fun of the fair for the day. The children played away happily all day and I'm sure there were some very tired little people that night. But that is what Shanes Castle Game Fair is all about. A day out for all the family, and something for everybody to enjoy young and old. Little Owen Brennan, came all the way from Dublin with his father Graham, as did Matt Slevin his children, and his lovely wife Catherine. They came all the way

from Slaney Valley down there in the County Wexford. I also spoke with Stephen McGonigle, author of 'The Seasons End' and bought a copy. Brilliant reading and reasonably priced. There was plenty of retail therapy from many trade stands to packed fine food halls and cookery demos and too much more to mention. A big thank you to all who entered their dogs, in both Racing and Showing.

And finally, Irene and Albert Titterington, what can I say that can describe as kind and generous people, the excellent work you do, and the enjoyment you give to so many families across the country through the organisation of your Game Fairs. You give us all something to look forward to through the long cold days and nights of winter. And when Spring breaks into Summer the fun begins and three top Game Fairs to look forward too. Many thanks to all your team for great Game Fair and a weekend full of happy memories.

## ***DWTC Show 29th July***

The venue was Feaghbridge Dog Track, situated on the outskirts of Coalisland Co Tyrone on the shores of Lough Neagh. This dog track is purpose built, and many champion racers started their training there and went on to win their place in the history of the canine world. Although the rain poured down it did not dampen the spirits. There was a large attendance at the show and ringside parking was provided.

It was great to see so many children in the ring, with plenty of up and coming dog handlers. It made little Poppy McVitty's day just to be in that ring with her dog, I immediately knew this class was definitely a winner, when I saw the smiles on her mother Terry's face, her grandmother Mandy McVitty, and her grandfather Terence Metcalfe. Young Liam Toner was also there, with one arm still in plaster, and the other arm just out of plaster. Liam definitely enjoyed himself at the show yesterday. Keep the interest up Liam and get well soon. Kieran Neeson ( junior) was in there too with his new Whippet. I also saw Finbarr Leonard and Ethan Barry and Ethan's sister Morgan. Daddy Leonard and Daddy Barry watch out, in another couple of years you will have some competition here. Before the children left the ring Tom Barry presented each child with a goodie bag and a big bag of sweets. You made so many wee people happy on Sunday.

My thanks to Leanne and Tom Barry, the DWTC and their committee and helpers for a most enjoyable day. Despite the heavy rain at times, the show ran with impeccable efficiency.

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## ***Farney Harriers Working Dog Show***

Dundalk, County Louth, enjoys a great location, approximately mid way between Belfast and Dublin. It was in this beautiful Dundalk countryside in the bed of the Cooley Mountains, that the Farney show took place on Sunday the 15th July 2012.

For a first show, the organisation was impeccable. Showing and racing went without a hitch and, on top of it all, beautiful weather. There was a very large attendance, both of Lurchers, Terriers, Whippets, Beagles and Pets. All rings were full most of the time. At one stage I counted 21 Lurchers in the ring and 18 whippet dogs and 9 whippet bitches in the whippet classes. Every time I looked at the terrier ring it was full too. There were lurcher, terrier, beagle, and whippet enthusiasts there from everywhere, all great show supporters. The craic was good and we all enjoyed the day. Dublin Desi, Patterdale 666 and Lurcher 330 and all the rest of the new Dublin people I met, thank you for your friendship. Hope to meet up with you all shortly again, maybe at Birr Castle. It is wonderful to see such a good atmosphere. The IWTF stand was visited by many people too.

Finally, many thanks to Geraldine Barry who was the master of ceremonies. For a first show, The Farney Harriers club committee did a great job and I was most impressed with the lure operator.

## ***Man O' War Dog Show Saturday 21st July***

Man O' War Dog Show gets its name from a townland between Keady and Castleblaney. We had spectacular views of the surrounding countryside and herds of cows and sheep could be seen far away on the hillside enjoying the freedom of the summer. The weather kept up and the attendance was good. The show was well organised, and it was evident that much hard work was carried out behind the scenes to make this show a success and enjoyable for everybody. All the folk arrived with their families, trailers, and dogs in tow. The field filled up very quickly, and it was not very long before you could hear the laughter of children playing, while the adults began to enjoy the show. At the end of the evening all the hard work and organisation paid off. It was announced that the show had raised £750 for the NDCS (National Deaf Children's Society) This is a charity very close to the hearts of Michelle and Charlene Rafferty the organisers of the show. It will be comforting to Michelle and Charlene to know that the money raised at their show will benefit children in our community and further a field. It was you, the show goers generosity and that of the sponsors that will help to enable these children to get the medical help they need. Well done Michelle and Charlene and many thanks for a very enjoyable day and a brilliant show.

## ***North West Lurcher, Terrier and Whippet Show Sunday 24th June***

This was the first show of the year for the North West Lurcher, Terrier and Whippet Club, held at Barron Top Fun Farm, Donemana, Co Tyrone. Barron Top Fun Farm provides the unique combination of being interesting, educational and very enjoyable, and was a real children's paradise, with the animal farm, slides, and train rides, and many more attractions, while their parents enjoyed the dog show. The one downer was the weather which resulted in people not being able to take their vehicles into the field up to the ringside, but owner George McGerrigle was on hand, and made sure everybody got parked safely in the yard next to the show ground. The rain did not dampen the spirits and the show commenced at midday with the racing.

In the digging competition the cheers and encouragement for the diggers was brilliant. Time ticked away and with grunts, moans and sheer elbow grease, the holes in the ground became wider and deeper. Time was counted down and the digging ended. The winners were the team of Conor Gamble and Thomas Melaugh.

It was nice to see some up and coming young show and huntsmen and women back at the shows showing off their whippets terriers and lurchers. I spoke to young Kieran Neeson, Shane Farrell, Nicola, Tracy and Nikilya Love, all who started attending the shows last year, and were so delighted to be back again this year with their parents. I have great admiration for all these young folk, who will be the show organisers and sports men and women of tomorrow and will carry on the sport I love.

At the end of the day, George McGerrigle had a lovely hot bowl of stew waiting for John and myself and other people involved in the show. Your hospitality was much appreciated. The show organisers Barry Holland, Joe Boggs and their committee worked tirelessly to make this show a success for everybody to enjoy. Your hard work paid off 100%. I will conclude by thanking again Barry Holland and Joe Boggs for the hard work put into this show and hopefully we will be back to Barron Top before the end of this season for another show.

## ***The Sporting Whippet Club of Northern Ireland show Sunday 17th June***

I had a very relaxing day at the Sporting Whippet Club of Northern Ireland's third show of the year. Although the weather was not kind, it still did not dampen the spirits of the people who turned up to support the show.

The show started with the children's handling class. These little people never cease to amaze me. They all go

into that show ring, and walk their dogs with such vigour and pride and their eyes light up with joy if they get a rosette or a trophy. Congratulations to all the winners and to all the adults that showed and raced their dogs and won trophies. Many thanks to the Chairman Janet Duke and committee for another great family day out.

### **The Gilford Lurcher & Terrier Club Annual Dog Show at the NI Countryside Festival, Moira 26th May**

The NI Countryside Festival, Moira was the venue where the Gilford Lurcher and Terrier club held their 13th annual Dog Show, and was a roaring success. I was in the field from 9.30am and by 11.30am there was very little parking place left. Cars and trailers arrived with dogs and family on board, and the field was buzzing. There was a great mix of terriers, lurchers, whippets and strong dogs. One of the big attractions this year was the high jump. It was different, well thought out, and a very successful extra in the show. And finally, many thanks to Ian and Justin and their team for all the hard work they put in. Each year they work tirelessly and what a success it has been. Congratulations on a very successful show. I met some lovely people at the show while taking results.

### **Mourne Terrier, Lurcher, Whippet and Strong Dog Charity show Sunday 20th May**

Mourne is a land of stunning views, dramatic landscapes of natural beauty, stone walls and a patchwork of green fields near the majestic Mountains of Mourne. Situated in the heart of these picturesque surroundings, Mourne was a brilliant Dog Show etched in my memory as one of the best dog shows and family days. I met up with so many old friends including Great Game Fairs of Ireland Director Albert Titterington and his wife Irene. All the showing, digging, strong dogs, and racing ran like clockwork and there was a very big attendance.

There was a real buzz of excitement when the digging competition commenced. As soon as that whistle blew, shirts were ripped off and digging began furiously. As the large crowd cheered on their favourite teams, these guys dug ferociously until to the whistle blew. The digs were measured, and the winners were announced. A big congratulations to Peter Morgan and his teammate Damian Maguire.

Thank to Kieran and team of helpers for a most enjoyable and relaxing day out in majestic surroundings. Kieran's show did not only give us all so much enjoyment on the day, but on top of that Macmillan Cancer Support will get £700 and Mourne Community Rescue Service will get £200.

Pictured at The Irish Game Fair, Shanes Castle - Show Winners

*(photographs courtesy of Deirdre McCoy)*



# Pictured at The Irish Game Fair, Shanes Castle

*(photographs courtesy of Deirdre McCoy)*



# Pictured at the DWCT Show

*(photographs courtesy of Deirdre McCoy)*





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# British Deer Society's New Approach to Deer Stalking Level One Certificate

**B**DS announced earlier this year that it was changing its strategy to delivering training and assessment for the Deer Stalking Certificate level 1 (DSC1). Irish Country Sports and Country Life sent me along to the first assessment day of this new training approach to be held in Ireland to review the new training package and to report on the response of the candidates.

The training and assessment for DSC1 has previously required the trainee to attend two consecutive weekends of intensive training and assessment. The overall cost of this could be as much as £500 including travel and accommodation. The new training approach, which is open to everyone, is a computer-based home learning package culminating in a one day assessment programme based on the BDS's Ultimate Deer Data DVD, which is the backbone of the package. This new approach is a response to feedback from candidates who had completed the two week end course, which is still available and to the emergence of cheaper and shorter courses from alternative training suppliers.

The first assessment day on Irish soil was hosted and run by Damian McElholm, who is the BDS course manager for Northern Ireland and was held in Brookeborough, County Fermanagh on the 1st September. There were 11 candidates from all over Ireland, all of whom had been attracted by the convenience and flexibility of this new training approach and the opportunity to study at home in preparation for the assessment in their own time. Only one of the candidates declared that the reduced cost was a deciding factor in taking this route to his DSC1, but all agreed that they found the training materials for home learning very good. Some did report a problem with running the deer recognition section of the Deer Data DVD on their computers, but this was resolved by contacting BDS for advice.

## Multi choice papers

On the day, as the candidates arrived for an early 8.30 am start, there was a definite air of anxiety which Damian very quickly

dispersed with his welcoming remarks and easy manner. His presentational style and the construction of his introduction to each of the three multi choice papers set all candidates at their ease and highlighted the importance of each topic to becoming a competent stalker.

The papers were on deer recognition of the six species of deer found in the UK, large game meat hygiene and general knowledge of deer ecology, firearms and deer legislation. The completion of the papers ended the classroom session and the group moved to the 100 metre shooting range, located on the edge of a wood which opens onto open moorland. The location was ideal for both the shooting test and the all important simulated stalk and safety assessment.

On arrival at the range, the group were met by Damian's range officers, Martin Dunn and Sean McChrystal, who delivered a safety briefing to all participants and wasted no time in getting the first detail into position. The candidates were required to fire three shots into a 100 mm circle at 100metres to establish both that the rifle was zeroed and that the candidates were capable of accurate shooting. The firing points seemed to be designed to replicate typical ground which would be in stalking, such as lumps and bumps and lots of tussocks. Candidates used a range of bipods and rests and all coped well with the conditions, passing this test under the watchful eyes and friendly but firm guidance of the range officers.

The next test was the firing of a series of six shots, two prone from 100metres, two sitting or kneeling from 70metres and finally two shots standing from 40 metres. This test was based strictly on heart and lung shots and

*The Class of September '12.*



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all the shots had to fall within a relatively small outline of the heart and lung area on a plain black outline of a life size Roe deer on which there was no aiming mark. This required the candidates to judge the point of aim from the outline of the deer shaped target just as they would have to do in a real situation. Not all the candidates achieved the required standard on the first attempt, but did so second time around, having either identified the problem themselves or with some words of wisdom from the range officers.



*Three candidates under the watchful eye of the Range Officer.*

### **Safety and a simulated stalk**

The final stage of the assessment was safety and this involved a one to one encounter with Damian who walked each candidate around a wooded area where deer silhouettes had been placed in various situations for the simulated stalk. The candidate had to declare if he or she would shoot or not shoot each deer and give the reasons for the decision made. This was followed by a series of scenario-based questions designed to test the candidate's knowledge of safe firearm handling and security. BDS consider this section so important that even if the candidates cover the required number of safety points in answering each question, they are also prompted to cover all remaining points not mentioned in their answer.

With the assessment completed and all candidates having passed the shooting and safety test Damian reminded everybody that DSC1 on its own does not make you a fully competent, stalker. He emphasised the importance of gaining experience under the guidance of an experienced stalker, particularly before moving on to the more advanced DSC2 qualification. Certificates were not issued, however, as all of the examination scores

have to be verified by Deer Management Qualifications Limited (DMQ) who issue the results and certificates centrally, a process that can take some weeks.

When interviewed, Damian said that the DSC1 is a fully accredited National Vocational Qualification and that the alternative qualifications available, which while apparently acceptable to the firearms licensing authority, are not accredited. He believes that the non accredited training courses and qualifications should at least be assessed by the licensing agencies to ensure that a consistent standard of safety is being imparted to the trainees.

So, what about the BDS's new approach to delivering DSC1? Is it an improvement on the face to face training over two weekends? The candidates on this assessment certainly thought so, but most admitted that they found Damian's briefings and introductions to each section of the assessment very helpful and he clarified some areas that they had misinterpreted from their reading and home study. Some initially found working from a computer screen uncomfortable, but did get used to it. Some suggested that the document on safety could do with proofreading and some correction, as they found it tricky to follow in places. The requirements and standards of the Assessment Day were identical to that met with on the full training course, which is still available for those whose learning style, like my own, is old school.

The most telling result of all came from Damian who said that, subject to confirmation by DMQ Ltd, the average score for the first home learning DSC1 Assessment was very significantly higher than any earlier full blown face to face training course and assessment. This would certainly appear to be the way to go for future training of this type but as he quite rightly pointed out, while the course materials are excellent, a candidate will only pass if he or she is sufficiently motivated to put the work into home study and practises for the assessment using the extensive quizzes provided and puts in some range time.



*(Left) Training Manager Damian McElholm and Maurice Connolly on simulated stalk and safety assessment.*

# Hunting Roundup

## **Northern Ireland Hound Show**

Gosford Forest Park, Markethill, was again the venue for the Hunting Association of Northern Ireland (HANI) hound show, run in conjunction with Armagh County Agricultural Show. Judges Mr WHC Montgomery and Mr MCR Higgins, both distinguished former Masters, had entries from six local packs and three from the Republic of Ireland to decide upon.



*Judges at the HANI show (l/r) Michael Higgins and William Montgomery.*

Sadly, the day began with a one minute silence of respect for the death of Paul O'Brien, who had been whipper-in and then huntsman to the Kilmoganny Foxhounds since 2003, that sad news having been relayed to everyone en route to the Show.

In the doghound classes local honour was upheld by the North Down Foxhounds, who won the unentered couples class and the entered couples class and by the East Antrim Hounds who won the Old English Doghound class while the East Down Foxhounds won the HANI Member Packs class. Otherwise, it was a Tour de Force by the Meath Foxhounds who won all the other doghound class, Gretrev 10 taking the Championship with their Limerick 11 as Reserve Champion.



*Showing in progress of Old English Foxhound bitches, including hounds being shown by the County Louth and the Tynan & Armagh hunts.*

The Fermanagh Harriers, won all the morning classes with their Severn UE taking the doghound Championship.

After lunch the status quo was maintained with the Meath Foxhounds and the Fermanagh Harriers winning all the classes, apart from the Louth Foxhounds' win in the Old English Foxhounds bitch class.

Given this dominance the Meath unsurprisingly took the Bitch Championship with Patsy 07, who nudged their Hearsay 11 into the Reserve position. The unentered Graceful gave the Fermanagh Harriers the Bitch Championship to complete a memorable day for handler Katrina Conlon who is the most ardent of puppy walkers.



*Champion Bitch, shown by the Meath Hunt.*

## **Irish Masters of Foxhounds Association Hound Show**

The Stradbally, Co Laois, home of the Cosby family again kindly hosted the IMFHA hound show as sixteen



*A good view of one of the strong classes at Stradbally. Foreground North Down Foxhounds' Huntsman Tommy Haddock and Whipper In Charlie McPoland*

packs brought a record number of hounds before judges Alastair Jackson, former Director of the English MFHA and Tim Coulson, MFH and huntsman of the Lauderdale Foxhounds.

The Island Foxhounds (modern) and the Waterford Foxhounds (Old English) got off to winning starts in the unentered doghound classes, followed by the East Down Foxhounds taking the unentered couples doghound class and the Kildare Foxhounds winning the open unentered doghound class. A second win for the Island Foxhounds, in the entered doghound (restricted) class, preceded the Tipperary Foxhounds' victories in the entered couples class and the stallion hound class. The doghound Championship went to Tipperary Ambridge

entered dog or bitch Old English (restricted) class the County Limerick Foxhounds took the red rosette while, in the entered bitch (restricted) class, the West Wicklow Foxhounds recorded their first success and the run of first wins was maintained by the Kilkenny Foxhounds in the entered couple of bitches (open) class.

The Meath Foxhounds took the prestigious two couples (open) class and the Tipperary Foxhounds recorded their penultimate win in the brood bitch class. A series of strong bitch classes culminated in the Tipperary Foxhounds adding to their morning Championship success, their unentered Package taking the Bitch Championship, with West Wicklow Melody 11 in Reserve.

11 with Island Paragon 11 as Reserve Champion.

After lunch came the rain, but it did not dampen spirits as the Waterford Foxhounds won the unentered bitch (restricted) class and then, immediately afterwards, the unentered Old English bitch (restricted) class.

The North Down Foxhounds took a deserved first place in the unentered couples (open) class before the Tipperary Foxhounds took the unentered bitch (open) class. In the



*Meath Foxhounds' Huntsman Kenny Henry with the winning two couple of birches at Stradbally. In the background Pat Dillon receiving the trophy from Mickey Flanagan.*

This is a well organised Show and it was good to see a record number of entries contesting the classes with both judges professing themselves very impressed with the high standard of those entries, particularly the bitches. Red rosettes here were well deserved as were the many plaudits for organiser David Lalor MFH and his team.

### **Around the puppy shows**

The Meath Foxhounds' are a pack with direct access to good stallion hounds from Great Britain and it certainly showed at their puppy show and in the later appearance of the main pack.

Judges Mr Stephen O'Connor MSH and Pat Coyle, huntsman, from the neighbouring Ward Union Staghounds had seven couple of doghounds and seven couple of bitches, from six litters sired by Oakley, Ledbury and Cottesmore stallion hounds, for their consideration.

In the event Locksmith (Oakley Loxley 06 - Bumble 08) was adjudged the best doghound and Habit (Cottesmore Haulage 07 - Hawthorn 08) the best bitch.

Locksmith was declared Champion puppy with Habit in Reserve.

After the puppy show joint master Richard Trimble presented a silver salver to each of the retiring Honorary Secretaries Mr Henry Reeves ( in office since 1989) and Mrs Pat Armstrong ( in office since 1993) having paid tribute to their immense contribution to the Hunt over those years.

The following day I returned to Co Meath for the Ballymacad puppy show, in continuing wet weather, so I was glad to see a large marquee under which everyone was able to shelter and also watch the judging at the same time.

Judges Joe Kavanagh MFH (East Galway Foxhounds) and Gerard Smith (ex huntsman of the Kilmoganny Foxhounds) had five couple of doghounds and six and a half couple of bitches sired by Irish and English stallion hounds. Huntsman Kevin Donohue believes in a regular infusion of Old English blood and the new entry included a litter by Ormond Aldin 07 and one by Waterford Alpha 08. Local blood and cross channel honours were evenly divided with the following decisions being announced.



*Honorary Kennel Huntsman Shay Daly at the West Wicklow Foxhounds' Puppy Show.*

Doghound Champion Aldin Ormond Aldin 07 - Lilly 09

Bitch Champion Minute Duke of Beaufort's Milton - Sahara 08

Aldin was then announced Champion puppy with Minute in Reserve.

Treasurer John Cadden then presented an engraved hunting whip to outgoing Hunt Chairman Garry O'Neil to mark his retirement after seven years in office.

Westmeath Foxhounds' huntsman James Lowry had three and a half couple of doghounds and four couple of bitches for judges Mrs Caroline Preston (who was in the Mastership here for some eighteen seasons) and Liam McAlinden (huntsman of the East Galway Foxhounds). Of the four litters on show two were by home based stallion hounds and two by Ballymacad sires and, again, honours were fairly evenly divided though both winners were from the same Ballymacad sired litter.

Doghound Champion Whaler Ballymacad Norman - Whiteface.

Bitch Champion Whimper sister or Whaler.

Whaler was then adjudged Champion puppy with Whimper in Reserve.

Dr David Mortell MFH then presented a cheque to outgoing whipper-in Noel Murphy, who is taking a sabbatical after thirteen seasons here, with the advice that he should take a well deserved holiday.

An unusually dry, even sunny, day gave the West Wicklow Foxhounds' puppy show a perfect background

at the home of senior joint master Rupert Macauley, who is also Chairman of the Irish Masters of Foxhounds Association. Rupert Macauley began by welcoming his new joint master, Christy Hart, who has now joined Rupert and Charles O'Reilly for the new season.

Kennel huntsman Shay Daly brought forward one litter of two couple of doghounds and one couple of bitches by Kildare Coldstream 09 out of Tipperary Ballad 08 for judges George Chapman MFH (Island Foxhounds) and Craig Caven MFH (East Down Foxhounds).

Doghound Champion Cardinal Kildare Coldstream 09 - Tipperary Ballad 08

Bitch Champion Chervil sister of Cardinal.

The continuing good weather enabled everyone to remain outdoors to enjoy this unexpected meteorological bonus.

At the East Antrim Hunt puppy show huntsman Patrick Headdon had three and a half couple of doghounds and three and a half couple of bitches for judges Keith McCall (huntsman of the Tynan and Armagh Hunt) and Ms Naiomi Liston (Sunnyland Beagles). The threatened rain did not appear enabling a larger than usual crowd to enjoy the judges' deliberations. Announcer Jane Logan then revealed the placings as:

Doghound Champion Founder Midman 07 - Echo 09

Bitch Champion Frenzy sister of Founder

It was a very nostalgic visit for me as I first went to these kennels as a five year old with my father sixty years ago subsequently spending many happy, childhood days here in the halcyon days when Jack Taylor was huntsman. The kennels are to be substantially renovated, involving some demolition, so I took a last walk around the lodges and yards to relive some of those memories.

## **Death of Albert Uprichard**

The death, at 93 years of age, of Albert Uprichard was literally the end of an era in local hunting circles as well as meaning that there is no Uprichard in the Banbridge area for the first time in 300 years.

As with his father and uncle before him Albert was master of the Iveagh Hounds, when they were Harriers, with his 14 years in the mastership being still very fondly remembered not least for Albert's uncanny hound empathy and control and his superlative horsemanship.

Born at Elmfield Castle, near Gilford, Albert dedicated his life to sport, becoming a major figure in Irish amateur boxing as well as a highly respected master of hounds and point to point rider. In all things he provided expert and empathetic guidance and advice to young people, a

fact reflected in the very wide age range of mourners at his funeral. After a service in his home Albert was buried at Moyallen Quaker Burial Ground outside his native Gilford.

A strong, determined character Albert refereed three amateur boxing bouts in Clones at 80 years of age and judged the East Down Foxhounds' puppy show in his early 80's, when I recall him giving a master class in hound judging. His wealth and social position saw him meet some of the most important people of the day - Northern Ireland's last Prime Minister Lord Faulkener, another joint master of the Iveagh Hounds, was a long time friend - but Albert was equally at home with people of very humble origins, especially those involved in boxing or hunting.

Albert is survived by his elder sister Maureen Hill, a nephew and two nieces, to whom every sympathy is extended over the loss of this true gentleman of probity, generosity of spirit and exacting personal standards.

It was entirely fitting that East Down Foxhounds' huntsman Declan Feeney, to whose late father Albert was such a good friend, blew the hunting horn for this gentleman who was also his long term friend and mentor, blowing the hunting horn being just one of the things that he taught Declan.

Albert Uprichard has gone and it is no exaggeration to say that he will never be replaced.

## **Death of Paul O'Brien**

The sudden and unexpected death of Paul O'Brien, who had whipped-in to then hunted the Kilmoganny Foxhounds since 2003, came as a sad and immense shock to everyone in Irish hunting.

Paul was the son of Pat and Bridget O'Brien, Pat having been with the Tipperary Foxhounds for forty seasons from where Paul developed his love of hunting becoming very much his parents' son being a gentle, honourable, country-loving man.

His ability with horses and hounds was something which he imbibed from infancy and which stood him in good stead as he followed his father into the profession, where he had most recently been working with John Marsh at the South Tipperary Harriers.

Paul's funeral at Saint Thomas the Apostle Church, at Rosegreen was one of the biggest seen in Co Tipperary for many years, with some estimates saying 2000 people attended. Burial was at the adjoining cemetery where Paul's friend Seamus Kelly, of the Jessfield Harriers blew 'Gone Away.'

Every sympathy is extended to Pat and Bridget on the death of a beloved son, Paul's brother Patrick, his partner Patricia Molloy their daughter Katie and Paul's step children Gillian and David on their very sad loss.



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# As the leaves begin to fall...



*The Author: doing what come naturally'.*

**W**ell it's finally here at last. The summer has gone and the season has arrived. Of course it will be a few weeks yet until the colder weather bites and the clocks go back, but I'm glad autumn is finally upon us. Don't get me wrong, I don't mind the summer, but I don't like it to run on too long! Although these days it rarely does as there seems to be barely a weekend without something happening. I seem to have less and less time as the years go by. Thinking back, I remember spending hours and hours fishing on long summer evenings, it might have been mullet, trout or even conger eels! But time seemed so much longer back then. These days I seem to spend my evenings rushing, getting home from work and back out to exercise the dogs, then I get home and start feeding cleaning and checking the three over, not to mention my ever increasing team of ferrets.

It's been a very unlucky year for me as ferrets go, and I have lost three in total, quite a loss and the most I have lost in as long as I can remember. The first fatality was my smallest and most reliable young jill. At seven years old she died very suddenly and after a day ferreting in which she performed so reliably as always. The second was my oldest jill, at eight years old, she had already had her best years as well but it will be hard to replace such a worker. She was the type of ferret that would bolt a rabbit after three or four younger ferrets went down and came back again! Lastly, my youngest and newest edition was an absolutely tiny hob ferret given to me by an older gentleman from the north of England, which he bred himself last summer. I took particular liking to the hob. For all he lacked in size he certainly made up for in courage! I worked him very early for a young pug, in fact several months early, as I normally give the kits to the turn of the same year before hunting, and therefore didn't expect much from him at all. He looked, in fact, like a good kick from an aggravated winter coney would put paid to his enthusiasm but, as I often am, I was wrong. The minute young Hob took to work like the proverbial duck and within a few Saturdays out was running rabbit warrens like an old hand. On every occasion he appeared to becoming faster and faster and was beginning to develop a habit of either ending up in the net with the rabbit, or better still, on the rabbit as it left the burrow! This made me laugh endlessly, and on one particular morning outing a rabbit missed the net and took off across the field. My young Whippet cross bitch "Molly" ran alongside it but would not strike the rabbit or lift it. I shouted towards her several times, encouraging her to do so but she would not touch the rabbit much to my dismay.

I finally caught up with the rabbit as it slowed and noticed the young hob holding fast to the other side, covered in mud and eyes squinting as the rabbit dragged him across the field, bouncing like a rodeo rider! I apologised to the whippet, as she had shown sense by not striking the rabbit and I knew then that my young Hob was a good'un!

After this particular incident, young Molly retrieved rabbits several times with the young hob still attached! He began to become a bit of an escape artist from his



*Molly, always alert.*

enclosure, and made a bid for freedom several times, but I got him back by way of several mink cages placed around the house. This worked well a few times until his most recent escape which was the last time I saw him. It's a shame because he was a great worker and an interesting little ferret. He had a strange habit of just staying with rabbits until I dug him out, as opposed to his house mates who are a little more shall we say 'cold hearted.'

On more than one occasion I dug down several feet to find him sitting looking back out at me with one or two and even on one occasion three rabbits in front of him, all very much alive which wouldn't normally be the case! Alas, I had no choice but to replace my ferrets after his demise. What is a rabbit catcher to do when in need of more hard working ferrets? I don't breed any myself and haven't done for some years.

### ***The 'Jill Jab'***

There is every summer a huge surplus of young ferret kits needing homed and the main reason is down to simply an old wives tale. There is a certain amount of truth in that a Jill will die if not mated, but it's not entirely correct. When a female ferret comes into season due to their unique reproductive system, by way of being induced ovulators they will remain in season until they are mated. This excess of oestrogen in the body will



*Ruby listening intently.*

eventually cause what is known as aplastic anaemia which basically means the ferret will become anaemic eventually causing death. This alone has led to the majority of ferret owners breeding their jills each summer and is the single cause for the ferret being too cheap and disposable. It comes down to too many ferrets and not enough homes. However, this entire problem is solved by a cheap and simple injection known as a Jill Jab, or probably by your vet as a Delvestrone injection. Delvestrone is simply a hormone that will take the Jill out of season in a week to ten days, preventing aplastic anaemia, preventing unwanted young ferrets needing homes and preventing a whole lot of hassle for everyone. It remains however relatively unknown, and it is pity there isn't as much interest in spreading such a message by vets as there is about neutering and spaying dogs and cats. I haven't bred my ferrets for years, and simply take all my jills in the spring for a Jill Jab. My local vet does the entire dozen for less than thirty pounds and it is well worth it. I can well do without the hassle of a hutch full of young kits in the summer. Anyone who has ever reared young ferrets will tell you just how ferocious their appetite can be! I remember quite some years ago breeding two jills of my own. The pair gave birth to two exceptionally large litters and feeding them became quite a job. It become hectic, collecting road kills and shooting rabbits when necessary to keep them settled and well fed. It become similar to putting Christmas trees through a wood chip machine, they just never seemed to be full!

JR and I slipped out for a few hours 'just to see what was about.'

Anyway, September 1st has come and gone. Some people like to make a big day of it, going out at all hours in the hope of a duck or whatever may be on the list, some other shooters like my father aren't bothered too much and like to hold back a little for the weather and the ducks to be just right. September 1st was on a Saturday this year and it made things easier for many people including myself. Had it not have been a Saturday the date wouldn't have crossed my mind. But, as it was, JR and I slipped out for a few hours 'just to see what was about,' with ducks on our mind as we rambled through the usual haunts. In years gone by I would have been out ferreting on 1st September; the ground I hunt has little cover and it makes it possible to start a little earlier. In fact it would be possible to do it all year round, but that would be of little interest to me nowadays, and I opt to wait until it cools a little. We didn't chance on any ducks, but young Fudge pushed a fox from the cover and gave it a good chase before running it to ground some distance away. We moved on and

decided to beat through some more cover further down so that the youngster might get run or two at her beloved rabbits! This type of ground and these rabbits are where a very young Fudge really learned to hunt up in the daytime. Before she had really experienced much hunting at all, she came here with me one September morning last year. As luck would have it the ground was quite thick with rabbits that morning, and as she rummaged through the reed beds with her nose, encouraged by me all the while, a rabbit got up which she chased and caught. The excitement and thrill of finding a new scent, chasing it and catching it must have been exhilarating for the pup. Ever since that day she will literally hit the ground running and use her nose and fast legs to her advantage! This was very evident on a day out with a friend near the end of the season this year, as we entered a field with similar cover in which he had permission, Fudge put up a rabbit and pushed out of the cover and across a green field before catching it right at our feet! Unfortunately this day we would be unlucky and although Fudge had a good few runs, she made no catches and we decided to move on in the hope of a duck at a location a little further down. As I approached the road leading to our next stop off, I noticed some rabbits feeding behind a wall as they usually are; it's a quiet location down a very long lane and the rabbits like to sit behind the hedge to the back of the wall and feed. I came up with a plan. I had been wanting to bag one of these rabbits for a while, and now

being  $\frac{3}{4}$  grown and in season they were ripe for the taking as well as cooking, I find nothing nicer than a  $\frac{3}{4}$  grown rabbit for the pot and, as my better half was leaving for the evening, it would make an ideal dinner. My lurcher was out here, it just did not suit.

The rabbits feed only yards from their warren and by the time the dog jumped the wall and made a run they would be off. There was little time for snaring or nets and the 12 bore was a little on the heavy side for the job. Many people sneer at .410 shot guns, especially my father! He and many others think they're not worth their salt. I purchased an old one last season and found them, when coupled with 3" Magnum cartridges to be a most effective gun with a little practice. My particular model folds in half and would easily slip into my jacket, similar in fact to that used by that notorious Victorian Poacher who appears at the Game Fairs, his jacket has a pocket made just for his .410 to go into. It is easy to see why the folding .410 became the tool of the poacher, quiet and easily concealed.

I parked up the car and made my way quietly along the wall. I kept low as I crept along, not wanting to startle the few rabbits behind. I took two of the pencil size magnum cartridges from my pocket and inserted them into the chambers. I slowly rose and folded the gun at the same time. As I glanced over the wall, there was one rabbit sitting out, nonchalantly feeding at his leisure. I rose the .410 and slowly and carefully steadied my aim across the wall, I lined the rabbit up nicely and he was quite unaware of my presence. With a little crack that barely disturbed the evening silence, the rabbit rolled on his side. I jumped the wall and collected my dinner. A lovely  $\frac{3}{4}$  grown rabbit just ripe for eating. As I have said, I am not a keen rabbit shooter. Any lurcher person is the same, why shoot what you can catch with your dog, its understandable. This was the first rabbit I have shot in probably years and it could be the same again before the next, it just does not interest me. Had the layout suited my dog, a net or even a snare I would far much prefer it.

### ***'The Seasons End' tells some folk's experiences with their dogs***

While we are on the subject of the Victorian Poacher and the Great Game Fairs of Ireland, I want to say thank you to some people. My time was taken up this year with a small book I put together. 'The Seasons End' was an idea I came up with a long time ago. I had always wanted to compile some of the great stories, articles and photos that so often go unseen. I thought it might be interesting to put together a small book featuring working dogs of all kinds from working dog people of all kinds, the true and genuine type that so often we hear about. Although I am a lurcher person at heart I will always champion working dogs no matter the breed or

vocation, and I believe many working dog people are the same. I make no difference in the working dog, be it a terrier, lurcher or whatever your breed may be, if they are honest and they work then who am I to judge? 'The Seasons End' is a reflection of this. I wanted to give a platform to anyone to tell their story about their experiences with their dogs and in doing so I received articles from of the finest ambassadors for working dogs you could hope to meet. After compiling such a variation of material I named it 'The Seasons End: Lurchers, Terriers, Teckels, Hounds and Hog Dogs.' It was a most enjoyable experience, I made some friends and had a few surprises along the way. Among the things that opened my eyes were a couple of people who contributed to the book. I won't name names, but they know who they are. These people put together articles and other pieces of exceptional quality.

Shanes Castle in July this year was a phenomenal day for me in many respects. Not only did I eventually launch my book that I had been working on for what seemed like a like a lifetime! But I had what I would call outstanding support from the field sports community, and the many lurcher and terrier enthusiasts I have come to know. To tell you I was surprised would be an understatement. Albert Titterington gave me so much support, help and free reign to launch the book at Shanes Castle which I am most thankful for, and the Shanes Castle crowd and the terrier and lurcher fraternity gave me support that I would never have dreamed of. I thank every one of you for supporting not only my book, but myself. Your kind words of support, encouragement and help were so unexpected and gratefully received. As I have said, 'The Seasons End is a platform for the working dog enthusiast.' I hope to build on the success of this first work and build it into annual or biannual publication, by the terrier and lurcher fraternity, for the terrier and lurcher fraternity.

Our sport is under so much pressure by those who wish end our way of life we should come together and work together to ensure we save what we love. I don't believe for a minute that the people who oppose our way of life can stop us. But if we do not come together it is us who will stop ourselves. In the words of the recently formed I.W.T.F, who I hope have continued success - United We Stand.

### ***Dogs, guns, pheasants and ducks were all high on the agenda***

It felt a little cooler tonight as I walked the dogs. The moon was out by the time we got back and it began to feel like autumn again. Maybe it was just my imagination looking forward to the season ahead. Of course it will be a good few weeks before its right into it and any serious hunting can begin, but at least it's not far

away. I knew I wasn't the only one looking forward to it as I met up with my father and brother earlier this evening for a suit fitting for my younger brother's forthcoming wedding. There was little mention of wedding plans as they discussed the forthcoming season. Dogs, guns, pheasants and ducks were all high on the agenda. On the way home my mind wondered over rabbits, ferrets, lurchers & long nets. It's been a bumper season for the rabbit, make no mistake. Coney is in abundance! The previous two winters of snow made short work of the small remaining pockets of rabbits across the country and it seemed for a season or two the population was on its last legs. Fortunately our friend isn't so easily beaten and it has taken literally six months for his numbers to go ten fold in some areas over a warm but very wet summer (if you could call it that). This winter will see a bulging rabbit population which will yield huge numbers in parts of the country. I have been contacted by more farmers than ever this year and visited one farm quite a drive away where the barley was eaten in several metres from the fence right around the perimeter of the field, something I haven't seen in a long time. As the winter moves on I barely find enough time to cover everywhere I hoped to and usually run out of time before I can manage to squeeze in a day on every farm and estate! This year I am looking forward to a few,



*Fudge, the apprentice.*

possibly final, days out with dear Old Ruby. Unfortunately her body isn't up to what her mind wants to do and I feel so bad for the old girl as I literally see her grow old in front of me. I took her on a huge rabbit adventure last season which really took it out of her and for the first time in years I saw a much older dog on our return. It was a trip that she wouldn't have batted an eyelid at a few years ago. Unfortunately it seems the last couple of years have aged her considerably. It's not all over yet though; Ruby is still my number one ferreting partner. She always wants to go, she's never late and doesn't mind a bit of digging and I know even in her old age she gets as excited as me, as the leaves begin to fall. Have a good season.



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# Otter madness



**I'm in an odd position now as a representative of the Irish Seal Sanctuary on the Irish Environmental Network where I regularly meet with environmentalists and people who I would previously have classified as tree-huggers, some edging on the mentalist side of environmentalist, but also many good people. Many are surprised and confused that I promote hunting and fishing and worse, proudly admit that I support both and have participated in both. Despite this fact, there are some locals, friends even, who still think that I am an anti, as I have been involved in wildlife matters for many years.**

I have been asked what sparked my interest in the environment and I always reply that it started when I was brought otter-hunting as a kid by relatives. Of course this was before the 1976 Wildlife Act, when there were several otter-hunting packs in the country. With the legal protection of otters many packs became defunct, some continued as mink hunting packs. But there is no question that the otters needed protection, not so much from hunting but from general persecution and habitat loss. By the late seventies, otters were very scarce in the east of Ireland where we hunted. Since legal protection and the general cleanup of our waterways, they have made a strong comeback and I'm glad to say that there are otters in the stream which flows through the town where I live.

Otter-hunting did not mean killing otters to me; in the four years I regularly hunted, I think four otters were actually killed and I did not witness one kill. I did see kingfishers almost every week and otters fairly often as they ran from the hounds. Of course it was great for a kid to be running after hounds, in and out of the river and seeing all the riverside wildlife as we charged after the pack and the horn blowing and yodeling huntsman and whippers in. I eventually knew the names of many of the hounds and could even get away with the odd shout of 'try-over' myself. Entirely inappropriate for a member of the field, more on that later. The whole experience was an education in itself. After a few years we tried beagling for a while, also a great experience; we did not go to kill the animals.

Otter-hunting has not been represented in countrysports writing over the years as much as foxhunting or stalking, but I did locate a book written in 1908, 'Otters and Otter-hunting' which is a fascinating insight into the sport. Otter-hunting is described as the 'Queen of summer sports.' The author, Ludovik Cameron, was a Master of Otter hounds in Scotland and hunted all over England. If you can get hold of a copy this is a fascinating work, It seems it was Somerville in 'The chace' (1735) who gave us the phrase "Sly goose-footed prowler" as a name for the poor otter. Cameron describes the natural history and legends but its worth reading as much for the fact that he deplores the idea of anyone killing an otter in the belief that this will help fish



*Otters are a remarkable sight in their own environment.*

populations. He believes in balance, and even decries Izaak Walton for stating the otters only eat fish. He maintains that they are a necessary part of a healthy system as they eat frogs and eels, the eaters of fish eggs: "Otters (in reason) do more good than harm to a trout stream." This book also lays out the duties and responsibilities of the huntsman, the Master, whippers-in and the field during the hunt. Hence I should not have dared to shout anything at the hounds in my excitement when hunting. He advises masters to tour the local taxidermists and watch out for otters, which have been shot. The master should threaten to move his custom elsewhere if the taxidermist does not reveal who was responsible and where the otter was shot. This book covers everything even to the edibility of otters. He states that he has eaten the heart of a young 15lbs bitch otter,

*(Right) I held my breath to see what might happen as it swam towards me.*



roasted in herbs and butter, and found it quite palatable. Otter spears or otter-grains as they were known, were used before hunting became the accepted way of controlling otters.

All otters are measured and weighed when caught; otter packs are described and he states that the Milton otter hounds were sold as a pack for 50 guineas, that was between 1903 and 1908 when the book was published. He even gives a list of names suitable for otter hounds. It was at approximately this time

that otter hunts adopted the blue jackets, bowler hats, knickerbockers of white and yellow waistcoats came into fashion. But importantly each hunt had its own combination of colours, which he lists. An ash pole is also part of the attire, which he describes in detail how to make, or "one of first rate finish may be obtained from Messrs. Swaine and Adeny, 185, Piccadilly." I don't know if you can still get them there. He also lists the proper horn notes and calls to be used by the M.O.H.





*Spraint: just one the telltale signs.*

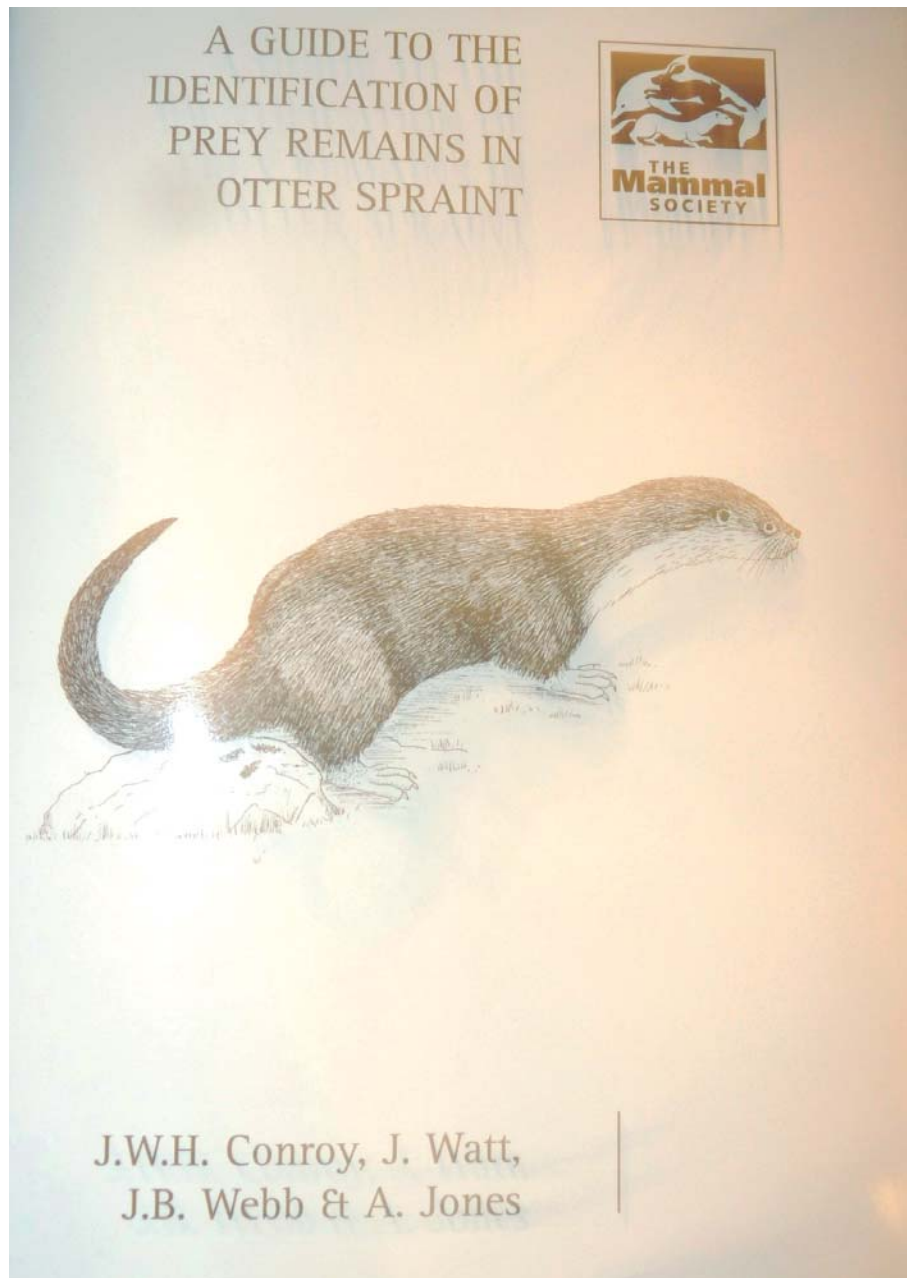
### **A bitch otter lead her two cubs along the bank**

Over the years, my appreciation of otters continued as I worked in the fishery board and, sometimes as we drifted downstream electrofishing a stretch of river, I would comment that there were otters about, having seen a sprainting point on a large rock or some such feature. My workmates would ask me how I knew, so we would chat about the animals and they would then keep their eyes out for sign and otters. We rarely saw the beast itself but we knew they were there.

On occasions we did see them, usually at night when we were staking out a spot for poachers and were hidden and quiet. One of the guys saw a bitch otter lead her two cubs along the bank close to where he was hidden, before leading them across the River Liffey, not far from Dublin. One of the older Fishery Officers told me a story which he swore was true, of when he was heading to Co. Meath to do a spot of pigeon shooting years before. This chap was a real character who rode everywhere on an old blue Honda 175cc motorcycle. He used to sling his shotgun over his shoulder and travel all around the country to shoot pigeons as they sat at roost. He did not like to waste ammunition, firing at flying birds. Anyway, as he was heading to Co. Meath one time he

passed over a bridge (and it becomes a habit to always check over any bridge being a Fishery Officer) and as he dismounted his bike he heard a splashing and carefully looked over. There he saw what he described as a great battle between a big dog otter and a large salmon in the pool below the bridge. He concealed himself and watched as finally the otter prevailed and killed the salmon, which it then dragged to the bank. However, before it could enjoy its meal. My friend shot it, climbed down and claimed both the otter and the salmon, which had a bite from the back of its neck. He brought the otter to a garda station and claimed the five pounds bounty and returned home with a ten-pound salmon, much to the amusement of his wife. Well, that's what he told me anyway; knowing him for the chancer he was, I don't doubt the story.

I finished working in the Fishery Boards some years ago due to ill health, but for years I too found it difficult



*This booklet is a useful field guide.*

to pass over a bridge without feeling the need to look over it. Anyway whenever I went angling be it on a river or lake, I often came across sprainting posts and thought of otters. On one estuary I visit after those elusive grey mullet I often saw otter tracks. One day, while there I met with angler Liam Kane and was glad to assist him weighing a specimen mullet he had just landed. He commented that an otter had come out of the river and checked him out as he sat quietly waiting for the mullet to show. The marks left by the otter were obvious in the deep soft mud He had time to take a few photos before the otter headed on his way. Liam has had a few close encounters with otters while fishing and kindly allowed me to use some of his photos This estuary is on the East Coast and there are often signs that otters are present, footprints and spraints.

### ***I located a sprainting site***

Then someone told me that they had heard otters late one night in a local stream, near where I live. I knew this person would know an otter call or whistle and this prompted me to keep a close eye on this stream. It was not long before I had located a sprainting site. Sometimes there would be no sign of it being used for months and then in use for months again. Anyway, I decided that this was the perfect place to try my remote camera trap, or trail camera as the yanks call them. Problem was, this site is open to the public and in view of a walkway regularly used by children on the way to school. I locked the camera to a tree but knew that it was too close to the sprainting site to get a decent image. I set it and hoped. A week later it was still there, and lots of photos had been taken. Among the various images of birds hopping through, and a cat, I found a fox had visited, and then a few photos of what was definitely an otter, checking the camera out, These images were all very washed out because the flash had gone off very close to the creatures. So I tried moving the camera across the stream to get a bit of distance from the site. Again I locked it to a tree and when I returned a few days later I was glad I had, because it had been thrown over the wall which it had been beside, it was OK and there were photos to check. Bingo! One image showed two otters, so now I know that the stream is part of a

bitch otters territory. The bitches tend to be more stationary while the dog otters roam around and visit a number of bitch otter's territories. This confirmation of the presence of otters in a small stream running through a small town surprised a lot of people. Unfortunately a few years ago a dead otter turned up in the river but more have moved in. The sprainting place where I got these photos is right beside a busy pond with many ducks which people feed every day. Ducklings don't last very long in this pond. Must be the old "goose-footed prowler" about again. I know that the otters move along this stream and out of town into the local countryside as I have found sprainting posts for about a mile upstream from where I took the photos. Long may they be about.

I believe that they are using this stream as a pathway to visit the coast. The stream enters the sea about half a mile downstream from the pond. The interesting thing is that it flows under a number of main roads so is culverted for much of its length through the town. This does not seem to bother the otters too much as their tracks have been seen near the beach. I know that crabs and small sea fish such as blennies and butterfish, are favorite foods so I wondered how I could check this. Then I found a little book called 'Identifying prey remains from otter spraints.' This is actually a key to the small bones, which are in the otter's spraints. I recovered some spraints from beside the pond and found them full of small fish bones. Following the instructions I cleaned the spraints and dried the bones on a paper towel. I managed to get a lend of a microscope and a shallow glass dish. Despite a few hours pouring over this dish of dry fish bones I had trouble finding the correct bones, but I did find that they feed a lot on sticklebacks from the stream. The problem is that you need to find vertebrae from a particular area of the fish's spine, and they have to be intact to identify the fish. Maybe the otters I found were just careful eaters and chewed their food well because most bones were fragments. I did find some hair in the spraints which means that they are eating small mammals along with fish.

*(Below) A fox was recorded on the stealth cam along with the otters.*



# RSPB Challenged Over Grouse

**Maybe I am getting soft in the head, or maybe it's just because I talked to two very nice people who work for the RSPB, but the upshot is I am hereby issuing a challenge to that august body to take over and put sustainable numbers of grouse and other moorland birds on any one of the moors I manage in North Antrim. It goes without saying that I did not discuss the matter with either of the two people I talked to, Ian Dillon, manager of the RSPB's Hope Farm in Cambridgeshire or Judith Carville in the organisation's Northern Ireland office. To cut a long story short, the RSPB has worked wonders for the past 12 years on the 400 acres of Hope Farm with the result that numbers of yellowhammers, skylarks and other small birds have increased dramatically. And it has done it without any attempt to control raptors or predators; it has relied entirely on improving habitat so that clutches can hatch safely and the chicks can survive and prosper.**

I have been working my socks off on moors in North Antrim for more than 40 years and I have not been able to bring grouse numbers there up to permanently sustainable levels. Now I am asking the RSPB if it thinks it can do the impossible on open moorland, with all its problems, in much the same way as it has done on Hope Farm.

Personally, I have shot only one grouse on those moors in all the time I have had them. It was an old cock that presented such a challenge that I could not resist it. My son Daniel and Dan McCollam had risen the cock far out on the Lough Mountain. It was too far off for them to get a shot at it. But, on it came directly in line with where I was standing at my peat bank. I lifted

the gun which was nearby for another purpose and down the grouse came at my feet. That was the end of my grouse shooting.

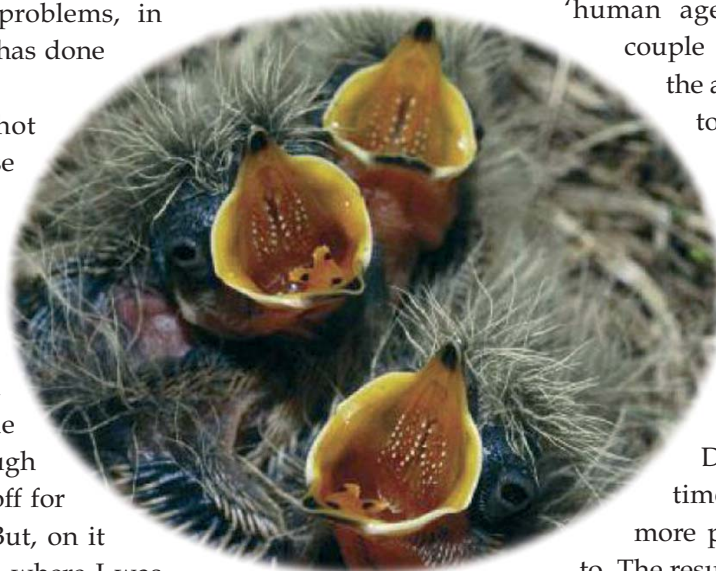
In the first 10 years that I managed those moors, grouse numbers built up steadily. I would take a few friends out once a year. I would work Harry, my magnificent setter, for them. The guns were strictly limited to a total of 10 per cent of available birds, mostly old cocks. Never once was that limit exceeded. I would say that there were well over 250 adult grouse on those moors at peak levels with coveys of 10, 11 and 12. Then something strange happened. I was counting the 800 acres Duncarbit moor in early March about 25 years ago with Harry and we put up 30 pairs on one section of the moor. Things looked very promising.

But a bit of a shock was to follow: Duncarbit is well off the beaten track and cannot be seen from the road - an ideal place for some skulduggery. Four months after I had counted 30 breeding pair on half the moor I ran Harry over it again. Not a feather was to be seen. There was no sign of fox work and no sign of remains of birds at or near the peregrines' eyrie at the foot of the mountain.

## ***It had been cleared by 'human agency'***

I sought advice from a top gamekeeper in Cumbria. His finding was final and quite shattering. He said the moor had been cleared by what he described as 'human agency.' In other words, a couple of scoundrels had netted the adult grouse when claiming to be lamping foxes at night.

It wasn't long until the 'disease' spread to other moors under my control. I was working in the News Letter in Belfast at the time and could not possibly watch the moors day and night as my son Daniel was too young at the time and other friends had more pressing business to attend to. The result was that over the past 25 years, thieves have reduced



*Hungry Skylark chicks at Hope farm.*

grouse numbers to below sustainable levels. Three moors were cleaned and the adjoining, once great 3,000 acres Cushleake moor (now under the aegis of the National Trust) was left with a mere handful of grouse - too few to even think of allowing anyone to shoot there. That means that all costs (relatively small though they may be) have been borne by me, with no financial return whatever. My only reward has been that I love the moors and would gladly spend every minute of the day out there.

### ***The challenge to RSPB***

Having set the scene, warts and all and having read with avid interest about what has been achieved on Hope Farm, I now challenge the RSPB to help bring grouse, lapwing, curlew, snipe, meadow pipits and golden plover back to the North Antrim moors in sustainable numbers. It can do this by selecting any one of the moors (800 - 1,000 acres) I manage and bringing it back to life, the way that it did in Cambridgeshire. Granted, geography and habitat would be very different to that in Cambridgeshire but all of these moors once held good populations of all the birds mentioned above. The rent for the RSPB would not be a problem, but sheep farmers would still want foxes, hoodie crows and magpies to be controlled especially at lambing time.

Approximately, 2,000 acres of those moors were burned in last Spring's wild fires, including scores of half-acre plots which I had burned professionally at considerable personal cost. But the new heather is coming well there now and there is still sufficient cover on some of the moors to shelter and protect grouse. At the moment my son Daniel and his friends keep foxes under control on all these moors with hounds and terriers. I am sure they would be prepared to continue that service at no cost.

I have to say this. Three days before writing this article I got talking to two RSPB employees. Of course I hadn't even thought of inviting the RSPB to play a part in restoring grouse and other moorland bird populations, but Judith Carville and Ian Dillon could not have been more helpful. Within five minutes of asking Judith for a copy of the Hope Farm report it was on my computer.

And Ian was equally helpful in elaborating on the Home Farm project. How could a son of Carnmoney near Belfast be anything else? Three days after asking Ian for the RSPB' booklet on Hope Farm it arrived with me in the post. I find it totally absorbing and would recommend it as essential reading for hill and arable farmers.

I would like to discuss the matter with senior RSPB people but they will understand that I, like them, have always put the interests of wildlife before profit.



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*Pointers .... Glennoo offers so much 'right on your doorstep'.*

# Glennoo Shoot and Fishery – Albert Titterington visits what could be an Irish sporting alternative to a Scottish trip

**I** have enjoyed two visits to Glennoo in the past two seasons and, prior to booking for this I took the opportunity to meet with Tom Woods and Damian McElholm to discuss the success of last season and their new plans for the 2012/2013 season.

Glennoo is part of the only true wild country existing in Northern Ireland. While the name and the terrain is reminiscent of Scotland, it is actually only around 75 minutes from Belfast and under two hours from Dublin by car. For those shooting parties who regularly travel to Scotland for smaller mixed shooting days you could probably have better value here on 'your own doorstep.'

The cost of the average trip to Scotland now approaches a level that few of us can afford comfortably in these hard times. With a ferry return averaging £250+, diesel for the trip from £100, accommodation and food at least £60 per day not to mention an evening or two in the pub and you don't get much change from £1000 per head

for your rough shooting trip. Glennoo is reachable from most places in Ireland within a few hours at most and has excellent B&Bs, hotels and the superb Blessingbourne self catering apartments set in an old world estate courtyard, which can cater for up to four per apartment. Leaves you lots of money to spend on more shooting! As for bringing your shotguns from the Republic of Ireland, the boys at Glennoo do virtually all the paperwork for you for £20 per person.

Glennoo began life in 2009 as Glennoo Shoot, offering small game bird days to groups of 3-6 shooters, on the bogs and forest slopes of Glennoo and Mullaghfad Mountains. Since then they have expanded their game shoot and introduced exciting new game angling packages for syndicates and day tickets. The shooting ground covers the small patchwork farms and the heather clad slopes you see on your left between Clogher and Fivemiletown when driving to Enniskillen from the Ballygawley roundabout. This is the Sliabh Beagh range of mountains that straddle the border between Tyrone, Fermanagh and Monaghan.

I have known Tom and Damian for many years and, as I was involved in a stalking syndicate on part of the ground for a short time, I was aware of the potential of this wonderfully wild area and I was intrigued to see what they had done to turn it into a novel and quite unique type of shoot.

In 2010 I took a group to shoot partridges in the morning and pheasants in the afternoon and, to really challenge the organisers of the shoot,

*Partridge at Glennoo offer incredible sporting shots.*





*Heading home after a great day's sport in wild surroundings.*

suggested we run a retriever trial in tandem with the shooting. I did take the precaution of Joe Johnston and I visiting Damian on the ground a week before the trial was to take place, to plan how it would be incorporated into the day's shooting. Both Joe and I were impressed with the range of ground available and the crispness of the whole operation.

Trial day arrived and after a hearty breakfast which the magazine hosted for guns, judges and stewards we set off in quite wet conditions for a very interesting day. In spite of the wet weather the birds flew well, the guns shot OK and with 37 partridges in the bag the dogs were well tested on some spectacularly long retrieves.

Trial over, the rain eased and we moved location and had a couple of hours of exciting driven pheasants again with a bag of over 30. All the guns thoroughly enjoyed our day and wanted to book for the following year. I also heard many of the trial guys enquiring about holding trials on the ground and booking it for training days.

For 2011 we again booked a partridge day. Three of the guns booked into the hotel the night before and thoroughly enjoyed their accommodation and evening meal, while two of us met them for breakfast. We were shooting over spaniels and again had an excellent day with a bag in the high thirties. Everyone got shooting and the top gun, Richard Edgar, who took his chances well, shot eleven birds to his own gun.

For the 2012/13 season Glennoo offers shooting clients a mix of red legged partridge, pheasant, woodcock and snipe. Bag sizes will range from 40-70 birds for walked up days and they have a few driven pheasant days left for 80-150 bird days.

Always looking to respond to the changing world of shooting Glennoo is introducing a new concept called 'Walked Up Wednesdays,' which will offer individual shooters the chance to join a team and avail of a full

shooting day without having to chase up a team of guns themselves. This package is very competitive and can cater for up to five guns at a time. There is also a rather unique shoot cabin available for tea and coffee plus the post match analysis.

Glennoo is about more than shooting and this year they have fully launched a comprehensive fishing package with superb trout fishing from boats on two beautiful and heavily stocked loughs in the Sliabh Beagh area. One is stocked with brown trout and the other with rainbows, with three boats on each. There are a few syndicate spots left at the time of going to print but we will have guided day ticket fishing available most days at £20 per angler based on two anglers sharing a boat. They also offer day tickets on the Blackwater at Clogher, which is a prolific wild trout river.

In all, 2012/13 promises to be another big season for Glennoo and they can look forward to seeing many of their old friends who, as Tom Woods says, "have got us to where we are today," as well as meeting many new customers who can now also enjoy all that is best in traditional shooting and fishing without having to mortgage the house. It is heartening to see a home grown walked up shoot take on a sector of the market dominated by the Scottish for so many years and we commend this to the many who sail away each season. From the feedback I got from shooters who have visited Glennoo you won't regret giving it a try.



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## The Need For Rural Ireland To Say Enough Is Enough!

It was a pure pleasure to exhibit our angling stand at Birr Castle Game Fair again and sincere congratulations to all who organised what had to be the best show yet from our point of view. It was an absolute privilege to meet and greet genuine angling and country enthusiasts, both young and old. Our Federation learns quite a great deal from visitors to our stand as it is so well attended by many of our affiliated clubs who are never shy about telling us what they think. We are indebted to Glenda, Joe and Stevie from APGAI Ireland who gave the FISSTA Youth teams a very thorough demonstration in the ring as the first event on Saturday morning. The

children who had travelled up from Kerry and the West coast were thrilled with their place in the sun and took home some great memories being coached by their idols again.

The decision by the organisers to invite FISSTA, NARGC and RISE members into the main ring to express concern to the government was a very brave and very worthwhile event and one that will be long remembered and appreciated after campaigns such as the present one is long over.

The fight to preserve our rural way of life has always been top of the agenda for the all our nature sportspeople and lovers of the land. That is why we all join rod and gun clubs or



*The RISE rally at Birr was an opportune time to make Irish Countrysports and Country Life magazine's 'Lifetime Commitment Awards' to John Carroll, outgoing chairman of FISSTA for his work on game angling, Turlough Coffey, retiring secretary of FACE Ireland and Margaret Neile for lifetime of committed work with the NARGC and other countryside organisations.*





*FISSTA's hard working President and Treasurer on the stand at Birr.*

affiliate and support the national bodies that take on the issues we need them to tackle which involve the important task of lobbying the politicians. That means engaging constructively with law makers not just at home but also in EU from where many of the decisions are made and most of the funds are administered. They call it harmonisation of legislation for almost everything we do and if we are not in there making sure the voice of our rod and gun people are heard we can find ourselves spending much time and money fire fighting what has been decided rather than avoiding the disaster first. That is why FISSTA are affiliated to FACE Ireland and EU, and take an active part in it to lobby our Ministers who seem to be sadly ignoring us for the present. Hopefully, the resurgence of RISE - Rural Ireland Says Enough in the last year will get our government to sit up again and heed our calls to protect our sports against the huge threats that are heading our way.

In the case of our wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout we are very concerned on a number of fronts as we fear that our fish will be wiped out under this government's new plan for fish farming that will increase it tenfold along our west coast. That is why we work very closely with the NARGC to ensure our message and appeals are heard all over the country. Every representative body who entered the NARGC World Tent at Birr Game Fair has to admire the achievements of the NARGC, whose staff and voluntary membership delivers the kind of success the rest of our organisations can only dream of as we strive to keep our dwindling membership static. Before the government of 2006 trebled our rod license, over 30,000 salmon licenses were sold to salmon anglers mainly living in Ireland.

Today we believe, (no updated stats yet) that number is less than 10,000 because of the state interference and mismanagement in our sport of salmon angling. Thankfully, we believe these 20,000 have they have not given up angling and have opted for the free freshwater angling on trout and coarse lakes or in the sea. Yes, the Irish salmon angler is always the only one that must pay the fishery boards of Inland Fisheries Ireland to deliver a service that is fast diminishing into an administrative black hole at HQ in a place called Swords, which puts the onus back on to our local volunteer to develop and maintain angling for their area. Salmon angling is the only sport that you have to pay the state to participate in and FISSTA continue to protest against this inequality. There is no cost to the state for a sports person to go golfer or indeed a shooter to go hunting and rightfully so, but why must anglers pay to wet a line for salmon. True, as the owner of a gun, a license is needed but that is a weapon that has a serial number on it, unlike the rod, which often can be more expensive to purchase depending on the taste of the angler. Scotland are the English speaking world leaders in angling tourism and they do not charge a license and to compete this state must do the same. Their increased tax revenue from profitable hotels and guest houses more than compensates for the shortfall of a charging a penal rod license that is often more expensive than the airline ticket an angler might pay for a week's fishing. It is time to call a halt to this outdated practice and start competing with those who are beating us out of the market. That is what we told Inland Fisheries Ireland at the recent seminars on youth and funding in Swords but we felt that our proposals

*Winners in the Kerry Schools Oweyccree Angling Club National schools Competition. Back Row Paul Lawton Fissta, Chairman and Michael J O' Keeffe Chairman of the Oweyccree Angling Club.*



were not considered serious as other new organisations acknowledged the funding shortfall and proposed to assist in raising more funds to keep a failed system going.

### **Time for a new vision**

At the recent seminar in Swords much was discussed but attending expressed views that demanded a new vision from Inland Fisheries Ireland as they were charged to protect, conserve and manage our inland fishery resource. It seems that all that IFI want is more funds to avoid cutbacks and further staff reductions. If salmon anglers are catching net marked fish it means the board policing service is found wanting and that is what is happening along the West coast all season as stocks dwindle. The laundering of wild salmon through the black hole of farmed fish boxes prove conclusively we have a serious problem that will only be resolved if fish farmers tag their fish like every salmon caught by rod and net must do. This, we have campaigned for over many years but such is the strength of the fish farm lobby our requests are ignored every year. We must make this season the last tagless farmed salmon year.

FISSTA is Ireland's salmon and sea trout angling body with the highest membership of both non licensed and licensed participants at all levels of the sport of salmon and sea trout angling. Inspired and supported by the voluntary efforts of its members, FISSTA was established in 1986 to succeed the former Irish Salmon and Sea Trout Council as an effective lobby group to improve and assist the lot of the Irish angler. During the past years the Federation has assisted many angling members to protect their angling by organising them into formally registered clubs on their local waters and especially on the best salmon rivers of Ireland. Our key objective for all voluntary clubs is to provide their members

with the most competitively priced local angling and services such as insurance cover so the personal assets of our registered members are protected, should a claim be made against them.

FISSTA are an all Ireland angling representative body promoting the voice for over 20,000 salmon and sea trout anglers in affiliated salmon and sea trout (salmonid) clubs located all over and engage with the three authorities Inland Fisheries Ireland (former regional fishery board areas) Loughs Agency (border areas) and DCAL (mid and East Ulster). As the premier provider of Irish salmon and sea trout angling FISSTA welcomes and develops angling tourism as a means to improve the facilities for all who engage in this age old traditional sport. Frequently, the lobbying often leads to organised campaigns such as the one to end drift netting which lasted for over twenty years of hard political campaigning which ended successfully on November 2006. A €35m. buyout part financed by the trebling of our rod license to €130 paid off the commercial nets-men in 2007. It was a very hard and expensive (still paying €120 for a rod license) pill to swallow for FISSTA clubs but the sweetener was that our vision for abundance would be realised within a couple of life cycles or by 2017.

Since this time the stocks of wild Atlantic salmon returning to our rivers improved significantly but sadly the graph of growth is severely hampered by the lack of any joined up thinking by the state services and ministers charged with this responsibility.

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registered angling clubs or bodies with a base of over 20,000 members. Many, who may not be anglers themselves, join our cause to support their local community based organisation that are environmentally committed to clean water in their river or lake, along with the conservation of our wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout.

The Wild Atlantic Salmon is migratory, born in the river of one nation and feeding in the coastal areas of several nations in the North Atlantic before returning to its home waters. During these travels from birth to its return it has to overcome daunting obstacles to its very survival from habitat degradation, pollution, predators, sea lice infection and diseases from ocean fin fish farming hunger from commercial plundering of its food chain, but most damaging of all are the man made legal and illegal interceptory nets which indiscriminately kill mixed stocks for different river catchments and indeed salmon bound for other countries. Ireland as a salmon friendly nation and the present Government must seize the initiative to revive the dwindling stocks by ending the licensing of:

Commercial netting that kill fish on their way to spawn  
Fin fish farm cages that pollute and infest migrating smolts;

Escapes from fish farms degrade the habitat for wild to feed;

Mink farming which devastates spawning salmon in their pools.

This policy damages the wild Atlantic salmon and stocks can no longer sustain a limited industry for fishermen who already have been compensated costing €35m in 2007.

Our sport of salmon and sea trout angling, is unique in that it is the only one which is regulated by the state under Inland Fisheries Ireland who sell us a license and tell us if our river angling is open or closed for that year. Even though angling only takes a small percentage of the allocation of their harvestable quota, our sport is regulated by IFI in accordance with the list issued annually by the Standing Scientific Committee and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. Inland Fisheries Ireland have also the brief to advise, monitor and manage the resource for the state and also promote the sale of rod licenses @ €100 per angler season. The recreational value to the local angler in Ireland makes a vital contribution to the state for very little cost in its own right. However, an even more valuable benefit to the state is value our clubs add to the angling tourism income. But IFI also monitor quotas, issue licenses and manage industrial netting to the commercial fishermen which conflicts with their conservation brief.

### ***Time for action and what we must do to protect Ireland's Salmon Resource***

Ask Minister Coveney/McEntee to: protect migrating smolts being killed at hydros and from sealice emanating from Dept. licensed fish farms – no new fish farms in sea.

Ask Minister Rabbitte/O'Dowd to: end commercial draft

and drift netting such as in Castlemaine and protect migrating salmon smolts being killed at hydros/farms – review dams under their responsibility.

### **The main areas of importance this Autumn are:**

Netting – end by lobbying both North and South as more August extensions are permitted and drift-netting in a mixed stock fishery is continued in Castlemaine;

Increase campaign to stop the fish farms being located off shore – onshore means we can control pollution and protect salmonid against sealice;

Defend angling rights on salmon waters – high court decision will be made by Ms Justice Laffoy this October on Gweebarra case which has implications for many clubs on traditional waters;

End hydros interfering with migrating smolts from all rivers – another new hydro granted in Bunrana with the loss of salmon and seatrout habitat – FISSTA are supporting the appeal to Bord Pleanala;

Lobby Minister O' Dowd to draw up a new action plan for the protection of our wild fish – FISSTA must convince him to act now to protect them against all threats;

Northern Ireland DCAL Minister Ui Chuilleann to consult with the No Salmon Nets committee after receiving many submissions;

FISSTA's Fin Fish Farming Awareness Week was a great success earlier this summer which kick started our campaign to lobby hard against application for new 15,000 ton production in Galway Bay. EIS not yet published until October;

RISE campaign under FACE Ireland to include FISSTA's opposition to fish farming.

Concerning the massive fish farm planned for Galway Bay, our last line of defence for this and other salmon habitats are the EU Habitats Directive and we hope to use in Brussels the various scientific research available to back up our claims in this regard when we get sight of the Environmental Impact Statement by Bord Iascaigh Mhara – whenever that will be. As anglers, we depend on the state to protect what the state owns and manages, but when another state body decides to damage salmon stocks for the good of a few foreign fish farmers then we have the problem that was highlighted at our open meetings in Menlo Park Hotel on last May, Silver Springs Hotel Cork in June, Ballina Manor Hotel in July and BIRR Fair in August. Most now call it the Save Galway Bay Campaign.

### ***Would you like to support Wild Salmon Conservation?***

Please buy a ticket for our fantastic FISSTA raffle and be in with a chance to win a framed print of John Moore's painting of the wild salmon. Send for 1 ticket at €2 or a book of 3 for €5 by contacting Noel Carr, FISSTA Secretary, Teelin Road, Carrick, Vo Donegal or tel 087 2352001

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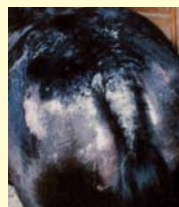
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# The Jaws of the Corrib

*Corrib from Glengarriff - here be monsters.*

**I** first stood on the shores of Lough Corrib, early summer, some 30 years ago on a very grumpy west of Ireland day. A good stiff wind was blowing over the Lough causing white horses and spin drift to tumble down the waves. I thought that Gene my fishing companion had made a mistake and we were looking out across the sea. Standing on the shore somewhere outside Moycullen my assertion that we had no chance of fishing was correct. This was however not due to the weather (the force 6 wind we were leaning in)! The fact there was an ongoing fishing strike. Not the best of introductions to the Lough.

As the second largest Lough in Ireland (after Lough Neagh) it boasts impressive statistics. A vast area of water of 44,000 acres it stretches from the Maam Valley in Connemara to Galway City, a length of 40 miles with the widest part from Cong, Co. Mayo to Oughterard, Co. Galway, a distance of 9 miles. The Lough lies in a general direction from west-north-west, in a curvature, to south-south-east. It has over 365 islands, plus innumerable rocks, shoals and reefs. The depth varies, with the deepest being 47 meters and average of approximately 12 meters. Even in the navigation channels there is only 2 meters of water in some places. This Lough demands respect (and the wearing of

personal buoyancy) particularly when fishing it in a good wave. The Lough can generally be divided in two. To the South a small shallow basin, north a larger and deeper basin. A narrow channel connects the two. To the west of the Corrib is Connemara, the land of mountain and bog. Looking east one has the more fertile plains of County Mayo. North an isthmus of land that separates Corrib from Lough Mask.

The name of the Lough and its formation are steeped in Irish mythology. Corrib is a corruption of the name 'Orib,' this itself a variation of the name 'Orbsen.' The Lough was at one time called Lough Orbsen, named after 'Orbsen Mac Alloid.' This is one of a number of names said to have been used by 'Manannán Mac Lir' when he assumed mortal form. Manannán Mac Lir was believed to be the lord of the sea. And the Lough came into being when Manannán Mac Lir was fighting a battle with Uillen Red Edge at Moycullen. Manannán Mac Lir lost the battle and was slain. The waters of the Lough were said to have sprung up from where his blood was spilled.

Though the Lough has a decent run of salmon its angling reputation (world wide) is for the quality of its trout fishing. On my first visit the plan had been to catch brownies. For the visit I had done my homework, read numerous articles on the Lough, the appropriate methods to use and tied the recommended flies. Stories of trout averaging 1 ½ lbs with plenty larger had wetted



Just because the trout season is coming to a close and winter is approaching there's no reason to put your fly rods into cold storage. Ireland's great lakes provide excellent fishing for pike all year round.

For the most up to date angling information on who is catching what, and where, log onto:  
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\* Packages are designed for a minimum of 2 fishermen.

my appetite particularly as then a good brownie for me was anything over a pound. Unfortunately I had been unaware of the rather 'heated' discussions going on over licenses. It was to be another 20 years or so (and moving over here) before I got the opportunity to net my first Corrib brownie.

My next visit to fish the Corrib two decades on was after a different target species. In the contravening years I had I accidentally discovered how well pike fight on the fly. A 25 lb pike on a size 12 white nymph had made me rethink my view of this species. A major bonus of pike for me is the fact that they allow me to extend my fishing season. At the end of September the trout 6 / 7 weight outfits are cleaned and put away whilst I dust down the 9 weights for the pike.

### **Very cold water leads to them sulking**

On Corrib, the trout season starts on the 15th February closing the end of September. In earnest the fishing really starts toward the end of March with hatches of duckfly. There is however no close season for pike. They can and are caught throughout the year, even on the fly unless it gets very cold. Very cold water leads to them sulking in an almost torpid state on the bed. With the fly I always do best relatively early in the year (April and May) and then in October and November. It is the late autumn fishing that I particularly enjoy as trout and salmon no longer distract me. Being a northern species pike like cool water. With early autumn the days shorten and water cools. At the same time pike start trying to pack on weight to over winter. For a short time they can let down their guard and get easy to catch.

Over the years the Corrib has become renowned for producing specimen pike. Fred Buller in his book 'The Doomsday Book of Mammoth Pike' records numerous large pike from the Corrib and its neighbour Lough Mask. The two largest Corrib fish were both 48 lbs. One caught in 1905 by Edward Mc Donagh, capture method



*Tomi Kurman and a Corrib beauty.*

is recorded as 'Gaff!' The second was caught by G. O'Sullivan in 1961 by use of a nightline.

As a 'born again' pike angler, I started spending time and effort looking for good pike fly fishing locations. Pike into the teens of pounds seemed easy enough to find in and around Co. Cavan but I was keen to connect with something larger. A friend told me that if I wanted a big fish (20lbs +) I should try the Corrib and even better he offered to take me.

Launching from Moycullen on a cool autumnal day I was glad Dave was a Corrib regular as he piloted the boat through a maze of rocks. I would not recommend a visitor going onto the Corrib without a guide or boatman



*Across the top*



*Coming to the net.*



discussion ensued how big a fly needs to be and can they be too big.

Since that visit I read from on going research (started in 1978) by Inland Fisheries Ireland, that as Lough Sheelin pike grow they change diet. Initially a catholic diet it becomes more specific. Fish as a component part of the diet, rise from 26% when they are under 39.9cm, to over 80% with pike exceeding a length of 60 cm. IFI found Sheelin pike to be semi opportunistic feeders taking any available fish; dietary abundance reflecting the population structure and availability of fish

species. And from looking at the size of fish found in the stomach contents the optimum prey size is about 10 inches. Then the largest flies I had were only 6 inches. On one went. Strangely the takes stopped. I gave it a good

for the first few visits due to both the Lough's size and the numerous underwater hazards. If one ignores the obvious dangers offered by the underwater topography; the Lough's sheer size could see one waste days trying to locate the pike. This visit saw us start in the bay where the Corrib River drains the Lough. Out of the channel this is an area of rush and weeds beds with depths mainly under 3 m. We fished both the drop off area into the channel as well as the shallows.

### ***I saw a shadow stalking my fly***

Dave started using 'poppers' so to maximise our chances of bumping into fish I used a different tactic, an intermediate line with a three inch Perch pattern at the dangerous end. After only a dozen casts, through my polaroids I saw a shadow stalking my fly. Close to the boat I let the fly hang, the shadow stopped and dropped down into the deep green. Lifting the fly vertically the shadow suddenly accelerated and struck. Hooked it went airborne and for a couple of minutes gave an excellent demonstration of tail walking and general acrobatics. After 5 minutes 12 pounds of muscle and teeth seethed in the net as I unhooked it. It then wetted me with its tail as I released it back into the depth. Taking a second fish, though only a 5lb 'jack' Dave started to get twitchy, should he change tactics? A third and fourth fish followed before he finally replaced the popper with a largish orange fly to fish sub surface.

By lunch time we had had netted a dozen fish between us with others missed, lost and a good few follows that had not converted to hook ups! Except for my first fish all the rest were jacks, nothing over 6 lbs. Dave suggested that we upped fly size. His theory 'big fly, big fish!' A

species. And from looking at the size of fish found in the stomach contents the optimum prey size is about 10 inches. Then the largest flies I had were only 6 inches. On one went. Strangely the takes stopped. I gave it a good

*A lovely 17 pound Corrib pike.*





*Big lures, big fish.*

half hour swim before restoring the perch pattern. It only took a few casts for normal service to be resumed; a 4 lb 'jack' with a big bite mark on its flank. Dave had fished this area the previous week and caught fish to 20lbs + so could not understand why we were only finding small fish. Time for another change of tactics or location. Dave decided we should try the mouth of the Clare River.

Where the Clare joins the Corrib is relatively shallow bay. The pike seem drawn to this spot as an ambush point feeding on the varying fish moving both in and out of the river. The water was slightly more coloured so I put on a yellow thing! The pike liked it and started coming thick and fast. I heard a strangled cry from the other end of the boat and saw a huge back rolling in front of Dave. Estimated at 30 lb + it had followed Dave's fly only to roll by the boat then melt away into the depth. Dave gibbered for the next hour or so and fished hard waiting and praying for his monsters return. Late afternoon and the gentle wind started to build and the odd shower scuttle across the Lough. It had turned colder; the best of the day had gone. With 28 fish boated the best of 17 lbs to my rod, for me it could not be seen as a bad day.

Since that first visit I have fished and caught pike throughout the length of the Corrib. I have yet to hook a



*Kopi ..... A quick photograph and back it goes.*

Corrib 20 pounder but have seen them and had the privilege of netting them for others. Corrib holds huge pike and with any luck somewhere there is one destined to meet me. I look forward with anticipation to my own battle with the Jaws of Corrib.

For further information on Lough Corrib go to [www.fishinginireland.info](http://www.fishinginireland.info)

## Guides

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# Come fish or high water

**The fly fisher's arsenal: Rod - check. Reel - check. Line - check. Leader and tippet - check. Flies - check. Rivercraft - check. Basic entomology - check. Casting ability - it'll do, it'll do. Casting has never been my strongest point, much to the dismay of my mate who owns a tackle shop and is a top casting instructor. I'll certainly never win any prizes for distances or efficiency of technique. But, as I almost exclusively fish small rivers these days this has never particularly bothered me. Most of my fishing is done a matter of feet away and casts tend to be improvisational affairs. As long as I can put the fly roughly where I want it, I am happy, I'm catching fish after all. Each season I tend to try to focus on one aspect of my fishing and try to improve it. This year it has been rivercraft; carefully watching the river levels, and how they affect the feeding activity of the wild trout that make their home in my small stream. The strange weather has certainly given me plenty of raw material to practice with, with unprecedented high levels for the time of the year.**

I fish two rivers mainly - a smaller tributary which is a few strides across and close to its moorland source, and one about twice its size. Both are rain fed and very 'spatey.' Out of necessity I have found myself fishing at times when the level has been higher than I would have ideally chosen. To my surprise though, I've found that I've often caught surprisingly well given the conditions, taking trout both off the top and with weighted nymphs.

Soon, a pattern began to emerge: providing the level had peaked after a given period of rain, and was starting to come down the other side, there was a good chance that it would fish well. But if the level was rising, from whatever starting point, as often as not the fish would

stop feeding - or stop taking my flies, at least. The effect could be very marked. I could be fishing and catching under darkening skies, then see the water start to rise up my wader and begin to colour, as the rain fell on the nearby higher ground. As often as not the fish would switch off. I've no idea why, that is just how it seemed to be.


When you've got a theory, the first thing to do is to try to break it. Soon a prolonged period of heavy rain had kept me off the water for a few days. The rivers were full to bursting. On one such day, partly because I was going stir crazy and needed to get out, and partly to test the theory, I decided to have a session on the bigger of the two rivers.

As soon as I arrived at the river I realised what a foolhardy mission I had embarked upon. A spate river in full flow can be a deceptively calm looking thing. All the boulders that usually break up the flow are submerged, and it looks as thick and smooth as a ribbon of treacle as the water rushes through. The true force of it though is betrayed by the noise as you approach the water's edge. Wading in these conditions is not to be recommended. In fact, it is highly dangerous. I only even considered it because I knew that river so well, it's every stone and hole underfoot by touch.

With a heavy reliance on a wading staff I made my way out into the central channel. Above my waist in the water, leaning right into the force of the flow, all common sense told me that I was never going to catch anything in these conditions. I made about twenty metres progress up stream casting a heavily weighted Czech Nymph before satisfying myself that there was no way I was going to catch. I felt like I'd had a good workout though, pushing up against the force of that water.

Once back on the bank the rain began to fall, torrential this time. I thought I'd have a walk upstream, see if I could see anything that looked as though there was any chance it might hold fish. About half a mile upstream the river passed through woodland. There was a spot on the far bank where underwater obstacles and tree roots must have conspired to produce what looked like a small oasis of slack water amidst the white heat of the river. I sat down on a fallen log, took up camp, and watched.

After about five minutes I saw a fish rise, head and shoulders breaking out of the water. A couple more minutes passed, then sure enough it came up again. It was not a big fish, but to have found signs of anything at all in these conditions felt like a triumph in itself. I had to catch it, the exception to



*Common sense told me that I was never going to catch anything in these conditions.*

prove the rule. I scrambled down the bankside and again took to the thundering waters. The flow rate was even faster here and I shuffled sideways across, using my staff to form a very firm tripod with my legs. It was treacherous under foot, strewn with boulders which were water-worn smooth, every tentative step risking a snapped ankle.

### ***Up it came again***

I got as far as I dare venture and braced myself against the flow. Up came the fish again. It wasn't a big fish and I couldn't see what it was taking, but I figured it most likely was a beetle or grub washed down from the leaves in the rain. Besides, if it was feeding in these conditions it couldn't have been too fussy. I was happy with the olive parachute emerger I'd put on. The big problem was going to be presentation. The calmer eddy of water at the bankside - and I use the word 'calm' very much in the relative sense - was beneath trees. There was about a nine foot wide window of opportunity, with a canopy of branches about five feet above the water, and tips of branches that usually would be airborne but were now dipping into the water just down stream.

I looked to make the cast with the tumult of water piling down just in front of me. A sideways cast, with the rod close to the water and I arced the ten feet of leader and got the fly in under the trees. My heart was racing, but then it was only on the water for a split second before my fly line got swept in the flow and skittered the fly across the water. I managed to snatch it away, cursing not even under my breath - it didn't matter - any sound I uttered was drowned by the roar of the river. I thought that was it, that totally unnatural movement of the fly must have put down the fish. But then it came up again. I looked skywards and thanked whoever was appropriate for the second chance, and made another cast.

Again I got the fly through the 'window' and this time I tried to mend the line as quickly as I could, but it wasn't quick enough and again the fly skittered away. But I was only half paying attention to the fly, because one eye was on the rapidly bowing line. Before I knew it I felt a tug but it wasn't the tug of a fish, it was the branches that dipped into the water than had snagged my fly. That was it now I knew. After that commotion there was no chance of catching that fish. As I stood there in that raging river, snatching bad-temperedly at those caught branches, the sense of loss was palpable. To have caught that fish in those conditions would have ranked right up there as one of my most treasured fly fishing moments. To have lost it, I knew straight away, would rank it always as one of my worst. But as the minutes passed my perspective changed. It was no longer an adrenalin pumping fishing problem, it was a cold, technical casting problem.

With all thoughts of stealth long gone, I snapped the tangled fly and tied on another, determined to get that presentation right.

I remember my casting instructor friend once telling me about a tricky casting situation, across a fast flow, where he had to mend the line in the air before it had actually landed. I suddenly knew exactly what he meant. I tried this, and could see that the theory was right, if not quite the execution - yet.

I stood there twenty minutes or so, braced against that flow. Cast, flick, loop rod and mend before line touches the river, dead drift, pull out at the last second as the line begins to bow and before fly catches in dipping branches. The technique managed a dead drift of probably no more than eighteen inches, but had it been the first cast, it would have got me that fish, I am sure of it. When I had managed to make this cast three times in succession, I made my way back across the river and up onto the bank. I flopped down onto the log, exhausted. I tried to tell myself that I had no right to expect to catch a trout in these conditions, no right at all. But I'd done the hard bit, I'd 'read the river' and found a fish, despite the conditions, right? That was a good thing. But it was the practical side, the 'doing' that had let me down. Sitting on that log and trying to find solace in this was a strange kind of consolation.

As I made my way back to the car, wading boots dragging heavier than usual, the rain clouds were breaking up and the sun beginning to come through. I vowed that this season, as well as working on the rivercraft, I was going to take my casting from 'roughly where I want it' closer to 'precisely where I want it.' I may even book a lesson or two with my mate who has the tackle shop. I laughed to myself, would I give him the satisfaction? I pictured his face as I admitted to needing casting lessons, an admission that 'idiosyncratic' was perhaps not after all the highest ideal. He would no doubt want to know what had finally led me to this conclusion, and I would have tell him that as is so often the case, the fish from which I had learned the most was the one that had got away.





# SPECTACULAR SHEELIN

**T**he anticipation had been building for weeks and the results of the International Competition the previous week seemed to confirm that something special was happening at our favourite fishing Lough. The Mallusk Angling Society converge at the little village of Finea every year at the end of May to celebrate the Mayfly on a very special and unique Lough Sheelin. The 'jungle drums' were communicating the info, the flies were being tied: Wulffs, Mosely Mays, spent patterns, new patterns and variants of the standards. A small fortune was spent on new gear and brownie points were amassed in various ways from painting the house, cutting of hedges, right through to booking of family holidays, anything to maintain domestic harmony while the boys head off on our fishing trip. Some years the fishing is really tough, others are not so bad, but always the welcome and hospitality are superb with Mary & Stephen O'Reilly from Innyside Lodge making all sixteen of us feel part of the family and Watty's Rock pub extending their normal hours of business to accommodate fishermen who may not be returning from the lake until midnight.

For many years we have made the pilgrimage to the lake that spans the borders of counties Cavan, Meath and Westmeath. Although sometimes the conditions were poor with the water green with algal blooms and the stench of pig slurry permeating the air, though the great hospitality and the superb beauty and natural

abundance of the Lough kept bringing us back, hoping that things may improve.

Things got so bad that the Lough Sheelin Trout Protection Association was formed and working in conjunction with the Fisheries Board, local councils and government agencies, they started to make improvements by reducing pollution, controlling the poaching element, improving spawning facilities and recruitment of juvenile trout and encouraging catch and release. Full credit must be given to all the bodies who have contributed to the restoration of this fantastic Lough. Then came that invasive species, the Zebra Mussel, which filters the water improving the water clarity though not necessarily removing pollution. After the Zebra Mussel came the collapse of the massive roach population, which may have been linked. The result of all this is that Lough Sheelin is improving and as already mentioned, the results of the International Event proved to be far better than anyone might have anticipated.

On the Friday of the last weekend of May, our little crew arrived in drips and drabs as everyone escaped from work, headed for Cavan and converged in the pub in Finea as usual before having dinner and making our way out to the Lough, hoping that the evening would stay warm and calm and the Spent Gnat would be making their way out to lay their eggs in their final, fatal flight. It's a great feeling to arrive every May and know that there are several days fishing and a few nights craic ahead and when the car is parked up you don't have to get back in until leaving for home as all the facilities are in the one place: guesthouse, boats, tackle room and pub are all adjacent to each other so no need for a car key from you arrive until you leave.



*A quality fish by anyone's standards.*

As we motored up the little River Inney we could see some mayfly and as the boat turned out into the Lough through a veil of tall rushes the majestic panorama opened up in front of our eyes as miles of Lough spread out ahead in a vision illuminated by the purple and magenta of the spectacular setting sun. Sure enough, the fly were on the water and there were clouds of mayfly dancing over the trees in their timeless courtship ritual; the sense of excitement immediately went up a couple of notches as did the hold on the engine throttles as each boat headed for their favourite spot hoping that the big Sheelin fish would be on the move, mopping up the spent fly as they lay helpless on the surface.

That first night nerves, tempers and nylon leaders were all tested as we tried to get on terms with our shy and elusive quarry, combined with the fact that our technique was still a little rusty but gradually we all settled in to the spotting, stalking and striking techniques and later (very much later!) in the pub there



*A welcome break in an idyllic setting.*

were stories of fish lost, leaders broken, huge trout seen and even a few around the three pound mark caught.

The following day proved to be a real heatwave, with scorching sunshine and a strong hot wind, hardly conducive to daytime fishing but at least the wind subsided in the evenings and there were great falls of fly to keep the fish moving. That proved to be the routine for the next few days: sunny with high winds during the day with the wind settling to give warm, balmy

evenings; perfect for a fall of Spents!

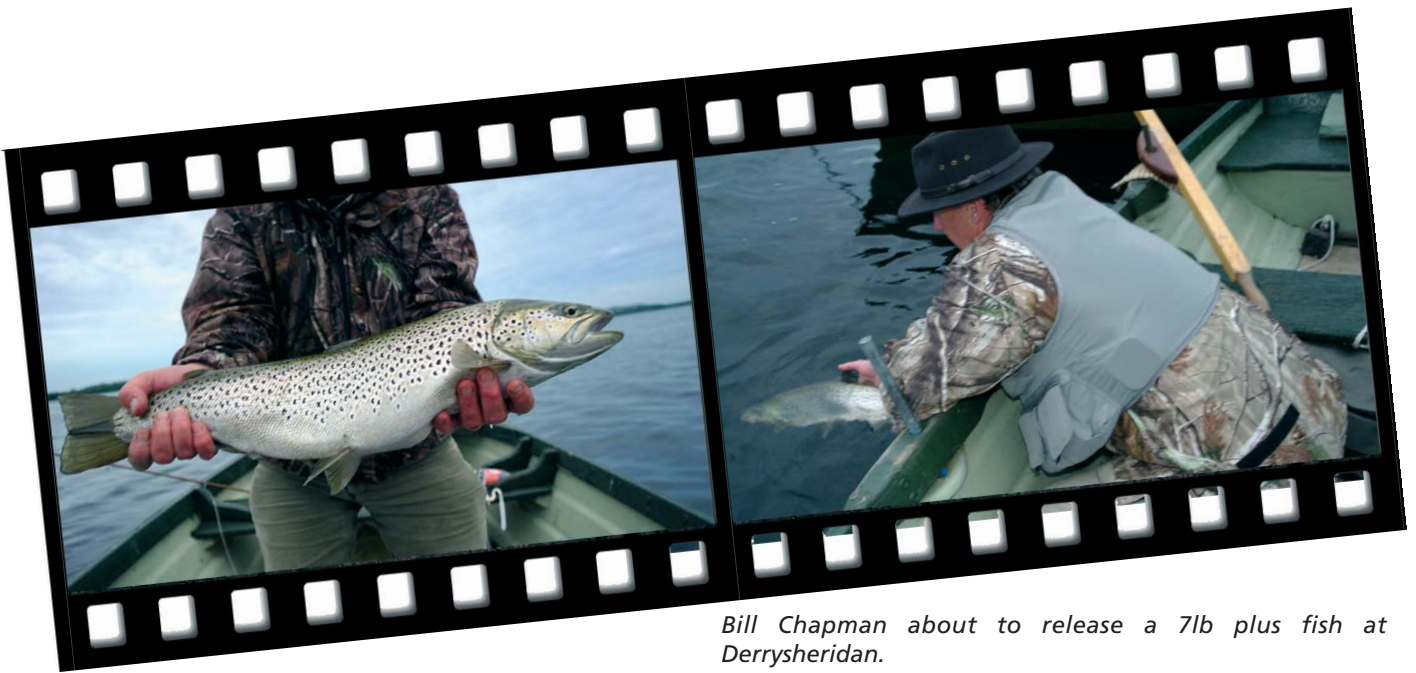
The Mallusk Angling Society lease a little wild brown trout lake in the hills above Belfast and we know well the



*And another fine Sheelin trout.*

benefits of good management, pollution control, good spawning and juvenile trout habitat, protection from predation and poaching and sustainable fishing practices which include a largely catch and release policy. These have improved our fishing beyond compare and we feel would work on any fishery. These

policies we also bring to Lough Sheelin, returning almost all of the fish to help regenerate the stocks for future years. One exception we made was to have a daytime competition (when very little was expected to be caught) on one of the days and only one fish was killed, the competition won, incidentally, by the Society Chairman, Jim Martin, in his seventieth year, with a fantastic trout of 5lb 9oz caught on a dry fly during the heat of a blisteringly hot day of blue skies and bright sunshine.



*Bill Chapman about to release a 7lb plus fish at Derrysheridan.*

### **An abundance of fly life**

During the evenings the atmosphere was electric, the mayflies danced above the trees in every bay and on Church Island in tremendous numbers. Anyone who hasn't visited Sheelin cannot start to understand the abundance of fly whether it be mayfly, buzzers or sedges. The shape of the trout betrays this incredible abundance and helps you to understand why the fish only have to feed at certain times. The trout may be numerous and heavy but they are certainly not easy to catch and I'd advise anyone visiting for the first time to recruit a local fisherman or guide because of all the Irish Loughs, Sheelin is the most difficult to locate fish. Stevie Munn, who belongs to our club, is a qualified APGAI casting instructor, Hardy Greys Instructor and guide and luckily is always on hand during our trip to give flies, advice and tips to any of the boys who are struggling. He also provides a lot of entertainment with his antics in the bar at night but that's another story!

Luckily we have made many friends through the years and learned where to expect to find fish so usually it's down to spotting a fish, having the right fly and careful presentation. We were lucky over several days (or evenings) to catch several trout over 3lb, some around 4lb, one over 5lb, one over 6lb and two over 7lb. All except one were returned unharmed in line with the LSTPA guidelines. We all had stories and witnessed trout of well over this weight but seeing them is one thing and getting them to select your fly from thousands of naturals on the water is another! I had to catch myself on one night when I was releasing a fine trout and one of the boys asked what size it was and I replied in all seriousness: "Only a three pounder!"

On one of the days we had heavy cloud cover during the day and in the hot, muggy weather the Spent Gnats fell during the day and up came the trout but we found them almost impossible to approach as every time the

boat came within fifty yards they would melt away and appear a hundred yards or more away. After spending a fruitless two hours chasing these fish, my boat partner and I just settled down for a cup of coffee and enjoyed this incredible spectacle. The abundance of food in the Lough is staggering and I find that the best way to find fish is to locate a profusion of food, whether it's flies caught in a wind lane out on the open water or in a slick behind an island or headland or even by flies washed along a shore by wind or current. Conditions are so important on Sheelin and I'd rather fish for one hour in good conditions than six hours or more when the conditions aren't right. I always try to spot a feeding fish because most of the time simply prospecting by pulling wet flies can be an unrewarding task. I find that I locate more trout by following my instincts and quietly pulling up in a likely spot, maybe lighting the Kelly Kettle for a brew and watching closely to see any disturbance on the surface.

### ***We were able get close enough to put the flies in his path***

This year, I had determined that I would make every effort to get my father (who as already mentioned is Chairman of the club in his seventieth year), over a big trout and fortunately this proved to be the case on several occasions. Before the trip we had a small altercation because he had put a new fly line on his reel with very little backing and I tried to explain the benefits of a fully loaded reel. Well, one evening I had stationed the boat between two wind lanes when suddenly this huge trout came surging up one of the wind lanes mopping up the mayflies with great urgency. As I pulled the boat over toward the wind lane he was taking every fly in his path but as dad got the cast out the fish disappeared and dashed over to the next wind lane another twenty yards away where he continued to hustle



*Jim Martin receiving the Sheelin Cup from Mary & Stephen O'Reilly, Innyside Lodge, for the only fish caught that day, a lovely 5lb 9oz specimen which took on a Grey Wulff . Also present were past Chairman, Jackie Childs and Mallusk Angling Society President, Sam Mills.*

up and down feeding hard and luckily we were able get close enough to put the flies in his path and with pounding hearts we watched in amazement as dads fly was simply inhaled and after a short delay the strike went home and the hook took hold. As the barb sunk deep, the trout took off like a scalded cat, no commotion on the surface, no delay, just an unstoppable run which pulled the rod tip down and had the real screaming. The fly line disappeared quickly followed by some backing then I heard click, click, click through the rod rings and I shouted to Dad: "Whats the noise?" to which he replied: "That's the extra backing I put on!" Luckily we were able to eventually land that fish after numerous runs and much drama which together with dads net weighed 8lbs exactly! We suspect the fish was a shade over 7lb and neither of us will ever forget that fish or the satisfaction we got as he swam away or rather bolted after he had been revived for a while.


A Sheelin regular who joined our party towards the end of the week is Andrew Brown. Drew is one of many who understand how important it is to protect this unique Irish Natural Heritage and who are willing to give of their time and resources to help make a difference. He is always willing to share information with others who feel the same way and his knowledge of fly hatches, fly patterns and fishing techniques is incredible. Drew is convinced that careful sustainable management of the Lough is the way forward; there is no need to be killing the trophy fish when everyone has

a camera in their pocket and it's far more satisfying to see your worthy adversary swim away to fight another day and to replenish stocks by spawning at the end of the season than to end up left at the bottom of a freezer. Andrew tells us how he patrols the spawning redds during the winter and how the little trout, two pounds or less, dart away as the lamp approaches whereas the 'Big Fellas' just hold station and he could swear they're just watching him with those big glassy eyes!

The stock potential for Sheelin is simply staggering, when lurching on the shore in May you'll see literally thousands of mayflies overhead. At night, when motoring down through Sailors Garden the surface of the water (and everything else) was just carpeted with millions of buzzers, Apple Greens and Grey Boys, they were in our ears, noses and eyes! Such an abundance of invertebrates is hard to understand until you've actually witnessed it. Should the fish be allowed to live to spawn for several generations the abundance of trout could be incredible. As it is, all our party from the Mallusk Angling Society can do is say a very big 'Thank You' to the LSTPA, the fisheries board, local councils and the Irish Government for recognising that this is indeed a Jewel in Ireland's Great Fishery Heritage. Also to Innyside Lodge, Watty's Rock pub and all the residents of the tiny village of Finea for making us feel so welcome every year.

Michael Martin received the Countryside Alliance 2012 Rural Hero Award



  
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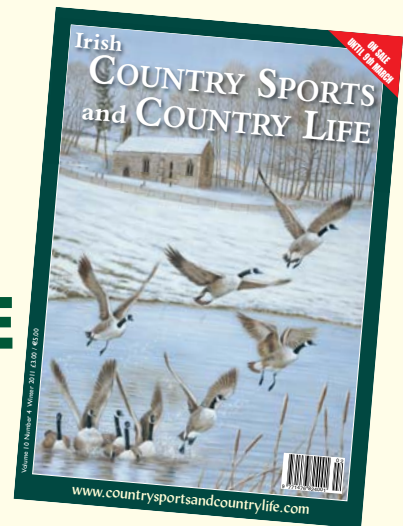
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# Plus Twos A Shot In The Dark

**W**hen a chap is sitting in his study of an evening trying to make sense of Purdey's game accounts with a little of the Woodless Elixir he doesn't expect to be shot at – not even in Woodless! Well, that's just what happened one windy winter's night and I can tell you it's not the sort of thing that settles the nerves. The bang was definitely from a shotgun but probably not a twelve bore and the pellets rattled off the window in front of the desk. I wasn't the only one to hear it, as Dixon launched himself into the room with the loyalty expected of an old retainer and switched off the light before any follow-up would arrive. The keepers, Dillon and Purdey, were obviously close at hand as I could hear their shouts as they pursued some miscreant down the drive and I could hear Dillon threatening to 'give him both barrels' if he didn't stop. Now the last thing you want in the twentieth century is a dead poacher on your hands as the criminal seems to have all the rights and the squire none.

The pair of them arrived into the study shortly afterwards and both of them were well blown like a pair of hard ridden hunters so it took some time – and several glasses of Elixir – to get any sense out of them. Purdey always feels the importance of his position as senior keeper, but Dillon tries to utilise his experience as a garda when explaining anything, still thinking he is in the witness box being paid full attention. They eventually managed to explain that they had an idea that it was just the sort of night for a bit of single handed poaching with little moon and plenty of wind and they were in hope of catching their favourite target, Griff Penny. Penny does a bit of work from time to time around the place and I can't imagine him as a poacher, but the keepers have very different ideas about him and his rather moth-eaten dog. The only thing that marks him out as a likely candidate is his very old Honda Fifty

motorbike which he keeps going with baling wire and determination as a means of semi rapid transport around the countryside. It's always a useful tool to transport you at the lowest possible cost and is easier to hide than a van. Purdey agreed that it sounded like a twenty bore or even, that favourite of poachers, the folding four-ten. Now Penny has a somewhat rusted twelve bore but, as far as we know he doesn't have any other weaponry, but you never can be sure.

We decided to hold a council of war the next morning and to get our friendly superintendent, Tim Farlow, around for a quiet chat. Farlow is not easily startled, especially when he's not the one getting shot at, but he thought this was a bit more serious than a stray shot. He suggested that he 'would make enquiries' and see if there was anything more sinister afoot. Purdey and Dillon went off to their various duties, but they were back by lunchtime in yet another state of breathlessness needing the restorative properties of a stiff whiskey. They had managed to get their hands on a few walkie-talkies for shoot days and used them every day as if they were running a military operation. This had brought Purdey across the estate at high speed as he responded to Dillon's distressed call that there were signs of poaching around the old warren. We have never used it as a working warren but it had been there for generations and provided a good harvest of well fed rabbits for Mrs. Reilly's various and often peculiar coney recipes.

***Netted by an expert, while the keepers' attentions were elsewhere***

The warren is on Lower Woodless land but borders on the much better grazing of Upper Woodless and old Keane-Handy was always complaining that we were robbing his best grass even though we couldn't control

wild rabbits. Now it was all ours, or had been until last night when, as we discovered, it had been netted and obviously by an expert while the keepers' attentions were elsewhere. This wasn't the work of a few lads with purse nets as the boot prints were well away from the warren and there was no sign of any digging. It had to be a long-netter and one with some experience at that. Penny certainly wasn't the type for long-netting and it hadn't been practiced around Woodless Down since Aunt Irene's grandfather's time. In fact I hadn't seen a long net apart from the old one that had rotted slowly in Tierney's stables when I was a lad visiting Aunt Irene.

Farlow is a canny chap and must have spent his younger days in the force in some strange places as he has a very suspicious mind and a strangely twisted sense of humour. People who, like Farlow, come from the more northern counties of Ireland often have a rather droll wit and he is no exception. He suggested that Plus Twos should call to Penny and ask his advice about the possibilities of doing some long-netting for the estate as money was tight as usual around Woodless and a few rabbits would add to the income. Purdey almost had an apoplectic fit as he choked on his coffee and said it would only alert him to our suspicions but Farlow was adamant and said that Penny wasn't that smart!

*Hares and rabbits are all the same to a poacher*



Now I hate that sort of underhand carry-on but it had to be done and the sooner I got it over the better. I took out the old shooting brake and headed for Penny's abode on the edge of Woodless village, where I expected to find him on the way to the pub if he had a few bob to hand. What I didn't expect to find was that he had a friend staying for a few days who was certainly an interesting character. His accent suggested Donegal or thereabouts and he was a wiry lad with a fit looking lurcher at heel and, as they were on their way to the pub, I could perhaps buy a round or two? I'm always game for an afternoon 'jolly' and a winter's day beside the fire with a 'drop of the crater' in Matty O'Connor's pub was a lot better than listening to the bleatings of the moaning minions of Woodless. Their endless pleadings for yet more money to be squandered on everything from pheasants to hunting mounts and hats to the children's education is enough to ruin any day.

Matty's bar is a haven for several ne'er-do-wells and their seedy curs

We settled down by the fire and Griff Penny introduced his friend as Stan McGlinchey who was looking up a few old friends around the Midlands. Now Matty's bar is a haven for several ne'er-do-wells, who have a collection of seedy curs that rarely even move if

you trip over them. McGlinchey had bought his lurcher with him and it sat quietly - very quietly - under his chair. I am used to barking, noisy and unruly dogs and the occasional 'singing' of the Woodless Harriers as they cross the fields but this dog never uttered a sound! Stan seemed a rather nice fellow with an interest in the countryside and especially the 'old ways' before high powered tractors and High Tec machinery and all those sprays and fertilisers that my farm manager keeps asking for. He was really interested in the way we ran the little shooting available and that there was still a rabbit warren which he suggested was probably there since Norman times. I didn't manage to find out what he did for a living for he certainly had a wide knowledge of Victorian farming and hunting

lore. It's always nice to meet a young chap with the interest in times past and it passed a pleasant few hours aided by a few pints. Needless to say I was a little late for dinner only to be told that Farlow supported by Dillon and Purdey were waiting for news about my visit to Penny.

Now keeping any man from his dinner is bad enough but it's a lot worse when he has built up an appetite with some stimulation in Matty's bar. Nothing would do them than a full blow by blow account of the afternoon so I started with meeting Stan McGlinchey and his dog. Farlow can be quite a torment when he's looking for information and he was at his most annoying on this occasion. You'd think I was describing a major bank robber or Jack the Ripper the way he questioned everything I said. The dog seemed to have raised his suspicions though I couldn't see why such an inoffensive dog could be a problem. Purdey kept muttering about not trusting any dog that didn't 'speak' and then Dillon asked the daftest question I have ever been asked. Have you ever heard the like of it? "Did he have buttons on his coat?" Buttons! what did that have to do with anything? According to Dillon, any lad without buttons on his coat is definitely a poacher who uses nets

because buttons get caught in the net and make life difficult in the dark. I'm not very good at this subterfuge stuff and I certainly didn't find out all I should have. In fact,

Farlow accused me of giving Penny and McGlinchey far more information which would be useful to poachers than I had gleaned. Dixon saved my bacon by mentioning that in Aunt Irene's grandfather's day it was common practice to cut brambles, gorse or thorn bushes and spread them around any field that was likely to be netted as it made one hell of a mess of the nets. Purdey wanted money to buy a few black rabbits to mix with the native population so he could spot if the rabbits were being harvested by someone other than those who had the right to do so. How is it that everything around the estate seems to require more money and between Dillon and Purdey I'll soon be stony broke. Anyway, there seemed nothing for it but to keep a very close eye on both Penny and his friend in case they were poachers. Penny turned up the next morning with a suggestion that the shot had been to divert the keepers, while some 'criminal' as he called him worked his nets in peace at the other end of the estate and it was a better thought than someone trying to 'assonate' Plus Twos.

Luckily the twins, Ivan and Sap, were away at school when this happened or I could just imagine the complications that would have arisen by the time they embroidered the story. Worse still they might have wanted to join the poachers just for the excitement as they already thought Penny was a prize asset with his military stories of far flung places.

Now, what do I do? I will wait for the good lady wife to tell what to do — — — — always sensible to follow that line?

Plus Twos  
Woodless House  
Woodless Bog  
Co. Westmeath

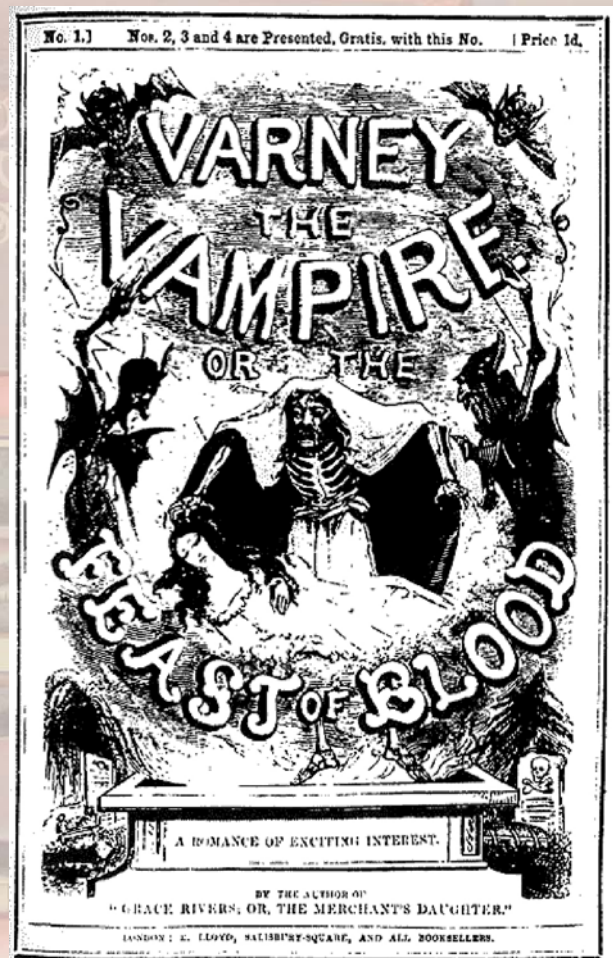


# Vampires Beware - We Are Armed!

If you were to choose a country steeped in myth and legend you could be forgiven for not looking any further than Ireland. Traditionally a country where religion has played a significant part in the fabric of its society, it is no wonder that anything associated with the antichrist was feared. Whether you believe or otherwise, Vampirism certainly captures the imagination. The use of holy water, garlic, lemons, bricks in the mouth, stakes through the heart, head and legs, decapitation and incineration, the use of hawthorn, oak, or ash stakes - the remedies appear beyond belief, especially as we are talking of something utterly fictional. For those already reaching for the computer I would advise a visit to Wikipedia as the invention from continent to continent is boundless. Whether European, North American, Asian or anywhere you care to visit on the planet, the resident cultures, modern and ancient, have wrestled with the menace of vampires. However, the word vampire didn't find its way into the Oxford English Dictionary until 1734 and came from the German word 'Vampir.' Various Balkan states, the birthplace of this genre, preferred other names and did much to fuel the imaginations of the people of the region and ultimately globally.

In the nineteenth century universal education, in conjunction with more advanced and cost effective printing processes, meant writers could reach a wider readership. Moreover, authors could indulge in fantasy and the audiences' thirst for excitement led writers such as John Polidoris in 1819 to write 'The Vampyre.' Other titles included 'Varney the Vampire' (1845-1847) written for the 'penny dreadfuls' by Rymer in the UK and Preskett in the USA. And of course all the aforementioned titles inspired Bram Stoker to write 'Dracula' in 1897. Don't think for a minute the twentieth century escaped the trend: In 1970 we were subject, in London, to the Highgate Cemetery vampire watch, for which the local press were prime movers. Birmingham in 2005 was seemingly hoodwinked by a similar prank. Various stories circulated in the press about a man stalking the streets and biting passers by. However, the

West Midlands Police never found a suspect and put it down to an urban myth! The local clergyman was heard to say: "I heard the story in the barber's the other day," said Father Anthony Rohan of the Holy Family Catholic church in Small Heath. "They asked me if I believed in vampires and I said no. Then the lollipop lady mentioned it to me as well. "I'm not worried, though. I've got a lot of crucifixes in the house."



Cover from a 'Penny Dreadful'

Some 80 million people in the world having Irish blood in their veins: from the humblest of professions to highest positions in the world, the Irish can boast of at least 22 Presidents of the United States with Irish ancestry, Barack Obama being the latest to join the ranks with one of his maternal ancestors having come from Co Offaly. Some other notable Irish Americans are Gene Kelly, Henry Ford, Walt Disney and Alfred Hitchcock. So, you might say, where does this diatribe lead the reader? Well, it takes us on a voyage not in this instance to America, but to Australia. Another part of the world

to be blessed with copious amounts of Irish blood. One of the greatest film stars to hit the silver screen, the legendary Errol Flynn was born Hobart, Tasmania in 1909 to parents of English/Irish stock. Flynn, after failing in business on two counts, finally moved to England in the early 1930s. He worked in both the provincial and London theatre and was finally spotted by Warner Brothers who cast him in 'Captain Blood' in 1935 and this movie brought him overnight success. The majority of Irish settlers were not so fortunate, but these hardy souls, for want of a better life, took the lifetime gamble of leaving their homeland.

One such Irish traveller left his home shores around the time of the potato famine in 1845. In his belongings he took a pistol. This pistol was either manufactured in Dublin or it could have been produced in Birmingham and possibly retailed by Calderwood & Son of 14 North Earl Street, Dublin. What connection does this pistol have with vampires? The answer is the vampire killing kit or slaying kit. I'm not suggesting for a moment that our traveller had anything to do with vampire slaying, but his pistol at some later stage found its way into this compendium.

Initially this article was focused on Calderwood the gunmaker but, having located this strange box of tricks by way of an internet search, it was decided to investigate it a little further and bring it to the forefront of this article.

Other vampire killing kits do exist and can be found from all over Europe and beyond, but this set is of particular interest due to it containing a classic Irish fish tailed stocked back-action percussion pistol, bearing the name of the celebrated Dublin gunmakers Calderwood & Son. Although the links may appear tenuous the fact that we have such a bizarre item linked with such rich Irish heritage makes for an interesting tale. I must thank Caroline Oxley of the Victoria Police Museum in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia for her kind assistance with photography and data.

According to the museum data the vampire slaying kit was seized during a drugs raid on a house in 2004 because the owner did not have a permit for the pistol and ammunition which is part of the kit. There was something interesting, yet sinister about the kit and so Chris Ferguson (Arresting Officer) had it DNA tested in Canberra and the following were found:

- The 'ivory' on the crucifix is human bone.
- There is human DNA on the tip of the dagger.
- The bullets are made of silver and there is a crucifix on each one.
- The bottle would have held Holy Water.
- The age of the kit is uncertain.



*Vampire Slaying Kit. Containing Calderwood & Son percussion pistol, Stake, Bottle for Holy water, a Crucifix (Human Bone) and silver ball bullets marked with crucifix. Reproduction with permission from the Victoria Police.*

The words on the lid are Ephesian Grammata – ancient Greek formulas from the 4th or 5th century BC. The inscription reads: "Aski Kataski Haix Tetrax Damnaneneus Aison" – Darkness, Light, The Earth, The Season, The Sun, The Truth."



*Calderwood & Son Percussion Pistol with Fishtail stock. Circa 1850. Reproduction with permission from the collection of Victoria Police.*



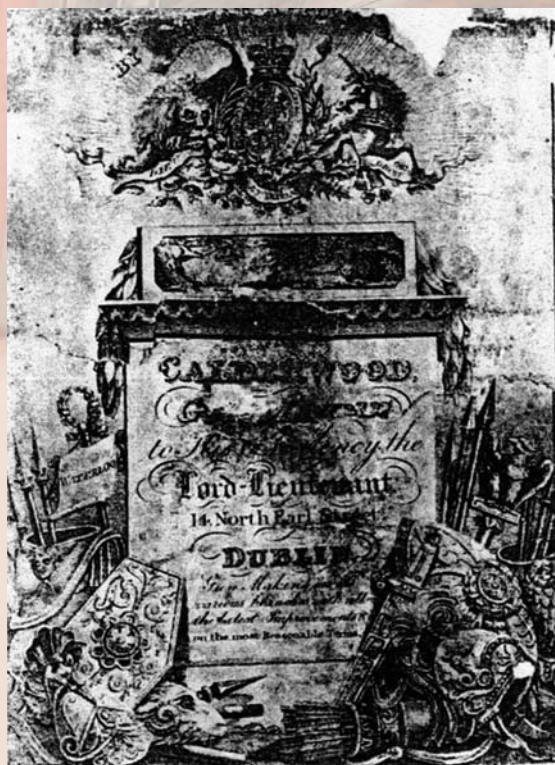
*Silver Ball Bullets with crucifix. Reproduction with permission from the collection of Victoria Police.*



Calderwood & Son Backaction Pistol Lockwork. Reproduction with permission from the collection of Victoria Police.

3 Godkin, Mrs. Anne Jane, wax and  
tallow chandler, 42l.  
, Smith, Richard A. chemist  
4 Calderwood and Son, gun-makers  
and armourers to the Lord Lieu-  
tenant, and the constabulary, 47l.  
, Calderwood, Henry G.—res. Sion  
hill, Drumcondra  
...here Marlborough-street intersects....  
5 Gater, Margaret, fancy bazaar, 40l.  
, M'Dermott, Mrs. Sarah

Calderwood & Son entry in the 1867 Thom's Trade Directory detailing their patronage with the Lord Lieutenant and the Constabulary. The figure in the right is the rateable value of their property (47 pounds) while at 14 North Earl Street



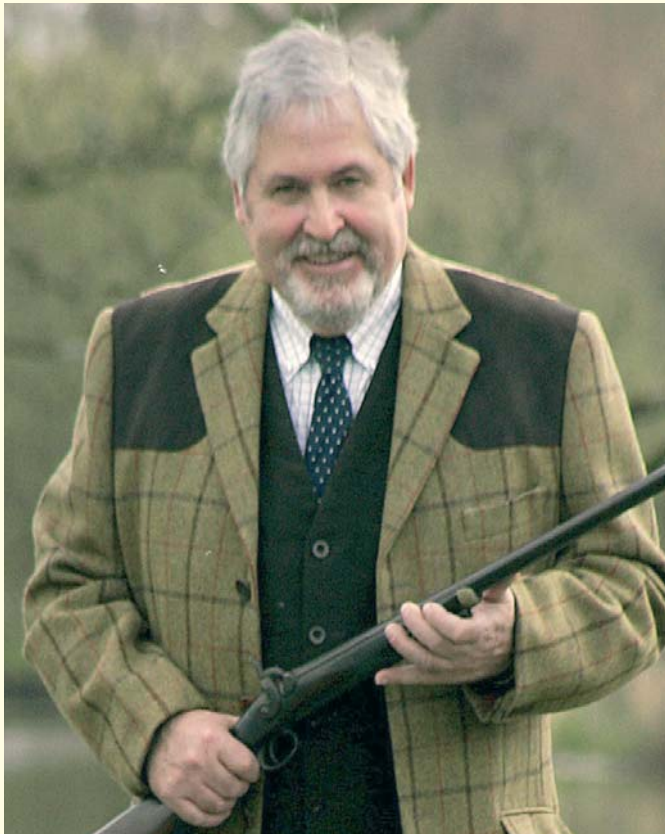
Calderwood trade label for 14 North Earl Street, Dublin.

## Calderwood Gunmakers trading dates and addresses

Calderwood, Thomas Dublin	1809-1812 22 Little Mary Street
Calderwood, Thomas Dublin	1813-1814 6 White Street, Dorset Street
Calderwood, Thomas Dublin	1815-1846 14 North Earl Street
Calderwood, James Dublin	1841-1844 21 Duke Street
Calderwood, James Dublin	1845-1858 22 Duke Street
Calderwood, Thomas & Son Dublin	1847-1851 14 North Earl Street
Calderwood, Thomas Dublin	1852-1857 14 North Earl Street
Calderwood, Thomas & Son Dublin	1858 14 North Earl Street
Calderwood, Thomas Dublin	1859-1864 14 North Earl Street
Calderwood, James Dublin	1859-1869 63 Upper Sackville Street. 1860
Calderwood, James Dublin	1870-1876 24 Upper Sackville St.
Calderwood & Son Dublin	1865-1897 14 North Earl Street

The Calderwoods traded in Dublin for almost the whole of the 19th century. Thomas Calderwood, the founder, was a highly respected tradesman, manufacturing and supplying firearms and other accessories to the Lord Lieutenant, the Constabulary and the Post Office. He was also called as a legal adviser about firearms in court cases within Dublin and other parts of Ireland. Calderwood weapons are quite prolific in today's antique firearms market and command above average prices when in fine condition. It should be remembered that this was a particular turbulent time in Irish history and many gunmakers were raided regularly if not by the ruling authority and then by the Irish Republican Brotherhood or sympathisers, leading to constant disruption of normal business operation. Therefore we see a sharp decline in business activity around 1880 when only 12 gunmakers are listed in the Dublin trade directories, and by 1900 this had fallen to only four, although three of these were sizeable companies namely Trulock, Harris & Richardson, Dawson Street; John Parkinson of 17 Arran Quay; and Charles Weekes & Co, 27 Essex Quay.

So we go full circle with the vampires possibly at work, but not much Irish blood having been spilt. Returning to the vampire slaying kit, we can date the pistol to around 1850, but the accoutrements and box containing this array of paraphernalia would date to around 1900 and looks to have been assembled in Australia. The Calderwood pistol has been added to give an earlier Victorian feel. It may well have been used in a theatrical play or film. Possibly this may be considered to have been a little guess work or blarney, but when you are dealing with myth and legend, a little guess work or blarney will invariably be nearer the truth!



# AJ's Angst

## Frank opinion on the issues facing the Irish country sports scene

contractors and exhibitors at many events do not realise the importance of this. We also pride ourselves on the ability to foresee potential problems and take remedial action before it is needed not afterwards including making necessary changes to the layout. We also have a rather self imposed constraint – the pride in giving the estate back to the owners virtually in the state we received it. This latter constraint at Shanes was heightened by the fact that the Antrim Agricultural Show was scheduled for less than three weeks after our event!

All of these plans and reactions were fully tested in the build up and the running of the Shanes Castle event and once again through the hard work of our team and the magnificent support of the estate staff in widening roadways, enhancing and improving gateways and in developing and working new operational plans we delivered a hugely successful 50th fair.

On to Birr, with the hope that the 'Indian summer' would eventually arrive. However the dire weather continued and again we were faced by the spectre of a number of large Irish events and festivals being cancelled and the added adverse imagery associated with exhibitors and public being towed out of a very muddy fair at Borris. Apparently the organisers' wet weather provisions rather failed to cope and the site rather degenerated into a veritable sea of mud.

Both of these led to a last minute rush of stand enquiries from traders with stock on their hands or who wanted to trade at a professionally organised event with proper wet weather provision. However we were in the fortunate position of having our full complement of stands in place and had to suggest that these last minute exhibitors book for 2013. We are happy to say that bookings for 2013 are now open and are coming in nicely.

We had taken the precaution of having put in roadways at Birr some years ago to facilitate us in wet weather planning, but I have to admit my heart rather sank when I visited the site a couple of weeks before the event to find that we had been rather put on the back foot through damage having been done to several areas of the grounds by a contractor taking silage out. So, instead of us taking over grounds in pristine condition and trying to keep them that way,

### CONGRATULATIONS

My sincere thanks to my colleagues and team for their massive commitment to helping deliver three very successful Great Game Fairs of Ireland, in a 'Summer' that was the wettest in living memory. Against a backdrop of several major events being cancelled in the UK, including the Scottish Game Fair at Scone, The Great Yorkshire Show and the CLA Fair and several events and festivals being cancelled in Ireland, through the dedication of our team we were able to continue our proud unbroken record and deliver our 49th, 50th and 51st fairs.

The Ballywalter fair was threatened by the weather, with hail stones five miles 'up the road' in one direction and flooding four miles down the road in the other direction, but although we had a few showers the worst of the weather swerved round us and our wet weather provisions were not really tested until the storm and horrendous weather hit the site on the Monday after the fair. Our thanks to the Ballywalter staff for 'pitching' in and helping our team and contractors get the infrastructure out in good order without much ground damage.

On to Shanes Castle and truly horrendous weather during the 'build up' and during the Saturday night and Sunday morning of the fair. We pride ourselves in planning for bad weather and hoping for good rather than the other way round and also in exerting tight control of the ground during the build up, in order that the ground be good and unbroken for the public coming to the fair. I find it remarkable that



we were immediately forced into revising our plans and taking remedial actions to prepare/repair the ground and putting in place an external exhibitors' car park complete with shuttle bus. The Birr Estate staff and many from our local network were magnificent in assisting us in taking the necessary actions to ensure the fair went ahead and it is through their hard work that we again delivered a hugely successful event with a record attendance for any Irish game fair ever on the Sunday. Thank you to the exhibitors, who, with one exception, accepted our parking arrangements and to the public who gave us their wholehearted support.

In fact I would like to thank all of the people who attended our events in 2012 including those hardy enthusiasts who attended all three. We try to give good value for money and great entertainment in spite of the weather!

### **A BRICKBAT**

To the rumour mongers who had spread the thought that I was retiring after 2012. While it is some achievement to have been involved in organising 51 fairs (and counting the four others in which I was not involved, a team effort of 55 fairs) I don't consider it is quite the right time to 'hand the baton on,' and at the time this rumour was circulating I was heavily involved in the planning for the 2013 event. Friends and 'foes' can rest assured that when I do decide to take a back seat in the running of the Great Game Fairs of Ireland, a proper succession plan will have been put in place to ensure they continue as Ireland's premier country sports events.

### **CONGRATULATIONS**

To the ladies from Flavour magazine for organising two very successful fine food festivals at Ballywalter and Shanes Castle Fairs. These, quite simply, were the best exhibitions of fine food staged at any Irish game or country fair. And congratulations as well to the many country sports organisations such as the NARGC, CAI and FISSTA which mounted absolutely super countryside exhibits at Birr.

### **CONGRATULATIONS**

To RISE for organising a very dignified rally at the Birr Castle Game Fair. Initially a potentially huge demonstration from the major organisations had been mooted, however due to potentially soft ground conditions and a smaller arena, H&S advice was that we stage a more modest rally with a number of representatives from each organisation. In addition, of course, there was no desire to bring the fair to a complete halt and take competitors away

from the various competitions. However a good number of representatives took part together with a large number of spectators who joined them in the arena to hear an inspiring speech by Philip Donnelly, Chairman of the Hunting Association of Ireland. A very smart demonstration that will have been noticed by those in government who we need to persuade to take action.

### **CONGRATULATIONS**

BASC, CAI and the other organisations on getting a petition out very quickly at Shanes Castle to object to some of the proposals in the

"CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO VARY FIREARMS LICENSING FEES AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS TO THE FIREARMS (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2004".

I was happy to be the first to sign it, although I have some reservations on the 'young shots' issue and have made my own submission on what I consider to be relevant and necessary safeguards directly to the Minister.

Whilst I appreciate gun dealers are hardest hit by the new proposed fees and of course are likely to also be hit by reduced customer demand through the new personal fees, I really do not think that using the gun dealers as a conduit for or to collate their customers' reaction was the best way forward.

BASC's advice was:

"NI shooters - visit your local gun shop by Tuesday 18th September

A meeting between firearms dealers and politicians will take place on Tuesday 18th September to discuss a wide range of proposed changes to firearms law in Northern Ireland. BASC urges shooters to visit their local gun shops to sign a petition, to encourage their firearms dealers to attend the meeting, and to pass on their views on the consultation."

I hope that shooters have visited their gun dealers to sign the petition but find it slightly odd that gun dealers are expected to act as a conduit for shooters' views at a meeting, when I for one would have preferred to have put my own views to such a meeting. Also, one has to ask the question why these proposals for swingeing increases in fees have got so far – should they not have been headed off at the Northern Ireland Firearms Control Liaison Committee, where I should have thought gun dealer and shooters' interests should be looked after by their representative bodies? Anyway that is a topic for another time and we would urge all readers to support the representative bodies in their attempts to block this increase in fees at this time.

## **And Finally A HUGE BRICKBAT**

To the organisers of the National Country Fair at Borris. Last issue I offered these gentlemen my sincere congratulations on their apparent change of direction in moving away from their apparent desire to use our brand names and trade marks of Irish Game Fair and Irish Game and Country Fair within their promotions with the re-branding of their northern fair. I genuinely thought that this heralded a new era, where our events could co-exist harmoniously, with each team using and promoting their own brand names and identities.

Unfortunately it would appear that they must have considered their re-branding attempts at Moira to be unsuccessful because we found that for Borris they came back with an even more potentially misleading internet promotional campaign i.e using our domain name [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) within their sites.

e.g a Google search turned up the following :

1. [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) Borris  
[www.nationalcountryfair.ie/Cached](http://www.nationalcountryfair.ie/Cached) - Similar National Country Fair Borris House, Visit the Carlow game fair, Ireland's leading game fair, the National Country Fair at Borris House in Co. Carlow. We are just ...  
Booking a Stand - Clay Shoot - Gallery - FAQ
2. [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) Borris House - National Country Fair  
[www.nationalcountryfair.ie/hunt-chaseCached](http://www.nationalcountryfair.ie/hunt-chaseCached)  
the only game fair in Ireland to host a hunt chase this year is the National Country fair at Borris House.
3. [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) Borris House - National Country Fair  
[www.nationalcountryfair.ie/borris-houseCached](http://www.nationalcountryfair.ie/borris-houseCached)  
Borris House hosts a top Irish game fair, the National Country Fair in August 2012.
4. [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) Borris - National Country Fair  
[www.nationalcountryfair.ie/contactCached](http://www.nationalcountryfair.ie/contactCached) Contact Ireland's foremost game fair at Borris House.
5. [BallinLoughCountryFair.com](http://BallinLoughCountryFair.com) - [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) Borris  
[whois.domaintools.com/ballinloughcountryfair.com](http://whois.domaintools.com/ballinloughcountryfair.com)  
[BallinLoughCountryFair.com](http://BallinLoughCountryFair.com) - National Country Fair Borris House, Visit the Carlow game fair, Ireland's leading game fair, the National Country Fair at Borris ...
6. [IrishCountryFair.com](http://IrishCountryFair.com) - [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) Borris  
[whois.domaintools.com/irishcountryfair.com](http://whois.domaintools.com/irishcountryfair.com)  
[IrishCountryFair.com](http://IrishCountryFair.com) - National Country Fair Borris House, Visit the Carlow game fair, Ireland's leading game fair, the National Country Fair at Borris House in ...
7. [Nationalcountryfair.ie](http://Nationalcountryfair.ie) - [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) Borris  
[www.webwiki.com/nationalcountryfair.ieCached](http://www.webwiki.com/nationalcountryfair.ieCached)

6 days ago – [Nationalcountryfair.ie](http://Nationalcountryfair.ie) is about Borris, Country, National and Fair. Find reviews and ratings for [Nationalcountryfair.ie](http://Nationalcountryfair.ie).

8. [www.Irishcountryfair.com](http://www.Irishcountryfair.com) . Irishcountryfair - [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) Borris  
[www.webstatsdomain.com/domains/irishcountryfair.com/Cached](http://www.webstatsdomain.com/domains/irishcountryfair.com/Cached)

17 Aug 2012 – [irishcountryfair.com](http://irishcountryfair.com) Information at [Webstatsdomain.NationalCountryFairBorrisHouse](http://Webstatsdomain.NationalCountryFairBorrisHouse), Visit the Carlow game fair, Ireland's leading game fair,"

I would ask the public and traders to note that Irish Game Fair is the brand name of the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle, Antrim. It is also a registered trademark of the Great Game Fairs of Ireland. [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) is the registered domain name of the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle. The Irish Game Fair brand and trademark and the domain name [irishgamefair.com](http://irishgamefair.com) have absolutely no connection to the fair organised at Borris and we consider that the organisers of this fair have no right whatsoever to associate their events with this brand name, domain name or trademark.

Now I would defy anyone to state that their use of our domain name was an attempt to carve out a separate and distinct identity for a new fair at a new location, but rather it appears to be a rather transparent attempt to either tap into the success of our branding and the fair at Birr and/or to cause confusion between the two events.

Further, the claim that this event which had not yet taken place and was based on the, at best, modest events at Ballinlough was 'Ireland's leading game fair' appears to be not only totally inaccurate but again appears designed to mislead public and traders.

As I have stated before, if one looks at a 'league table' of Irish game or country fairs in terms of what would generally be regarded as the criteria for success my own ranking prior to the 2012 fairs was 1. & 2. Birr and Shanes, 3. Moira, 4. Ballywalter 5. Ballinlough/Borris and I see absolutely no reason to change this.

In my opinion the activities of these organisers in apparently publishing inaccurate comparative claims and appearing to want to 'tap into the success of our brand names' or even worse cause confusion amongst the events should be deplored by any right thinking country sports enthusiast. Certainly these actions cannot be regarded as being conducive to fostering good relations between the various events or in my opinion cannot be good for Irish country sports.

Public and traders should not be misled – the Shanes Castle and Birr Castle Fairs are most definitely Ireland's LEADING and FOREMOST GAME FAIRS.

There are Irish country fairs and countrysports fairs  
... and then there are the  
**GREAT GAME FAIRS OF IRELAND**  
Irish Game Fair our 52nd Irish Game Fair



**29th & 30th June 2013 Shanes Castle, Antrim**

[www.irishgamefair.com](http://www.irishgamefair.com)

Irish Game and Country Fair



**30th (Activity Day & Local Country Living Festival)**

**31st August and 1st September 2013 Birr Castle, Co Offaly**

[www.irishgameandcountryfair.com](http://www.irishgameandcountryfair.com)

Ballywalter Game & Country Living Fair

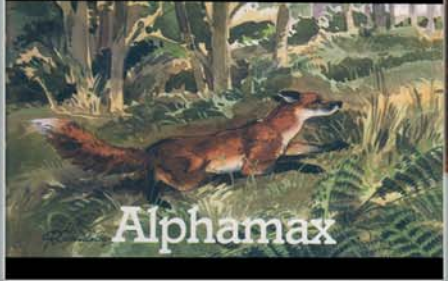
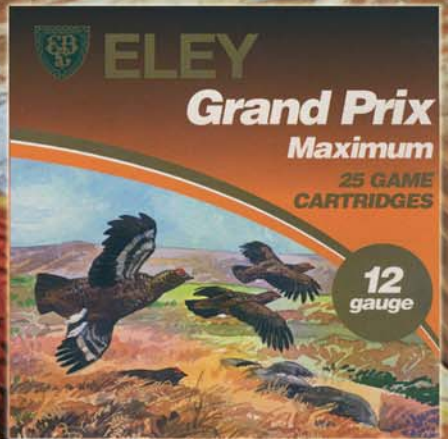
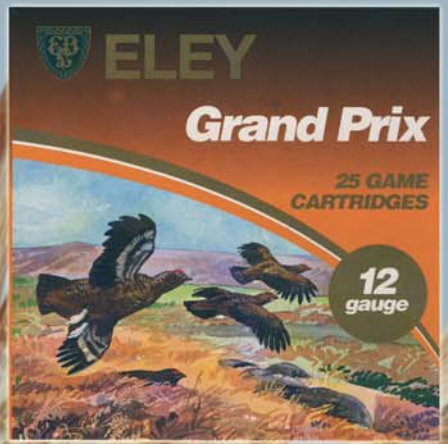
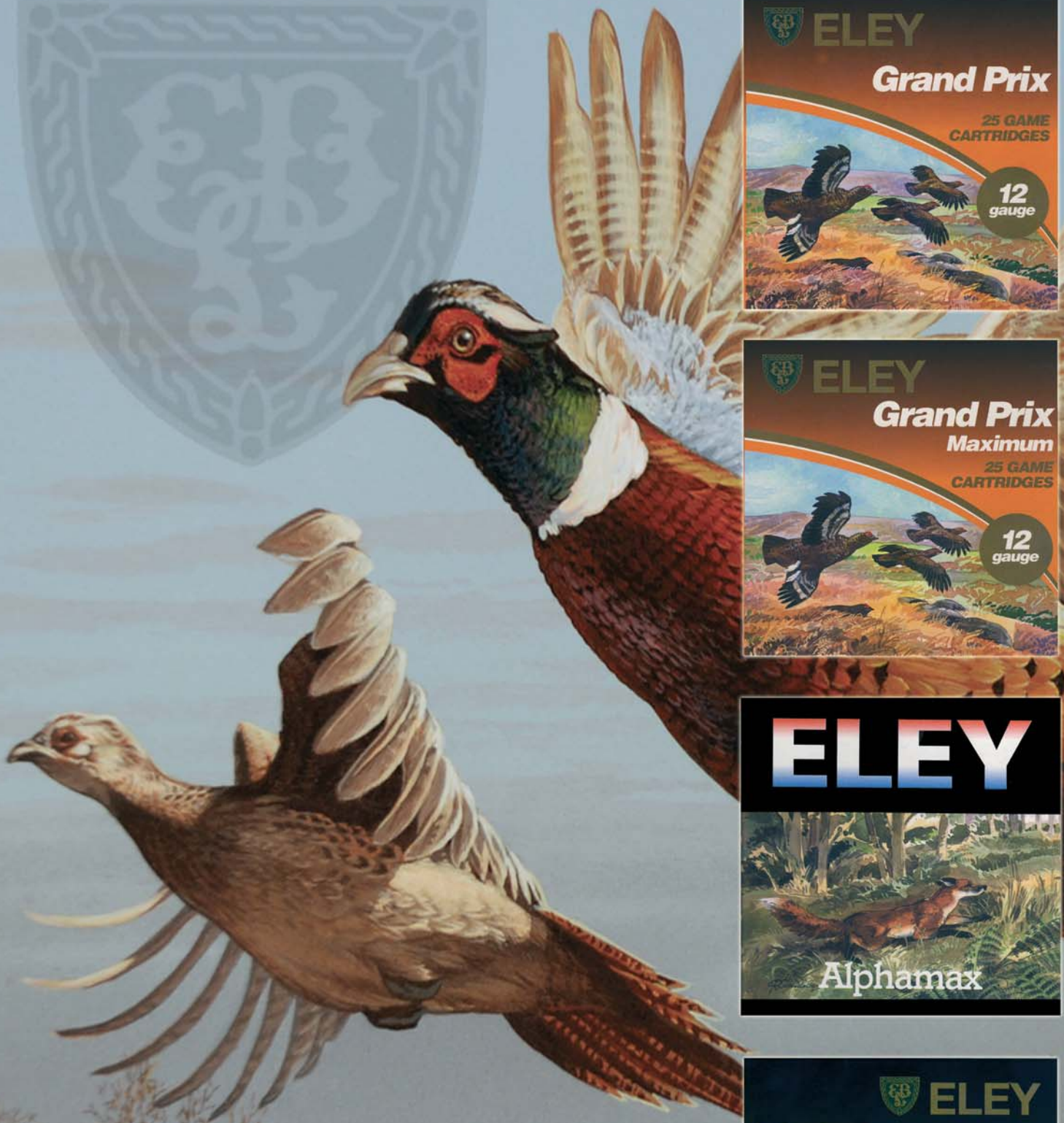


**4th & 5th May 2013 (Dates & Venue provisional)**

[www.ballywaltergamefair.com](http://www.ballywaltergamefair.com)

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